

Book of Recommendations of National Convention on European Integration 2026



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European Movement in Albania (EMA)

**Rr. Milto Tutulani, Nd.1, Ap. 3., Tirana
1019 – Albania**

Tel: +355 44 104 247

E-mail: info@em-al.org

Web: www.em-al.org

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Introduction

Albania's long-standing endeavour toward membership in the European Union (EU) has entered its most substantive phase, marked by accelerated accession negotiations and an increasingly implementation-oriented reform agenda. Since submitting its application for EU membership in 2009 and obtaining candidate country status in 2014, Albania has progressed through successive stages of the accession process, culminating in the opening of accession negotiations in 2022 and the subsequent advancement of negotiations under the Fundamentals Cluster. This trajectory reflects both Albania's strategic commitment to European integration and the EU's renewed engagement with enlargement in the Western Balkans.

The formal completion of the screening process in November 2023 constituted a significant milestone in Albania's accession path. As the foundational assessment of a candidate country's alignment with the EU *acquis*, the screening process evaluated the compatibility of Albania's legal, institutional, and administrative frameworks with the Union's standards and obligations. While the process confirmed substantial progress in legislative approximation and institutional reform, it also identified persistent challenges in areas central to the rule of law, judicial independence, anti-corruption policies, the fight against organised crime, and the protection of fundamental rights. These findings reinforced the necessity of sustaining comprehensive reforms and ensuring their effective implementation.

The First EU–Albania Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), held on 19 July 2022, formally launched accession negotiations and established the negotiating framework governing Albania's path towards membership. Following the completion of screening, Albania engaged in extensive technical consultations with the European Commission and Member States concerning the findings contained in the screening reports, particularly those relating to Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). These reports identified priority reforms and served as the basis for the development of the Rule of Law Roadmap, the Public Administration Reform Roadmap, and the Roadmap on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, which constituted the opening benchmarks for the Fundamentals Cluster.

The Second Intergovernmental Conference, held in Luxembourg on 15 October 2024, marked the formal opening of negotiations under Cluster 1 – Fundamentals. In line with the revised enlargement methodology, this cluster occupies a central position in the accession process, as progress in the rule of law and democratic governance conditions the overall pace of negotiations across all policy areas. The opening of the cluster signified the European Union's recognition of Albania's reform efforts while simultaneously underscoring the expectation that reforms would translate into measurable and sustainable results.

Since the opening of Cluster 1, Albania's accession agenda has increasingly focused on the fulfilment of interim and closing benchmarks under Chapters 23 and 24. These chapters constitute the core of the rule of law *acquis* and remain subject to continuous monitoring throughout the negotiation process.

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The emphasis has gradually shifted from the adoption of legal frameworks towards demonstrating a credible track record of implementation, enforcement, and institutional resilience. Particular attention has been devoted to the functioning of judicial governance bodies, the sustainability of the justice reform process, the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures, the prosecution of high-level corruption and organised crime cases, the protection of fundamental rights, media freedom, and the strengthening of law enforcement capacities.

The European Commission has repeatedly stressed that the fulfilment of the interim benchmarks under Chapters 23 and 24 represents a prerequisite for moving towards the closing phase of negotiations. Consequently, Albania's current challenge is no longer limited to legislative alignment with the *acquis* but extends to demonstrating tangible results through effective institutions, judicial independence, accountability mechanisms, and a sustained record of enforcement. Progress in meeting these benchmarks will determine not only the pace of negotiations within the Fundamentals Cluster but also the opening, advancement, and eventual closure of negotiations across all other clusters.

A decisive turning point in Albania's accession process occurred with the adoption of the European Union's Interim Common Position on Cluster 1 – Fundamentals and the convening of the Eighth EU–Albania Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in Brussels on 26 May 2026. Following a positive assessment by the European Commission and the approval of the Member States through COREPER, the European Union formally confirmed that Albania had, overall, fulfilled the interim benchmarks established for the Fundamentals Cluster. This assessment, commonly referred to as the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR), represented the first comprehensive evaluation of Albania's progress since the opening of Cluster 1 in October 2024 and constituted a prerequisite for advancing to the next stage of negotiations.

The significance of the IBAR extends beyond a mere technical assessment. In accordance with the revised enlargement methodology, interim benchmarks serve as gatekeeping conditions designed to evaluate whether a candidate country has established a sufficiently credible and sustainable reform framework in the areas of rule of law, democratic governance, and public administration. The positive assessment received by Albania indicated that the European Union considered the country to have achieved a satisfactory level of progress in implementing the commitments contained in the Rule of Law Roadmap, the Public Administration Reform Roadmap, and the Roadmap on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions. Nevertheless, the assessment simultaneously emphasised that the most demanding phase of the accession process still lies ahead, requiring the consolidation of reforms through concrete implementation and demonstrable results.

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The Eighth Intergovernmental Conference of 26 May 2026 consequently marked the transition from the interim benchmark phase to the closing benchmark phase of negotiations under Cluster 1. During the Conference, the European Union formally established the closing benchmarks for Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security), thereby opening the possibility for Albania to begin the gradual provisional closure of negotiating chapters once the prescribed conditions are fulfilled. This development effectively positioned Albania among the most advanced candidate countries in the current enlargement process and confirmed the country's entry into a more demanding accession stage focused on implementation, sustainability, and the establishment of robust track records. Consistent with the "fundamentals first" principle of the revised enlargement methodology, progress under these chapters will continue to determine the overall pace of accession negotiations. The European Union underlined that judicial independence, accountability, effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions, the fight against organised crime, protection of fundamental rights, migration management, border security, and judicial cooperation remain areas requiring continuous monitoring throughout the negotiation process. Consequently, the fulfilment of the newly established closing benchmarks will depend on legislative alignment with the *acquis* and on the demonstration of irreversible reforms and a sustained track record of implementation.

The adoption of the Interim Common Position and the positive IBAR assessment therefore represent both recognition of Albania's reform achievements and the beginning of a new phase characterised by heightened scrutiny and performance-based evaluation. While the successful fulfilment of the interim benchmarks has enabled Albania to move towards the closure phase of negotiations, the ultimate success of the accession process will depend upon the country's capacity to translate institutional reforms into measurable outcomes capable of meeting the closing benchmarks under Chapters 23 and 24.

Beyond documenting the milestones of Albania's EU accession process, this Book of Recommendations 2026 serves as a practical and analytical guide for understanding the country's reform trajectory in relation to the *acquis*. It is designed not merely as a catalogue of recommendations but as a framework that connects sector-specific reforms to the broader integration agenda, showing how progress in individual chapters contributes to Albania's overall path toward membership. The book is structured into three core sections, each dedicated to a pivotal chapter under negotiation: Chapter 5 – Public Procurement, Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security.

Introduction

Each section begins with an overview of the current state of reforms, highlighting both achievements and persisting challenges, and situates these within the negotiation framework and benchmarks assigned by the European Commission. It then examines the legal and institutional foundations in place, alongside policy initiatives, strategic documents, and compliance gaps, to provide a comprehensive picture of alignment with EU standards. The heart of each section is the synthesis of expert roundtable discussions, where practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors contributed concrete recommendations tailored to the Albanian context within the Working Groups sections for Chapter 5, 23 and 24 within the National Convention on European Integration, established by EMA since 2014. These recommendations are not presented in isolation; rather, they are contextualised within the EU accession logic, ensuring their relevance for both domestic stakeholders and EU interlocutors. In the final section, the Book presents the monitoring of these recommendations and their follow-up by the relevant institutions. It assesses whether each recommendation has been fully or partially addressed, and provides the corresponding justification. This assessment is based on a review of relevant institutional reports and documentation, complemented by continued communication with the institutions concerned. By combining descriptive analysis and policy-oriented recommendations, the book aims to be simultaneously a resource for practitioners implementing reforms, a reference for EU institutions evaluating Albania's progress, and an analytical tool for scholars and observers seeking to understand the interplay between domestic reforms and EU conditionality.

CHAPTER 23 – JUDICIARY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

SNAPSHOT OF CHAPTER 23 ASSESSMENT FOR ALBANIA

Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights remains the cornerstone of the European Union's enlargement policy and embodies the Union's commitment to safeguarding the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, namely democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the protection of minorities. Within the revised enlargement methodology, Chapter 23 occupies a privileged position as part of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals and serves as a determining factor for the overall pace and credibility of accession negotiations.

The chapter is structured around three interconnected pillars: the judiciary, anti-corruption policy, and fundamental rights. However, under the current enlargement framework, the European Union's approach extends beyond legislative approximation and focuses increasingly on implementation, institutional resilience, and the establishment of a sustainable track record of results. Consequently, candidate countries are required not only to align their legal systems with the *acquis* but also to demonstrate that reforms are effective, irreversible, and capable of producing tangible outcomes. Following the adoption of the Interim European Union Common Position on 22 May 2026 and the positive Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR), the European Union concluded that Albania had, overall, fulfilled the interim benchmarks established for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals. This assessment enabled the transition from the interim benchmark phase to the closing benchmark phase of negotiations under Chapter 23. The focus of EU monitoring has therefore shifted from the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks towards the consolidation, implementation, and sustainability of reforms.

Functioning of the judiciary - In the field of judiciary, the European Union acknowledges that Albania has achieved a high level of legislative and institutional alignment with the *acquis* and European standards. Nevertheless, the Union emphasises that the priority now lies in consolidating the results of the justice reform through the implementation of the Justice Strategy 2024–2030 and through the strengthening of institutional independence, accountability, and efficiency. Particular attention is devoted to preserving the standards established through the judicial vetting process, ensuring merit-based appointments and promotions, maintaining the integrity of judicial self-governance bodies, and protecting the judiciary from political interference. The EU has explicitly expressed concern regarding attempts by public officials and political actors to exert undue influence on justice institutions, including SPAK, and has stressed that both the executive and legislative branches must fully respect judicial independence and implement Constitutional Court decisions without delay.

The current closing benchmark phase further requires Albania to demonstrate measurable improvements in court efficiency, reduction of judicial backlogs, completion of judicial appointments, strengthening of the High Judicial Council, High Prosecutorial Council and High Justice Inspector, as well as the establishment of a fully functional integrated case management system. The EU also requires sustained implementation of integrity standards throughout magistrates' careers and the effective application of random case allocation mechanisms.

Eight Against Corruption – Anti-corruption policy remains one of the most scrutinised aspects of Chapter 23. While the European Union recognises the positive results achieved by SPAK and the Special Anti-Corruption Courts, including investigations and convictions involving high-ranking officials, it continues to consider corruption a widespread and systemic challenge affecting public administration, public procurement, property administration, customs, taxation, healthcare, education, and public-private partnerships. The EU therefore expects Albania to establish a durable and convincing track record in the investigation, prosecution, conviction, and confiscation of assets in high-level corruption cases. Particular emphasis is placed on safeguarding the operational independence of SPAK and ensuring that anti-corruption institutions remain free from political influence or public pressure. The current phase of negotiations requires Albania to demonstrate that anti-corruption policies generate systemic impact and are capable of addressing corruption risks across all sectors of public life. The effectiveness of preventive mechanisms, political party financing rules, conflict-of-interest controls, and inter-institutional cooperation are also key elements of the EU's assessment.

Fundamental Rights – With regard to fundamental rights, the European Union considers that Albania has established a substantial legal framework but continues to face implementation challenges. The current reform agenda focuses on ensuring effective protection of rights in practice, strengthening independent oversight institutions, and implementing recommendations issued by international monitoring bodies and judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The EU places particular emphasis on freedom of expression, media pluralism, protection of journalists, personal data protection, property rights, non-discrimination, gender equality, minority rights, and the rights of vulnerable groups. The Interim Common Position identifies media freedom as an area requiring significant further progress. The EU calls for greater transparency of media ownership and financing, stronger guarantees for editorial independence, alignment with the EU Anti-SLAPP framework, and effective measures against intimidation, harassment, and strategic litigation targeting journalists. Furthermore, Albania is expected to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination, the People's Advocate, and other human rights institutions while ensuring adequate financial resources for the implementation of equality and anti-discrimination policies.

A particularly important dimension of the closing benchmarks concerns the protection of property rights and the implementation of final domestic and European Court of Human Rights judgments. The European Union has linked progress in this area to the completion of cadastral reform, digitalisation of property registration, transparency of ownership records, and the effective enforcement of judicial decisions concerning property claims. The achievement of tangible results in these areas is expected to constitute an important indicator of Albania's overall readiness to fulfil the requirements of Chapter 23.

Consequently, the European Union's current legal and policy strategy under Chapter 23 is centred on the principle of irreversibility of reforms. Albania's success in fulfilling the closing benchmarks will depend not on the adoption of new legislation alone, but on its capacity to demonstrate sustained implementation, institutional maturity, judicial independence, effective anti-corruption enforcement, and a comprehensive system for the protection of fundamental rights. Progress in these areas will remain decisive for the advancement and eventual completion of Albania's accession negotiations.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Ministry of Justice – The Ministry of Justice, in accordance with the Constitution and applicable laws, must draft and implement justice-related policies, prepare legal and sub-legal acts, and ensure the proper functioning of services related to the judicial system. It is responsible for overseeing the execution of civil and criminal decisions, regulating legal professions, fostering international cooperation in civil and criminal matters, and coordinating the harmonization of Albanian legislation with European Union requirements. The Ministry is tasked with supporting and coordinating the judicial reform and aligning its work with the country's democratic development and EU integration process. The Ministry collaborates with judicial and prosecutorial bodies while respecting the principles of separation and independence of powers. The Ministry is also obligated to manage judicial administration, provide expert opinions on legal reforms, support legal education, and facilitate international legal agreements and partnerships. These roles collectively contribute to strengthening the rule of law and ensuring justice in Albania. In the national negotiating structure established in 2019, the Ministry of Justice is the negotiating institution for Chapter 23, representing the country during bilateral meetings concerning this Chapter. Moreover, the Deputy Minister is the negotiator for Chapter 23 part of the Negotiation Group, while being the head of the Inter-Institutional Working Group for European Integration and Partnership Platform on European Integration.

Minister of State for Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption – The Minister of State for Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption was established in January 2024. The Minister acts as the National Coordinator against Corruption. Minister's role includes supervising the activities of the General Directorate for Anticorruption (GDAC). In June 2024, the Council of Ministers adopted a decision to transfer officially the GDAC from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of State for Public Administration and Corruption.

Justice Institutions reformed and updated after the Justice reform of 2016 such as:

The High Judicial Council (HJC) oversees the governance of courts, the functioning of the judicial system, and the career and discipline of judges. It comprises 11 members, 6 elected by judges at all levels and 5 by the Assembly from non-judicial jurists, including lawyers and academic staff.

The High Prosecution Council (HPC) ensures the independence, accountability, and discipline of prosecutors, including appointing those in the Special Prosecution against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK). It also proposes candidates for Prosecutor General, with members elected from prosecutors and non-judicial jurists.

The High Inspector of Justice (HIJ) investigates disciplinary violations and initiates proceedings against judges, prosecutors, and other key judicial figures. It is appointed by the Assembly and oversees institutional inspections of courts and prosecution offices.

The Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure includes SPAK and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), focusing on high-level corruption and organized crime. Cases are referred to the Special Courts of First Instance and Appeal for handling.

Independent Institutions such as:

Ombudsperson (People's Advocate) - The Ombudsperson in Albania serves as an independent institution focused on protecting citizens' rights and freedoms against unlawful or improper actions by public authorities. Its primary role includes investigating complaints, monitoring human rights violations, and ensuring public institutions comply with the law. The institution also provides recommendations to improve governance and advocates for systemic reforms to uphold fundamental rights.

Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination - The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination works to prevent and address all forms of discrimination in Albania, ensuring equal treatment for all individuals. Its mandate includes investigating complaints of discrimination, monitoring the implementation of anti-discrimination laws, and promoting awareness about equality and inclusion. The Commissioner also provides guidance to institutions and the public on legal protections against discriminatory practices. It addresses cases of discrimination in various fields, including employment, education, and public services. By working with both public and private sectors, the Commissioner fosters a culture of tolerance and equal opportunities, while advocating for stronger protections against discriminatory behaviours.

Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data - The Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data in Albania is responsible for safeguarding individuals' privacy and ensuring the lawful processing of personal data. Its primary aim is to enforce data protection laws, monitor compliance by public and private entities, and investigate complaints related to data misuse or breaches. The institution also promotes awareness about privacy rights and provides guidance on the secure handling of personal information to prevent unauthorized access or misuse.

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 “On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration”. The Ministry of Justice is the leading institution for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and as such some of the roundtables were held in close collaboration with its representatives. During the roundtables, members of this DCTs have been present along other stakeholders who contribute and possess expertise on the specific issues discussed on each roundtable.

Roundtable: The Active Role of Civil Society in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions within the Political Criterion Framework, January 22, 2024

This meeting of the Roundtable on Chapter 23 in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice paid special attention to the discussion on the active role that civil society actors can and should play in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, both during the approval process and, above all, for monitoring the measures and priorities outlined in the Roadmap, while taking into account the established deadlines and the need for coordination and cooperation between state and non-state actors. The Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions has been prepared by the Inter-Institutional Working Group for European Integration and is of particular importance for the continuity of the negotiation process for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals. The areas covered by this guideline include: I. The electoral process, II. The functioning of the Assembly, and III. The role of civil society. The special focus of the discussion was on the active involvement of civil society actors and their means of engagement in the decision-making process and the monitoring of the policies intended to be adopted and implemented within the framework of the guideline, with the aim of achieving a more transparent and inclusive policymaking process, as well as enhancing dialogue among parties and ensuring that civil society is a significant actor with a tangible contribution within the negotiation process with the EU.

The participants provided their recommendations regarding the monitoring of elections by the CSOs for the supervision of the election process and stressed the imperative for increased collaboration with the Central Election Commission. The participants delved into the role and challenges that the Albanian media has, with a particular focus on the issues surrounding online media and social networks that are currently unregulated by law.

The participants stressed the pressing need for additional funding and financial support for CSOs to effectively carry out their monitoring role. Moreover, they explored strategies for finding incentives to enhance the activity and involvement of CSO-s in the consultative process.

The Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions has been requested by the European Commission as part of the screening process for Cluster 1 - Fundamentals. While not being a mandatory opening benchmark for Albania, this Roadmap is useful in determining priorities and actions required to implement reforms concerning the Political Criterion. The Roadmap includes the legal and institutional framework, wherein the measures undertaken should address legal and institutional gaps, key challenges the country faces in this regard, the institutional enforcement capabilities ensuring effective implementation and monitoring of reforms, as well as compliance with EU standards, and the functioning and performance of public administration. The Roadmap outlines specific, well-argued measures based on concrete data, along with timeframes and deadlines for each action anticipated to be taken during the 2024-2030 period. The areas covered in the Roadmap are: the electoral process, the Assembly, and Civil Society. There are two priority issues related to the electoral process, namely media monitoring during the electoral campaign and financing of political parties. In Albania, there are around 68 media operators (Radio and Televisions), with only 4 of them being national, while approximately 1000 portals and online media outlets are counted. The absence of distinct laws controlling the management and operation of the media, particularly online media, and their lack of formalisation are problematic. Authorities face challenges in monitoring and identifying these entities, especially during the electoral process, in which cases of misinformation and their exploitation by political parties have occurred. Concerning the financing of political parties, a continuous issue highlighted in European Commission reports

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A closer and proactive collaboration between the Central Election Commission and civil society is recommended to create an enabling environment for engagement and involvement in the media monitoring process during the electoral campaign.
- Although the Central Election Commission cannot impose or coerce the inclusion of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in this process, it is required to promote and encourage their involvement by establishing a more structured and sustainable dialogue with interested civil society actors. The Central Election Commission's new regulations, which acknowledge CSOs as significant collaborators, can include this cooperation.
- It is suggested to map out the organisations with experience and expertise in this field and contact them directly to involve them in the process.
- Training and capacity-building sessions are recommended for organisations interested in participating but lacking experience in the monitoring part. These training sessions could be conducted in collaboration with foreign or local experts.
- Since ensuring free and fair, uncontested and transparent elections is a priority, it is recommended to increase funding opportunities and grants for CSOs (with a more significant role for the Agency for the Support of Civil Society) and the increase of financial support from other local or international donors.
- Civil society actors are often inactive or not involved due to a perceived lack of impact on decision-making and policy formulation, and due to not being able to see any result or follow-up of their contribution and activism. It is crucial for interested institutions to respond to all inputs and recommendations from civil society, whether accepted or not, providing well-argued reasons. This is essential for establishing a sustainable collaboration between public institutions and CSOs, encouraging them to continue their mission.
- Information dissemination and the implementation of an awareness campaign for the inclusion of interest groups are also essential elements, in which it is suggested that through promoting collaboration opportunities and contributions from civil society actors, their active involvement in the electoral process can be facilitated.
- Civil society organisations, especially those offering necessary expertise, can be involved as experts and contribute to providing expertise for interested institutions or actors, where incentives, including financial ones, should be provided to acknowledge the value of their contribution and motivate CSOs to share their expertise.
- A higher level of attention should be given to organisations working at the local level, which may have fewer opportunities for involvement (due to financial constraints or human resource limitations). However, they can provide valuable contributions, especially concerning local-level issues. A closer collaboration between local CSOs and local authorities is highly appreciated for their direct involvement.
- CSOs should engage in networks or groups of organisations and draft monitoring reports on measures and reforms undertaken by local authorities in the negotiation process, known as shadow reports, which could be valuable documents for comparing reports produced by public institutions with the ones by CSOs on one side, and the reports of the European Union on the other.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Protecting children online from all forms of violence and abuse, 28 March 2024

As work progresses on drafting the new Criminal Code of Albania, special attention in this code has been devoted to the protection of children online and the fighting against various forms of abuse and violence they may encounter online. On the other hand, a recommendation of the European Commission remains the criminalisation of all forms of online sexual abuse against children, as a sensitive problem to be solved and to take the necessary measures. These issues remain a priority and are included within Chapter 23 as topics directly related to the protection and human rights, more specifically those of children. The present Roundtable for Chapter 23 held in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice in Albania brought together Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania; Mrs. Elona Bano, Director of Integration and Negotiations at the Ministry of Justice; Mrs. Anda Hysi, the Minors and Juvenile Crime Prevention Center, Ministry of Justice; the members of PPIE, representatives from civil society or academia, legal professionals and experts to discuss these issues and provide the necessary recommendations and successful practices and procedures to follow.

Slovak experience and European policies on protecting children online were also discussed during this roundtable through the presence of JUDr. PhDr. Lilla Garayova, PhD., Vice Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Pan-European University in Bratislava, who made it clear that over 40% of children aged 9 to 16 who use the internet are involved in cyberbullying, exposed to harmful content, and privacy breaches. She further presented the platform called Stoplevel.sk, which fights against child abuse (such as child pornography, sexual exploitation, child prostitution, child trafficking, care for them, and others), manifestations that violate fundamental human rights and freedoms (intolerance, racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, anti-gypsyism, and others), content or other activities that indicate signs of criminal acts. Stoplevel.sk has seen a significant increase, including cases of online sexual abuse of children. Dr. Garayova had the opportunity during her presentation to discuss legislative measures, international conventions, and the role of governments and interested parties in creating a safer internet environment for children.

Children's rights are fundamental rights and are included in Chapter 23 of the EU Acquis - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. According to today's data worldwide, 1 in 3 internet users is a child, while about 40% of children have encountered at least one form of online violence or abuse (cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, fake news, online sexual abuse, etc.). This shows that protecting children in the digital world is challenging, considering that this is a field that has recently undergone significant development, adding that it is a highly dynamic field with frequent and rapid developments. In this regard, the formulation of policies and measures to protect children from online abuse and risks, as well as informing and raising awareness for prevention, should be implemented at the same speed and should be updated according to the needs and changes that arise in this field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A legal framework for online media is recommended, with a special focus on protecting children in the digital world from abuse or other risks. The Criminal Code being drafted should also consider the establishment of abusive or criminal online practices as convictional acts by defining pertinent sanctions. An example from Slovakia is that the harasser or abuser who may be liable for criminal acts can be either a natural person or a legal entity.
- Responsible structures and policymakers are recommended to be ready to make necessary changes and updates to the legal framework whenever there are developments and innovations in online media and the digital world. As a field that evolves rapidly, the risks that may arise are also fast and often unknown. Therefore, monitoring of these developments and immediate responses whenever needed is recommended. Sharing experiences with other European countries is seen as a good opportunity to stay updated on these issues and to find and share solutions quickly and effectively.
- Another element to consider is the categorization of the risk of content in online media, which should be aligned with their level and the measures and sanctions to be taken (such as complete ban of the content or adaptation and filtering for a specific audience), establishing safety clauses with a focus on the children's interest and protection.
- The formulation of an integrated and standardized Code of Ethics for online media, with specific points for the online protection of children regarding the content they offer and the audience they target, is recommended.
- A positive experience from Slovakia is the compilation of monitoring reports on children's rights conducted periodically by responsible institutions. These reports help understand the situation of children's protection, and major issues and are guiding for future measures. They should contain necessary data and statistics to specify the monitored issues. These monitoring reports can also be drafted in cooperation with civil society actors involved in these fields or with their contribution.
- Regarding the update of the legislation for the protection of children online, it is suggested that the measures taken not only meet the obligations arising from the EU or international instruments (thus the minimum approximation to European legislation) but also adapt to the specific needs and issues that may exist in the country, aiming to better address these issues and provide solutions that align with the reality in Albania.
- Another positive experience from Slovakia is the establishment of a monitoring and complaint platform regarding content and messages coming from audiovisual and online media that may harm children. Slovakia has an Audiovisual and Online Media Council that monitors and makes decisions on media content in case of complaints and requests from citizens. Albania lacks such an authority for the online media.
- It is recommended to establish or form an inter-institutional working group whose work is directly related to the protection of minors in the digital space, which would serve to coordinate policies and concrete measures, but also to monitor and make pertinent assessments regarding their efficiency and impact.
- To prevent the risk and harm to children online, it is recommended to inform and educate them about digital safety and how to protect themselves in risky situations. This can be achieved in collaboration with various actors: Education in schools through awareness campaigns and activities not only for students but also for teaching staff and parents.
- It is suggested that to inform and educate children and young people, a more innovative, clear yet attractive approach is needed, especially created for these age groups to stimulate their interest in engaging in these awareness campaigns and understanding them. A positive practice is the direct involvement of children in carrying out these activities and awareness campaigns, to have an active role rather than just being recipients of this information.

- It is recommended to prepare a guide or list of practical and orienting rules regarding the safe use of online media and the internet, targeting not only
- minors as users but also other actors: parents, teachers, providers of online media services, civil society actors, and state institutions, defining their role, responsibility, and measures they can take to prevent online risks or promote the protection of children in the digital world.
- For this dynamic and highly sensitive field, a cooperative approach between state institutions and other involved actors is recommended, considering it involves several actors and interest groups. Among other things, close cooperation and a very active role between state institutions and media providers or internet service providers are suggested, who should be involved in monitoring and filtering the content they allow by having the necessary security filters and clauses. Also, in cases of complaints, they should collaborate in finding solutions and taking necessary measures.
- Civil Society is recommended to play a monitoring and supervisory role, especially concerning online content and online media. In Albania, there is a lack of dedicated legislation for online media as well as an institution (watchdog) for its monitoring. In this aspect, in cooperation with Civil Society, it can be made possible for online media to be more proactively monitored by those civil society organizations to prevent any content that may be inappropriate or harmful for minors in Albania.

Roundtable: Each one's Integration in Europe – Protecting Fundamental Rights and Marginalized Communities, 14 May 2024

This roundtable in collaboration with Pro LGBT organization, aimed to provide an open and free space for information and discussion with stakeholders, civil society, activists, and experts with state institutions on issues related to human rights and the protection of marginalized groups. Fundamental rights are one of the subfields within Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, which is one of the chapters to be opened first in the framework of the negotiation process and remain at the core of the rule of law, good governance, democratic institutions, and the promotion of justice and equality. Panellist experts provided information on (legal and institutional framework), elaborated and assessed the policies undertaken within the framework of European integration, as well as promoted the advocacy and monitoring role civil society plays and should play on these issues through their proactive involvement in the policymaking process.

The panelists included Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania; Nirvana Deliu, Policy Researcher at the European Movement in Albania; His Excellency Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Ambassador of the European Union in Albania; Robert Gajda, Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination; Alba Ahmetaj, Executive Director of the Pro LGBT organization, and Dea Nini, Legal Expert at the Aleanca LGBT organization. The roundtable further underlined that measures should be taken to fight discrimination and promote acceptance and tolerance towards the LGBTQIA+ community, not only through legal changes such as updating the Family Code or the Criminal Code regarding hate crimes but also by promoting these rights, increasing information, promoting awareness, and accelerating the public debate on these issues. Participants with interest and desire to discuss cooperation on the way to the creation of European Union standards. They reflected on the challenges that marginalized groups face, focusing on the importance of the issues in the field of human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Legal recognition of LGBTQIA+ community persons is still lacking in Albania, starting from their gender or sexual identity as well as the rights derived from them, such as family law, social protection or health care. For this reason, it is recommended that the national legislation to be updated and revised, taking these elements into consideration to ensure the full and comprehensive protection of their rights.
- Revision of the Criminal Code regarding the part of Hate Speech and Hate Crimes to be accurate and present the procedures and standards to identify these crimes and to sanction them as clearly as possible. In Albania, there is no dedicated practice and jurisprudence that deals specifically with hate speech and hate crimes, especially those based on the sexual orientation and gender identity of persons.
- Regarding the revision of the Family Code, it is necessary to recognize by law the cohabitation of persons of the same sex. In Albania, there is still no legal regulation regarding the cohabitation of persons of the same sex and this leads to the human rights not being fully provided, bringing as a consequence the violation of not only the international obligations and conventions that Albania adheres to, but also of its own Constitution which defines the right of every citizen to create a family.
- The European Union has recently adopted two Directives to guarantee the standards of equality bodies with the main purpose of strengthening the competences of equality bodies to fight discrimination in the fields of employment and social security, but also to increase their independence, to increase human and technical resources and empower them in the direction of dispute resolution in cases of discrimination. For this, the Albanian state is encouraged to take the necessary measures to align the Albanian legislation with these directives to make it possible for the equality bodies in the country, such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, to strengthen their capacities, role and independence in line with the new directives of EU.
- The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsperson, as the two main bodies in Albania for the protection of human rights, despite the good work done over the years, still encounter difficulties in terms of strengthened human capacities, financial resources and infrastructure for the full completion of approved Strategies or Action Plans. The inclusion of Albania in the CERV mechanism as well as the technical assistance being offered by TAIEX is positively evaluated, but such programs and support should be more numerous and sustainable to ensure that these bodies fully fulfil their role and responsibilities that they hold in these fields.
- An increased and more active role should be played by local authorities Local Government Units, since they are directly contacting with citizens and the community at the local level, offering the necessary services to these communities.
- Greater cooperation and an active role of Civil Society Organisations that focus on the protection of human rights, the fight against discrimination and the protection of the LGBTQIA+ community with public institutions and equality bodies in Albania is recommended. They can contribute by providing accurate and real information on the problems they encounter during their field work and the direct contact they have with these communities. This information is often difficult to be identified by public institutions, so a continuous cooperation and communication with CSOs would facilitate their work in taking measures as well, as in immediate reaction that should come from the responsible public institutions on issues and challenges.
- CSOs should be more active especially in rural areas and other cities of Albania (outside of Tirana), where these topics are discussed very little or not at all and the difficulties of LGBTQIA+ persons are even greater. In many cases, dedicated and specialised organizations are missing in these areas, but they can be assisted in building capacities and expertise by umbrella associations with more experience through collaborations and networks that can be created.

- CSOs are encouraged to also be cooperative with other interest groups and other actors and different sectors of society, as well as to be more active in pushing forward the necessary legal changes by formalizing them to clear concrete measures and policies directed to the legislators and beneficiaries of these policies.
- A more active involvement of CSOs in the consultative and policy-making process is recommended by being involved and contributing with recommendations to the established consultation structures and mechanisms, such as the Partnership Platform for European Integration, where their contribution to policies with a focus on marginalized communities not only within Chapter 23 but also other EU Acquis chapters that include education, employment, health care and social protection, public health, etc.
- An information and awareness campaign on the LGBTQIA+ community in Albania is considered necessary, since there is often a lack of information on this community and there is an increase of misinformation or disinformation that leads to an increase in discrimination and the risk of hate speech, crimes or violence towards this community. This information campaign should be promoted by CSOs who are in the vanguard, but in cooperation with traditional media and social media, and also with the inclusion and cooperation of the public institutions and other actors.
- Informative activities and trainings on this community, on their rights and their protection is suggested to be done with the pedagogical staff (teachers of pre-university education) but also with the psycho-social staff (psychologists, social workers etc.) who work and have contact with young people and teenagers who often fall prey to misinformation and may be perpetrators of bullying and hate speech, or for young people who identify as part of the community but who are discriminated against and encounter difficulties in accepting their identity openly.
- The media is encouraged to be more proactive in promoting the work that equality bodies do, in order to increase the awareness of affected persons to turn to these bodies in cases of discrimination that they may encounter. There is often a reluctance and mistrust on their work, as citizens do not have information that their problems can be solved or how to address them in these cases. Complaints that come to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination have been increased from year to year, but again the number is low compared to the real cases in the country. While the Ombudsperson has had zero complaints this year from people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. In regard to this, it is suggested as a positive practice that there should be a wider media coverage of the work of these bodies, and the cases they solve in order to inform and encourage citizens to share their complaints and problems.
- It is recommended that there be training and capacity building activities for journalists and the media in these areas, since accurate information is often lacking and the media have also contributed to promoting misinformation because journalists are not sufficiently informed and prepared for the issues related to the community. A special attention should be paid to raising the capacities of the local media, so that for these media that deal in more detail with everyday life of the citizens, awareness and information on issues of this nature to be increased.

Roundtable: The Law on Volunteering in Albania: A priority for the development of an enabling environment for civil society, 09 July 2024

Through this roundtable, it was aimed to improve and address the issues that were concerning during the implementation of the Volunteering Law 45/2016, including the involvement of civil society actors in the entire process of drafting, consulting and monitoring. The Minister of State for Youth and Children has initiated a drafting of the Volunteering Bill, aimed at supporting civil society actors, activists, youth and volunteer networks across the country. The objective of this proposed legislation is to address the challenges in the implementation of Law on Volunteering No.45/ 2016. These challenges have been brought forth by civil society organisations, who have also provided recommendations for enhancing the law to ensure its enforceability and to eliminate obstacles faced by CSOs.

Reviewing the Law on Volunteering is a priority outlined in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, as it is a key benchmark for Cluster I, Fundamentals of the EU chapters related to the country's European integration. This review should be approved by 2025, with the aim to create a supportive environment for civil society, encouraging inclusive participation, effective cooperation and meaningful contributions of civil societies in the process. The draft law will propose amendments to the existing Law No.45/2016, with the first draft expected for public consultation in September 2024.

The meeting brought together the Minister of State for Youth and Children, Ms. Bora Muzhaqi; Ms. Olta Manjani, Deputy Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation; H.E.Mr. Silvio Gonzato, EU Ambassador to Albania; Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA; Ms. Arjola Agolli, Manager of the National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania, Partners Albania for Change and Development; Mr. Oltion Pengu, Legal Advisor to the Minister of State for Youth and Children, the Slovak experience and best European practices with the presence of doc.PhDr. Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová, Assistant Professor at Matej Bel University and President of Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organisations in Slovakia, and representative from civil society, as well as youth and volunteers to discuss this draft law by offering recommendations and suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is essential to clarify what constitutes volunteering, distinguishing it from activities that do not qualify as volunteering. The term “voluntary work” should be avoided and instead, volunteering should be defined as an act or action that does not invoke an employment relationship. A clear distinction must be made between social services or professional work practices, which should not be classified as volunteering. Additionally, the law should differentiate between structured volunteering and mass volunteering, without obstructing the latter with formal barriers and financial obligations for volunteers or organisations.
 - The law should address the recognition of skill and volunteer experience as professional experience. Mass volunteering would not require such recognition, structured volunteering however should. This recognition should be accredited by an appropriate authority based on an assessment of skills obtained during the volunteering period.
 - The law should clarify the parties involved in volunteer relationships. Specifically, the law should define what certifies as a volunteering organisation, who qualifies as a volunteer, and who are the beneficiaries of the voluntary act - this may include individuals or legal entities separate from the volunteering organisation. This clarification will better the understanding of roles and responsibilities in volunteering agreements.
 - The concept of volunteering should not be restricted to youths but made to include a broader spectrum of all ages, diverse social groups and even foreigners. It is advised to lower the minimum age on volunteering, to include adolescents and children engaged in volunteering activities.
 - Greater emphasis should be placed on sectors that promote volunteer activity and involve varied target groups, particularly in sports, recreational activities, and religious communities. These can offer opportunities for increased volunteer engagement.
 - The law should avoid charging the registration of volunteers for their services, as this creates unnecessary bureaucracy and exhausts the volunteering organisation of its resources. For mass volunteering, such registration is most impractical.
 - The regulation of volunteering should consider broader national legal frameworks and other laws affecting or affected by volunteering, such as social and health insurance laws, employment laws, social services laws, youth laws and education laws.
- Support and involvement from state institutions are vital for volunteering initiatives, as providing volunteer services is costly for organisations; therefore, it is recommended to:
- Establish a dedicated fund for volunteering and volunteering organisations, similar to Slovakia’s model, where an accreditation body recognises organisation meeting specific criteria and allowing them to access these funds.
 - The state could cover health or work injury insurance for volunteers, thus easing the economic burden on volunteering organisations and encouraging more volunteer engagement.
 - The legal and contractual nature of the relationship between the Volunteer and the Volunteering Provider should be clarified, with the aim of specifying, above all, the respective tax obligations, contributions, etc., and the legal avoidance of these obligations. The volunteering relationship cannot be a work or service relationship.
 - It is recommended that agreements between the volunteer, the volunteering provider organization, and/or the beneficiary of the volunteering be as flexible as possible, with minimal bureaucracy and restrictions, and clearly outline the duties and rights of each party.
 - The provision of Article 16(2) should be removed from Law 45/2016. The conditions of contract invalidity should be identified and declared in accordance with the conditions and provisions of the Civil Code of the Republic of Albania.
 - The nature and type of insurance for Volunteers under Article 22 should also be clarified to facilitate the proper implementation of the law by all interested parties (so that clarification is not limited to an interpretation by a technical decision of the Tax Directorate - see recommendation 1 above). Volunteer insurance in the social security scheme for

- workplace accidents and retirement pensions seems appropriate in the volunteering relationship; this insurance can be provided by the state. The issue faced by the existing law is in cases where individuals who are simultaneously receiving social assistance engage as volunteers and are paid by the volunteer provider organization for social security, creating a problem for receiving social assistance, as in such a case, due to the ambiguity of the process and lack of system identification, they appear as employed. Thus, the situation is that individuals receiving social assistance risk losing this assistance when engaged as volunteers under the existing law.
- It is recommended that during the establishment of the contractual relationship between the volunteer and the offering organization and/or beneficiary, a guiding and informative document should be created to ensure protection against abuse and other risks that may arise during volunteer service, such as labour exploitation, verbal or physical violence, or the risk of harassment and sexual abuse. This is especially relevant when the agreement includes vulnerable categories such as minors, individuals with mental or physical health issues, marginalized groups, etc.
- More work is needed on raising awareness and informing individuals involved in voluntary service (both volunteers and beneficiaries) about the mechanisms for protecting their rights and how to proceed in case of problems to report or file complaints with the appropriate state authorities.
- There is a lack of studies on volunteering and accurate data on the number of organizations offering volunteering in the country, the number and type of volunteers, and other necessary information regarding volunteer contributions (type, duration, target groups, typology of volunteers and beneficiaries, main areas of volunteer contribution, etc.). These studies are considered important to understand the real state of volunteering in the country and to guide volunteering policies. Studies are recommended to be conducted by public institutions, in cooperation with civil society organizations, which can contribute in this area with their experience and capacities.
- The legal regulation of volunteering and, in particular, the use of the Volunteer Register should function to assess the contribution of volunteers to society and avoid the potential misuse of the Register's information for financial, fiscal, etc., burdens on Volunteers and Offering Organizations. The law should clearly define the purpose and function of the Register. Thus, if such a register is to be established, a detailed and comprehensive analysis of its purpose, utility, and benefits for the volunteering process is recommended.
- Registering volunteers in an online register adds additional costs to organizations in terms of time, human resources, and finances. This becomes particularly difficult in the case of mass volunteering campaigns. This administrative burden may be unbearable for a large number of organizations, reducing their incentive to offer volunteering due to bureaucratic obstacles.
- It is recommended to consider that for the establishment of such a register, there must also be a good mechanism to protect and prevent the misuse of personal data held by this register. Given the high risk of cybercrime and past cases where citizens' personal data were not protected and were published and misused, this is an important element that must be considered in the creation of the national online volunteer register.
- The national online register may not be necessary if all organizations have their own internal documents and procedures regarding volunteer registration and data maintenance, such as: internal registers of organizations, minutes, participant lists, certificates, participation confirmations, or reference letters, or agreements and contracts concluded between organizations and volunteers. All these documents can serve as proof of the volunteer service and the volunteers involved in the organization.
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Roundtable: Presentation of the Crosscutting Strategy on Justice 2024-2030, 02 October 2024

The Ministry of Justice has completed the drafting process of the Intersectoral Justice Strategy 2024-2030, developed in accordance with the obligations arising from Albania's integration process into the European Union. This strategy outlines the most important objectives and expected results for the next seven years. This important document was prepared with the technical assistance of the JustAL Project. The new strategy emphasizes the consolidation of the legal framework and the sustainability of the achievements of the Justice Reform in line with EU acquis, the elimination of backlogs, and the increase of efficiency. It also focuses on improving the quality of services, strengthening the institutional framework, enhancing the infrastructure of the justice system, and reinforcing accountability and transparency mechanisms.

The Ministry of Justice has completed the drafting process of the Inter-Sectoral Justice Strategy 2024-2030, prepared in accordance with the obligations arising from Albania's integration process into the European Union. This strategy outlines the most important objectives and expected outcomes for the next seven years. This important document was developed with the technical assistance of the JustAL Project. The new strategy places emphasis on consolidating the legal framework and ensuring the sustainability of the achievements of the Justice Reform in line with EU acquis, eliminating the backlog, increasing efficiency, and improving the quality of services. It also focuses on strengthening the institutional framework, enhancing the infrastructure of the justice system, and reinforcing accountability and transparency mechanisms.

This roundtable in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice brought together Mr. Tedi Dobi, Deputy Minister of Justice and Negotiator for Chapter 23; Mrs. Elona Bano, Director of Integration and Negotiations at the Ministry of Justice; esteemed professor of Albanian jurisprudence, Mr. Njazi Jaho; Mr. Artan Kotro, General Director at the Ministry of Justice, and civil society actors, representatives from academia, and the business sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is urgent to complete the regulatory acts for the functioning of two important bodies of the justice system: the High Judicial Council (KLGJ) and the High Prosecutorial Council (KLP), which have so far operated without having such a complete legal basis.
- Activities on promoting mediation should be more proactive, focusing not only on information and awareness campaigns for citizens, but also on intensifying the court referral system and encouraging citizens, where possible, to lean towards alternative solutions through mediation.
- The budget for free legal aid is recommended to be reviewed to align with the needs and demands of the categories of individuals benefiting from free legal aid, while also providing a thorough analysis of the situation of these beneficiary groups.
- The objective that aims that 80% of the magistrates will be evaluated through the vetting process until 2030, should be reassessed. This process [the vetting process] should be completed as soon as possible and as quickly as possible.
- It is concerning that prosecutors have either suspended or not even initiated the prosecution of cases against judges or prosecutors, providing unfounded justifications for their actions. This has resulted in many of these cases exceeding the statute of limitations for criminal prosecution. This issue should be prioritized.
- As digitalisation of services is currently developing and also based on the momentum gained by artificial intelligence, it is suggested that the digitization of the court system should be an area of increased focus for improving the provision of online services (to avoid economic costs or save time) and to begin efforts to further advance the possibility of conducting online court sessions.
- In the context of digitization, it is recommended that the Integrated Case Management System be linked with as many other databases as possible containing relevant information that facilitates the acquisition and exchange of information between these online systems.
- It is necessary to provide feedback and responses after recommendations and suggestions are made, so that the process is as transparent and interactive as possible, offering information on which recommendations have been considered or not, and when possible, providing the relevant justifications.
- Cooperation with civil society should be structured and formalized to clarify the role and involvement of civil society actors; what is expected of them, and how they can contribute concretely. In this regard, attention should also be given to combining the activities with those of the Chapter 23 Round Table of the Partnership Platform, as well as with other networks and platforms established by civil society actors focusing on issues related to the justice system.
- CSO-s should also be included as watchdogs for monitoring the Strategy and its implementation in those areas and issues where they have expertise and can provide accurate and detailed assessments of the measures and indicators of the strategy.
- It is advised that there be direct communication facilitated by the Ministry of Justice between civil society actors and justice institutions, or the Ministry; to inform or alert during the monitoring or evaluation of the Strategy, as well as regarding opportunities for joint actions and activities.
- It is recommended that there be better coordination between the Ministry and justice institutions for the implementation of the measures outlined in the Strategy, where these institutions can prepare more detailed action plans for those points and issues that they are directly involved. This would facilitate the monitoring process as well as inter-institutional coordination.
- It is also recommended that deadlines be set not only for activities but also for the measures outlined in the Strategy, as this would facilitate the monitoring process and provide a clearer picture of achievements and challenges. These deadlines would assist both the ministry and the responsible institutions in monitoring, as well as civil society in tracking these results.

- It is recommended to strengthen existing monitoring mechanisms and instruments, as well as to use new methodologies in collaboration with civil society or academia and universities for monitoring the strategy, the planned measures, and the achievement of objectives. Special attention should be given to monitoring and evaluating of:
- the aspect of increasing citizens' trust in justice institutions and improving justice services for citizens, as these are two interrelated elements.
- the impact that the strategy may have on gender equality during its implementation by preparing analyses based on specific indicators related to the needs of gender groups.
- the impact that the New Judicial Map will have on access to justice, especially for vulnerable groups (whether positive or negative).
- For a clearer assessment and understanding of the process of how the strategy is being implemented, it is recommended that the indicators be linked not only to the objectives but also to concrete measures of action. In this way, this connection helps to more accurately understand in which areas there is progress and results are achieved, and which ones show problems and require greater attention.

Roundtable: Beyond barriers to media independence: A new impetus for the European integration process, 11 December 2024

The European Commission's latest report on Albania for 2024 clearly indicates a lack of progress in aligning the legal framework with the EU acquis in the field of freedom of expression, including the Media Freedom Law. In this context, this roundtable aimed to delve deeper into the issue of media market concentration to enhance transparency and establish limitations on media ownership and audience reach, as clearly outlined in the Rule of Law Roadmap. Following the adoption of the regulation “On the criteria and procedures for reviewing changes in the ownership structure and the data transparency related to the ownership of Audiovisual Media Service Providers” in April 2024, audio and audiovisual media in the country, regulated by the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), are now required to declare their beneficial owners. This regulation, drafted after adapting the 2018 Directive into the institution’s law, has introduced significant changes in this regard.

Moreover, Albanian audiovisual media have yet to develop clear strategies for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the adaptation of ethical codes, leaving them unprepared to address the complex challenges that this innovation may pose. One of the key topics of the roundtable was the necessity of ethical AI usage in audiovisual media, especially in an environment where sensitive issues such as bias, misinformation, and lack of transparency risk undermining the credibility and integrity of journalism. The use of AI demands a cautious approach, emphasizing professional ethics and the development of protective mechanisms to avoid negative impacts on public information.

This roundtable in collaboration with the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) and the Center for Transparency and Freedom of Information (CTFI) brought together Mrs. Armela Krasniqi, Chairperson, AMA; Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, EMA; Donika Daci, Director, Legal Directory, AMA; Sami Neza, Executive Director, CTFI; and the Slovak expert, Mr. Tomáš Kamenec, Partner at the Paul Q Law Firm, who shared best European practices with the other participating stakeholders, including representatives of civil society, media, academia, local government associations, and field experts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is essential to successfully implement the audience measurement process, which has also been declared a priority for the tasks covered by AMA, in order to ensure accurate and reliable statistics for audiovisual media in the country, enabling content monitoring and guiding developments in the media sector;
- The legal use of social media, particularly the TikTok platform, needs to be regulated, in accordance to the European policies and practices, to avoid and filter harmful content for minors, ensuring safety and ethics in the use of these platforms;
- Audiovisual media in the country must raise awareness about respecting ethical standards and relevant laws, based on professional journalism codes, treating the media as reliable, objective, and honest source. The public has the right to receive accurate, impartial information, free from manipulation, speculation, or political influence that undermines its trust. In this regard, AMA, together with other responsible authorities or non-governmental actors, should enhance media awareness regarding standards, deontology, and professional ethics.
- One of the key points discussed during the roundtable was the content of various advertisements broadcasted on audiovisual media, focusing on their regulation primarily for consumer protection and the preservation of ethical codes. The broadcasting of advertisements by AVMSPs must carefully comply with the provisions of the existing legislation, with particular attention to prohibited advertisements and those that are hidden.
- Advertisements in audiovisual media must adhere to ethical standards as outlined in Law No. 97/2013, as well as the Audiovisual Media Broadcasting Code, approved by Decision No. 60, dated 10.07.2023, the principles and rules of which are applied in accordance with the Codes of Conduct developed by AVMSPs, since audiovisual media are often flagged for not complying with these standards;
- Advertisements must protect consumer rights in accordance with Law No. 9902, dated 17.4.2008, "On Consumer Protection," as amended. Any advertisement that directly harms the consumer
 - through misleading practices and infringes upon their fundamental rights, such as the right to health protection, environmental safety, and life security, should be coordinated between AMA and other actors, such as civil society organizations, to report violations and communicate with the relevant authorities;
- Due to abuses by some media outlets, it is crucial to monitor advertisements for prescription medications, ensuring they are properly marked as either medications or supplements. As highlighted in Section 8, "Advertisements in Audio and Audiovisual Broadcasting," item 8.7, in the Audiovisual Media Broadcasting Code, advertisements for pharmaceutical or medical products that are only available with a doctor's prescription are prohibited. Therefore, it is recommended to continue close communication with the Medicines Agency to prevent the misuse of such advertisements;
- Financial sanctions should continue for audiovisual media that violate existing laws and for administrative violations that have been identified regarding advertisements that do not comply with the aforementioned points.
- It is recommended that the use of AI by the media to be aligned with journalistic ethical standards and filtered in real time, primarily with the ten principles of the Paris Charter for Artificial Intelligence and Journalism, in order to avoid inaccurate or manipulated information;
- The use of AI should help preserve and improve the use of the Albanian language, which is often distorted due to improper usage. Audiovisual media have high visibility, not only within the country but also in the diaspora, and it is important to maintain and strengthen the use of the Albanian language.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Institutional Engagement and Coordination, and the Contribution of Civil Society in the context of the Chapter 23 negotiations, 06 March 2025

The opening of negotiations for Chapter 1 – Fundamentals has intensified the work and monitoring of policies and reforms, which the European Union has also defined interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24. For Chapter 23, priorities have been set, divided into three main subfields of the chapter: four benchmarks for the judiciary and justice reform, three benchmarks for the fight against corruption, and seven benchmarks for the protection and promotion of human rights. Meanwhile, reporting and monitoring work between Albania and the EU continues, and within the framework of the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, the subfield of fundamentals and the rule of law is part of this agenda and has been prepared as opening criteria. This meeting created space for information sharing and discussion on developments in these areas, as well as opportunities for the involvement of stakeholders and other members in this process.

The roundtable on Chapter 23 brought together its members, representatives from civil society, universities, and experts to discuss these issues and offer meaningful contributions to this phase of the European integration process.

In this context, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, emphasized the importance of stakeholder inclusion in roundtables and the dissemination of information to both institutions and the public, highlighting civil society's role in providing feedback on strategic documents such as the Cross-Cutting Justice Strategy. He noted the potential of combining PPIE roundtables with Inter-Institutional Groups as models for other negotiation chapters. Tedi Dobi, Deputy Minister of Justice and Chapter 23 negotiator, stressed the need for these platforms amid Albania's preparation to open Clusters 2 and 3 on the economy and competition. He outlined the 14 EU interim benchmarks for Chapter 23,, and reported 131 concrete measures identified through weekly EU meetings, linking progress to the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and the goal of completing technical negotiations by 2027. Elona Bano, Director of Integration and Negotiations, detailed work on Chapters 23 and 24, including addressing 124 critical gaps in the Rule of Law Roadmap, implementing magistrate investigations, reforms for freedom of expression, and police training. She highlighted challenges such as coordination across independent institutions and encouraged civil society and public institutions to strengthen the Rule of Law and the Growth Plan implementation to meet milestones effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the Legal and Institutional Framework for Specific Issues Covered in Chapter 23

- Regarding Justice Reform: It is recommended to change the anonymization system for judges who are appointed or promoted to positions, in order to increase transparency for citizens and to consider the public interest.
- Regarding Judicial Independence: It is necessary to continue guaranteeing the independence and non-interference of the judiciary, especially from political factors. However, this independence should be based on the principle of checks and balances to ensure that these institutions remain independent but do not acquire absolute power that cannot be monitored or supervised.
- Regarding Freedom of Expression: Legal protection for journalists and media freedom must be guaranteed by creating a separate module for anti-SLAPP directives and providing free legal assistance for journalists.
- Regarding Minority Rights: It is required that these minorities are more informed and involved in the process, with increased financial and logistical support to build capacity and ensure comprehensive participation in this phase of the integration process in the country.

On the Process of Meeting the Criteria in the Negotiation Framework

- It is necessary to ensure the quality of the process of fulfilling the obligations under the chapters of the EU integration process to guarantee their closure, not just the opening of new chapters. Given the very tight deadlines, there must be a clear balance between the speed of reforms and their full, substantial fulfillment without compromising quality.
- It is essential to ensure an equal distribution of information regarding the ongoing efforts for the preparation of the Second Rule of Law Report and concrete measures that will be undertaken in Chapter 23, in cities and regions outside of Tirana as these meetings are held.

- Coordination and cooperation among all actors and institutions involved in Chapter 23 is needed. It has been estimated that the Working Group (GNPIE) for Chapter 23 consists of 193 members, which often makes coordination and communication with these involved institutions challenging. A clear distribution of responsibilities, setting deadlines, and continuous communication on the stages of the process could facilitate this coordination and collaboration.
- It is very important to combine measures and reforms between the interim criteria established for Chapter 23 and the measures anticipated in the Reform Agenda of the Growth Plan. It is also crucial to consider the horizontal approach to rule of law issues alongside trade and Single Market issues, as there are instances where these connections are not adequately addressed or appreciated.
- For the negotiation process, it is important to prioritize not only the technical dimension (implementation of reforms, meeting criteria) but also the political dimension, which has sometimes hindered or slowed the process. For this, there must be efforts from Albanian institutions to maintain close communication with both EU institutions and member states and their national institutions.

On the Framework for Cooperation with Civil Society Actors

- It is recommended that state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Justice, communicate more frequently and clearly with civil society actors, especially when providing feedback on their proposed recommendations to ensure that the process is as transparent and interactive as possible.
- It is advised to facilitate joint meetings between members of the PPIE roundtables and members of the Interinstitutional Working Groups (GNPIE) on specific issues or topics where communication and collaboration with representatives of public institutions and civil society actors would be valuable. These meetings would serve to:

- Ensure that discussions are more technical and specific regarding the topics in question, combining the expertise of GNPIE members and civil society actors from PPIE.
- Positively encourage public institutions to understand that communication and discussions with civil society actors are important and valuable, as they share experiences and expertise.
- Clarify for civil society actors the technical aspects of the process, the workload, and commitment required by public institutions, while also specifying where civil society actors can contribute meaningfully to this process.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Justice Reform in Progress: The Role of the School of Magistrates and Judicial Integrity in the EU accession process, 20 June 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 23 aimed to bring together representatives of the School of Magistrates, magistrates and professionals, civil society organizations, academics, and law students to discuss the role of training in ensuring integrity and accountability in the judicial system, in line with EU standards. The activity will serve as a platform to share views, challenges, and recommendations on how professional and ethical standards are built and applied through institutional training, both in Albania and in EU member states. Special attention was given to the exchange of best practices, with the participation of an expert from Slovakia who shared concrete models and successful experiences from the EU context.

The session on judicial reform and integrity emphasized the critical role of the School of Magistrates in advancing justice reform in Albania, with Borana Mustafaraj highlighting the need for transparency, accountability, and a shared culture of integrity to strengthen trust in institutions. She reflected on reforms to entry and training processes, including the move to anonymous written exams, integrity checks, and ethics-focused curricula designed with international partners to prepare magistrates for real-world dilemmas. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, EMA, stressed the importance of collaboration between civil society, academia, and judicial institutions to strengthen reforms, framing this as part of broader EU integration efforts. Slovak expert Pavol Žilinčík, Lecturer of Judicial Academy of the Slovak Republic and Member of Judicial Selection Committee, underscored that lasting reform depends on embedding ethics and integrity into the judiciary's culture, drawing lessons from Slovakia's institutional failures and stressing the need for "transformative reforms" that reshape behaviours and norms, not just formal structures. Together, the speakers underlined that sustainable judicial reform requires continuous training, open dialogue, and a living ethics framework to ensure credibility, professionalism, and resilience within the justice system.

Reform process

- On Integrating Integrity into Justice Reforms – When focused on integrity, reforms should include it as a central component of the ongoing transformation of the justice system and institutions in Albania. In this regard, reform processes should combine rules with identity, traditions, and informal norms. For example, vetting procedures can strengthen public trust if they are genuine, but erode trust if manipulated. Rigid and clear procedures should therefore be combined with cultural strategies, norms, and history of society concerning integrity, corruption, or conflict of interest. A monitoring exercise should follow, combining internal mechanisms (implemented by the institutions themselves) with external ones, ensuring open cooperation with CSOs, experts, and academia.
- On Alignment with the EU Accession Process – Participants emphasized that strengthening judicial integrity in Albania should be closely tied to the priorities of the EU accession process, particularly Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. Embedding integrity in reforms not only addresses internal challenges but also aligns Albania with EU. Judicial institutions should ensure that integrity-related measures are explicitly linked with EU benchmarks, and that monitoring of reforms includes both domestic and EU-driven evaluation mechanisms.
- On Internalisation of Integrity through Education – Ethics should not be treated as an external add-on but as part of a judge's professional identity, while training and capacity building on integrity should be continuous. Judicial schools should integrate ethics modules not only at entry-level training but throughout a judge's career, reinforcing reflection and peer dialogue. It is recommended based on best practices from other MS:
- Organisation of regular training and workshops that also include case-based discussions: e.g., a new judge whose family members are lawyers, or a judge asked to join a politically sensitive demonstration.
- Facilitating mentorship programs where senior judges, experts from academia and CSOs, and counterparts from the region and EU offer their expertise and mentor especially early-stage magistrates. In Sweden, for example, judicial training encourages judges to ask themselves key ethical questions before acting.
- On Safeguards Against Abuse and Manipulation – Integrity requires credible procedures that are not easily abused, thus it is essential to have transparent, merit-based systems for the selection and promotion of magistrates. Disciplinary systems should be narrowly tailored to genuine misconduct and protected from political or hierarchical abuse. Across some EU member states, ethics have been undermined through manipulated selection procedures, unfair promotions, or disciplinary proceedings used as punishment for independent judges.

Procedures and Frameworks for a culture of integrity

- On Ethical Frameworks – Judiciaries should not only adopt formal codes of conduct, but ensure that they are accessible, practical, and regularly discussed. For example, the Netherlands uses several complementary codes: one for impartiality and one for judicial staff written in clear, practical language. This makes it easier for judges to see how principles apply in daily practice. Another best practice comes from the Czech Union of Judges which has created an Open Collection of Ethical Dilemmas, where real scenarios are documented and debated. This transforms the code from a static text into a dynamic learning tool.
- On Creating a Culture of Integrity – Integrity should be internalised through ongoing discussions and community among magistrates in order to cultivate the ethical culture. It is recommended that during collegial meetings within justice institutions a specific focus is given to ethical discussions where issues of conflict of interest, integrity, and moral dilemmas are addressed. The discussions can be established as ethical dilemmas forums where judges discuss and interpret the real scenarios based on the theoretical framework and definitions of integrity. One best practice is the creation of tools such as the traffic-light framework (through guidelines and

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practical examples it clarifies what actions are totally acceptable, which ones are questionable, and which are unacceptable. It has been proven that sharing such examples helps in creating a common practice and vocabulary that can be transmitted to other justice institutions and to future generations of magistrates.

Cooperation and Openness

- On Judicial Independence and Public Accountability – Magistrates operate in public life and face dilemmas about speech, association, and participation. Clear guidance is needed to balance independence with accountability. This can happen through developing and preparing context-specific guidelines for magistrates' participation in public life (political affiliation, membership in clubs or business networks, engagement in civic and political life such as demonstrations or media appearances). These guidelines are recommended to include practical examples and a self-assessment checklist concerning integrity and conflict of interest.
- On Public Trust towards Justice Institutions – Judicial integrity is assessed and perceived not only internally but also by society. Public trust collapses when citizens see case manipulation, unfair promotions, or ethical breaches going unaddressed. It is imperative that institutions have transparent procedures, including during the examination, application, and assessment of new magistrates as well as promotions. It is recommended that judicial institutions communicate openly, also welcoming inputs from civil society or academia through training, public activities, and training modules. This helps in building a culture of integrity and accountability, while raising awareness on integrity, its relevance, and challenges.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Implementation of the New Law on Personal Data Protection in the Context of Chapter 23 Negotiations: Dialogue with Civil Society and the Private Sector, 15 July 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 23 aimed to bring together civil society organizations, human rights activists, academics, legal professionals, private operators, and media representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the new Law on Personal Data Protection No. 124/2024, adopted in December 2024. Among other things, this law introduces several innovations and new elements that seek to provide more targeted and comprehensive protection of personal data, ensuring better alignment with European Union legislation, as part of the negotiation process and the fulfillment of the interim benchmarks set for Chapter 23 in this sub-area. Also an essential part for discussion was the ongoing work for the approval of secondary legislation to ensure its effective implementation. Special attention was devoted to the exchange of best practices, with the participation of an expert from Slovakia who shared concrete models and successful experiences from the EU context, focusing on the implementation process of the GDPR.

During the discussion, Blerta Nerguti from the Commissioner's Office noted the law's alignment with EU standards but stressed the importance of inclusive consultations with stakeholders. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, EMA, highlighted that reforms must not only meet formal EU criteria but also actively involve civil society, business, and experts to ensure meaningful outcomes. Pjerina Mema detailed the law's innovations, such as the right to be forgotten, data portability, stricter supervision, and sanctions, coupled with awareness campaigns to strengthen compliance. Nerguti further explained the consultation process, adoption of five sub-legal acts (with three more underway), and alignment with GDPR and the Police Directive, alongside efforts in capacity building and awareness-raising. Slovak expert Zuzana Motuzova, Lawyer and Co-Founder of Motuzova & Lacko Law Company, shared lessons from GDPR implementation, pointing to inconsistent interpretations, overlaps with domestic law, and a lack of technological expertise, recommending Albania provide clear compliance guidance, focus on substance over formality, and build a culture of data protection and digital security.

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On the Legal Framework for Personal Data Protection

- Albania has made significant progress with the adoption of the new law, which is fully aligned with EU standards and the GDPR. However, since Albania has not yet been included in the EU adequacy decision list, it remains important to:
 - Keep the legal framework continuously updated in line with developments and innovations in the field;
 - Ensure the effective implementation of the law and its by-laws;
 - Guarantee full protection of personal data;
 - Establish effective and functional oversight.
- In drafting and implementing the legal framework for personal data protection, consideration should be given not only to EU requirements and recommendations within the accession negotiations, and alignment with GDPR standards, but also to the latest developments in technology, economy, science, and security. This will make implementation more effective, updated, and above all, inclusive.

On Law Implementation and Institutional Capacities

- With the adoption of the new law and ongoing work on the by-laws, it is essential to:
 - Strengthen the staff capacities of the Commissioner through targeted trainings;
 - Approve a dedicated budget line for this component.

Based on the Slovak experience with the entry into force of the GDPR, the lack of interpretative guidelines and practical orientations from public institutions created uncertainty and confusion in implementation. This led to violations of rights and standards, as well as the imposition of fines and sanctions, which were often challenged in courts as excessive or wrongly applied. This happened because institutions focused on monitoring and inspections while neglecting awareness-raising, guidance, and clear interpretation that would have made implementation easier and more harmonized for operators and controllers. In the Albanian context, the adoption of by-laws and mandatory guidelines by the Commissioner is evaluated positively, alongside ongoing work on sectoral guidance documents of an advisory

and explanatory nature. In this regard, it is recommended that, in addition to these efforts, special attention be given to strengthening the human and financial resources of the Commissioner, as well as conducting wide-scale awareness campaigns, which remain essential for effective and harmonized implementation.

- The field of personal data protection, especially with rapid technological developments, cannot be limited to legal matters alone. Increasingly, it intersects with technology, open data, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity. For effective application of legislation, these areas need to be understood in connection with each other. The challenge lies in finding local expertise that combines knowledge of both technology and human rights law. Therefore, it is recommended to invest more in developing experts with dual competencies in these domains.
- Strengthening digital literacy and knowledge for all staff of responsible institutions, both at central and local level, would facilitate the collection, processing, and protection of data, while reducing the risk of mistakes or violations.
- An analysis of the financial cost of implementing the new law should also be undertaken, both for public institutions (central and local) and other stakeholders, as implementation will require increased capacities, a dedicated budget, technological infrastructure, more human resources, and training. Such analysis would make the transition period for proper implementation smoother and reduce unforeseen challenges. To achieve this, cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors is strongly suggested, especially in training and capacity-building.
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codes by granting certifications or special approvals to operators who prepare and apply them in compliance with the law.

- Finally, it is recommended to promote a culture of personal data protection and privacy. This culture should become part of daily life, as a guarantee of respect for dignity and individual rights, thereby building a society grounded in trust and security.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Addressing Challenges in the Implementation of the Right to Information: Capacity Gaps, Unsupported Refusals, and Key Obstacles, 13 November 2025

This roundtable aimed to bring together representatives of public institutions, civil society organizations, academia, media, students, and information coordinators to discuss the right to information, transparency, and accountability in the context of Albania's EU integration process. The discussion focused on the implementation of the legal framework on access to information, the institutional challenges related to its enforcement, and the role of stakeholders in strengthening transparency and good governance. An important component of the roundtable was the exchange of international experiences, with the participation of an expert from Slovakia who presented both positive practices and challenges related to the implementation of access-to-information legislation within an EU Member State.

During the discussion, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized that Albania's progress in the EU accession process is increasingly assessed not only through legislative alignment but also through the effectiveness of institutional capacities and the practical impact of reforms, highlighting the need for broader engagement of civil society, academia, media, and other stakeholders. Elona Hoxhaj, Director General at the Commissioner's Office, underlined that access to information is a fundamental right and a key element of good governance, noting that while Albania's legal framework is highly advanced and aligned with European standards, implementation remains the main challenge. Emerlinda Pema Guri, Director of Transparency Program Monitoring at the Commissioner's Office, explained the relevance of the right to information across several EU negotiation chapters and stressed the importance of proactive transparency and institutional accountability. Michal Piško, Director of Transparency International Slovakia, shared lessons from Slovakia's experience, pointing to recent legislative setbacks, the lack of an independent oversight authority, and the benefits of mandatory online publication of public contracts and invoices. Participants further discussed issues related to transparency obligations, access to public documents, digitalization of information services, public procurement transparency, and the balance between transparency and personal data protection.

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Institutional Capacities & Implementation Challenges

- According to the 2024 Annual Report of the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, there were 12,000 information requests and around 1,000 complaints submitted to the Commissioner. Based on the Commissioner's assessment, in 60–70% of cases where no response was provided, the cause was negligence or workload; in cases where responses were explicitly denied, the main reasons were confidentiality concerns or unclear requests. In this context, the following is needed:

-Development of training for public administration on how to classify information, clarifying which information can be provided and which cannot; and increasing transparency (wider publication of information reduces the number of requests).

-Clarification of responsibility for failure to provide information — under the new law, responsibility no longer falls solely on coordinators but on all representatives of the administration responsible for the information.

-Clear distinction between ignoring a request and formally refusing it.

- The Commissioner's Office consists of a staff of 15 people but faces serious difficulties in monitoring and supervising the implementation of the law due to limited human resources and insufficient budgeting, leading to growing workload pressures.
- The interpretation of internal acts by institutions often results in unjustified refusal to provide information by categorizing it as an internal document. In many cases, information is disclosed only after the Commissioner's intervention, creating obstacles for CSOs, experts, and public monitoring; this results in additional time and resource costs.

The Role of the Public Information Coordinator

- The role of the coordinator should be twofold:
 - 1. to coordinate information requests and provide the requested information;
 2. to serve as a guiding point for citizens, helping them understand the right to information and how to formulate their request.

Positive practices from developed countries show that these offices should be welcoming, empathetic, and offer real support to citizens.

- It is recommended that communication between the Commissioner and the institutions subject to complaints be formal and conducted via email, to ensure traceability, transparency, and easier access for third parties.

Public Information, Awareness-Raising & Communication Channels

- Information and awareness-raising campaigns, as well as training/workshops (in cooperation with CSOs and universities) on: the right to public information; types of information that can be requested; how to prepare a request; procedural steps
- Diversifying the ways public information is provided: beyond email, post, and phone, the Slovak model allows provision of information through mobile phone and text messaging.
- Transparency is not achieved merely by publishing information — it must be: clear, organized, easy to identify. The current practice of uploading documents in unstructured ways (e.g., unnamed documents, scan documents just as picture page by page and not as a single document) makes public access difficult.
- Digitalizing the list of questions and answers (FAQ) to reduce repeated requests and administrative burden: 1) creation of a chatbot or interactive section, 2) use of artificial intelligence for automated responses.
- The need to build a wider culture of transparency and accountability — not only within public administration but also among citizens, to understand their rights and the limits related to public information.

Positive Practices from Abroad (Slovakia)

- Mandatory publication of signed contracts by public institutions on both their official websites and the National Online Register (functional since 2020). A contract that is not published is not valid, a highly effective anti-corruption practice.
- Expansion of the scope of authorities required to provide public information, including:
 - public entities established by law or funded by the state (universities, hospitals, museums);

- health insurance companies;
- companies where the state holds majority ownership or controls the board;
- and as of 2025, NGOs receiving public funds.

Suggestion from participants: political parties, private universities, and private hospitals should also be included, as they provide services of public interest.

- Introduction of sanctions for Harassing Requests — requests that do not aim to obtain information but to burden/harass institutions. The law defines their characteristics, and once a request is classified as such, the institution is not obliged to respond and is not penalized. A clear methodology and training are needed for correct identification.

Legislation & Clarification of Legal Obligations

- Clarification of responsibilities under the new law for providing information across all administrative institutions.
- Expanding the entities legally obliged to provide public information (following the Slovak model).
- Clear regulation of the Harassing Requests category and its classification methodology.
- Need for formal and documented communication between the Commissioner and institutions.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Progress on meeting the interim benchmarks for Chapter 23, February 17, 2026

This roundtable focused on ongoing reforms in the justice sector, inter-institutional cooperation, transparency, and stakeholder engagement in the EU integration process. Particular attention was devoted to informing participants about the implementation of the Crime Victims Awareness Week, launched under the Intersectoral Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims (2024–2030), and the initiation of the drafting process for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan 2026–2030. The roundtable also served as a platform for exchanging views on strengthening good governance, access to justice, victim protection, and participatory policymaking in line with European standards and Chapter 23 requirements.

During the discussion, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized the importance of transparency, stakeholder participation, and coordinated legislative reforms to ensure both the quality and effectiveness of the EU integration process. Tedi Dobi, Deputy Minister of Justice and negotiator for Chapter 23, presented recent developments in fulfilling the interim benchmarks, including the submission of the Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR), ongoing justice reform measures, legislative initiatives such as the Law on Lobbying and amendments to the Criminal Code, increased investments in justice institutions, and reforms aimed at strengthening judicial integrity, efficiency, and accountability. Anairda Arizaj, Acting Director at the Ministry of Justice, highlighted the objectives and activities of the Crime Victims Awareness Week, stressing the importance of inter-institutional cooperation, victim-centered services, access to free legal aid, and support for vulnerable groups. Mona Xhexhaj, Advisor to the Minister of State for Public Administration and Anti-Corruption, presented the drafting process of the OGP National Action Plan 2026–2030, emphasizing its alignment with the EU integration agenda, the expanded involvement of public institutions, and the establishment of a Multi-Stakeholder Committee with equal participation of public institutions and civil society. Participants concluded the discussion with recommendations on strengthening access to justice, improving the protection of crime victims, particularly marginalized groups, and enhancing transparency and public participation in decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the involvement of non-state actors

- Transparency and public communication regarding the negotiation process and reforms under Chapter 23 should be further strengthened through the regular publication of information on progress achieved, existing challenges, and upcoming steps. This would contribute to better public awareness and broader stakeholder engagement. It is also important to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the relevant institutions involved in Chapter 23, so that civil society organisations can better identify which institutions are responsible for specific issues and where monitoring and advocacy efforts should be directed.
- The early and systematic involvement of civil society organisations, academia, professionals, and other relevant stakeholders should be ensured from the initial stages of policymaking and legislative drafting, particularly for initiatives related to justice, fundamental rights, and the protection of vulnerable groups.
- Closer and more practical cooperation should be established between central and local government institutions and civil society organisations working directly with vulnerable groups. CSOs can provide legal expertise, quantitative and qualitative data based on their research and monitoring activities, as well as targeted recommendations addressing the specific needs of vulnerable communities. Such contributions can support both the legislative drafting process and the effective implementation of adopted measures.

On the functioning of justice institutions and access to justice for vulnerable groups

- Efforts to increase the efficiency of the judicial system should continue through addressing the backlog of cases, strengthening human and institutional capacities, and investing in the physical and digital infrastructure of justice institutions. Further efforts should be made to strengthen integrity, professionalism, and ethical standards within the justice system by supporting reforms related to professional evaluation, continuous training, the role of legal assistants, and the standards applied by the School of Magistrates. Civil society organisations can also contribute through specialised training programmes and courses in these areas, not only for newly appointed magistrates but also for other justice professionals.

- Mechanisms for the protection and support of crime victims should be strengthened by ensuring: (a) enhanced inter-institutional coordination; (b) sustainable financial support; and (c) effective access to services, particularly for vulnerable groups and marginalised communities.
- Access to justice for vulnerable groups should be guaranteed by ensuring that public policies and services adequately address the specific needs of victims, women, children, persons with disabilities, and other communities in need. This should be achieved through regular field consultations with civil society organisations, social workers, and legal professionals who work directly with these groups and possess first-hand knowledge of their challenges and needs.
- Cooperation between central government institutions, local authorities, and civil society organisations should be strengthened in the implementation of the Intersectoral Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims 2024–2030, with a particular focus on prevention, awareness-raising, and free legal aid. Local government plays a key role in outreach and direct communication, facilitating cooperation with local civil society actors and providing valuable information and data on the situation of vulnerable groups.
- The Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims should also address the protection of foreign victims in Albania who may be subject to labour exploitation or sexual exploitation. Given the growing number of foreign nationals employed in Albania in recent years, this category faces increased vulnerability and should be specifically addressed through an adequate legal and institutional protection framework.
- Despite the awareness-raising campaigns conducted, including those organised during the Crime Victims Awareness Week, it is important that clear and accessible information remains available on a continuous basis through close cooperation with organisations working in the field. Information and communication efforts should be adapted to the specific circumstances and needs of vulnerable groups and should utilise a variety of communication tools, including digital information, brochures, leaflets, and in-person outreach activities, while also ensuring coverage of rural and remote areas.

On transparency and integrity

- An inclusive and transparent process should be ensured for the preparation of the OGP National Action Plan 2026–2030, guaranteeing the active and meaningful participation of civil society organisations, experts, academia, and the media throughout all stages of the process.
- Raising awareness and strengthening capacities on Open Government Partnership (OGP) principles, transparency, and integrity remains highly important. While a number of training activities have already been conducted, future initiatives should include not only public institutions but also civil society actors. Training programmes could also focus on practical ways in which civil society can contribute to monitoring, oversight, and the formulation of recommendations in the areas of transparency, accountability, and integrity.

Roundtable on Chapter 23 – Progress of negotiations and implementation of priorities under Chapter 23 in the framework of European integration, 17 April 2026

This roundtable focused on ongoing reforms in the justice sector, inter-institutional cooperation, transparency, and stakeholder engagement in the EU integration process. Particular attention was devoted to informing participants about the implementation of the Crime Victims Awareness Week, launched under the Intersectoral Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims (2024–2030), and the initiation of the drafting process for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan 2026–2030. The roundtable also served as a platform for exchanging views on strengthening good governance, access to justice, victim protection, and participatory policymaking in line with European standards and Chapter 23 requirements.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusion and cooperation with non-state actors

- Considering that the European integration process has entered an intensive phase of drafting and adopting legislation, with a significant number of legal acts expected to be developed, it is important to ensure the involvement of civil society from the early stages of the policymaking process. Civil society actors can provide their expertise and input during the legislative drafting phase itself, rather than having their participation limited solely to consultations conducted after draft legal acts have already been prepared.
- A more proactive and structured role is needed from the existing mechanisms for the involvement of non-state actors. The National Council for Civil Society, as a consultative body for policymaking and decision-making processes in Albania, should be more active and visible in communicating its recommendations and activities. Likewise, the Partnership Platform for European Integration should communicate its results, work, and recommendations in a clearer, simpler, and more accessible manner, regardless of the technical nature of the process. At present, there is a lack of a comprehensive public communication strategy, and these mechanisms remain largely unfamiliar to a broad segment of society.

The Juvenile Justice Code and Free Legal Aid

- The new draft Juvenile Justice Code introduces a more comprehensive approach to children's rights, focusing not only on juveniles in conflict with the law but on the child and their rights as a whole, in line with the principle of the best interests of the child. This approach should also be reflected in institutional policies and measures and requires greater information-sharing and awareness-raising among all stakeholders involved.
- With regard to free legal aid, it remains essential to address the barriers faced by communities that should be able to benefit from this right but are unable to do so for various reasons. One concrete example is the Roma community, where the lack of civil registration prevents access to this service. There is a continued need to identify practical solutions for such cases, and civil society actors can play an important role in this regard.

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- Greater coordination and cooperation are needed among different structures to promote and expand the use of mediation, particularly in cases related to juvenile justice. Measures that should be encouraged include:
 - training law enforcement structures, such as police officers, as well as justice sector institutions (prosecutors and judges), on mediation as a practice;
 - Increasing information-sharing and awareness among affected parties and stakeholder groups regarding the use of mediation, its benefits, and the relevant procedures.
- With regard to restorative justice, the current legal framework lacks clear provisions governing the participation and assistance of professionals and experts. This makes their involvement more difficult and creates challenges in planning for the remuneration and costing of their services. In this context:
 - the involvement of these professionals should be explicitly provided for in budget planning, with clear provisions for the costing and financing of their services;
 - It is recommended that practitioners and actors working directly in the field be involved in the budgeting and costing process to ensure that these measures are realistic and aligned with actual needs.

Strengthening Institutional and Human Capacities

- Although there is an extensive calendar of capacity-building activities (training sessions, workshops, etc.), there is a lack of clear assessment of their impact on public administration practices. Therefore:
 - Mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness and tangible outcomes of these activities need to be developed;
 - Such assessments would help inform the design of future training and capacity-building plans, ensuring they are based on actual needs and priorities.
- While civil society actors and professionals possess a strong level of expertise and practical field experience, this knowledge is not sufficiently utilized in research and policymaking processes. In this regard:
 - Strengthening cooperation among policymaking institutions, civil society organizations, field professionals, and academia is recommended;

-The objective should be to develop studies and analyses aimed at assessing the impact of services, identifying target groups, and designing more effective policies.

- It is important that policies and measures are addressed not only at the national level, but also at the local and community levels, taking into account the specific characteristics of different regions and groups. In this context, local government should play a more active role through:
 - participation in training and capacity-building programs;
 - the creation of coordination mechanisms or structures at the municipal level to monitor and facilitate the delivery of services for minors;
 - the involvement of professionals (psychologists, sociologists, social workers, NGOs) in the provision and monitoring of services.
- Greater inter-institutional coordination is required, along with an integrated approach that links justice with social protection, reflecting the interdependence of these fields.
- A more comprehensive approach to access to justice is needed, which includes not only judicial proceedings but also support services such as psychosocial and rehabilitation services. In this regard:
 - The coordination of referral procedures remains problematic, especially in cases where minors come into contact with the police and are not included in the service system;
 - It is also recommended to ensure dedicated budgets for these services, in cooperation with experts and the community.
- Education and awareness remain key elements. In this regard:
 - Legal education, as part of the Intersectoral Justice Strategy, should be strengthened and intensified;
 - More awareness-raising activities are needed in cooperation with schools across all municipalities;
 - Practical and accessible discussions for the public should be developed, both in traditional and social media;
 - It is recommended to increase initiatives in pre-university education for students' legal literacy, through extracurricular activities and the involvement of legal experts in school environments.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Regulation of Lobbying in Albania: Strengthening Transparency, Implementation Challenges, and Alignment with European Standards, 22 May 2026

This roundtable brought together representatives of public institutions, civil society organizations, academia, local government, and experts to discuss the implementation of Law No. 12/2026 “On Lobbying in the Republic of Albania.” The discussion focused on the institutional, legal, and administrative steps required for the effective implementation of the newly adopted legislation, which forms part of Albania’s commitments under the Rule of Law Roadmap and Cluster I – Fundamentals in the EU accession process. Particular attention was devoted to the establishment of the lobbying register, the adoption of the necessary bylaws, transparency and accountability mechanisms, and the distinction between lobbying activities and civil society advocacy. The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange international experiences, with a comparative perspective from Slovakia and examples from other EU member states regarding lobbying regulation and oversight.

During the discussion, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized that the main challenge lies not in adopting the law but in ensuring its effective implementation through adequate administrative capacities, institutional preparedness, and public awareness. Besnik Dervishi, Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, highlighted that the law aims to strengthen transparency, integrity, and ethical standards in public decision-making by regulating interactions between lobbyists and public officials, while also requiring significant institutional, financial, and human resources for its implementation. Emerlinda Pema, Director of Transparency Program Monitoring at the Commissioner’s Office, presented the key provisions of the law, clarifying the distinction between lobbying and activities such as public consultations, access to information requests, media publications, and academic research. She outlined the responsibilities of the Commissioner’s Office, including the administration of the public lobbying register, monitoring compliance, and drafting the necessary secondary legislation. Klodiana Kosta, Program Director at Partners Albania for Change and Development, welcomed the adoption of the law but raised concerns regarding the broad definition of lobbying and the potential impact on civil society advocacy activities, stressing the need for proportionate obligations and sanctions. Michal Piško, Director of Transparency International Slovakia, provided a comparative overview of lobbying regulation across Europe, highlighting key international standards such as public lobbyist registers, codes of conduct, and lobbying footprints, while warning against overly restrictive definitions and insufficient oversight mechanisms. Participants concluded the discussion by addressing issues related to institutional independence in monitoring lobbying activities, transparency requirements, reporting obligations, and the readiness of public administration to implement the new legal framework effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Framework and Secondary Legislation

- Civil society actors have noted that the definitions contained in the Law on Lobbying draw a broad distinction between public-interest advocacy and lobbying conducted on behalf of private or commercial interests, leaving room for interpretation and creating uncertainty for civil society organisations and other actors engaged in advocacy campaigns and activities. It is therefore recommended that this distinction be further clarified through the secondary legislation. In particular, questions remain as to whether civil society advocacy on issues that directly affect the organisation's own interests should be considered advocacy or lobbying for a private interest. Such ambiguity may create unnecessary administrative burdens for civil society organisations and discourage active civic participation in democratic processes.
- The system of sanctions should be proportionate to the nature and gravity of violations, ensuring fair and balanced enforcement of the law. Excessively severe sanctions may have unintended negative effects on both lobbying and advocacy activities.
- In drafting the secondary legislation, it is recommended that the provisions be aligned with the standards of the Council of Europe, OECD principles, and European Union best practices. This would help avoid challenges already encountered in other European countries regarding the management of lobbying registers, procedural requirements, and the clarification of responsibilities for both affected stakeholders and competent institutions.
- The seven planned secondary acts should provide clear guidance on registration procedures, the operation of the lobbying register, required documentation, and the obligations and responsibilities of all actors involved.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Cooperation

- European experience demonstrates that not all countries operate a national lobbying register. At

- the same time, the way lobbying and lobbyists are defined can significantly affect the number of registrations, resulting in either an excessively broad scope or a very limited number of registered lobbyists. It is therefore important that the Albanian framework adopts definitions appropriate to the national context and conducts an initial mapping exercise to identify the likely number of lobbyists. Such an assessment would support proper planning of the human and financial resources required for registration, oversight, and monitoring.
- The Law on Lobbying represents the first attempt to regulate lobbying activities in Albania through dedicated legislation. While this constitutes an important development, it also introduces new challenges, particularly for the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, which assumes new responsibilities under the law. In this regard:
 1. The supervisory institution should operate with full institutional independence, free from political influence in monitoring and enforcement processes.
 2. Adequate human, financial, and technical resources should be secured to ensure effective implementation of the law, including the establishment of dedicated staff within the Commissioner's office.
 3. Specialised training programmes should be organised to support the proper and comprehensive implementation of the Law on Lobbying.
- Effective institutional interaction and cooperation with public officials require parallel efforts:
 1. Awareness-raising and information sessions should be organised to inform public officials and relevant institutions about the law, their obligations and responsibilities, as well as applicable procedures, deadlines, and reporting requirements.
 2. Communication and dialogue between public officials, institutions, and stakeholders should be strengthened to avoid delays or obstacles in the registration, monitoring, and assessment processes.

Electronic Lobbying Register

- The establishment and operation of the public electronic lobbying register should ensure completeness, accessibility, and user-friendly information for both stakeholders and the wider public.
- Consideration should be given to incorporating the concept of a “legislative footprint” or “lobbying footprint” within the register. This would allow the tracking of influence on decision-making processes, including information on actors involved, objectives pursued, and policy areas affected, thereby improving transparency and understanding of lobbying activities.
- Before the register becomes fully operational, clear guidance and instructions should be provided, including templates and standard forms for the submission of information and documentation by lobbying entities and other affected actors.
- Clear rules should also specify which documents and information submitted to the Commissioner’s office will be publicly available and which will remain confidential, while ensuring compliance with personal data protection legislation and preventing the disclosure of sensitive information.
- Deadlines for periodic reporting by both lobbyists and public officials should be harmonised and coordinated. Consideration should be given to extending reporting deadlines for public officials, as excessively short deadlines may create unnecessary administrative burdens and discourage engagement and communication with lobbyists and stakeholders.
- Awareness-raising and information campaigns should also be carried out to clarify newly introduced concepts such as lobbying, lobbyist, beneficiary, public official, and advocacy. This is particularly important for civil society organisations, which require clear guidance on which activities fall within the scope of lobbying and which do not.

Involvement of Non-State Actors and Lobbyists

- It is essential to conduct a communication campaign targeting lobbyists, civil society organisations, public institutions, and public officials to explain the objectives of the law. The campaign should emphasise that the purpose of the legislation is to increase transparency and integrity in decision-making processes rather than to create a punitive framework.

Chapter 23, Media Freedom and Challenges Against SLAPP – Towards a More Protective Justice for the Media, 05 June 2026

This roundtable, organized by EMA in cooperation with the School of Magistrates, had its focus on the protection of journalists and the role of justice institutions in ensuring a free and safe environment for media work. The discussion placed particular emphasis on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), in the context of Albania's EU integration process and the strengthening of the rule of law.

In his opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, underlined the importance of addressing SLAPP cases as part of EU accession commitments. He highlighted the lack of a dedicated legal framework and stressed the need for continued dialogue to support future legislative development. He also emphasized the key role of civil society in both consultation and policy drafting processes, particularly given the extensive legal harmonization required under Chapter 23. Flutura Kusari, expert from the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom and member of the EU expert group on SLAPP, explained the concept of SLAPP and distinguished it from legitimate litigation. She noted that SLAPP cases are used to intimidate and silence journalists and public-interest actors, undermining freedom of expression, media freedom, and access to justice. She presented the European framework, including Council of Europe recommendations, the European Commission recommendation, and Directive (EU) 2024/1069. She also outlined key indicators such as power imbalances, unfounded or disproportionate claims, procedural abuse, and reputational attacks, as well as key safeguards including early dismissal mechanisms, cost-shifting rules, compensation for damages, sanctions, and support measures for victims.

Aida Bushati, lecturer at the School of Magistrates, focused on strengthening judicial capacities and training needs related to SLAPPs and media freedom. She highlighted the growing need for specialized training on SLAPP cases, protection of journalistic sources, defamation, the right to be forgotten, and judicial communication with the media, particularly in the digital context. She emphasized the importance of integrating European Court of Human Rights and EU Court of Justice case law into judicial practice and stressed the need for a balanced approach that ensures fairness between media freedom and individual rights, while also strengthening trust between the judiciary and the media. Tedi Dobi, Deputy Minister of Justice, stressed the need to balance freedom of expression with protection against harmful or defamatory statements. He noted that defamation in Albania has been decriminalized and is now regulated through civil and administrative mechanisms. He also informed participants that work is ongoing on a consolidated legal framework aimed at ensuring clarity, legal certainty, and alignment with EU standards, while remaining practical and enforceable.

The discussion concluded with exchanges on practical challenges in handling SLAPP cases, the need for further training of magistrates, strengthening institutional capacities, and the role of civil society in identifying and addressing such cases. Participants also highlighted the links between SLAPPs, media freedom, hate speech, and democratic participation, emphasizing the need for a balanced and rights-based approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Framework and Alignment with European Standards

- A clear legal definition of SLAPPs should be introduced, distinguishing abusive proceedings aimed at silencing public participation from legitimate legal actions intended to protect reputation, privacy, or other rights.
- The legal framework should provide effective procedural safeguards against abusive litigation, including the possibility of early dismissal of manifestly unfounded claims, measures to prevent procedural abuse, and mechanisms to discourage the misuse of judicial proceedings.
- Consideration should be given to introducing proportional sanctions and remedies against those who initiate abusive proceedings, including compensation for damages suffered by SLAPP targets and reimbursement of legal costs.
- It is recommended that when journalists or activists are sued, liability should primarily be directed to the media outlet or organisation they represent, rather than the individual personally, in order to reduce personal intimidation and pressure.
- In assessing whether a case qualifies as a SLAPP, courts should consider whether the claimant has attempted alternative dispute resolution mechanisms before initiating court proceedings. A refusal to use non-judicial remedies may indicate that the primary intention is not dispute resolution but intimidation or reputational harm.
- It is recommended to consider that SLAPP cases should be covered both in domestic and cross-border contexts.
- Exchange of experiences and best practices with EU Member States and regional partners should be strengthened, both in terms of legislation and judicial practice. Judicial training and awareness-raising activities should also be included. Kosovo, for example, offers relevant experience in transposing anti-SLAPP frameworks and could serve as a useful reference for regional cooperation.

Strengthening Judicial Capacity and Institutional Response

- Continuous training should be provided for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and other justice sector professionals on identifying and addressing SLAPP cases, drawing on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and relevant European standards.
- Training programmes should address the balance between freedom of expression, media freedom, protection of reputation, privacy rights, and access to justice, ensuring a consistent and rights-based approach.
- The School of Magistrates should continue integrating topics related to media freedom, protection of journalistic sources, strategic litigation, hate speech, online expression, and SLAPPs into its curricula.
- Institutional capacities should be strengthened to ensure effective collection of data and monitoring of potential SLAPP cases, enabling evidence-based policymaking and trend analysis.
- Courts should give due consideration to the public interest dimension of a case. Where the subject matter concerns issues of high public relevance, there should be a stronger presumption that the case may constitute a SLAPP, and therefore enhanced safeguards for the defendant should apply.
- A clear distinction should be made between intentional defamation or fabrication of information and cases where journalists, civil society actors, or activists have made unintentional errors or relied on inaccurate sources. This distinction should be taken into account to avoid disproportionate liability.
- The lack of a specific legal framework and limited jurisprudence in Albania on SLAPPs creates uncertainty for judges, making them more hesitant to qualify cases as SLAPPs in the absence of established legal guidance.

- Judges may also face indirect pressure when dealing with SLAPP-related cases, which may limit transparency and public communication even after cases are concluded.

Protection of Journalists, Civil Society and Public Participation

- Journalists, media organisations, civil society organisations, human rights defenders, researchers, activists, and other actors engaged in matters of public interest should benefit from enhanced protection against abusive legal actions intended to intimidate or silence them.
- Support mechanisms should be explored for individuals and organisations targeted by SLAPPs, including access to legal aid, information, psychological support, and professional guidance where necessary.
- Particular attention should be given to cases where legal proceedings are accompanied by public discrediting campaigns, reputational attacks, or other forms of pressure that may undermine freedom of expression and public participation.

- Civil society organisations and media representatives should be actively involved in future consultations and legislative discussions on anti-SLAPP measures, ensuring that reforms respond to real challenges faced by those most exposed to abusive litigation.
- Continued dialogue on SLAPPs should be maintained within the framework of Chapter 23, recognising that the protection of public participation and freedom of expression is a core element of the rule of law and democratic governance.

Awareness, Dialogue and Stakeholder Involvement

- Public awareness should be strengthened regarding the nature and risks of SLAPPs, including their impact on freedom of expression, media freedom, democratic participation, and the right to access information.
- Cooperation between justice institutions, media organisations, and civil society should be strengthened. In Albania, there is still a lack of a fully functional and trust-based relationship between the judiciary and the media, with mutual perceptions often shaped by distrust. This relationship should be gradually normalised through:
 - Joint dialogue and cooperation meetings
 - Joint training sessions and courses
 - Development of practical guidelines for both judges and journalists to clarify rights, responsibilities, and boundaries in this relationship

Roundtable for Chapter 23 - Improving the Business Climate: Legal Certainty, Property Rights, and the Business Community's Perspective within the Framework of Chapter 23, June 15, 2026

European Movement Albania (EMA), in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, organised a roundtable discussion on improving the business climate through strengthening legal certainty, property rights protection, and the rule of law. The activity aimed to facilitate dialogue between public institutions, the business community, civil society organisations, and legal professionals on key challenges affecting economic development and investor confidence in Albania.

The discussion focused on issues related to judicial effectiveness, legal predictability, property registration and compensation, anti-corruption measures, and the broader impact of Chapter 23 reforms on the business environment. Particular attention was given to the need for stronger institutional capacities, enhanced coordination among responsible institutions, improved efficiency of court proceedings, and the completion of ongoing reforms related to property rights and digitalisation processes.

The meeting brought together Ms. Elona Bano, Director General of Policies and Projects in the Field of Justice, Integration and Negotiations at the Ministry of Justice; Ms. Najada Shundi, Director of the Directorate of Integration and Negotiations at the Ministry of Justice; Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement Albania (EMA); representatives of the business community, legal professionals, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to discuss the impact of Chapter 23 reforms on the business environment and provide recommendations on strengthening legal certainty, property rights protection, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation in the EU integration process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening legal certainty, efficiency, and predictability for the business climate

- Legal certainty, particularly in civil and administrative matters affecting businesses, should be further strengthened through the consistent and uniform application of legislation, avoiding divergent institutional interpretations. It is also recommended to pursue the unification of the legal framework, as it has been observed that by-laws and administrative acts often create overlaps and inconsistencies.
- Transparency in judicial processes that directly affect the business climate should be increased, particularly in commercial and property-related cases.
- Backlog cases in courts, especially in appellate courts, should be addressed as a priority in order to reduce excessive delays in adjudication. Such delays may reduce incentives for doing business in Albania and negatively affect foreign investment attraction.

Improving the property rights framework

- Judicial practice in property-related cases should be further unified based on the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court, as well as European standards and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (EctHR).
- The process of property registration and digitalisation is ongoing and remains a priority, with completion targeted for 2027. This process should be accompanied not only by efficiency, but also by effective institutional coordination and continuous communication with directly affected stakeholders.
- Property restitution and compensation remain problematic, with challenges identified in institutional coordination and management. Despite available funds, delays persist due to calculation processes and judicial decisions. It is recommended to strengthen restitution and compensation mechanisms and to develop a clear valuation methodology, with transparent, efficient, and predictable procedures for both institutions and stakeholders.

- The establishment of a central property register in Albania is recommended. The register should be open and accessible, providing information on property type, location, ownership, and status (e.g. whether properties are for sale or registered).
- A key issue in property management institutions is the lack of institutional memory and planning capacity, leading to missed deadlines, unclear procedures, and weak institutional coordination.

Business community involvement and strengthening public trust

- Measures should be intensified to strengthen integrity within the justice system and public administration, particularly in sectors with direct impact on business and property. Institutional transparency should be increased to reduce perceptions of corruption, which directly affect public and investor confidence.
- Earlier and more systematic involvement of the business community and other stakeholders in legislative processes should be ensured, engaging them already at the conceptual and drafting stages to better reflect their specific needs and perspectives.
- Institutional communication on reforms should be improved, including on chapters that may not appear directly linked to business, by clearly explaining their impact through regular and accessible information, and by establishing structured dialogue channels with chambers of commerce and umbrella business associations.

Role of civil society and expertise

- Cooperation with civil society organisations and legal experts in monitoring justice and property reforms should be further strengthened, making greater use of analyses and data produced by non-state actors.
- Consultation tables under the Platform and Convention should adopt a more technical and thematic dimension, rather than being purely informational or dialogue-based, allowing civil society to provide concrete recommendations and expert input on specific issues.

Roundtable for Chapter 23 – Digital Services in Albania within the framework of the accession negotiations – DSA Governance, Fundamental Rights, and Institutional Coordination, 30 June 2026

European Movement Albania (EMA), in cooperation with the Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP), organised a roundtable discussion on Albania's alignment with the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) and the challenges related to its transposition and implementation. The activity aimed to facilitate dialogue among public institutions, regulatory authorities, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders on the emerging regulatory framework for digital services and its implications for Albania.

The discussion focused on the legal and institutional requirements arising from the DSA, including the designation of the Digital Services Coordinator, the responsibilities of online platforms, user and consumer protection, the protection of minors, and mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and enforcement. Particular attention was given to the need for stronger institutional, technical, and human capacities, effective inter-institutional coordination, and continuous stakeholder consultation throughout the harmonisation process with the EU acquis.

The meeting brought together Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement Albania (EMA); Mr. Gentian Sala, Chairperson of AKEP; Ms. Valbona Alikaj, Director of Legal Affairs at AKEP; Mr. Altin Petre, Advisor at AKEP; Ms. Michaela Vanišová, as well as representatives of relevant institutions and stakeholders. The policy paper "Digital Services Act: Challenges and Opportunities for Albania", published by EMA, was presented as a basis for discussion and for developing recommendations to support the effective transposition and implementation of the DSA in Albania.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional Framework and Governance of DSA

- The designation of the Digital Services Coordinator (DSC) should be treated as one of the first priorities in the DSA transposition process. The selected authority should comply with the requirements established by the DSA, including institutional independence, operational autonomy, adequate financial and human resources, and sufficient technical expertise, ensuring its capacity to coordinate implementation and enforcement effectively.
- A clear institutional framework should be established by defining the respective roles and responsibilities of all competent authorities involved in DSA implementation, including AKEP, AMA, AKSK, the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, law enforcement authorities and the judiciary. Strong coordination mechanisms should be developed in order to avoid fragmentation, overlapping competencies and institutional gaps.
- Albania should follow a phased roadmap for the transposition and implementation of the DSA, distinguishing between legislative approximation, institutional preparation and practical enforcement. The implementation sequence should ensure that institutional capacities and enforcement mechanisms are operational before the legislation becomes fully applicable.
- Particular attention should be given to the adoption of secondary legislation, internal procedures and operational protocols necessary for the effective functioning of the future implementation framework, including complaint handling, cross-border cooperation and enforcement procedures.
- The implementation process should remain aligned with evolving EU practice, including new European Commission guidelines, implementing acts and the experience of Digital Services Coordinators across EU Member States, ensuring consistency with future developments of the acquis.
- The implementation of the DSA should be accompanied by continuous investment in institutional capacities, including specialised human resources, technical expertise, digital infrastructure and regular professional training for all competent authorities involved in its implementation.
- Civil society organisations, academia, research institutions, the private sector and digital service providers should be actively involved throughout the legislative drafting, consultation, implementation and monitoring phases. Their expertise represents an important contribution to ensuring transparent and effective implementation of the DSA.
- Particular attention should be given to establishing structured cooperation with non-state actors, including future Trusted Flaggers and independent researchers. Transparent selection procedures, continuous dialogue and adequate safeguards should be introduced to protect their independence, credibility and effective participation in the DSA governance framework.
- Public institutions should develop a comprehensive communication strategy explaining the objectives, principles and practical implications of the DSA. Communication efforts should clarify that the Regulation establishes procedures and responsibilities for digital services rather than determining the legality of online content, thereby reducing misinformation and strengthening public trust in the reform process.
- Greater efforts should be dedicated to informing businesses, digital service providers, civil society organisations and citizens about their future rights and obligations using various dissemination tools, either public activities, awareness campaigns, online informative materials etc. under the DSA before the legislation enters into force, facilitating smoother implementation and greater legal certainty.

Capacity Building, Stakeholder Engagement and Public Communication

Implementation, User Protection and Enforcement

- The implementation of the DSA should prioritise practical effectiveness rather than merely formal legal compliance. Particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring that complaint mechanisms, transparency obligations,

notice-and-action procedures and user remedies function efficiently and are accessible to citizens in practice.

- Competent authorities should establish accessible, transparent and efficient complaint-handling mechanisms, accompanied by clear public guidance regarding institutional competences, reporting procedures and available legal remedies for users affected by illegal online content or platform decisions.
- Special priority should be given to strengthening the protection of children and vulnerable users online through enhanced cooperation between institutions responsible for digital governance, child protection, cybersecurity, education and law enforcement, while promoting awareness raising and preventive measures.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be introduced to assess the practical implementation of the DSA, identify emerging challenges and measure its impact on users, digital service providers and public institutions. The findings should inform future legislative and policy improvements throughout Albania's EU accession process.

CHAPTER 24 – JUSTICE, FREEDOM, SECURITY

SNAPSHOT OF CHAPTER 24 ASSESSMENT FOR ALBANIA

Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security constitutes a core component of the European Union acquis and represents the operational dimension of the Union's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. In contrast to Chapter 23, which focuses on the structural integrity of the judiciary and fundamental rights system, Chapter 24 is primarily concerned with the effective functioning of law enforcement systems, border governance, migration management, judicial cooperation in criminal matters, and the Union's broader internal security architecture. Within the enlargement framework, it is embedded in Cluster 1 – Fundamentals under the revised methodology, reflecting the European Union's strategic priority that no candidate country can progress towards membership without demonstrating robust, sustainable, and operationally effective capacities in addressing cross-border crime, migration pressures, and security threats.

Following the opening of accession negotiations in 2022 and the completion of the screening process in 2023, Albania entered a phase of progressive alignment with the EU acquis under Chapter 24, guided by the findings of the European Commission screening report and subsequently the 2025 Rule of Law Report. These assessments confirmed that Albania had achieved a substantial degree of legislative alignment in the areas covered by Chapter 24, particularly in relation to law enforcement cooperation, migration governance frameworks, and participation in international judicial and police cooperation mechanisms. However, they also highlighted that implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and the consistency of enforcement outcomes remained key structural challenges, particularly in relation to organised crime, trafficking networks, and migration management systems.

Fight against organized crime - The fight against organised crime remains the most strategically sensitive component of Chapter 24, given its direct implications for both Albania's domestic governance and the internal security of the European Union. The 2025 Rule of Law Report acknowledges that Albania has significantly strengthened its institutional framework for combating organised crime, particularly through the enhanced operational role of the Special Structure against Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK), improved cooperation between prosecution and police structures, and intensified engagement with Europol and Eurojust. These developments have resulted in an increase in investigations targeting high-level criminal networks involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, economic crime, and cross-border illicit activities. Nevertheless, organised crime continues to be characterised as a persistent structural phenomenon embedded within regional and transnational networks, which adapt dynamically to enforcement pressures. The EU therefore emphasises that progress cannot be assessed solely on the basis of investigative activity but must be measured through a sustained track record of final convictions, dismantling of criminal organisations, and effective confiscation and recovery of criminal assets, as well as the disruption of financial infrastructures supporting organised crime.

Fight against drugs - Closely linked to the fight against organised crime is the EU policy area on drugs, which remains a key sub-component of Chapter 24 due to Albania's geographical position along major trafficking routes affecting the Western Balkans and the broader European market. The 2025 Rule of Law Report notes continued efforts by Albanian authorities to strengthen anti-drug trafficking operations, improve intelligence-led policing, and enhance cooperation with international partners. Significant seizures and coordinated operations are acknowledged as indicators of increased operational capacity. However, the report also highlights that drug trafficking remains a high-impact criminal activity, with production, transit, and distribution networks continuing to exploit geographic and institutional vulnerabilities. The EU therefore underscores the need for stronger preventive strategies, improved financial investigation capacity, and deeper integration between law enforcement, customs, and judicial authorities in order to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable response to drug-related organised crime.

Migration and Asylum - Migration and asylum constitute another central pillar of Chapter 24 and reflect the broader EU concern with the management of external migration pressures and the protection of international obligations. The 2025 Rule of Law Report confirms that Albania has continued to align its legal framework with EU standards in the areas of asylum procedures, readmission agreements, and irregular migration management. Cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been strengthened, and Albania has participated in joint operations aimed at managing migration flows along the Western Balkan route. Despite these developments, the EU assessment identifies persistent challenges in ensuring the full functionality of the asylum system, including limited reception capacities, administrative bottlenecks, and uneven coordination between responsible institutions. Particular attention is also given to the protection of vulnerable categories of migrants, including unaccompanied minors and individuals in need of international protection, where implementation gaps remain. As a result, migration governance is assessed as an area requiring continued structural consolidation rather than mere legislative alignment.

Visa policy and Schengen - Visa policy alignment and Schengen-related cooperation represent a further dimension of Chapter 24, reflecting Albania's gradual integration into the EU's common visa framework and external border governance system. The 2025 Rule of Law Report highlights Albania's continued efforts to align its visa regime with that of the European Union, including strengthening visa policy coordination, improving document security standards, and enhancing risk analysis capacities. Cooperation with EU Member States in addressing irregular migration and preventing visa overstays has also been reinforced. However, the EU continues to stress that full alignment with the Schengen acquis requires further progress in administrative capacity, data exchange systems, and the consistent application of visa policy standards. In this context, visa liberalisation is framed not as a static achievement but as a continuously monitored policy area requiring sustained compliance with EU security expectations and migration management discipline.

Cybercrime and counterterrorism - Cybercrime and counterterrorism form an increasingly important component of Chapter 24 in light of evolving security threats and the EU's broader strategic emphasis on resilience against hybrid threats. The 2025 Rule of Law Report notes that Albania has made progress in aligning its legal framework with EU directives on cybersecurity and counterterrorism, including the adoption of national strategies on cybersecurity and improved institutional coordination in responding to cyber incidents. Nevertheless, enforcement capacity remains limited, particularly in relation to specialised technical expertise, inter-agency coordination, and the ability to respond to complex cyber threats targeting both public institutions and critical infrastructure. In the field of counterterrorism, Albania continues to cooperate closely with international partners and has developed preventive frameworks aimed at addressing radicalisation and terrorist financing. However, the EU highlights the need for stronger operational capabilities, improved information sharing systems, and enhanced resilience against emerging hybrid and digital threats.

Judicial Cooperation - Judicial cooperation in criminal matters constitutes the final core sub-area of Chapter 24 and is essential for ensuring effective cross-border law enforcement and judicial coordination within the European legal space. The 2025 Rule of Law Report acknowledges Albania's active participation in international cooperation mechanisms, including mutual legal assistance frameworks, extradition agreements, and operational cooperation with Europol and Eurojust. These mechanisms have facilitated improved coordination in transnational criminal investigations and strengthened Albania's integration into European security networks. However, the effectiveness of judicial cooperation remains closely linked to the broader functioning of the justice system, particularly judicial independence, procedural efficiency, and institutional capacity, all of which are addressed under Chapter 23. Delays in judicial proceedings, uneven case management practices, and limited human resources in specialised prosecution units continue to constrain the full effectiveness of international cooperation instruments.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Ministry of Interior of Albania is the main institution responsible for the policies related with Chapter 24. The core objective of the Ministry of Interior of Albania is to improve the services on issues related with security and order, while fostering the fight against crime, against drugs and money laundering. The vision of the rule of law is combined with the philosophy, of not only giving penalties but also with preventive measures and cooperation with citizens and community in securing the public order. The Decision No.604, dated on 20.10.2021 defines the mission and responsibilities of the Ministry of Interior. Article 2 of this Decision states that Ministry of Interior is responsible “for drafting and implementing the internal affairs policies in the Republic of Albania”. The fields that fall under Ministry of Interior’s responsibility as defined by Article 3 of this Decision, are the same with the fields that are included in Chapter 24 such as: order and public security; fight against organized crime and human antitrafficking; integrated border management and migration; asylum and citizenship; counterterrorism and violent extremism; administration of confiscated assets from organized crime. In the national negotiating structure established in 2019, the Ministry of Interior is the negotiating institution for Chapter 24, representing the country during bilateral meetings concerning this Chapter. Moreover, the Deputy Minister is the negotiator for Chapter 24 part of the Negotiation Group, while being the head of the Inter-Institutional Working Group for European Integration and Partnership Platform on European Integration.

Albanian State Police is an integral body in enforcing the law and guaranteeing the order and security in local and national level. The Albanian State Police structure is lead by the General Director of the Albanian State Police, and there are several departments such as the Criminal Police Department, the Border and Migration Police Department, Order and Security Police Department, International Relations Department, Counter Terrorism Directorate, Sector for Investigation of Economic and Financial crime etc. The Albanian State Police has a total of 11 932 officers, equivalent to 260 officers per 100 000 inhabitants (compared to an EU average of 335.3 – Eurostat, 2019-2021). The EC assessment of Albanian Police, it is stipulated clearly on its screening report: “A professional, reliable and efficient police organisation is of paramount importance to ensure the rule of law within the country and to be a reliable partner for other Member States, EU agencies, third countries and international partners in relevant investigations and criminal cases, as well as other judicial proceedings with a transnational aspect.” General Directorate of the State Police plays the main role in the implementation of measures on the reduction and supply of drugs. There is in place an Anti-Narcotics Unit (7 staff) and a Narcotics and Trafficking Investigation Unit (23 staff) which are specialised structures dedicated to the fight against drugs. In all twelve Police Districts there are Units for Narcotics Investigation, with a total of 121 police officers engaged only in the fight against drugs[13]. It is assessed that legal and institutional reforms conducted in recent years have strengthened the capacities of the ASP’s Operational Directorate.

However, staff rotations are frequent, affecting the ASP operational capacity. Other elements that should be tackled by ASP should make better use of technology and special investigation techniques, while have a more proactive and systematic approach in response against crime. When it comes to Law Enforcement Cooperation Albania has an agreement at operational and strategic level with Europol since 2013 and has a liaison officer to EUROPOL. Albania has been a member of Interpol since 1991. Albania is also party to the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCCSEE). Albania has 35 bilateral agreements with countries party to the PCCSEE Convention, including five Member States. The agreements between the Albanian State Police and the Special Prosecution Office and the National Bureau of Investigation respectively allow them to access SIENA. A similar agreement is in place between the Albanian State Police and the Customs. These agreements cover various areas in the field of security, including the fight against organised crime, terrorism, violent extremism, cross-border crime, and police training..Another important element is the established cooperation between the Albanian Security Academy and the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) which is considered well established. Through this agreement Albania can fully access the CEPOL Exchange Programme and is also participating in the CEPOL-led Partnership against Crime and Terrorism project in the Western Balkans.

Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA) - It is responsible for the drafting and implementation of visa policy and negotiation of necessary acts of international cooperation in the field of migration; supporting the Albanian emigrants abroad and protecting their rights, organising the Albanian Diaspora, coordinating actions with the MoI structures on readmission of Albanian citizens etc. Other responsibilities of MEFA include: improvement and digitalisation of services and information for consular services and improvement of digital information available to citizens; improvement of treatment of foreigners in Albania by guaranteeing rights of foreigners upon arrival to Albania.

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 “On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration”. The Ministry of Interior is the leading institution for Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security, and as such some of the roundtables were held in close collaboration with its representatives. During the roundtables, members of this DCTs have been present along other stakeholders who contribute and possess expertise on the specific issues discussed on each roundtable

Roundtable: Roadmap for Rule of Law - Priorities regarding Chapter 24 according to the Rule of Law Roadmap, 07 December 2023

The first session of the Working Group (WG) for Chapter 24 – Rule of Law Roadmap and next steps after the opening of Negotiating Cluster 1: Fundamentals, held on 7 December 2023, focused on presenting the Rule of Law Roadmap and outlining the concrete steps that Albania must take after successfully completing the screening process for Cluster 1. The main topics discussed included Albania's legislative developments, the establishment of the first asset recovery office, the enhancement of border police capabilities, and the fight against drug abuse. The session also emphasized the importance of civil society involvement, the need for strengthened cooperation with European counterparts, and the upgrading of technology to address challenges posed by tourism. The event was attended by 27 participants, with 63% coming from civil society organizations (CSOs), and the remaining participants included experts on Chapter 24 issues, representatives from universities, and professionals from public administration. Public institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and various agencies involved in the Chapter 24 process were present. The discussion also included stakeholders from civil society and academic sectors, emphasizing the need for cooperation in addressing common issues related to the Rule of Law Roadmap. Besfort Lamallari, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Interior, spoke about the key aspects of the Rule of Law Roadmap, focusing on legislative priorities, asset recovery, and border police capabilities. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, discussed the involvement of civil society, comparing Albania's status with other Western Balkan countries and highlighting the need for sustained dialogue. Aleksandar-Andrija Pejović, former Montenegrin negotiator for European Integration, emphasized the importance of the Rule of Law Roadmap and the role of civil society in monitoring and evaluating Albania's progress. The event concluded with an open discussion on ways to involve civil society in future stages of the process, as well as opportunities for collaboration on issues such as asset seizure, cybercrime, and engaging universities in raising awareness among youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the framework of the fight against organized crime, it is a priority to adopt a strategy and its action plan for the recovery of assets, to be in accordance with the relevant EU Directive (Directive 245/2022), as well as the establishment of the first Asset Recovery Office, which has not been set up so far in Albania.

Regarding the structures and capacities of the State Police, especially that of the border, three main areas should be prioritized:

- raising the capacities of the staff through various trainings and programs,
- increased cooperation with their counterparts in Member States, but also with the institutions and agencies of the EU,
- improving technology and setting up digital systems to have more effectiveness and real-time results during their work

The fight against drugs, is another important element included in Chapter 24. And for this priority area, firstly are recommended:

- Establishment of a mechanism for the identification of new drugs and establishment of a national system for the exchange of information on drugs;
- The war should not focus only on the prohibition and fight against drugs, but in the first place on the prevention of using them. For this, it is recommended to not only increase the capacities, but also the horizontal coordination and cooperation with other national and international institutions and agencies.
- On the other hand, it is recommended to promote informative and preventive campaigns for the use of drugs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection for the prevention but also the support and treatment of people affected by drugs.
- The strengthening of cooperation, coordination and exchange of experiences and information is necessary and should continue further between law enforcement institutions, police structures, the judicial system and the prosecution for a proper synchronization of tasks and procedures, in order to achieve timely concrete results without impediments.

- A stable and realistic track record should be taken into consideration. Of importance are not only the reports of the number of investigations or seizures/confiscations of assets, but also the size and importance that they have in the process (how these results are translated into monetary value).
- The positive experience of organizing the roundtables for Chapter 24 should serve as motivation for this cooperation and dialogue with civil society actors and other non-state actors to continue and deepen further, in response to the progress that is being done as part of the negotiations for Chapter 24. It is necessary and required that the involvement of civil society actors be expanded further, that they be called and involved more, and that they be given the opportunity to be informed to understand the importance of the process and the value of their contributions.
- A recommendation from civil society actors is that before they are invited to contribute to consultations and discussions, they should be informed and oriented in a clear and concrete way about the time and modality of the meeting, the topic that is going to be discussed and what is expected regarding their contribution and involvement.
- Civil society can play its role and contribute concretely, especially in terms of monitoring the Roadmap and other strategic and planning documents, through the preparation and implementation of monitoring and evaluation reports and documents. A positive example is the work that CSOs in Serbia do, implementing what are known as shadow reports, reports that civil society itself prepares with a focus on the Rule of Law after monitoring the work of responsible public institutions, and which compare the reports issued by the public institutions themselves or those of the EU.
- For more inherent involvement of CSOs in the process, the key is the dialogue with public institutions and better coordination of work. This cooperation between the two parties should make it possible to share experiences and increase capacities on both sides. It is very important to keep in mind that the progress for Cluster 1 is essential, since if there is no progress in this cluster, there cannot be any progress in the other clusters either.

- Regarding cybercrime, it is recommended that the responsible governmental institutions have a compact cooperation with other actors, especially with businesses and experts who work in these fields and can exchange the best techniques but also positive European experiences, as a result of the expertise they have and the work that they have with international partners.
- The involvement of the youth, students or junior professionals should be promoted, who may not be directly contributing to the process with expertise, but it is important that they are informed as early as possible about the process and the opportunities for involvement and consultation, in order to be as prepared and oriented as possible to contribute during the stages of negotiations until the country's membership.
- A greater involvement should also come from the academic staff, lecturers and researchers who should be involved in a more proactive way in researches made on issues related to the European integration process, as well as being offered the possibility to share the findings of these studies share with the responsible institutions and relevant stakeholders.

Roundtable: Management of irregular migration and cooperation with frontex – main priorities under the National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030 framework, 31 January 2024

On January 31, 2024, a roundtable focusing on Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security, was held at Europe House in Tirana. Organized jointly by the Ministry of Interior and the European Movement in Albania, the event was part of the ongoing Partnership Platform for European Integration and the National Convention for European Integration.

The discussions centered on the Rule of Law Roadmap, which is crucial for Albania's reforms in the justice, freedom, and security sectors. Key topics included the implementation of this roadmap, migration management, and the importance of international cooperation with EU institutions, Frontex, and other relevant bodies. The roundtable also highlighted the alignment of the National Migration Strategy for 2024-2030 with EU recommendations, addressing irregular migration, asylum processes, and the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. The event gathered a wide range of participants, including representatives from public institutions such as the Ministry of Interior, the Border and Migration Police, and the Slovak Police. Civil society actors, experts, and professionals engaged in European integration processes were also present.

Various stakeholders, including international organizations and EU agencies, contributed to the discussions, emphasizing the collaborative efforts required to address regional migration challenges. Besfort Lamallari, Deputy Minister of Interior, stressed the importance of adhering to the Rule of Law Roadmap and the commitment to cooperation with international organizations like IOM, Europol, and Frontex. Suela Jahaj, Director for Integration at the Ministry of Interior, highlighted the role of the Rule of Law Roadmap as a guiding document for future reforms and discussed the new National Strategy for Migration. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, emphasized the need for continued consultation on Chapter 24 issues and valued regional collaboration. Silvana Banushi, General Director of Development for Migration and Asylum at the Ministry of Interior, presented the National Migration Strategy and its inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. Saimir Boshnjaku, Director of the Border and Migration Police, discussed efforts to manage irregular migration and the improved cooperation with neighboring countries. Jana Jurickova, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police in Slovakia, shared Slovakia's approach to irregular migration and the challenges posed by recent global events like the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The event concluded with a session of comments and suggestions from participants, focusing on the implementation, monitoring, and cooperation efforts related to the strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An all-encompassing approach to border control that incorporates strategic planning and preparation is necessary for the effective management of irregular migration. The timely and highquality information sharing as well as the coordination between pertinent organisations and structures—which takes hierarchical management levels into account—are essential to this endeavour. Slovakia provides an effective model that divides the management of irregular migration into three tiers: local, regional, and national. Every tier has specific duties that include border management, preventing illegal immigration, trafficking, and smuggling, performing risk assessments and investigations, and working with Frontex and Europol.
- One noteworthy positive example from Slovakia that should be evaluated specifically in the context of the implementation of the Schengen acquis is the creation of rapid response units that are tasked with combating organised crime, border surveillance, and protecting people's lives and health. Personnel involved in these operations receives psychological as well as physical training from these units.
- It is crucial to recognize that border management is important for neighbouring countries as well as the nation in which the control is exercised. This creates more difficulties in the EU, where there are no longer any internal borders. As such, prospective EU candidates need to take the necessary steps to guarantee efficient integrated border management.
- The visa policy and the harmonisation of policies among the candidate countries (that have achieved visa liberalisation with the EU) require distinct focus due to their direct impact on both the Schengen countries and the EU as a whole. Albania has demonstrated an exemplary model by aligning its visa policy with that of the EU, a practice that should be upheld in future endeavors.
- Another essential component that becomes apparent is risk analysis, which calls for local as well as national implementation. These analyses ought to cover operational and tactical aspects of border management strategies, as well as strategic policies, with a primary emphasis on local implementation in the latter cases.
- Collaboration with Frontex proves invaluable, particularly in joint operations. Such cooperation should encompass provision of technical assistance, building the capacities and fostering more collaboration between Frontex units and respective countries.
- Slovakia's positive practice includes the establishment of a dedicated office that handles informational and training sessions for border police officers. This office directly prioritises curriculum development aligned with national objectives and strategies, emphasising the need for enhanced cooperation with Frontex and neighbouring/EU states to facilitate knowledge exchange during training initiatives.
- The primary concern in this domain is the preparedness of responsible structures to maintain standards and collaborate with neighbouring countries, given its dynamic nature and the emergence of unpredictable challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic or conflicts like the war in Ukraine. During the conflict, for example, controlling the influx of people from Ukraine presented complex challenges that required efficient control, identification, registration, and temporary integration while upholding their rights to temporary protection.
- Fast response measures should be enabled by the responsible institutions to amend laws at the national level and make decisions directly, with the primary goal of defending and advancing the rights of migrants in accordance with international agreements and European legislation, especially in situations that are unprecedented.
- Meticulous planning is necessitated by structural and capacity factors with regards to the establishment of reception centers or the increase of crossing points and border control measures.
- Translation support for migrants who are waiting to go through the process continues to be a recurring obstacle, given the difficulty in locating translators for certain unique languages. It is advisable to seek cooperation with neighbouring countries or European authorities in addressing this issue.

- Priority ought to be accorded to the provision of psycho-social assistance for migrants originating from regions marked by conflict, individuals who have fallen prey to trafficking and smuggling, or minors who find themselves without the accompaniment of adults. The said assistance should be in accordance with the most commendable methods and global standards.

In terms of its strategic importance, the subsequent recommendations bear considerable significance:

- Thorough scrutiny and synchronisation of the Strategy, utilising insights from prior accomplishments and unfulfilled objectives of the previous Strategy (2020-2024). The creation of entities such as the Technical Committee for Migration (TCM), Working Group for Migration (WGM), and Technical Secretariat for Migration marks positive advancements, necessitating a precise delineation of responsibilities and task coordination.
- Explicit measures should be precisely assigned in terms of deadlines, costs, and human resources, drawing upon recommendations delineated in reports from the European Commission, including screening and annual evaluation reports.
- The active involvement of civil society organisations in monitoring and providing recommendations, expertise, and support throughout the implementation phase of the Strategy is indispensable.

Roundtable: From Strategy to Action: Managing Irregular Migration and Meeting the Interim Benchmarks for Chapter 24, April 29, 2025

This roundtable aimed to inform civil society actors and other stakeholders about the implementation progress of the National Migration Strategy 2024–2030 and its Action Plan, with a particular focus on steps taken to meet the interim benchmarks related to migration, asylum, and integrated border management under Chapter 24. The roundtable also sought to foster dialogue between institutions and non-state actors, contributing to a more transparent and accountable policymaking process. An added value of this meeting was the exchange of best practices with EU Member States, as a Slovak expert shared their experiences and practical recommendations on migration governance and the EU accession process.

In this light, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania, opened the meeting by highlighting the importance of involving civil society in monitoring and contributing to the implementation of Albania's Migration Strategy under Chapter 24, building on progress since the strategy's approval a year ago. Suela Jahaj, Director for Integration and International Agreements at the Ministry of the Interior, detailed the interim benchmarks for Chapter 24, noting ongoing gaps in legislation, institutional structures, and capacity building, while highlighting strategic developments such as the Asset Recovery Office, the National Early Warning System, and the National Drug Observatory. Silvana Banushi, General Director for Migration and Asylum Development, outlined the implementation of the Migration Strategy and Action Plan, emphasizing priorities like harmonising legislation with EU directives, strengthening institutional coordination, preventing irregular migration, and supporting refugee integration. She also noted achievements such as Albania's observer status in the European Migration Network, enhanced Border Police capacities, decentralization of migration services, and protection measures for unaccompanied minors. Miroslava Mittelmannová from Slovakia shared insights and recommendations from the Slovak experience, emphasizing the critical role of civil society and local authorities in managing migration effectively and integrating newcomers, particularly highlighting lessons learned from hosting Ukrainian nationals following the 2022 war. Overall, the meeting underscored the importance of multi-level cooperation, civil society engagement, and continuous adaptation to advance Albania's Chapter 24 commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A clear distinction must be made between unaccompanied and separated children, by foreseeing such a differentiation also in the relevant legislation. For example, in Slovak law, there is no clear definition of what constitutes a separated child, which makes it difficult to handle such cases in a proper and accurate manner. For this reason, the treatment of such cases should be approached by focusing on the best interest of the child, ensuring appropriate protection for them.
 - There appears to be an increase in the number of unaccompanied children crossing the border and entering Albanian territory irregularly, especially from Greece, and their accommodation remains a problem. These children cannot be placed in closed centers for migrants, thus requiring greater attention in resolving this issue and ensuring children's rights, by guaranteeing that they have suitable environments and services for minors, as also provided for in Conventions and international instruments.
 - According to Slovak experience, the type of residence permit for foreigners can affect their full integration. The case of migrants from Ukraine, who are beneficiaries of temporary protection, has revealed several issues, such as:
 - Lack of the right to own a business – Foreigners with temporary protection status are not allowed to obtain a trade license, forcing them to engage in illegal activities.
 - Difficulties in education – For children holding a 6-month residence permit, attending compulsory education in Slovakia is not mandatory. As a result, in many cases they do not attend school, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, sexual violence, or trafficking, since they are not under the supervision of parents or adults for a large part of the day.
 - Currently, there is no updated data on foreigners entering Albania, especially those who enter and stay irregularly. The data published by INSTAT, although released periodically, is insufficient and not published in a timely manner. To have a clearer and real-time updated overview, better coordination is needed among institutions such as the State Police, the Ministry of Interior, or the Ministry of Welfare to provide updated data according to the type of migrants, along with other important demographic information. These data are important to identify and better understand the situation of migrants in Albania, so that the policies and measures undertaken are in response to this picture.
 - Migrants who enter Albania irregularly often become victims of violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking, or smuggling. In most cases, they view Albania as a transit country, which makes them more easily exposed to risks such as trafficking and smuggling. For this reason, increased attention is needed to assess and address these irregular migration situations as potential risks for the migrants but also as a risk for the growth and strengthening of organized crime.
 - It is recommended that municipalities and local government authorities play a more active role in supporting migrants by offering services that are tailored and informed by their needs.
- Best practices from Slovakia include the creation of one-stop-shops where migrants can access all services related to their integration and the protection of their rights, including employment, healthcare, accommodation, and education. This model reduces bureaucracy and enables easier guidance for migrants, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Local authorities in Slovakia have developed and implemented several strategic plans focused on the integration of foreigners, which serve as guidelines and concrete measures to ensure the provision of necessary services and the protection of migrants' rights. These strategies are customized to the specific needs of different groups of migrants, including those under temporary protection.
- It is recommended that periodic and targeted monitoring be carried out by independent institutions such as the People's Advocate and/or the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, in order to ensure a fair and accurate assessment of reception conditions, accommodation, and services for foreigners. These monitoring visits should be conducted without prior notice, to obtain a genuine and unfiltered view of the conditions and services provided in these centers.

-Part of the monitoring process should be the drafting of Monitoring Reports, which must provide important information and recommendations for improvements. These reports should be published and shared both with the responsible institutions and with relevant stakeholders, to enable the implementation of further measures.

-It is recommended that civil society organizations, especially those working directly with migrants and targeted vulnerable groups, be included in these monitoring processes.

- Closer cooperation with public authorities, particularly local ones, is necessary to ensure accurate and detailed information on the needs of migrants and to enable the provision of more appropriate and effective services.
- Civil society organizations should be more actively involved in the process of policy-making and implementation, ensuring that the needs of migrants are addressed in an efficient and timely manner. The work of these organizations on the ground, through direct contact with affected groups, can offer more detailed and accurate information to responsible institutions—information that is essential for effective governance and the improvement of migrant conditions at the local level.
- CSOs that provide legal expertise and analysis should play a more proactive role in monitoring the drafting and implementation of laws, by offering recommendations and identifying issues that may arise during the application of the law. A successful example comes from Slovakia, where civil society organizations advocated—using legal arguments—for amendments to the Law on Foreigners, in order to ensure a more complete and fair integration of migrants into society. This law was amended following civil society's intervention and advocacy work, aligning it with international standards and EU directives.

Albanian law provides for free legal aid for migrants and foreigners, but often those in need of this service lack proper information about the procedures they must follow to benefit from it. For this, the following steps are recommended:

- Information about the free legal aid service should be made available in the service offices of local authorities, through meetings with staff who can strengthen and facilitate communication and connection with legal aid providers. Additionally, simple informative brochures should be used, prepared in several foreign languages, to ensure that the information is understandable to all migrants and foreigners.
- There should be greater cooperation with civil society organizations that provide free legal services and have legal expertise and legal representatives who can offer direct legal assistance and support to migrants and foreigners.
- It is recommended to conduct information and awareness-raising campaigns, in cooperation with state institutions, civil society organizations, and international organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, Save the Children, and UNICEF, to ensure that the information reaches all those in need.
- Trainings and capacity building activities should be organized for public authority employees, so they understand the importance of free legal aid services and are capable of providing accurate and necessary information to interested parties.

Roundtable: The Importance of Public Education on Money Laundering – Strengthening Cooperation with Non-State Actors, 21 May 2025

This roundtable for Chapter 24, organized by the European Movement in Albania (EMA) in cooperation with the Albanian Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF), focused on raising awareness regarding the implementation of the Public Education Strategy on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism 2025–2027, and the role of civil society and the private sector in combating money laundering.

In this regard, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized that as Albania's EU integration progresses, institutional responsibilities grow, but meaningful involvement of civil society, business, and academia is essential to understand the impacts and costs of reforms. He highlighted successful collaborations through platforms like the National Convention on European Integration and the Partnership Platform for European Integration, and called for strengthened dialogue throughout the process. Nikolin Jaka, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Tirana, stressed the need for the business sector to meet national and international standards, invest in human resources and technology, and actively participate in integration efforts, particularly to prevent money laundering. Agim Muslia, Director of Compliance and IT at AIF, presented the Public Education Strategy on Anti-Money Laundering, emphasizing awareness-raising, interinstitutional coordination, and engagement of civil society, schools, universities, and the media to mitigate the economic, social, and security impacts of money laundering. Andrej Leontiev, lawyer and AML expert from Slovakia, shared EU examples highlighting the crucial role of non-state actors, or “gatekeepers,” in monitoring beneficial ownership and reporting suspicious cases, noting that 95% of such reports in Slovakia came from civil society and journalists. He concluded that while corruption and money laundering cannot be completely eradicated, their deterrence can be increased by raising transactional costs and ensuring active cooperation between public institutions and non-state actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important to acknowledge that the phenomenon of money laundering will always be present. Therefore, the focus should be on taking preventive measures. In this context, public education should be treated as a preventive tool to help mitigate risks and foster a deeper understanding of this issue.
- For the strategy to be effectively implemented, better coordination and engagement among the involved actors is necessary. This coordination should take place on two levels:
 1. Improved institutional coordination among public bodies and law enforcement agencies, with a clear definition of their respective responsibilities;
 2. Strengthened cooperation with non-state actors such as the business community, civil society, academia, and the media.

Regarding the target groups for education and awareness-raising efforts, special attention should be paid to:

- The business community, which is increasingly being targeted or misused for money laundering purposes. More informative activities and trainings are needed to raise awareness of the relevant criminal offenses and ways to protect economic activity from being misused.
- Students and young people, through cooperation with schools and universities, in order to raise awareness and build knowledge about this phenomenon from an early stage.
- Legal professionals and law enforcement institutions where trainings may even be mandatory and accompanied by testing and certification. Practice has shown that prosecutors, judges, and the police require continuous updates on developments in this field.
- The Slovak model for education includes three phases, which may serve as examples of good practice for inclusive public education:

1. Creating and disseminating information for targeted groups;
2. Developing up-to-date educational materials and curricula tailored to the needs and interests of these groups;
3. Involving as many stakeholders as possible in public outreach and awareness-raising activities through public information channels.

The stakeholders known as "gatekeepers" (such as journalists, representatives of civil society, business, etc.) play an important role in ensuring transparency and flagging suspicious cases. To support this, the following are necessary:

- Public institutions must be open and transparent, especially regarding data on businesses, public procurement, and beneficial owners.
- Journalists, NGOs, and the business community must be self-motivated to signal and monitor cases, through analysis of public data.
- Legal professionals such as lawyers, notaries, accountants, or banks should be encouraged to cooperate with authorities and report discrepancies or suspicious cases. They can serve as trusted intermediaries in verifying ownership data or identifying clients.
- The legitimate interest of journalists and NGOs to access the register of beneficial owners must be recognized, without practical obstacles.
- Data on the ultimate beneficiaries of public funds, public contracts, or state assets should be accessible and transparent to the public.
- Civil society must be engaged not only as an actor that contributes to the fight against money laundering but also made aware of the risk it poses through its potential misuse as a tool for money laundering. It has a dual role – as a protector and as an entity at risk.

- Non-state actors such as businesses, media, banks, or independent professionals should be valued for the expertise, capacities, and resources they can offer. To join forces with public institutions, the first step must be to inform and raise their awareness of the benefits of being part of this process.
- The media and journalists have an irreplaceable role in education and awareness-raising. This involvement should take place in two forms:
 1. Through dedicated capacity-building trainings, familiarizing them with the phenomenon, terminology, and the latest developments.
 2. By encouraging investigative journalism, with more space for analytical and investigative articles that go beyond event reporting.
- Public institutions must be more cooperative with the media, by informing and involving them in public activities to ensure media coverage and increase public outreach.
- The media should be more proactive. For example, in Slovakia it has been observed that successful cases in the fight against money laundering have been promoted in the media – as a result of the work of public institutions, but also due to investigations by civil society or the business sector. These cases serve as an incentive for greater awareness and further involvement.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 – Information and awareness-raising on Financial Technology (Fintech) – the innovations and risks it brings in the context of combating money laundering, 30 October 2025

This roundtable, organized in collaboration with the Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF) aimed to raise awareness and foster dialogue on FinTech developments and the associated risks in combating money laundering, terrorism financing, and the financing of weapons of mass destruction. The discussion brought together representatives from public institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations, and legal experts, focusing on the impact of financial innovation on regulatory frameworks, institutional coordination, and financial security in line with EU integration requirements.

During the opening remarks, Ervin Koçi, Director General of the Financial Intelligence Agency, highlighted the transformative impact of FinTech on financial systems, noting both its efficiency and the emerging risks related to financial crime. He emphasized the establishment of a dedicated FinTech sector within AIF to monitor and analyze emerging threats and strengthen compliance with international and European financial security standards. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, underlined the importance of information-sharing and inter-institutional coordination in addressing the rapid evolution of digital finance, emphasizing continuity in dialogue within Chapter 24 discussions. Valentina Semi, Deputy Director at the Bank of Albania, presented developments in digital payment systems, instant transactions, and Albania's integration into SEPA, stressing the need for stronger inclusion of the banking sector in policymaking and regulatory consultation. Ada Qazolli, Chair of the Compliance Committee at the Albanian Banking Association, emphasized that innovation must go hand in hand with compliance and institutional cooperation to ensure integrity and alignment with international standards.

Irida Goxharaj, Executive Manager at the Albanian Association of Foreign Exchange Offices, highlighted the importance of digitalization and regulatory alignment with the Albanian Digital Agenda 2022–2026, including e-invoicing and e-government platforms such as e-Albania, as tools to enhance transparency and efficiency. Redina Nasi, Head of the FinTech Sector at AIF, presented the legal and operational framework for FinTech supervision, focusing on risks linked to virtual assets, crypto platforms, and emerging fraud schemes such as phishing, hacking, and “pump and dump” operations, while emphasizing recent enforcement actions and the need for stronger preventive mechanisms. Andrej Leontiev, anti-money laundering expert from Slovakia, discussed the increasing role of artificial intelligence in enabling financial fraud, calling for enhanced regulatory responses, real-time detection systems, and targeted awareness campaigns to address vulnerabilities across different population groups.

The roundtable concluded with an interactive exchange on cyber-enabled financial crime, the importance of public awareness, and the need for strengthened cooperation between national institutions and international partners to effectively address evolving risks in the financial sector and support Albania's alignment with European standards under Chapter 24.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The rapid growth of FinTech and digital finance presents both opportunities for innovation and challenges for regulation. Financial innovation must be accompanied by a proactive approach to preventing money laundering, fraud, and cybercrime. Risk mitigation should be treated as a preventive tool to safeguard consumers, businesses, and the financial system. Measures to mitigate risks may include:

-Implementation of real-time transaction monitoring and AI-driven fraud detection systems to quickly identify suspicious activities.

-Use of blockchain analytics and secure system integrations to track digital asset movements and prevent exploitation through APIs or third-party connections.

-Regular staff training, public awareness campaigns, and clear guidance for users to identify and respond to phishing, social engineering, and investment or employment scams. Special attention should be paid to seniors and older people, who may be less familiar with digital finance practices and more vulnerable to scams.

-Development of incident response plans and continuous monitoring of emerging threats to keep policies and systems up-to-date.

Operational coordination and AML classification

- Establish 24/7 fraud officer services within banks, enabling police or other authorities to communicate directly and report or investigate suspicious activities immediately.
- Treat all suspicious financial losses or thefts as potential AML cases. While it may sometimes be difficult to classify these incidents at the outset, it is recommended to treat them as the worst-case scenario: potential money laundering. This allows for a more rapid and thorough investigation, protects victims, and prevents gaps in oversight.
- Victims should:
 - Report any suspicious financial activity immediately, even if uncertain whether it constitutes fraud or theft.
 - Receive guidance on how the case will be investigated under AML procedures to ensure a swift response and protection.
- Banks and financial institutions:
 - Ensure timely reporting with sufficient detail to support AML investigations.

- Law enforcement and regulatory authorities should:
 - Prioritize rapid investigation and coordination with banks to minimize delays and gaps.
 - Use AML classification to enable comprehensive analysis, tracing, and prevention of further criminal activity.

Coordination among key actors

- Improved regulatory coordination among supervisory authorities at national and international levels, with clear allocation of responsibilities and harmonized approaches to emerging FinTech models, including neobanks, crypto-asset service providers, and blockchain-based platforms.
- Strengthened cooperation with non-state actors such as FinTech companies, traditional financial institutions, civil society, the banking sector, academia, and media to share knowledge, best practices, and intelligence on emerging threats.

Target groups for awareness-raising and capacity-building

- FinTech providers (digital-only banks, crypto exchanges, crowdfunding platforms, Buy Now Pay Later providers) require continuous guidance to embed AML and fraud mitigation measures into their business models.
- Customers and end-users should be educated on risks including synthetic identities, account takeover, phishing, social engineering, fake investment platforms, online romance scams, and employment fraud.
- Seniors and older people should be specifically targeted, as they are often less familiar with digital finance practices and more vulnerable to scams.
- Legal and compliance professionals, as well as regulators, should benefit from ongoing capacity-building, training, and certification in the latest AML, cybercrime, and fraud detection technologies.
- Encourage careful online practices by users: verify email addresses and URLs, check investment or employment offers, use strong passwords and two-factor authentication, and exercise caution when sharing personal data online.

International collaboration and knowledge-sharing

- Monitor Fraud-as-a-Service platforms, malicious bots, deepfake technology, and other sophisticated cybercrime tactics.
- Promote standards for secure APIs, mobile applications, and blockchain transactions.
- Align national legislation and regulatory guidance on virtual assets with international best practices, including FATF recommendations and EU AML Directives (AMLD5/6).

Role and involvement of non-state actors

- FinTech companies and financial institutions should adopt best practices, integrate compliance into business models, and raise awareness among clients about digital finance risks.
- Civil society and academia should be engaged as contributors to the fight against fraud and money laundering and made aware of potential risks in using digital finance platforms; they have a dual role as protectors and entities at risk.
- Media and journalists play an irreplaceable role in public education and awareness-raising:
 - Through capacity-building, familiarizing them with FinTech, virtual assets, and cybercrime phenomena.
 - By encouraging investigative reporting that exposes scams and fraudulent schemes to incentivize public awareness.
- Public authorities must maintain transparency regarding online platforms, investment opportunities, and the regulatory framework for virtual assets, and cooperate with media and civil society to enhance outreach.
- Users and the public should be empowered with knowledge and tools to protect themselves, including guidance on spotting phishing attempts, verifying offers, avoiding scams, and knowing steps to take if they fall victim to fraud.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 – Strengthening Albania’s Response to Cybercrime and Child Online Protection: Legal Alignment and Institutional Capacities, 15 January 2026

This roundtable in cooperation with the Albanian State Police and within the framework of the National Convention for European Integration, focused on cybercrime and the protection of children online. The discussion aimed to strengthen interinstitutional coordination and awareness on online child safety, bringing together representatives of public institutions, civil society organizations, foreign missions, legal and media professionals, and international experts. Particular attention was given to the growing risks of online child exploitation, institutional responses to cybercrime, and the importance of aligning national practices with EU and international standards.

During his opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized that the National Convention for European Integration serves as a key platform for structured dialogue between institutions and stakeholders, enabling expertise-driven contributions to legislative alignment and implementation in line with EU standards, particularly in the sensitive areas covered by Chapters 23 and 24, including justice, security, human rights, and child protection. Sokol Bizhga, Deputy Director General of the Albanian State Police, underlined the institution’s frontline role in combating cybercrime and expressed readiness to strengthen cooperation with national and international partners in line with Interpol and EU standards to ensure effective protection of children online. Suela Bonjaku, Head of the Cybercrime Unit’s Sector for Computer Forgery and Unauthorized Access, highlighted the evolving nature of online threats against children, stressing that offenders often use deceptive and normalized online interactions to exploit minors. She presented ongoing efforts to enhance investigative capacities, including the establishment of a dedicated unit for online child sexual abuse material, strengthened cooperation with international platforms such as TikTok, access to rapid reporting channels, and participation in 24/7 international information exchange mechanisms. She also emphasized the importance of early education, parental awareness, and cooperation with schools as essential preventive measures.

Róbert Bohunický, Counterfeiting Specialist at the Ministry of Interior of Slovakia, shared comparative EU experience, presenting Slovakia’s structured cybercrime unit and its cooperation with Europol, Interpol, ICSE, and other international partners in combating online child exploitation and cybercrime. He highlighted the importance of data analysis, cross-border information exchange, and public awareness initiatives, including educational campaigns targeting children, parents, and older populations, as well as dedicated online support platforms. He also noted key challenges such as increasing cyber threats and limited human resources, and recommended strengthening institutional capacities, enhancing cooperation with international partners, and ensuring continuous operational readiness. During the discussion, participants further addressed the need for improved cooperation with digital platforms, the establishment of a national database for child abuse cases, updates to criminal legislation including provisions on online bullying, and the development of stronger victim support mechanisms alongside broader public awareness initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institutional and Operational Capacity

- Online child sexual exploitation and cybercrime are evolving phenomena that require continuous institutional adaptation. While important steps have already been taken — including the establishment of a dedicated sector for the investigation of online child sexual abuse material, further strengthening of institutional and operational capacities remains essential.

- the Cybercrime Unit should be reinforced through sustainable human resource planning. The increasing number of online threats, combined with the technical complexity of investigations, demands the recruitment and retention of specialized personnel in digital forensics, data analysis, and cyber investigations.

-Continuous training should be ensured in order to prevent the loss of expertise and maintain operational resilience.

-investments in modern technological tools are necessary, including advanced software for image and video analysis, secure data storage systems, and AI-assisted identification tools. Given the sophistication of perpetrators in the online environment, law enforcement authorities must be equipped with equally advanced investigative capacities.

-the functioning of the 24/7 contact point for international information exchange should be ensured with adequate staffing and technical support. Time-sensitive cases, particularly those involving live-streamed abuse or active exploitation, require immediate cross-border coordination and rapid evidence preservation.

-consideration should be given to establishing a centralized national case-tracking or database system for online child abuse cases, in full compliance with data protection standards. Such a mechanism would enhance coordination between institutions, facilitate pattern analysis, and support evidence-based policymaking.

2. Legislation and Implementation

- Full alignment with the EU acquis under Chapter 24 requires continuous legislative review and effective implementation. Particular attention should be given to ensuring alignment with Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, as well as relevant developments at EU level related to digital services and online platform responsibilities.

- A comprehensive assessment of the Criminal Code should be conducted to ensure that online grooming, possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material, livestreamed abuse, and other technology-facilitated forms of exploitation are clearly defined and adequately sanctioned.

- In addition, discussions during the Working Group highlighted the need to review the legal framework concerning cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment affecting minors. The rapid evolution of digital behavior may create legal gaps that undermine effective prosecution and victim protection. Clarifying these provisions would strengthen legal certainty and improve enforcement.

- Implementation must be accompanied by clear procedural protocols for the processing of international reports, including those received from NCMEC and other international partners. Standardized procedures for prioritization, referral, investigation, and statistical reporting would enhance transparency, accountability, and operational efficiency.

3. Information, Prevention, and Awareness

- While enforcement remains a central pillar, prevention should be treated as a long-term strategic priority. The online environment often blurs the line between entertainment and risk, particularly for children. Early education and digital literacy are therefore essential preventive tools.

- National awareness campaigns should be developed and regularly implemented, targeting children, parents, teachers, and the wider public. These campaigns should utilize social media platforms, national television, and school-based programs to disseminate accessible information about online risks, reporting mechanisms, and available support services.

- Inspired by good practices from EU Member States, Albania may consider developing a dedicated online platform providing guidance, educational materials, and reporting instructions for individuals who feel threatened or exposed to cybercrime. Such a platform could serve as a centralized resource hub for prevention and victim support.

- Furthermore, the institutionalization and expansion of trained police officers assigned to schools could strengthen early intervention mechanisms. School-based engagement fosters trust, improves reporting rates, and creates a safer digital culture among minors.

Cooperation with Other Actors

- Given the transnational and multi-dimensional nature of cybercrime, effective cooperation remains indispensable.
- At international level, continued and enhanced engagement with Europol, Interpol (including ICSE), NCMEC, and other strategic partners should be ensured. Participation in Joint Investigation Teams and international projects contributes to knowledge exchange and strengthens Albania's alignment with EU standards.
- Cooperation with major digital platforms such as TikTok, Meta, and other widely used services should be further formalized. While access to reporting channels represents an important achievement, structured cooperation protocols with clear communication procedures and response timelines would significantly improve operational efficiency and evidence preservation.
- Inter-institutional cooperation at national level should also be strengthened through regular coordination mechanisms involving the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor's Office, child protection authorities, data protection institutions, and other relevant bodies. A permanent expert or coordination group could ensure strategic coherence and consistent monitoring of progress.
- Finally, the role of civil society organizations should be formally recognized and supported. Their expertise in child protection, digital rights, and victim assistance complements state efforts and contributes to a more holistic, rights-based approach. Involving civil society in prevention campaigns, policy consultations, and support services aligns with EU principles of participatory governance and strengthens the credibility of reforms under Chapter 24.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 – Strengthening institutional capacities and best practices for the functioning of the Asset Recovery Office (ARO), 25 March 2026

This roundtable focused on strengthening institutional capacities and promoting the exchange of European best practices for the functioning of the Asset Recovery Office (ARO), in cooperation with the Albanian State Police. The roundtable brought together representatives of state institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, legal professionals, and international experts, serving as a platform for consultation on the establishment and operationalization of ARO in Albania. The discussion emphasized the role of asset recovery in the fight against organized crime and money laundering, as well as its importance in meeting EU requirements and benchmarks under Chapter 24.

During the opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, highlighted the National Convention for European Integration as a key platform for structured cooperation between institutions and non-state actors, enabling expert input and practical recommendations to strengthen Albania's legal and institutional framework. He underlined the importance of Chapter 24 as a core pillar of the rule of law, security, and the effectiveness of anti-organized crime and anti-money laundering mechanisms. Arben Ujkaj, Director of the Asset Recovery Office within the Albanian State Police, emphasized the strategic importance of establishing and consolidating ARO as a key instrument for identifying, tracing, and recovering assets derived from criminal activity, noting that its full operationalization requires strong legal foundations, interinstitutional cooperation, and engagement with international partners. Rezar Velimishi, Sector Chief at the State Police, presented the legal and institutional developments related to ARO, stressing its alignment with EU priorities, the need for secondary legislation and internal procedures, and the importance of strengthening human resources, technical capacities, and coordination mechanisms to ensure effective functioning.

Michal Pavlik, Head of the ARO Department at the Slovak Police, shared European Union best practices and Slovakia's experience in asset recovery. He referred to the EU framework under Council Decision 2007/845/JHA and highlighted the importance of rapid cross-border information exchange for identifying and tracing criminal assets. He described the organizational structure of Slovakia's ARO, its access to institutional and financial data even outside formal criminal proceedings, and its cooperation with tax authorities, financial institutions, and social insurance bodies. He also emphasized capacity building through specialized training, international cooperation via Europol channels such as SIENA, and engagement with the private sector in asset identification processes. Pavlik further referenced the latest EU developments, particularly Directive (EU) 2024/1260 on asset recovery and confiscation, which expands ARO responsibilities and strengthens its institutional role, with a transposition deadline set for November 2026. The discussion concluded with interventions underlining the importance of strengthening ARO's operational capacity, ensuring effective interinstitutional coordination, and continuing the exchange of European best practices to enhance Albania's alignment with EU standards under Chapter 24.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Asset Recovery Office (ARO) is a newly established structure in Albania, created as a requirement of the process of aligning legislation with the EU standards for combating corruption and organized crime on the framework of Chapter 24.

- In this regard, it is important that this structure has a clear description of its functions, procedures, and the standards to be implemented, ensuring unified and operational functioning.
- It is important that the internal organization of the ARO is defined through secondary legislation and internal institutional regulations, ensuring operational flexibility and clear inter-institutional coordination.
- The ARO may have limited, but it should have highly specialized capacities (a small and focused structure), supported by sufficient human and financial resources.

It is recommended that there should be accurate and clear budget planning for the capacity building of ARO, which should include projections of staffing and operational needs, as well as dedicated training programs focused on:

- enhancing digital skills and the use of specialized databases
- familiarity with the procedures, standards, and legal framework of the EU in the field of asset recovery
- strengthening language capacities (particularly English) for effective and real-time international cooperation.
- Currently, the ARO does not have investigative powers; however, under the new EU Directive 2024/1260, which is expected to be transported, an expansion of its functions is envisaged, including the possibility of administrative measures for the preservation of assets (not classical confiscation), thereby creating scope for rapid intervention and notification of judicial authorities. In this regard, it is recommended that these innovations are reflected in the legal and procedural framework of the ARO in Albania.

It is recommended to strengthen cooperation and coordination with:

- justice institutions and specialised structures (SPAK), the courts and the prosecution offices, as well as with fiscal and information agencies
- European and regional counterpart offices through the rapid and structured exchange of information

the Financial Intelligence Agency and the agency for the management of seized assets, with the aim of achieving institutional synergy

- the private and banking sector for rapid access to financial information and asset tracing, as well as with international technology platforms and companies for access to relevant data (e.g., digital platforms and online services).

From the experience of EU countries, delays in the exchange of information are a recurring problem. For this reason, it is recommended:

- the establishment of binding legal deadlines for the provision of information
- defining expedited procedures for high-risk cases
- providing sanctioning mechanisms in cases of non-cooperation or unjustified delays.

- It is suggested that representatives of the ARO in Albania should be included in the EU ARO network and database, enabling the rapid identification of counterpart contacts and direct operational communication in urgent cases. It is recommended to ensure membership and active participation in the European ARO network, as well as the use of secure interinstitutional communication platforms for the exchange of information in real time.

From the Slovak experience, a continuous increase in requests for information within the EU has been observed, which requires that the ARO in Albania build sufficient capacities for the rapid and efficient processing of such requests. Continuous training of ARO staff is essential and should include:

- the use of information systems and databases
- financial investigations and asset tracing
- interinstitutional and international cooperation
- the use of secure communication platforms.
- Training should be continuous and aligned with the new legal developments in the EU, including the new Directive on asset recovery. It is recommended to ensure regular participation in international training programs and exchanges of experience with EU countries.

Information and awareness-raising; involvement of non-state actors

- As a newly established structure and in the context of the changes introduced by EU Directive 2024/1260, it is recommended to carry out a structured information and awareness-raising campaign on the role, function, and obligations of the ARO, as well as on the responsibilities of other institutions within the chain of cooperation.
- These campaigns may be carried out in cooperation with civil society, academia, and experts in relevant fields (organized crime, financial crime, money laundering, and cybercrime), targeting public and justice institutions; the financial and banking sector; businesses and economic actors; the media and journalists as actors of public information; as well as citizens and interest groups.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 – Strengthening Law Enforcement Capacities through Police Education and International Cooperation: The Role of the Security Academy in the European Integration Process, 07 April 2026

This roundtable was held in cooperation with the Security Academy of Albania and the Slovak Security Academy, with the support of the European Union. 24. Particular attention was given to the role of security education institutions in preparing future law enforcement officers, as well as to the exchange of European best practices in security training, human rights, and emerging challenges such as artificial intelligence in education and policing.

During the opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized the importance of cooperation with the Security Academy of Albania as the main higher education institution responsible for training future police officers. He underlined that alongside legal approximation and policy development, direct engagement with law enforcement practitioners and training institutions is essential for strengthening public security capacities and ensuring effective implementation of Chapter 24 obligations. He highlighted the role of the Security Academy in building professional competencies, sharing expertise, and contributing to closer coordination between national and European security frameworks. Prof. Dr. Ilirjan Mandro, Rector of the Security Academy of Albania, presented the institutional development of the Academy as an accredited higher education institution and outlined its ongoing alignment with EU standards in curricula, research, and training methodologies. He emphasized specialized training in areas such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, regional cooperation agreements with neighboring countries, and international partnerships with institutions in the EU and beyond. He also highlighted initiatives on human rights-based training, inclusive admission policies, and student participation from vulnerable communities, as well as cooperation with national law enforcement bodies and international academic exchanges. He further noted ongoing internationalization efforts through student mobility programmes and cooperation with European and global partners, while stressing the need for continued support to reach EU-level standards. Dr. Jozef Medelsky, Vice-Rector for Teaching at the Slovak Security Academy, presented the Slovak experience in security education, emphasizing the institution's long-standing structure, multi-level academic programmes, and integration of practical and theoretical training. He highlighted the importance of foreign language skills, international cooperation through Erasmus+ exchanges, and participation in European security networks such as CEPOL, EMPACT, and SOCTA. He also presented best practices in victim protection, including specialized facilities for child and juvenile victims, and underlined the growing importance of artificial intelligence in education. In this context, he outlined ethical guidelines for AI use, including transparency requirements, disciplinary measures, and the integration of practical assessment methods to ensure academic integrity and responsible use of technology in education and training.

The discussion highlighted the importance of curriculum modernization, international cooperation between police academies, and the integration of emerging technologies into education systems. Participants emphasized the need for stronger student exchange opportunities, continuous curriculum updates aligned with EU standards, and structured cooperation between Albanian and Slovak security education institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scientific Research, Academic Development and Technological Challenges

- Based on Slovak practice, a comprehensive combination of theory and practice is recommended at all levels of study (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral studies), as well as in continuous professional learning after graduation. Graduates should be equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills to design and implement effective measures in the fields of security and law enforcement. They should be able to assess security environments, manage risks and respond to emergency situations.
- It is recommended to strengthen the human rights component and knowledge of European Union legislation within the training programmes and curricula of the Security Academy, in the framework of Chapters 23 and 24 of the EU accession negotiations. This includes increased focus on European standards for investigative procedures, safeguarding fundamental rights, protecting vulnerable groups, and upholding the rule of law in the performance of duties by law enforcement authorities, in line with the EU acquis.
- Foreign language learning, particularly English, should be considered a priority and further reinforced. In this regard, the Police Academy in Slovakia has a dedicated foreign languages department providing English-language instruction focused on professional communication in policing and public administration.
- Scientific research should be prioritised within the Academy as part of the modernisation of practices and techniques. Greater cooperation with academics, researchers and experts from various fields is required in order to address needs and challenges in the security sector. In Albania's case, the focus should also include the European integration process and accession negotiations, as well as cooperation with EU agencies and regional partners. Research should generate practical and applicable outcomes for policing and security work.
- The internationalisation of Albania's Security Academy is essential, with international cooperation playing a key role in improving the quality of education and research. Cooperation with CEPOL, as well as involvement in SOCTA and EMPACT, contributes to updating curricula, developing

analytical thinking, and strengthening the link between theory and practice.

- Increased participation of the Security Academy in European Union programmes and instruments such as Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and other academic and research cooperation initiatives is recommended. Currently, limited participation in these programmes restricts opportunities for exchange of experience, staff development and curriculum modernisation. Participation in such schemes would directly contribute to strengthening professional capacities, internationalising the institution and aligning it with EU standards in the field of police education and security.
- Greater use of technological opportunities and e-learning tools is also important. Training platforms offer online courses, knowledge exchange, access to study materials and the standardisation of training at European level, thereby modernising the learning process.
- Artificial intelligence presents challenges for higher education and scientific research. In order to minimise risks arising from the use of AI, while also enabling its appropriate use, several measures may be introduced. Based on Slovak experience, these measures include:
 - guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence for students and academic staff;
 - mandatory training for students and academic staff on the ethical and appropriate use of AI;
 - alternative assessment methods (practical work, internships, tests, etc).

Training and Capacity Building

- Continuous training is an important element in strengthening and improving the capacities of police officers already in service. A practice derived from Slovak experience recommends that such training should be mandatory for staff, based on profiling and identified needs, ensuring that they remain continuously updated with the required knowledge.
- Priority training areas should relate to the latest developments in technology and cybersecurity, human rights with a focus on children and vulnerable groups, as well as dedicated courses for different professional profiles, including specialised

police studies, police management training, police attaché courses, non-verbal communication courses, and specialised anti-corruption investigation training.

- An incentive for increasing the professionalism of students and police officers is their certification and authorisation in specific areas, such as alcohol/drug testing, speed control and the use of specific firearms.
- Strengthening capacities and skills in the field of technology is of particular importance due to growing cyber risks and the development of artificial intelligence, which require rapid and effective responses. These trainings should be delivered with the involvement of experts from EU Member States, as well as specialists from relevant fields.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 - Justice, freedom, security Cooperation Police–Media: Freedom of Speech and Public Security in the Process of European Integration, 10 June 2026

On 10 June 2026, the Working Group of Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security, together with the State Police, held a roundtable within the National Convention on European Integration focused on cooperation between the police and the media. The discussion centered on the balance between public safety, public order, human rights standards, and the protection of journalists. Participants included representatives from civil society, media, academia, and public administration.

In his opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali (EMA) emphasized the importance of the topic in the context of Albania's EU accession process. He highlighted the need for continuous dialogue between institutions, media, and civil society to strengthen cooperation and ensure better protection of journalists' rights and safety. Gentian Mullai from the State Police stressed that the media and police are key pillars of democracy and that their relationship must be based on trust, partnership, and accountability. He presented ongoing measures such as the "Guidelines for the Safety of Journalists," structured communication channels for reporting incidents, and continuous training for police officers. He noted that increased reporting reflects growing trust in institutional mechanisms and improved access to reporting tools, rather than necessarily more violations. Miranda Boshnjaku presented the institutional framework supporting journalist safety, including the guidelines developed with media, civil society, and international partners and approved in May 2025. She highlighted complaint mechanisms, coordination structures, and training programs for police officers aimed at improving response and protection in practice. She also noted that journalist safety is integrated into the 2025–2026 police training curriculum. Pauline Adès-Mével presented European standards and comparative practices, noting both progress and remaining challenges in Albania. She referred to 42 reported violations against journalists in 2025 and highlighted issues such as implementation gaps, limited awareness of protection mechanisms, and trust deficits. She also shared European best practices involving structured cooperation between police and media.

During the discussion, participants emphasized the need for a clear distinction between the roles of the police and journalists during protests, as well as the strengthening of mutual information and coordination with the media, in order to ensure free but also safe reporting in the field. They also addressed incidents occurring during protests, such as damage to journalists' professional equipment or interference with live broadcasts, highlighting the importance of clarifying whether such cases are treated as administrative or criminal matters, as these issues are directly linked to the police's capacity to protect journalists and strengthen their safety on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An important element is ensuring a clear distinction between the role of the police and that of journalists during protests and public assemblies. Journalists should be treated in accordance with specific standards that recognize their role in informing the public and guarantee their safety while reporting in the field. In this context, they should not be considered part of the crowd or among the actors participating in the protest, but should be able to carry out their duties independently and safely.
- In practice, a number of issues arise that require greater institutional clarity. For example, in cases where incidents affecting journalists occur during protests, such as damage to professional equipment, interference with live broadcasts, or damage to media vehicles while reporting, it is important to establish whether such cases have been addressed through administrative or criminal procedures and whether the relevant proceedings have been concluded. Where processes remain incomplete, there is a need for clear complaint and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that every case is followed through and does not remain without an institutional response.
- Other issues requiring attention include the management of live broadcasting vehicles during protests and public assemblies, as well as their positioning in safe areas in order to avoid exposing journalists and technical crews to unnecessary risks or placing them in areas of heightened tension. Equally important is ensuring that security measures do not become obstacles to the free exercise of journalistic activities and independent reporting in the field. In this regard, strengthening journalist protection mechanisms and institutional response procedures is essential.
- In this context, preventive measures should be taken before demonstrations and public events take place. This requires mutual information-sharing, continuous communication, and coordination between the State Police, journalists, and media organizations in order to ensure free and safe reporting on the ground.
- Beyond ensuring the protection of journalists during protests and public assemblies, including the establishment of protective perimeters to prevent their exposure to risks and attacks from various groups, there is also a need to strengthen institutional capacities for addressing threats originating from online platforms. In this regard, it is important to assess whether existing State Police guidelines or protocols adequately address journalists' safety both in the field and in the digital environment. The lack of sufficient attention to journalists' digital security represents a gap that requires further institutional intervention.
- Police officers engaged in public order operations should receive practical training on identifying journalists, respecting their role during demonstrations, communicating appropriately with media representatives, and applying European standards in real operational situations. Training should also include practical exercises and simulations, involving journalists whenever possible.
- At the same time, journalists themselves need continuous training on their rights and responsibilities while reporting from demonstrations and public events, procedures for interaction with law enforcement structures, risk assessment, and physical and digital security measures. The development of joint training sessions involving both police and media representatives would contribute to improving cooperation in the field. In this regard, Germany has invested in specialized training programs focused on the safety of journalists reporting from high-risk events.

- The establishment and functioning of public communication mechanisms within the State Police, through the appointment of a Coordinator for the Right to Information and spokespersons within Regional Police Directorates, is welcomed. However, the recommendations above highlight the need for permanent liaison mechanisms between the police and the media. Such a mechanism, involving the State Police, the prosecution service, journalists' associations, and media organizations, would create regular spaces for dialogue and cooperation before specific incidents occur. Similar structures already operate successfully in several European countries and have contributed to strengthening institutional trust and improving operational effectiveness. In this regard, Sweden has developed its own dialogue model, emphasizing communication before, during, and after demonstrations. The Netherlands has established PersVeilig, a comprehensive partnership bringing together journalists, the police, and the prosecution service to support reporting, case follow-up, and assistance for journalists facing threats. Meanwhile, France, Croatia, and Ireland have also designated liaison officers, reporting mechanisms, and structured communication channels between authorities and the media.
- The 2027 local elections represent an important opportunity to test in practice the effectiveness of journalist protection mechanisms under real operational conditions. For this reason, preparations should begin at an early stage, with particular attention given to areas outside Tirana, where local and regional journalists often have fewer opportunities to interact with central institutions. The pre-election period could be used to organize information sessions throughout the country, promote State Police contact points, distribute practical materials on journalists' rights and existing protection mechanisms, and conduct joint simulation exercises involving the police, prosecution service, and media representatives. At the same time, it is important to develop clear evaluation indicators that will enable the monitoring and measurement of the effectiveness of these mechanisms throughout the entire electoral period.

Roundtable for Chapter 24 – Promoting scientific research and strengthening university curricula on money laundering and terrorist financing, 23 June 2026

The roundtable organized within the National Convention on European Integration – Chapter 24 focused on strengthening scientific research, university curricula, and professional capacities in the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. The discussion brought together representatives from public institutions, academia, civil society, and field experts to explore how stronger cooperation can contribute to meeting EU standards.

In his opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania (EMA), emphasized that Albania's European integration requires not only legislative alignment, but also the development of expertise and professional capacities in complex areas such as money laundering and terrorist financing. He highlighted the importance of involving academia alongside public institutions, the private sector, and civil society in order to develop better policies, research, and recommendations. Sabiela Seitaj, Head of the Institutional Coordination Sector at the Financial Intelligence Agency (FIA), highlighted the importance of interinstitutional cooperation and partnerships with academia, the private sector, and civil society. She also emphasized the need for joint training and continuous capacity-building programmes to strengthen professional expertise and institutional cooperation in the fight against money laundering.

Skerdian Kurti, Lecturer at the Faculty of Law, University of Tirana, stressed that money laundering should be addressed through an interdisciplinary approach, combining law, economics, finance, and technology. He highlighted the lack of empirical research and academic analysis in areas such as asset confiscation and preventive measures, and called for universities to play a more active role through research, specialized training, internships, conferences, and joint projects with relevant institutions. He also stressed the need to update university curricula to address emerging challenges such as cryptocurrencies, digital assets, and modern forms of financial transfers. In short, the roundtable stressed that effectively combating money laundering and terrorist financing requires stronger cooperation between public institutions, academia, the private sector, and civil society, together with greater investment in research, education, specialized training, and professional expertise as an important part of Albania's EU integration process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalize cooperation among public institutions, universities, the private sector, and civil society organizations through the establishment of permanent mechanisms for coordination, research, and the exchange of expertise. Such cooperation would facilitate the development of evidence-based policies, strengthen professional capacities, and ensure the more active involvement of academia in the negotiation process and the implementation of the EU acquis.
- Promote scientific research and the development of empirical studies on money laundering, the confiscation of assets of criminal origin, and terrorist financing by engaging universities, master's and doctoral students, and the responsible institutions in joint research projects. The findings of these studies would contribute to the development of more effective preventive policies and to assessing the impact of existing measures.
- Review and strengthen university curricula by developing dedicated courses and programmes on money laundering, terrorist financing, and financial crime, with particular emphasis on the challenges related to emerging technologies, cryptocurrencies, digital assets, and artificial intelligence. Preparing specialists in these fields is essential to respond effectively to the evolving nature of financial crime.
- Develop joint training and specialization programmes between universities and the responsible institutions, such as the Financial Intelligence Agency (FIA), SPAK, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and the State Police, including open lectures, professional internships, short-term courses, and joint research projects. This would contribute to strengthening institutional capacities and fostering a continuous culture of knowledge exchange.
- Promote an interdisciplinary approach to the study and prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing by combining legal, economic, financial, technological, and cybersecurity expertise. The complexity of modern forms of financial crime requires professionals with broad knowledge and the ability to analyse the phenomenon from different perspectives.
- Increase attention to terrorist financing through the development of specialized studies, training programmes, and inter-institutional cooperation, even though Albania is considered a country with a relatively low level of risk. A proactive approach would help ensure the early identification of risks and strengthen prevention mechanisms.
- Establish a national network of experts in the field of money laundering and terrorist financing, involving representatives from public institutions, universities, the private sector, and civil society organizations. This network could support public policymaking, European projects, scientific conferences, as well as the development of academic literature and scientific research in this field.
- Make broader use of European Union programmes and funds for research, innovation, and capacity-building by promoting partnerships among universities, public institutions, and civil society organizations. The financing of research projects and specialization programmes would contribute to the development of domestic expertise and to preparing Albania to meet EU standards in the field of combating money laundering and terrorist financing.

CHAPTER 5 – PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

SNAPSHOT OF CHAPTER 5 ASSESSMENT FOR ALBANIA

Chapter 5 – Public Procurement constitutes one of the most technically demanding components of the European Union acquis within the enlargement framework, as it directly governs the rules, procedures, and institutional safeguards ensuring transparency, competition, non-discrimination, and equal treatment in the awarding of public contracts. In the context of the European Union's internal market, public procurement is not merely an administrative or technical policy field but a central mechanism for safeguarding the integrity of public expenditure, preventing corruption, and ensuring the efficient use of public funds. Within the enlargement methodology, Chapter 5 is part of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, reflecting its structural importance for the functioning of a transparent market economy and its close interconnection with rule of law principles, particularly in relation to corruption prevention and administrative accountability.

Unlike Chapters 23 and 24, which are continuously monitored due to their systemic rule of law implications, Chapter 5 is characterised by a more structured accession trajectory with clearly defined legislative and institutional benchmarks, including specific closing benchmarks that must be fulfilled before provisional closure. This reflects the European Union's assessment that procurement systems, while technical in nature, constitute one of the most vulnerable areas to corruption risks, clientelism, and administrative misuse, particularly in contexts where institutional capacity remains under development. As a result, Chapter 5 operates as a hybrid field, combining internal market law, administrative law, and anti-corruption safeguards, and is therefore treated as a critical indicator of both governance quality and economic integrity.

Following the opening of accession negotiations and Albania's progression through the screening phase completed in 2023, the European Commission confirmed that Albania had achieved a considerable degree of legislative alignment with the EU acquis in the field of public procurement. This includes the adoption of a modern legal framework largely aligned with the principles of Directive 2014/24/EU and Directive 2014/25/EU, the establishment of institutional structures responsible for procurement oversight, and the formalisation of electronic procurement systems designed to increase transparency and reduce direct administrative discretion. The screening process nevertheless identified persistent challenges related to implementation consistency, administrative capacity, and the effective enforcement of procurement rules at both central and local government levels, particularly in sectors characterised by high public expenditure such as infrastructure, healthcare, and public utilities.

The 2025 EU Rule of Law Report further reinforces this assessment by highlighting that, while Albania has made measurable progress in improving the transparency and digitalisation of procurement procedures, significant vulnerabilities remain in relation to the effective prevention of corruption risks and the consistent application of competitive procedures. The report acknowledges improvements in the use of electronic procurement platforms and increased publication of tendering procedures, which have contributed to greater procedural transparency. However, it also notes that direct awards, restricted procedures, and instances of unjustified exceptions continue to present risks to the integrity of the procurement system. Moreover, concerns are raised regarding the administrative capacity of contracting authorities, uneven enforcement of procurement rules, and limited effectiveness of ex post controls and audit mechanisms.

A particularly important dimension of Chapter 5 concerns the link between public procurement and anti-corruption safeguards, which places this chapter at the intersection of internal market regulation and Chapter 23's rule of law framework. The EU consistently emphasises that procurement systems are among the most corruption-sensitive areas of public administration, as they involve significant financial flows and discretionary decision-making. In the Albanian context, the 2025 assessment highlights that while institutional frameworks for oversight exist, including procurement regulatory bodies and audit institutions, their effectiveness depends on the consistency of enforcement, the independence of oversight mechanisms, and the capacity to detect and sanction irregularities in procurement procedures. The persistence of concerns related to conflicts of interest, political influence over contracting authorities, and limited deterrence effects of sanctions demonstrates that formal alignment alone is insufficient without demonstrable enforcement outcomes.

Within the context of EU accession methodology, Chapter 5 is also directly linked to the functioning of the internal market and the broader objective of ensuring fair competition. The European Union places particular emphasis on the ability of candidate countries to ensure equal access to public contracts for domestic and EU operators, transparent publication of procurement opportunities, and the consistent application of objective award criteria. In this regard, Albania's progress in digitalising procurement procedures and enhancing transparency through electronic systems represents a significant step forward. However, the EU continues to underline that digitalisation alone does not eliminate systemic risks if institutional oversight and enforcement mechanisms remain weak or inconsistently applied.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The institutional structure of public procurement is a critical element defining how procurement processes are carried out efficiently, transparently and in an appropriate legal way. This subsection briefly outlines the various bodies that are involved in public procurement in Albania, including their functions, duties, and interactions with a view to supervise, regulate and manage procurement practices. A structured institutional environment guarantees the optimal utilization of public resources, thereby contributing to the efficiency of public expenditure and confidence of government procurement.

The Public Procurement Agency (PPA) is the central public procurement body responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring the public procurement policy as well as for the practical functioning of the system. Its main function and roles derive from the Law No.162/2020 “On Public Procurement”, amended.[86] Article 23 clearly specifies that Public Procurement Agency submits legal and sub-legal proposals on public procurement to the Prime Minister; approves standard tender documents through decisions, which are to be used in procurement procedures according to public procurement rules; verifies the legality of public procurement procedures after the signing of the procurement contract or the cancellation of the procedure, in accordance with the requirements set out in this law and the sub-legal acts; excludes an economic operator from the right to benefit from public contracts, in accordance with the provisions of this law; drafts and publishes the Public Notices Bulletin, etc.[1] It coordinates and its leader institution of negotiations for the EU membership in the public procurement field and the accession negotiations in the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA).

Public Procurement Commission (PPC) is the highest administrative body in the public procurement field that monitors and reviews the complaints for the procedures of public procurement, concessions/PPPs, public auctions and competitive procedures for granting mining permits. It is a public legal person, financed from the state budget and delivers reports to the Assembly. It is created by Law No. 10170, dated 22.10.2009 "On some changes and additions to law no. 9643, dated 20.11.2006 "On public procurement", amended". Meanwhile, its operation is currently prescribed in Article 30 of Law No.162/2020 “On Public Procurement”, amended, clearly stipulating that the complaint review process takes place when at least 3 of 5 members are present, one of which shall be the Chairman or Vice-Chairman. For the complaints of below-threshold public procurement procedures, the review is conducted by only 3 PPC’s members. Pursuant to Article 25 in the present Law, the Chairman and the members are elected by the Assembly, with the proposal of the Council of Ministers. The Chairman and the Vice-Chairman have a five-year term,

with the right to re-election only once. The Public Procurement Commission prepares the annual report, which is presented to the Assembly by the Chairman at the end of the first quarter of the following year.

Concession Treatment Agency (ATRAKO) is a dependent institution of the responsible Minister of Economy, which provides support to the Contracting Authorities in the concessions and public-private partnership projects, as well as in the procedures' development, providing support into the drafting and unification of standard tender documents for the procedures of concessions a public-private partnerships and the organisation of personnel training. Competencies of this agency are defined in the Article 12 of Law No. 125/2013, dated 25.04.2013 "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships", amended. Article 14 of this Law stipulates that the register of Concessions/Public-Private Partnerships is maintained by ATRAKO, pursuant to legal provisions in force. Meanwhile, Article 18 clarifies that for the examination and granting of the concession/public private partnership, the contracting authority, in coordination with the Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO), creates the commission of the concession/public private partnership. Point 3 defines that not less than 2 members of this commission should be from ATRAKO.

Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence are the main leading institutions in the public procurement in the field of defence and security. The procurement procedures on this field are based on Law No. 36/2020 "On procurement in the field of defence and security"; Law No. 10/2023 "On classified information"; DCM No. 1170, dated 24.12.2020 "On the approval of procurement rules in the field of defence and security", and DCM no. 542, dated 29.9.2021 "On the rules, procedures and requirements for the protection of classified information during procurement in the field of defence and security."

FUTURE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the convened DCTs and recommendations provided within the National Convention on European Integration, in synergy with the Partnership Platform for European Integration pursuant to Prime Minister's Order no. 113, dated 30.08.2019 "On the forms of participation, functioning and institutional structure of the Partnership Platform for European Integration". Based on this order, the Public Procurement Agency published a call on its official website on December 1st, 2023,[95] as the leading institution for Chapter 5 on the negotiation process in Albania, to invite different stakeholders (civil society organisations, local actors, business community, media and academia representatives) to become members of the DCT, and contribute with their perspective and recommendations to the other institutions, European Integration Secretariat and other responsible bodies for the European Integration process for the field of interest they cover, and to monitor and assess the assistance provided by the EU for Albania. The first DCT had its main focus not only to expand the dialogue on the pertaining concerns to Chapter 5, but also to disseminate this call and invite different actors to provide their expertise within PPIE. After the establishment of this DCT, three other roundtables convened revolving around various concerns on Chapter 5.

Roundtable: Main issues and involvement of civil society actors, 7 December 2023

This roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement titled “Main issues and involvement of civil society actors” in the framework of the establishment of the Discussion and Consultation Roundtables under the Partnership Platform for European Integration was held in Tirana jointly convened by the European Movement in Albania, and the Agency for Public Procurement, as the central body responsible for the well-going of the public procurement system in Albania.

The purpose of this roundtable was to present the public procurement as the regime that can provide for transparency, equal treatment, free competition and non-discrimination in its general principles, to highlight the alignment process of the Albanian legal framework vis-à-vis the EU acquis, and to introduce the public call for membership into the Chapter 5 Roundtable within PPIE as well to further establish this roundtable, which was not successful during two other calls of the PPA.

This roundtable brought together Mrs. Xhoana Ristani, Director of the Directory for the Implementation of the Strategic and Integration Policies at Public Procurement Agency; Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania; and Mrs. Nirvana Deliu, Policy Researcher at European Movement Albania, and other actors interested on this particular Chapter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Chapter 5 of the EU Acquis encompasses the field of Public Procurement, which includes Classical Procurement, Procurement in utility sectors, Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships, Procurement in Defence and Security, and Administrative Review. Albania has relatively recent legislation in this area, with the Public Procurement Law and the Law on Procurements in the field of Defence and Security being approved in 2020. Meanwhile, the Law on Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) was approved in 2013, undergoing subsequent amendments over time. Despite this, as a dynamic field, there is a need for an ongoing process to align the domestic legal framework with the EU Acquis and the relevant Directives and Regulations for this field. Special attention should be given to the approval and updating of sub-legal acts.
- It is crucial not only to have an aligned and updated legal framework but also to establish an appropriate institutional framework with the necessary human, administrative, and financial capacities to enforce laws accurately, fairly, and efficiently and to be in line with EU standards for public procurement, including transparency, non-discrimination, equal treatment of economic operators, and free and fair competition.
- Drafting a New National Strategy for Public Procurement after the completion of duration of the Strategy for the period 2020-2023 is highly recommended.
- This Draft Strategy should have clear and achievable objectives for the planned period, with particular attention to budgetary considerations and human resources.
- Coordination among institutions involved in drafting this strategy is crucial, with the Public Procurement Agency being the main responsible institution for Chapter 5. Collaboration with other institutions, such as the Public Procurement Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Ministry of Defence, Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO), and the Central Purchasing Agency, is vital.
- Involvement of non-state actors, such as civil society experts, business sector representatives, trade chambers, academic staff in the High Education Institutions and interest groups, is key for consulting and discussing this draft strategic document along its compilation and final approval. Inclusion can occur through physical public meetings or online participation via the Electronic Register for Public Consultation and correspondence via email.
- The roundtable for Chapter 5 should be active and convened at least once a month, as stipulated in the relevant order for the establishment and functioning of the Partnership Platform for European Integration.
- The selected discussion topics should be in accordance with recent developments in the field of Public Procurement and be based on the requirements and criteria identified during the screening process for this chapter.
- Institutional transparency for sharing all necessary documents, materials, and information with roundtable members is very significant to keep them informed in a timely manner about ongoing developments and topics for discussion.
- Recommendations and summaries of discussions during the roundtable meetings should be distributed to roundtable members, as well as a follow-up on these recommendations, whether accepted or rejected along with explicit justifications. This approach will motivate roundtable members to actively participate and contribute meaningfully to these meetings.
- It is recommended that the roundtable membership be updated on a regular basis, if only to expand its membership base but primarily to diversify the involved interest groups, making it as inclusive as possible.
- Active participation during meetings and discussions is recommended. Their physical presence during activities is important, as well as their concrete contribution to discussions and recommendation-giving, whether in writing or verbally.

- Roundtable members should be well-informed about their rights as members and apply them proactively to establish a cooperative and proactive dialogue with the state institutions involved in this chapter.
- It is important for the roundtable members to have the opportunity to promote and inform their network of organisations and collaborators about the results and activities of the Chapter 5 roundtable, ensuring broad awareness in those organisations or interest groups that cannot be present directly at these meetings.

Founding Roundtable of Chapter 5 - Public Procurement, 16 January 2024

This activity served to present the members of this particular roundtable after the open call for participation by the Public Procurement Agency, the central body responsible for overseeing the public procurement system in Albania, and the role of the members beyond updating them on the negotiation process and monitoring its phases step by step. Furthermore, the Draft National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and the Action Plan for its implementation 2024-2027 will be presented for public consultation, as the document that identifies essential strategic objectives to further ensure an effective procurement system based on the principles of transparency, free competition, non-discrimination, and equal treatment. In line with this, a presentation of the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026 with a focus on Public Procurement was introduced to the participants to set clear the following actions planned to be taken.

Apart from the members, this roundtable brought together Mr. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA; Mrs. Reida Kashta, General Director of the Public Procurement Agency; Mrs. Daniela Laze, Head of the Strategic Policy Implementation and Statistics Sector at the Public Procurement Agency; and Mr. Geri Pilaca, Head of the Integration and External Relations Sector at the Public Procurement Agency. Members of the roundtable engaged by expressing suggestions and discussing about concessions, public and private procurement, civil society involvement, inclusive event development, integrity plans, compilation of legal acts to improve process transparency, as well as development of useful and productive databases.

The discussion among the roundtable members also encompassed topics such as digitalization and the application of artificial intelligence in public procurement, the oversight and management of the Chapter 5 legislative framework, the combat of corruption, and the collaboration of various sectors towards enhancing performance and effectively implementing these strategic documents. With regards to this, the following recommendations take into account all the discussions held within this roundtable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further enhancement of the legal framework for Chapter 5 - Public Procurement pursuant to European standards, which arises as an obligation from the implementation of the Stabilization- Association Agreement. A particular emphasis shall be given to:

- The revision of Law No. 162/2020 "On Public Procurement" and sub-legal acts in accordance with this law
- Approval of the new and secondary legal framework in the concession and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) field
- The finalization and submission of the first economic offer to the GPA Secretariat, in which Albania's accession process to the GPA-WTO is seen as valuable for advancing the good practices in the public procurement prism by 47 member countries
- Strengthening institutional capacities where 10 trainings of the accountable institutions personnel have been foreseen, as well as recruiting new personnel for the Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO) and the arrangement of three trainings respectively.
- Establishment of the Central Purchasing Operator with the special structure and organisation, and the approval of the relevant sub-legal acts.
- Professionalisation of the public procurement function where the first activity is expected to be the drafting of the Memorandum of Understanding with Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA) and Department of Public Administration (DoPA), as well as the preparation of supporting materials such as recommendations or roadmap.
- Improving the functionality of the system for electronic procurement by increasing the connectivity of the system with other public systems, adding functionalities and indicating the use of environmental and social criteria.
- Use of artificial intelligence in public procurement processes, for which manuals will be published on the official website of Public Procurement Agency (PPA).
- Drafting the Integrity Model-Plan with the Ministry of Justice for all contracting authorities, aiming integrity insurance in the public procurement system, which is also recommended to be achieved by organising trainings, awareness raising events and informative sessions on the fight against corruption.
- Increasing the capacities of appeal deliberation and organising trainings with the economic operators and contracting authorities on solving the issues encountered in various complaints, as well as improving the electronic appeal system and process automation.
- The compilation of new legal packages in the field of public procurement not only in accordance with European standards, but also taking into consideration the Albanian context, such as the case of subcontracting up to 50% in order to minimize liability.
- Active participation of non-state actors in awareness raising activities organised not only by APP, but also by other responsible institutions, mainly within the framework of Integrity Plans.
- Involvement of civil society actors on issuing new acts intended to improve the process transparency and to inform them starting from the announcement up to the contraction of public procurement processes in order to play the role of a "watchdog" group.
- Continuation of the implementation of Integrity Plans by other accountable institutions as well, except ministries, ensuring a wide scope of integrity security, since the risk of corruption is felt significantly in public procurement processes.
- Organising activities in cooperation with the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest (HIDAACI) and the drafting of joint recommendations between HIDAACI and PPA, in the fields of interest on public procurement sensitive issues.
- Organisation of future informative sessions focusing in avoidance of underhanded offers in cooperation with the Albanian Competition Authority (ACA).

- Increased contracting authority facilitation of public procurement procedures using the electronic procurement system, which interconnects all the PP's systems, and two concurrent plans are highlighted: substantive changes implying adjustments as a result of the system interaction with the economic operators to increase the exposure to higher control measures, as well as technical system changes with the addition of functionalities such as red flags, which signal corruptive practices, in order to bring improvement of the overall procurement system in Albania.

Roundtable: Revision of the Law "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)", and best European practices, 29 February 2024

The main purpose of holding this roundtable was the revision of the Law "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)" and its harmonisation with the directive of the European Union, precisely Directive 2014/23/EU. Taking this directive into consideration, the Albanian law in this field must fulfil elements that include transparency and procedures for the selection of concessionaires; criteria for the selection of offers and their objective evaluation; supervision of PPP-financed projects, as well as ensuring equal conditions for competition in the market. Based on Prime Minister's Order No. 6, dated 17.01.2023, an Interinstitutional Working Group has already been set up for the revision of this law, following the recommendations of the last annual report of the European Commission, which reiterates the importance for the continuity of legislative amendments in this field.

The National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, published by the Public Procurement Agency, also provides for the review and approval of relevant amendments in this law, which mainly aim at a more effective evaluation and monitoring process of concessionary projects according to the principles of public procurement.

At this roundtable, the included panelists were Mrs. Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of European Movement in Albania; Mrs. Xhoana Ristani, Director of the Directorate of Implementation of Strategic Policies and Integration, Public Procurement Agency; Mr. Besard Buzi, Director at the Directorate of Concessions Planning and Promotion, Concessions Treatment Agency. An added value to this activity was the presence of the Slovak expert, Mr. Lubomir Kubicka, Board Member of the Office for Public Procurement, Slovakia, who brought special attention to the best European practices in terms of Concessions and PPPs legislation, to ensure that Albania has a favourable legal environment for investment and economic development in accordance with EU international standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensuring that Albanian law is fully in line with EU directives, especially Directive 2014/23/EU, is a crucial factor to take into account during the revision process. Transparency, competitiveness, and adherence to international standards are just a few of the core values that should be prioritized in this alignment, which should go beyond simple formal compliance. To make sure that the current laws reflect the spirit and requirements of EU directives, every provision should be thoroughly examined during the revision process.
- Not only should inconsistencies be found in the legal gap analysis (LGA), conducted by SIGMA in cooperation with the Public Procurement Agency and Concessions Treatment Agency, but the analysis should also evaluate how these gaps affect Concessions and PPP projects' ability to be implemented successfully. The results of this analysis need to act as a roadmap for the revision process, helping decision-makers solve different flaws and align the law more closely with EU requirements.
- Any uncertainties and inconsistencies in the current legal framework should be addressed by the potential revised law by giving precise definitions and guidelines. To guarantee the efficient execution and enforcement of the law due to be amended, it is imperative to provide precise definitions for crucial terms like contracting authorities, concessions and PPPs, operational risks, exemptions, and contract duration. Improved comprehension and adherence among interested parties, such as governmental bodies, businesses, and civil society associations, will also be facilitated by clarity in these domains.
- In the execution of concessions and PPP projects, bureaucratic obstacles must be minimized and procurement processes must be made more efficient. In order to facilitate the procurement of goods, services, and works under concessions and PPP arrangements, the revised law should establish clear and standardized procedures. This entails implementing electronic procurement platforms to expedite the procurement process, defining explicit financial thresholds, and streamlining the below-threshold contracting process. More competition, faster project delivery schedules, and increased project efficiency will all result from simplified processes.
- The allocation and management of risks in Concessions and PPP projects should be clearly outlined in the foreseen amendments. This includes determining and reducing any risks related to the financing, operation, and maintenance of the project as well as its delivery. In order to ensure that risks are assigned to the party best suited to manage them, the legal framework should provide procedures for open and honest risk sharing between partners in the public and private sectors. Furthermore, the law needs to specify how risks are to be assessed, tracked, and minimized over the course of the project.
- Enhance the concessions and PPP framework's accountability and transparency mechanisms to foster public confidence in the procurement process. The revised legislation needs to mandate the full disclosure of project details, such as financial arrangements, contract terms, and performance indicators. To improve transparency and allow for meaningful public scrutiny, it is important to make project documentation and decision-making processes accessible to the public. To hold stakeholders responsible for their choices and actions throughout the project lifecycle, strong accountability procedures should also be put in place.
- Concessions and PPP projects must be implemented and overseen effectively, which requires a strong institutional foundation. Key institutions involved in the handling and oversight of concessions and PPPs should have their roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the law which is about to be amended. This includes the organizations in charge of project monitoring, regulatory compliance, dispute resolution, and oversight of procurement. Improved accountability, openness, and efficiency in concession and PPP project management will result from strengthening the institutional framework.
- The revised law should incorporate principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility into concessions and PPP projects. This includes promoting eco-friendly practices, encouraging investments in renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency, and integrating environmental considerations into project planning and

- implementation. The revised law should incentivize private sector participation in sustainable infrastructure projects and prioritize investments that contribute to environmental conservation and climate resilience.
- Throughout the revision process, meaningful stakeholder engagement is necessary to make sure that the revised law represents the various interests and viewpoints of different stakeholders. This entails proactive interaction with academic institutions, businesses, civil society organizations, and other pertinent actors. Opportunities for stakeholder participation in the revision process should be made available through workshops, public hearings, and consultations. Through proactive stakeholder engagement, policymakers can foster greater ownership and acceptance of the revised law and build consensus around them.

Roundtable: New National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027, 19 September 2024

The main objective of holding this Roundtable was to facilitate the exchange of views and suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the vision and objectives of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024-2027, approved by Decision No. 304, dated May 22, 2024, "On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024-2027." This Roundtable also focused on identifying and addressing the challenges and opportunities for improving the public procurement system, concentrating on ensuring a sustainable and efficient system that respects the principles of transparency, fair and free competition, non-discrimination, and equal treatment of all participants in the procurement processes.

The three main objectives of the Strategy, detailed in 9 strategic objectives and 24 measures/activities, are essential for increasing the efficiency and transparency of procurement processes, supporting sustainable development, and ensuring fair and balanced management of public resources. Key measures of the new Strategy include reviewing and amending the Law on Public Procurement and Decision No. 285/2021, concerning procurement rules, as well as adjustments to Law No. 162/2020 and regulations on monetary thresholds. The establishment of a Central Purchasing Operator (CPO) is another critical initiative aimed at streamlining public purchases, with plans with organisational structuring and staffing to support centralised procurement. The strategy also prioritises green and social procurement, with plans for drafting sub-legal acts to incorporate environmental and social criteria into procurement procedures. Objectives include organising 2 training sessions for the staff at the Public Procurement Agency and ATRAKO on these criteria, along awareness-raising events. Furthermore, the electronic procurement system will be enhanced by adding new functionalities, such as red flags to prevent corrupt practices, while improving its interoperability with other public systems to ensure greater transparency and efficiency in contracting.

This roundtable also served to present the achievements and results of the previous National Strategy for Public Procurement 2020-2023, as well as to reflect on them and formulate an improved approach for the new Strategy. Out of 43 planned activities, 32 of them (74%) were fully completed, while 11 activities (26%) are still in progress, indicating strong overall performance. 10 key indicators (KPIs) with data available for 8 of them in this finalised Strategy included improvements in the quality of goods and services, increased participation of SMEs in procurement, and enhanced procurement planning. Notably, in 2023, there was a significant increase in the quality of contracts awarded based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) criterion, alongside a remarkable 93.9% participation of SMEs. One of the main successes of the Public Procurement Strategy 2020-2023 was the full publication of Concession and PPP contracts,

which has helped bolster public trust and has improved efficiency in the contracting processes. Additionally, improvements were observed in complaints review system, with a notable reduction in complaints reported outside the legally stipulated timeframe.

In this context, the Steering Committee of the National Public Procurement Strategy was involved, providing comments and assessments on the current situation of the public procurement system in the country, along with members of the PPIE and other interested participants in this field. The roundtable brought together Mrs. Reida Kashta, The Director General of the Public Procurement Agency; Mr. Gledis Gjipali, The Executive Director of the European Movement in Albania; Mrs. Daniela Laze, The Head of the Strategic Policy Implementation and Statistics Sector at the Public Procurement Agency; Mrs. Xhoana Ristani, The Director of the Directorate for the Implementation of Strategic Policies and Integration at the Public Procurement Agency. Discussions raised the need for more increased transparency and oversight at all stages of procurement, particularly in addressing challenges from the previous strategy and improving electronic systems and processes related to social and environmental criteria. Participants stressed that ongoing consultations with civil society and interest groups to ensure that procurement policy is inclusive and aligned with international standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advancing and ensuring monitoring for public procurement will provide a clear and reliable structure for procurement processes, offering a new level of accountability for public institutions and increasing citizens' trust in the procurement system. In addition to monitoring and evaluating every phase of the procurement process, including planning, implementation, and assessment of results, it is advisable to analyse them and publish regular reports on the transparency and efficiency of procurement processes in real-time. These reports should be accessible to the public, ensuring that any interested party has access to the necessary information to understand how public resources are managed.
- Within the framework of continuous monitoring, it is recommended to create a mechanism for the regular evaluation of the National Strategy and its Action Plan, to ensure that the objectives and goals are aligned with new developments and market needs. Furthermore, it is important that the monitoring indicators of the Strategy are accurate and realistic, to ensure that they serve as a valid guide for understanding the actual situation of implementation and the impact brought by the application of reforms. To enhance transparency and civil society engagement, it is recommended that monitoring reports should be published on the official website and accompanied by informative campaigns to inform stakeholder groups.
- Improving the evaluation of contracting authorities by including data on their performance in previous projects will help in selecting the most capable and reliable bidders in the procurement processes. The collected data and evaluation results should be accessible to the public.
- Another recommendation is to increase efforts to collect and update detailed data and statistics on economic operators, procedures, and areas of procurement. This will help to create a strong information base, which is essential for monitoring and evaluating public procurement policies. Having a clear picture of the situation will enable decision-makers to identify real needs and develop more effective strategies.
- The Competition Authority, which is essential for ensuring a regulated market and fair competition. This cooperation will help identify best practices and create an environment that encourages competition in public procurement.
- Close cooperation is also necessary with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, especially for social procurement and the quality standards that must be adhered to in this area, thus contributing to the improvement of public services.
- Additionally, it is essential to develop ongoing cooperation with the National Agency for Information Society (AKSHI) to improve the electronic procurement system. This will ensure that Albania benefits from the advantages of modern technology in public procurement.
- Increasing the professionalism of the administration and the capacities of the institutions responsible or operating in this field should be a top priority. This can be achieved through collaboration with the Academy of Political Studies and Administration (ASPA) and the Directorate of Public Administration (DAP) to implement training and curricula tailored to the standards and developments of the European Union. Investing in professional development will contribute to creating a more qualified and efficient administration. Establishing an online training platform for professionals involved in procurement will provide opportunities for continuous professional development. This platform could include courses, seminars, and educational materials that cover best practices and innovations in the field of public procurement. The platform will also provide tools and resources to assist in the implementation of green criteria.
- Finally, with the development of e-procurement, it is essential to pay increased attention to cyber risks that may arise from the use of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, as well as hacking threats. For this reason, it is recommended that European experiences serve as a guide to build a secure system and efficient protection for users and relevant institutions. These measures will help to create a more reliable and efficient procurement environment, contributing to the sustainable development of the country.

Working Group for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement: Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework, 10 June 2025

This roundtable, organised in collaboration with the Public Procurement Agency, focused on the fulfilment of provisional closing benchmarks for this chapter and on the findings and recommendations of a monitoring report assessing the implementation of Public Administration Reform (PAR) principles in public procurement practices, with a particular focus on the tourism sector.

In his opening remarks, Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized the need for deeper cooperation between institutions and stakeholders across different levels in order to accelerate the EU accession process, stressing that legislative approximation alone is not sufficient without effective implementation and informed participation of all relevant actors. He highlighted the importance of inclusive consultation processes, noting that the short duration of public consultations limits meaningful engagement, and underlined the need for improved dialogue with interest groups and public administration to support the fulfilment of EU benchmarks. Geri Pilaca, Head of the Integration and Foreign Relations Sector at the Public Procurement Agency, stated that work toward closing the benchmarks is progressing according to a structured plan in coordination with relevant institutions, highlighting ongoing reforms in the Law on Concessions and PPPs, which has been drafted in line with EU Directive 2014/23/EU and SIGMA recommendations and submitted for public consultation. Xhoana Ristani, Director of the Directorate of Strategic Policy Implementation and Integration at the Public Procurement Agency, presented detailed progress on the three key benchmarks, including legal alignment with the EU acquis, institutional capacity building, and the development of a transparent procurement system. She noted ongoing review of Law No. 162/2020 on Public Procurement, preparation of amendments in the field of defence and security in line with Directive 2009/81/EU, certification programmes for procurement officials, analytical work on procurement procedures, and cooperation with the World Bank on procurement tools, alongside the development of a strategy for strengthening the Centralised Purchasing Operator. She also highlighted ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and integrity, including the preparation of a statistical performance report (2022–2025), development of a corruption risk assessment methodology, and integrity planning in cooperation with relevant national and international partners.

Elda Zotaj, Lecturer and European affairs expert, presented findings from the EMA monitoring report under the WeBER 3.0 project, focusing on the implementation of Public Administration Reform in public procurement and public finance management within the tourism and environment sector. She noted mixed levels of implementation across assessed criteria, including gaps in transparency, regulatory alignment, and stakeholder involvement, and highlighted that civil society participation in the new Public Procurement Strategy 2024–2030 is limited, despite its proven contribution to reform processes. She emphasized that stronger inclusion of civil society is essential to improve transparency, strengthen democratic governance, increase public trust in institutions, and enhance the quality of public services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first panel of the roundtable, where the planned measures and their status for successfully meeting the three benchmarks set for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement were presented, the following recommendations emerged from the discussions:

- With regard to the second closing benchmark set by the EU upon the opening of negotiations for this chapter on 15 October 2024, which stipulates that “Albania puts in place adequate administrative and institutional capacity at all levels and takes appropriate measures to ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of national legislation in this area in good time before accession”; it is important that the implementation of social criteria is not limited solely to close cooperation with the National Employment and Skills Agency for the employment of registered individuals. This criterion should not be conceived only in such a narrow dimension, but should also encompass other social elements in the administration and implementation of the public procurement process. The Centralised Purchasing Operator, as well as other relevant institutions, should identify additional ways to apply the social criterion more effectively. Furthermore, the process of selecting registered beneficiaries must be more transparent, properly documented, and supported by clear statistics in order to ensure accountability from other actors involved in the process as well.
- Considering the low number of foreign companies involved in the public procurement system in Albania, greater resilience is needed to address challenges in this area, particularly after accession to the European single market. To demonstrate preparedness in this regard prior to EU membership, it is essential to conduct detailed analyses of the reasons preventing these entities from participating in public tenders, as even in cases where they do participate, the contract values remain very low, as also reflected in the annual reports published by the Public Procurement Agency. For this reason, an analysis of the situation of commercial companies registered in Albania with foreign ownership, as well as foreign associations operating in the country, would be valuable in better understanding the existing barriers and distinguishing between them. Furthermore, strengthening cooperation with the Competition Authority is recommended, with the aim of fostering fairer and more effective competition in the field of public procurement.

- Regarding the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the public procurement system, questions were raised about how this process will unfold in practice, as well as the need to ensure that the use of AI is grounded in clear standards and ethical principles. The importance of not overlooking the “human” component in this technological transformation was also emphasized. The active involvement of professionals remains essential to guarantee transparency, and a balanced approach between technology and human intervention must be maintained to ensure the proper functioning of the public procurement system in line with its fundamental principles.

The discussions held during the second panel focused on the role of civil society as a continuous monitoring actor in the public procurement process. The following points were highlighted as particularly valuable:

- Civil society should have a more prominent role and greater recognition for the contribution it provides, particularly in the process of drafting strategic and monitoring documents. For example, in the National Public Procurement Strategy 2024–2030 and the Action Plan 2024–2027, adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2024, the contribution of civil society is mentioned only once, specifically on page 38. This highlights the need for its more structured and meaningful involvement at all stages of the process—from consultation and discussion to drafting and monitoring the implementation of policies. Civil society should be treated as an equal and integral partner in developing a fair, transparent, and inclusive public procurement system.
- Strengthening cooperation between various central institutions and civil society is essential, which implies not only broader access to relevant documentation but also inclusion in direct discussions with technical staff and decision-makers. Such an approach would enable civil society to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation regarding various challenges encountered, as well as to produce valuable and reliable reports that reflect the implementation of reform standards, as is the case with the Public Administration Reform. In addition, civil society also plays an important role in raising public awareness, where direct cooperation with it can increase knowledge in this highly specific field and contribute to addressing and shaping public perceptions—many of which regard this sector as one of the most exposed to misuse, being the primary sector linked to the management of public funds.

Working Group for Chapter 5 – Status of Chapter 5 in the negotiation process: Fulfillment of closing benchmarks, 27 February 2026

This roundtable, organized by the Public Procurement Agency, focused on the current progress under Albania's EU accession negotiations, the fulfilment of provisional closing benchmarks for Chapter 5, and the co-creation process of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan 2026–2030. In her opening remarks, Reida Kashta, Director General of the Public Procurement Agency, emphasized that ongoing efforts are fully concentrated on meeting the Chapter 5 closing benchmarks through parallel progress in legislative harmonisation, institutional consolidation, and the development of a credible track record in public procurement practices. She highlighted continuous work on amendments to the public procurement law, the law on concessions and public-private partnerships (PPPs), and the law on procurement in the fields of defence and security, noting that these reforms are being carried out in cooperation with the European Commission, SIGMA, and relevant national institutions. She stressed that the by-law drafting process is ongoing with a deadline set for September 2026, while ensuring alignment with evolving EU directives. She further underlined the importance of the professionalisation scheme in public procurement, noting that certification of procurement staff has become mandatory and that 499 professionals have already been certified. Kashta also presented progress under the second and third benchmarks, including institutional restructuring for concessions and PPPs, ongoing capacity building, and the development of a corruption risk assessment methodology in cooperation with ANAC, MAPA, and the OSCE. She noted that a comprehensive 2022–2025 performance report is being prepared, alongside data-driven analysis of procurement procedures, including cancellation rates and sector-specific risks.

Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, welcomed the pace of reforms and highlighted that progress in public procurement is reflected in European Commission assessments, while underlining that sustained institutional commitment and continuous monitoring remain essential, given that negotiation chapters remain provisionally closed until EU membership is achieved. He stressed the importance of civil society involvement in monitoring implementation and ensuring accountability throughout the process. Xhoana Ristani, Director at the Public Procurement Agency, presented the structure and methodology of the corruption risk assessment system, which combines macro and micro indicators to identify systemic and procedural risks in public procurement. She explained that the methodology defines clear thresholds for risk levels and allows institutions to assess performance across key indicators such as procurement methods, competition levels, procedural timelines, and cancellation patterns. The system aims to enable early detection of irregularities and support corrective actions at both institutional and system levels. Geri Pilaca, Head of Integration and External Relations at the Public Procurement Agency, presented developments related to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), highlighting the launch of the National Action Plan 2026–2030. He noted that the plan extends the implementation period to four years and introduces expanded institutional participation, including Parliament and independent institutions. He emphasized that Commitment 15 focuses on increasing transparency in public contracts through digital solutions, improved accessibility of procurement systems, corruption risk monitoring, and strengthened cooperation with civil society in contract oversight and implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the first panel of the roundtable, where the planned measures and their status for successfully meeting the three benchmarks set for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement were presented, the following recommendations emerged from the discussions:

- With regard to the second closing benchmark set by the EU upon the opening of negotiations for this chapter on 15 October 2024, which stipulates that “Albania puts in place adequate administrative and institutional capacity at all levels and takes appropriate measures to ensure the proper implementation and enforcement of national legislation in this area in good time before accession”; it is important that the implementation of social criteria is not limited solely to close cooperation with the National Employment and Skills Agency for the employment of registered individuals. This criterion should not be conceived only in such a narrow dimension, but should also encompass other social elements in the administration and implementation of the public procurement process. The Centralised Purchasing Operator, as well as other relevant institutions, should identify additional ways to apply the social criterion more effectively. Furthermore, the process of selecting registered beneficiaries must be more transparent, properly documented, and supported by clear statistics in order to ensure accountability from other actors involved in the process as well.
- Considering the low number of foreign companies involved in the public procurement system in Albania, greater resilience is needed to address challenges in this area, particularly after accession to the European single market. To demonstrate preparedness in this regard prior to EU membership, it is essential to conduct detailed analyses of the reasons preventing these entities from participating in public tenders, as even in cases where they do participate, the contract values remain very low, as also reflected in the annual reports published by the Public Procurement Agency. For this reason, an analysis of the situation of commercial companies registered in Albania with foreign ownership, as well as foreign associations operating in the country, would be valuable in better understanding the existing barriers and distinguishing between them. Furthermore, strengthening cooperation with the Competition Authority is recommended, with the aim of fostering fairer and more effective competition in the field of public procurement.

- Regarding the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in the public procurement system, questions were raised about how this process will unfold in practice, as well as the need to ensure that the use of AI is grounded in clear standards and ethical principles. The importance of not overlooking the “human” component in this technological transformation was also emphasized. The active involvement of professionals remains essential to guarantee transparency, and a balanced approach between technology and human intervention must be maintained to ensure the proper functioning of the public procurement system in line with its fundamental principles.

The discussions held during the second panel focused on the role of civil society as a continuous monitoring actor in the public procurement process. The following points were highlighted as particularly valuable:

- Civil society should have a more prominent role and greater recognition for the contribution it provides, particularly in the process of drafting strategic and monitoring documents. For example, in the National Public Procurement Strategy 2024–2030 and the Action Plan 2024–2027, adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2024, the contribution of civil society is mentioned only once, specifically on page 38. This highlights the need for its more structured and meaningful involvement at all stages of the process—from consultation and discussion to drafting and monitoring the implementation of policies. Civil society should be treated as an equal and integral partner in developing a fair, transparent, and inclusive public procurement system.
- Strengthening cooperation between various central institutions and civil society is essential, which implies not only broader access to relevant documentation but also inclusion in direct discussions with technical staff and decision-makers. Such an approach would enable civil society to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation regarding various challenges encountered, as well as to produce valuable and reliable reports that reflect the implementation of reform standards, as is the case with the Public Administration Reform. In addition, civil society also plays an important role in raising public awareness, where direct cooperation with it can increase knowledge in this highly specific field and contribute to addressing and shaping public perceptions—many of which regard this sector as one of the most exposed to misuse, being the primary sector linked to the management of public funds.

Working Group for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement: Update on the current status of meeting the closing benchmarks and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the public procurement system, 18 June 2026

This roundtable, organized by the European Movement in Albania (EMA) in cooperation with the Public Procurement Agency on 18 June 2026, focused on Albania's progress in fulfilling the closing benchmarks for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement within the EU accession negotiations, as well as the planned integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the public procurement system. The discussion addressed legislative reforms, institutional capacity, transparency and anti-corruption measures, and the opportunities and risks linked to AI.

Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director of EMA, emphasized the importance of civil society participation in monitoring reforms and contributing to policymaking, highlighting the need for continued dialogue between public institutions, civil society, businesses, and experts. Xhoana Ristani, Director at the Public Procurement Agency, presented progress on legislative alignment, including amendments to the public procurement law and reforms concerning concessions, PPPs, and defence and security procurement. She also highlighted efforts to strengthen institutional capacity through training and certification, with 904 procurement officials certified, as well as the development of corruption risk assessment and integrity mechanisms. Remaining challenges include completing legal reforms, further professionalising the system, operationalising the new PPP institution, and advancing Albania's accession to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement.

Ristani also presented plans to integrate AI into public procurement, including its use in estimating contract values, drafting specifications, evaluating bids, handling complaints, and contract monitoring. She stressed the need for legal compliance, interoperability, green procurement criteria, corruption "red flags," and stronger institutional capacities. Alba Brojka, Digital Policy Analyst and author of EMA's policy paper on AI in public procurement, highlighted the need for a cautious and balanced approach, stressing that AI requires reliable data, transparent processes, trained personnel, effective regulation, and continuous human oversight. She recommended adopting a National AI Strategy, improving procurement data, strengthening institutional capacity, monitoring AI systems, and ensuring transparency and alignment with the EU AI Act.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The need to draft a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy was highlighted, which would serve as a guiding framework for the development of public policies in this field and beyond. The absence of such a strategic document creates the risk of fragmented and uncoordinated development of artificial intelligence systems within public administration, including public procurement.
- Along the same lines, it was recommended to draft and adopt internal institutional regulations that clearly and comprehensively define the use of artificial intelligence in public procurement processes. These regulations should address the procedural and functional aspects of technology use, specifying the concrete stages at which AI may be applied, the division of responsibilities among institutional actors, and the permissible limits of automation in public decision-making.
- The importance of full alignment with the EU acquis, including the latest developments in the field of artificial intelligence such as the EU AI Act, was recommended. This process was considered essential for ensuring the compatibility of Albania's public procurement system with European standards and for preparing the country for the advanced stages of the integration process.
- Regarding technological development, the importance of ensuring full interoperability between artificial intelligence systems, existing electronic procurement platforms, and other public databases was emphasized. AI integration cannot be effective if it remains fragmented; it must be supported by an integrated digital system that enables real-time data exchange, auditability, and sustainable use throughout the entire public procurement cycle.
- The development of artificial intelligence in public procurement should progress in parallel with the strengthening of institutional and human capacities. It was assessed that the implementation of new technological systems should be accompanied by structured training programs for public administration staff, including the Public Procurement Agency, contracting authorities, and other actors involved in the development and use of the system. These training programs should focus not only on the technical use of the technology but also on the interpretation of risks and results, as well as on ensuring responsible decision-making.
- During the discussions, the need to guarantee the principle of non-discrimination in the use of artificial intelligence, particularly in the selection of economic operators and the evaluation of bids, was also emphasized. In this regard, it was considered essential that systems be based on verified and balanced data and be accompanied by continuous auditing mechanisms and human oversight, especially at critical stages of decision-making. Despite process automation, final decisions should always remain under the control of an individual (human oversight), who ensures verification, accountability, and the correction of potential algorithmic errors.
- It was emphasized that the use of artificial intelligence depends directly on the quality of the data on which it is trained and operates. Where data are incomplete, fragmented, or influenced by problematic practices, there is a risk that AI systems will reproduce and amplify the same existing distortions. In this context, the need for full compliance with personal data protection standards was also highlighted as an integral part of any digitalization process.
- It was stressed that citizens and economic operators should have clarity regarding how automated systems function and the institutional rationale behind their use. To this end, strengthening institutional transparency and documenting decision-making processes are considered necessary to ensure that the use of AI is understandable and publicly justifiable.
- The establishment of a sustainable system for periodic reporting on the performance of artificial intelligence in public procurement was considered necessary. Such a mechanism would enable continuous monitoring of system effectiveness, identification of problematic contracts or procedures, and ongoing improvement of algorithm performance. In this context, international examples were also cited, where various countries have used post-tender analyses to identify risk patterns and strengthen the integrity of the system.

MONITORING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ROUNDTABLES OF NATIONAL CONVENTION FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION 2023-2026

ADDRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 23

The Active Role of Civil Society in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions within the Political Criteria Framework 22 January 2024

During the reporting period the first session of WG for Chapter 23 was organized on 22 January 2024, with the main focus on the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap. During the discussions between civil society organizations and representatives of Ministry of Justice (as lead institution for drafting this roadmap) it is observed that the updated version of this roadmap has included some new measures or has updated the measures foreseen which are now aligned with some of the recommendations that have been extracted during this session [1]. More specifically:

- Policy recommendations point (1), point (2) and point (3) urge “a closer and proactive collaboration between the Central Election Commission and civil society for deeper engagement and involvement of CSOs in the media monitoring process during the electoral campaign”. Also, it is encouraged “the establishing of a more structured and sustainable dialogue with interested civil society actors”, while it is suggested the CEC to “map out the organisations with experience and expertise in this field and contact them directly to involve them in the process”. These recommendations are in line with the updated measures of the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap included in the subfield: The Electoral Process, such as: “Continuous implementation of robust monitoring mechanisms from CEC in collaboration with other related institutions enabled by Electoral Code amendments” and “An easy-to-process reporting data will be offered by CEC to CSOs, media, and electoral researchers starting from 2025”
- Policy recommendation point (5) urges “for an increase of funding opportunities and grants for

[1]A comparison analysis has been conducted between the draft of the Functioning of Democratic Institutions Roadmap that has been published for consultation on the online consultation platform - <https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/692> and the final version of this Roadmap prepared after the finishing of the consultation process (in which this WG session was part of) - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ioa3FSeYpntRrHUIsYqnG2EqjwASMcD/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=111999003229908040714&rtfpof=true&sd=true

CSOs (with a more significant role for the Agency for the Support of Civil Society)”. The existing measure in the previous version of the roadmap included in the subfield: Civil Society has been updated in the final version as follows: “Administrative procedures of public funds and (public funds in general- not just the ones managed by the National Agency to Support Civil Society) the ASCS grant process improved within 2025 and public funding increased to enable CSOs to perform their roles of service providers.”

Protection of children online from all forms of violence and abuse 28 March 2024

The Roundtable for Chapter 23, held on 28 March 2024 within the Platform of Partnership for European Integration and the framework of the National Convention for European Integration, brought together a wide range of stakeholders – representatives of state institutions, civil society organizations, legal professionals, experts, and activists. The activity, organized by the Ministry of Justice and the European Movement in Albania and financed by the European Union, focused on the protection of children online from all forms of violence and abuse. Throughout the discussion, panel experts highlighted pressing challenges related to safeguarding children in the digital environment, emphasizing the growing risks of online exploitation, harmful content, and technology-enabled crimes against minors. The presentations underscored the need for stronger institutional cooperation, capacity-building, and comprehensive preventive measures to effectively address these threats and ensure a safer online space for all children.

The monitoring of recommendations on the protection of children in the digital environment is based on the review of the Annual Reports of the State Agency for the Rights and Protection of Children (ASHDMF) for the years 2023 and 2024. The 2023 report[2] provides a baseline of activities and initiatives prior to the recommendations issued in March 2024, while the 2024 report[3] reflects newly implemented activities, workshops, and institutional collaborations that were absent in the previous year. The monitoring focuses strictly on factual developments, such as the organization of awareness activities, participatory workshops, inter-institutional meetings, and submissions to relevant authorities, without assessing the impact or effectiveness of these measures.

[2] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Ag-jencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2023-.pdf>

[3] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Ag-jencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2024.pdf>

- Policy Recommendation point (9): "To prevent risk and harm to children online, it is recommended to inform and educate them about digital safety and how to protect themselves in risky situations. This can be achieved in collaboration with schools, teaching staff, and parents through awareness campaigns and activities."

Explanation on addressing of recommendations:

- 2023: Awareness activities were limited to advising parents to be informed and vigilant and to guide their children about digital risks. Children received counseling on how to report online abuse or bullying to trusted adults. No structured collaboration with schools or targeted educational programs was reported.
- 2024: Structured educational and awareness programs were organized in 11 municipalities (Tiranë, Durrës, Kukës, Gramsh, Cërrik, Lezhë, Kuçovë, Fier, Shkodër, Gjirokastrë, Përmet, Berat), reaching 1277 children and 244 professionals (teachers, parents, psychosocial staff). Activities included individual and family counseling, guidance for parents on active supervision and open communication, and direct collaboration with schools to organize information and awareness sessions on online safety. These structured and school-based activities were not present in 2023.

Policy Recommendation point (10): "It is suggested that a more innovative, clear, yet attractive approach be used, especially created for children and young people, to stimulate engagement in awareness campaigns. A positive practice is the direct involvement of children in carrying out these activities."

Explanation on addressing of recommendations:

- 2023: In 2023, no participatory or child-focused workshops were reported. Activities were limited to advising parents to be informed and vigilant and to guide their children about digital risks. Children received counseling on how to report online abuse or bullying to trusted adults. Additionally, in implementation of Law 18/2017 "On the Rights and Protection of the Child," ASHDMF and AKCESK discussed the need to institutionalize cooperation for raising awareness among children, communities, and professionals. Coordination meetings were held with professionals, including prosecutors and police, in the municipalities of Tiranë, Durrës, Elbasan, and Krujë. A total of 76 professionals participated in these meetings. There were no structured school-based activities, workshops, or direct involvement of children in 2023.
- 2024: In contrast, during 2024, structured educational and awareness activities were organized in 11 municipalities (Tiranë, Durrës, Kukës, Gramsh, Cërrik, Lezhë, Kuçovë, Fier, Shkodër, Gjirokastrë, Përmet, and Berat), reaching 1277 children and 244 professionals, including teachers, parents, and psychosocial staff. Within these activities:
 - 33 school-based awareness and information sessions were conducted in nine-year and secondary schools, directly involving children in learning about online safety.
 - Four dedicated workshops for professionals and parents were held in Tiranë, Kukës, Durrës, and Cërrik, training 200 professionals and 43 parents.

Participants received guidance on reporting cases of online bullying, harassment, and blackmail, best practices for safe internet navigation, and the importance of inter-institutional cooperation for child protection in digital spaces. These structured and participatory activities, including the direct involvement of children, were not reported in 2023 and represent a first-time implementation following the March 2024 recommendations.

Policy Recommendation point (11): “For this dynamic and highly sensitive field, a cooperative approach between state institutions and other involved actors is recommended, including close collaboration with media providers and internet service providers for monitoring content, filtering, and responding to complaints.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations:

- 2023: No formal inter-institutional collaboration, media initiatives, or engagement with service providers were reported. The reports do not mention any structured coordination or formal guidance on ethical reporting or child protection in digital spaces.
- 2024: New institutional cooperation and media-related initiatives were introduced. ASHDMF actively participated in inter-institutional meetings aimed at improving media reporting quality and guaranteeing the protection of children’s rights. Key activities included:
 - Submission of formal recommendations to the Audiovisual Media Authority promoting ethical reporting and the protection of children, including:
 - Promoting positive and educational stories focused on children.
 - Use of sensitive and ethical language in reports involving children in difficult situations.
 - Development of awareness campaigns for journalists and media outlets.
 - Protection of children’s privacy and dignity, especially in cases involving violence, victimization, or trauma.
 - Dissemination of information on children’s rights through public and educational media programs.
 - Collaboration with schools, law enforcement, and partner organizations to ensure coordinated responses to digital risks and online abuse.

**Each one’s Integration in Europe - Protecting Fundamental Rights and
Marginalized Communities**
14 May 2024

On May 14, 2024, in cooperation with the Pro LGBT organization and Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, organized a table discussion focusing on the integration of all individuals in Albania and Europe and the protection of fundamental rights, particularly for marginalized communities.

Policy recommendation point (4): “The European Union has recently adopted two Directives to guarantee the standards of equality bodies with the main purpose of strengthening the competences of equality bodies to fight discrimination in the fields of employment and social security, but also to increase their independence, to increase human and technical resources and empower them in the direction of dispute resolution in cases of discrimination. For this, the Albanian state is encouraged to take the necessary measures to align the Albanian legislation with these directives to make it possible for the equality bodies in the country, such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, to strengthen their capacities, role and independence in line with the new directives of EU. “

and

Policy Recommendation point (5): “The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the Ombudsperson, as the two main bodies in Albania for the protection of human rights, despite the good work done over the years, still encounter difficulties in terms of strengthened human capacities, financial resources and infrastructure for the full completion of approved Strategies or Action Plans. The inclusion of Albania in the CERV mechanism as well as the technical assistance being offered by TAIEX is positively evaluated, but such programs and support should be more numerous and sustainable to ensure that these bodies fully fulfil their role and responsibilities that they hold in these fields” emphasize the need to “strengthen the capacities, independence, and resources of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) and the Ombudsperson,” as the principal institutions responsible for the protection of fundamental rights and the enforcement of anti-discrimination measures, including those affecting marginalized communities such as LGBTI persons.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations:

The recommendations highlight the importance of enhancing human and technical capacities, securing sustainable financial resources, and expanding institutional mandates to enable these bodies to fully implement approved strategies, issue guidance, and respond effectively to violations of rights.

[2] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Agjencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2023-.pdf>

[3] <https://femijet.gov.al/all/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Raport-v-jetor-i-punes-se-Agjencise-Shteterore-per-te-Drejtat-dhe-Mbrojtjen-e-Femijes-Viti-2024.pdf>

These recommendations are reflected in the recently approved Gender Balance Law, which introduces provisions aimed at reinforcing the supervisory, advisory, and monitoring powers of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Specifically, the law obliges public institutions to adopt equality policies, implement measures preventing harassment and discrimination, report on progress, and cooperate with equality bodies. The Commissioner is granted enhanced authority to review institutional practices, provide recommendations to ensure compliance with equality standards, and follow up on corrective actions. While the law primarily targets gender equality, its strengthened mechanisms are cross-cutting and cover all protected grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This linkage ensures that measures designed to promote gender balance also reinforce the institutional protection of LGBTI persons and other marginalised groups, supporting more comprehensive and consistent responses to discrimination, harassment, or unequal treatment in public institutions, workplaces, and other sectors.

The Volunteering Law in Albania: As a priority for the Strengthening of the Civil Society's Enabling Environment,

9 July 2024

The Minister of State for Youth and Children has initiated a drafting of the Volunteering Bill [4], aimed at supporting civil society actors, activists, youth and volunteer networks across the country. The objective of this proposed legislation is to address the challenges in the implementation of Law on Volunteering No.45/ 2016. These challenges have been brought forth by civil society organisations, who have also provided recommendations for enhancing the law to ensure its enforceability and to eliminate obstacles faced by CSOs. Reviewing the Law on Volunteering is a priority outlined in the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, as it is a key benchmark for Cluster I - Fundamentals of the EU chapters related to the country's European integration. This review should be approved by 2025, with the aim to create a supportive environment for civil society, encouraging inclusive participation, effective cooperation and meaningful contributions of civil societies in the process. The draft law proposes amendments to the existing Law No.45/2016, with the first draft published for public consultation in September 2024.

Policy Recommendation on Definition of Volunteering: It is essential to clarify what constitutes volunteering, distinguishing it from activities that do not qualify as volunteering. The term “voluntary work” should be avoided and instead, volunteering should be defined as an act or action that does

[4] Analysis is based on the published Consultation Report from the Minister of State of Youth and Children: https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_800_Formati_-raporti-individual--i-Konsultimit-Publik-projektligji-p-r-Vullnetarizmi.docx and the Draft Law on Volunteering: https://konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_800_Projektligji-pe%CC%88r-vullnetarizmin.docx

not invoke an employment relationship. A clear distinction must be made between social services or professional work practices, which should not be classified as volunteering. Additionally, the law should differentiate between structured volunteering and mass volunteering, without obstructing the latter with formal barriers and financial obligations for volunteers or and organisations. – fully addressed

- Policy Recommendation on Recognition of Skills: “The law should address the recognition of regulation of volunteering should consider broader national legal frameworks and other laws affecting or affected by volunteering, such as social and health insurance laws, employment laws, social services laws, youth laws and education laws.” – fully addressed
- Two policy Recommendations on Support from State Institutions: “Additional support and involvement from state institutions are vital for volunteering initiatives, as providing volunteer services is costly for organisations; therefore, it is recommended to:

-Establish a dedicated fund for volunteering and volunteering organisations, similar to Slovakia’s model, where an accreditation body recognises organisation meeting specific criteria and allowing them to access these funds.

-The state could cover health or work injury insurance for volunteers, thus easing the economic burden on volunteering organisations and encouraging more volunteer engagement.” - fully addressed

- Six Policy Recommendations on Obligations and Rights from the Contractual Relationship for Volunteering – fully addressed as follow:

-“The legal and contractual nature of the relationship between the Volunteer and the Volunteering Provider should be clarified, with the aim of specifying, above all, the respective tax obligations, contributions, etc., and the legal avoidance of these obligations. The volunteering relationship cannot be a work or service relationship.”;

-“It is recommended that agreements between the volunteer, the volunteering provider organization, and/or the beneficiary of the volunteering be as flexible as possible, with minimal bureaucracy and restrictions, and clearly outline the duties and rights of each party.”;

-“The provision of Article 16(2) should be removed from Law 45/2016. The conditions of contract invalidity should be identified and declared in accordance with the conditions and provisions of the Civil Code of the Republic of Albania.”;

-“The nature and type of insurance for Volunteers under Article 22 should also be clarified to facilitate the proper implementation of the law by all interested parties (so that clarification is not

limited to an interpretation by a technical decision of the Tax Directorate - see recommendation 1 above). Volunteer insurance in the social security scheme for workplace accidents and retirement pensions seems appropriate in the volunteering relationship; this insurance can be provided by the state. The issue faced by the existing law is in cases where individuals who are simultaneously receiving social assistance engage as volunteers and are paid by the volunteer provider organization for social security, creating a problem for receiving social assistance, as in such a case, due to the ambiguity of the process and lack of system identification, they appear as employed. Thus, the situation is that individuals receiving social assistance risk losing this assistance when engaged as volunteers under the existing law.”;

“It is recommended that during the establishment of the contractual relationship between the volunteer and the offering organization and/or beneficiary, a guiding and informative document should be created to ensure protection against abuse and other risks that may arise during volunteer service, such as labour exploitation, verbal or physical violence, or the risk of harassment and sexual abuse. This is especially relevant when the agreement includes vulnerable categories such as minors, individuals with mental or physical health issues, marginalized groups, etc. “

“More work is needed on raising awareness and informing individuals involved in voluntary service (both volunteers and beneficiaries) about the mechanisms for protecting their rights and how to proceed in case of problems to report or file complaints with the appropriate state authorities.”

- Policy Recommendation on Research on Volunteering: “There is a lack of studies on volunteering and accurate data on the number of organizations offering volunteering in the country, the number and type of volunteers, and other necessary information regarding volunteer contributions (type, duration, target groups, typology of volunteers and beneficiaries, main areas of volunteer contribution, etc.). These studies are considered important to understand the real state of volunteering in the country and to guide volunteering policies. Studies are recommended to be conducted by public institutions, in cooperation with civil society organizations, which can contribute in this area with their experience and capacities.” – fully addressed
- Four Policy Recommendations on Registering of Volunteers – fully addressed

“The legal regulation of volunteering and, in particular, the use of the Volunteer Register should function to assess the contribution of volunteers to society and avoid the potential misuse of the Register's information for financial, fiscal, etc., burdens on Volunteers and Offering Organizations. The law should clearly define the purpose and function of the Register. Thus, if such a register is to be established, a detailed and comprehensive analysis of its purpose, utility, and benefits for the volunteering process is recommended.”

“Registering volunteers in an online register adds additional costs to organizations in terms of time, human resources, and finances. This becomes particularly difficult in the case of mass volunteering campaigns. This administrative burden may be unbearable for a large number of organizations, reducing their incentive to offer volunteering due to bureaucratic obstacles.”

-“It is recommended to consider that for the establishment of such a register, there must also be a good mechanism to protect and prevent the misuse of personal data held by this register. Given the the high risk of cybercrime and past cases where citizens' personal data were not protected and were published and misused, this is an important element that must be considered in the creation of the national online volunteer register.”

-“The national online register may not be necessary if all organizations have their own internal documents and procedures regarding volunteer registration and data maintenance, such as: internal registers of organizations, minutes, participant lists, certificates, participation confirmations, or reference letters, or agreements and contracts concluded between organizations and volunteers. All these documents can serve as proof of the volunteer service and the volunteers involved in the organization.”

Presentation of Cross-Cutting Strategy on Justice, 02 October 2024

On October 2, 2024, with Ministry of Justice was organized a consultative meeting as part of the NCEI and the Partnership Platform for European Integration. This activity resulted from a significant and positive development, namely the drafting of the Cross-cutting Justice Strategy [5], in accordance with the obligations arising from Albania's integration process into the EU, which brought together around 40 representatives from civil society and academia.

- Policy recommendation point (1)“...to complete the regulatory acts for the functioning of two important justice system bodies: the High Judicial Council (HJC) and the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC), which until now have operated without such a comprehensive legal basis,”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been addressed in the strategy, specifically in measure 1.1.10, which relates to making legislative changes to ensure efficiency in terms of human resources in courts and prosecution offices. This measure is further detailed through concrete activities aimed at its implementation.

- Policy Recommendation point (2):“Mediation measures should be more proactive, focusing not only on information and awareness campaigns for citizens but also on intensifying the court referral system to encourage citizens to consider alternative dispute resolution through mediation whenever possible,”

[5] Analysis is based on the published Consultation Report from the Minister of Justice: https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Raporti-i-konsultimit-publik-strategjia-2024_Final.docx-16.12.2024.docx and the Draft Cross-Cutting Strategy: https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Dokument-Konsultativ.docx and https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/documents/RENJK_780_Strategjia-Nd-rsektoriale-e-Drejt-sis-2024-2030-Final.docx

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been addressed in the strategy, which aims, among other things, to improve the referral mechanism for alternative dispute resolution, strengthen the role of mediation and the courts in this field, and increase awareness and the number of mediation service cases among the general public. Transparency in licensing procedures will be enhanced to encourage an increase in the number of mediators, and parties will be informed about mediation options in line with legal provisions. This process will be monitored and evaluated by relevant institutions such as the HJC and the High Inspectorate of Justice (HIJ) to ensure that proper standards and practices are upheld, contributing to the reduction of court workloads and costs. Therefore, concrete measures/activities have been planned for their realization, including measure 3.4.3, which pertains to the legal obligation of courts to properly inform parties about the possibility of mediation, as assessed by the HJC in performance evaluations.

- Policy recommendation point (3): “...the budget for free legal aid should be reviewed to align with the actual needs and demands of the beneficiary categories, with a thorough analysis of their situation,”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been addressed in the strategy, as the law “On State-Guaranteed Legal Aid” aims to create a system for organizing and providing free legal aid to ensure equal access to justice for all individuals; to ensure the proper organization, administration, and functioning of the responsible state institutions; and to provide professional, highquality, efficient, and effective legal aid services. For this purpose, the strategy has foreseen measures to enhance human and infrastructural capacities for the proper functioning of the Free Legal Aid Directorate (FLAD), as well as a review of the regulatory framework to improve citizens' access to free legal aid.

- Policy Recommendation point (5): “It has been observed with concern that prosecutors have dropped or not initiated cases against judges or prosecutors, providing unfounded justifications, leading to the expiration of criminal prosecution deadlines. This issue should be prioritized.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The strategy includes measure 1.2.4, which mandates that prosecutorial services proactively initiate criminal proceedings against judges and prosecutors whose vetting process has revealed potential criminal elements. The strategy seeks to enhance accountability and transparency in the justice system by ensuring that such individuals face prosecution, strengthening public trust, and preventing future abuses.

- Policy Recommendation point (6): “to prioritize digitalization efforts in the justice system to improve online service delivery and explore the potential for online court hearings”,

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been addressed in specific objective 3.5, which aims to increase efficiency in courts and prosecution offices through information and communication technology (ICT). The strategy outlines concrete measures to achieve digitalization through staffing, capacity-building, legal changes, inter-institutional cooperation, and securing the necessary budgets.

- Policy Recommendation point (7): “to integrate the Integrated Case Management System

(ICMS) with other relevant databases to facilitate information sharing”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been addressed in the strategy, as the ICMS aims to interconnect with other justice systems to provide improved service delivery and information sharing across platforms.

- Policy Recommendation point (8): “to ensure feedback and transparency in the consultation process, the Ministry of Justice has established long-standing experience in strategic document drafting, following a transparent and inclusive process”.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: For every suggestion received from civil society, the ministry provides official responses regarding their inclusion or exclusion, with appropriate justifications.

- Three Policy Recommendations point (9),(10),(11): "Cooperation with civil society should be structured and formalized to clarify roles and expected contributions."; "Civil society organizations (CSOs) should be involved as watchdogs to monitor the strategy in areas where they have expertise."; "Direct communication between CSOs and justice institutions should be facilitated by the Ministry of Justice to inform and coordinate joint activities"

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Ministry of Justice maintains a well-established relationship with CSOs in the justice sector. The ministry includes them in discussions and meetings and values their expertise in shaping strategic documents. Collaboration has grown steadily over the years, and the strategy foresees further joint activities under measure 5.2.3 to strengthen cooperation and enhance citizen awareness of the justice system.

Beyond barriers to media independence: A new impetus for the European integration process 11 December 2024

This Working Group session, organised in cooperation with the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) and the Center for Transparency and Freedom of Information (CTFI), focused on media market concentration, transparency of media ownership, and the emerging challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in audiovisual media. The discussion addressed the need for stronger safeguards for media pluralism and transparency, in line with Albania’s EU integration commitments and the Rule of Law Roadmap, while also exploring the importance of ethical and responsible use of AI in journalism. The session brought together representatives of public institutions, civil society, media, academia, local government and international experts to exchange views and European good practices on strengthening media freedom, transparency and professional standards.

Policy Recommendation point (2): “The legal use of social media, particularly the TikTok platform, needs to be regulated, in accordance to the European policies and practices, to avoid

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Albania has not yet adopted a dedicated legal framework regulating online platforms such as TikTok in line with the EU's Digital Services Act. Currently, a draft law addressing this area is undergoing public consultation, which is open until 10 September 2026. [6] Consequently, the protection of minors on very large online platforms remains outside the scope of the current audiovisual legislation, which primarily regulates audiovisual media service providers rather than digital platforms. However, this recommendation has been partially addressed through institutional measures. In August 2024, the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) established a dedicated cooperation mechanism with TikTok, creating a direct reporting channel through which AMA mediates complaints submitted by Albanian users concerning harmful content and copyright violations. At the same time, AMA launched a dedicated online reporting portal enabling citizens to report harmful TikTok content directly to the Authority. [7] As of 4 February – 29 June 2026 for example, 225 complaints had been reviewed, with 89 identified as violations and 65 videos removed.[8] These developments indicate growing administrative capacity and cooperation with digital platforms. However, the current approach remains voluntary and operational rather than regulatory. It depends on cooperation agreements with the platform rather than legally binding obligations applicable to all online platforms.

- PolicyRecommendation point (3): “called for audiovisual media to strengthen compliance with ethical standards, professional journalism codes and relevant legislation, while AMA and other responsible actors were encouraged to enhance public awareness concerning media standards, deontology and professional ethics.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: This recommendation has been substantially addressed through AMA's monitoring, media literacy and awareness activities. During 2025, AMA conducted 329 reviews of broadcast content for legal compliance and identified 106 violations. Administrative measures included 94 cases in which broadcasters were formally called to attention and 12 financial sanctions. [9] AMA has also undertaken activities specifically related to professional journalism and media literacy. In February 2025, AMA supported the Faktoje Center's journalist training programme on disinformation, emphasizing the importance of professional reporting, public awareness and responsible journalism. [10] AMA explicitly linked these activities to its media-literacy responsibilities and the promotion of professional journalism. In addition, AMA participated in the Council of Europe's Alliance against Hate Speech and discussions on media

[6] <https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/1022>

[7] <https://ama.gov.al/denonco-shkelje-per-tiktok/>

[8] <https://ama.gov.al/transparenca-ama-tiktok-higen-nga-platforma-65-video-audio-me-permbajtje-te-demshme-2/>

[9] <https://ama.gov.al/content-monitoring-during-2025-12-fines-94-attention-drawn/?lang=en>

[10] <https://ama.gov.al/ama-supports-the-faktoje-center-for-its-journalist-training-program-on-disinformation-in-times-of-war-and-conflict/?lang=en>

literacy as a means of protecting the public. [11] AMA also continued publishing educational material addressing hate speech, AI, misinformation and online safety, including information specifically concerning the dangers of the virtual world and protection of children online [12].

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It should be noted that this recommendation has been substantially addressed through the existing legal framework and strengthened enforcement measures, although the institutional coordination envisaged in the recommendation has not yet been fully achieved. Consumer protection against misleading commercial communications is established under Law No. 9902/2008 "On Consumer Protection", while Law No. 97/2013 "On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania", together with the Audiovisual Media Broadcasting Code (Decision No. 60/2023), regulates audiovisual commercial communications and prohibits misleading advertising, including advertisements for prescription medicines and inappropriate medical treatments. During 2025, the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) intensified its monitoring of audiovisual media service providers, identifying repeated violations related to commercial communications for medicines and medical treatments. Following this monitoring, AMA required broadcasters to immediately discontinue unlawful practices, including hidden commercial communications within health programmes, the promotion of healthcare professionals and private clinics contrary to legal requirements, and the advertising of prescription medicines. The Authority also initiated administrative procedures against non-compliant broadcasters and reaffirmed its cooperation with the State Agency for Medicines and Medical Devices (AKBPM) to verify suspected infringements and ensure compliance with the applicable legislation. These activities are reflected in AMA's 2025 Annual Report [13], which highlights continuous monitoring of commercial communications, inspections of broadcasters, and enforcement actions aimed at strengthening consumer protection and safeguarding public health.

- Policy Recommendation point (7): "Financial sanctions should continue for audiovisual media that violate existing laws and for administrative violations that have been identified regarding advertisements that do not comply with the aforementioned points"

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Based on AMA's annual report of 2025 [14] it is noted that during 2025, AMA strengthened its oversight of audiovisual content, identifying 106 cases out of 239 reviewed in total in which broadcasters failed to comply with the requirements of the Law No. 97/2013 "On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania", as amended, the Broadcasting Code and other applicable regulatory provisions. These findings resulted in administrative measures against the concerned audiovisual media service providers, including 94 formal warnings and 12 financial sanctions.

[11] <https://ama.gov.al/the-next-meeting-of-the-alliance-against-hate-speech-media-literacy-discussed-as-an-investment-in-public-protection/?lang=en>

[12] <https://ama.gov.al/category/media-literacy/?lang=en>

[13] Audiovisual Media Authority. Annual Report 2025, <https://ama.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/Raport-Vjetor-2025.pdf>

[14] Ibid, pg.12.

Implementation of the New Law on Personal Data Protection in the Context of Chapter 23 Negotiations: Dialogue with Civil Society and the Private Sector

15 July 2025

This Working Group session, organised in cooperation with the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Personal Data Protection, focused on the implementation of the new Law on Personal Data Protection, adopted in December 2024 and aligned with the EU GDPR. The discussion brought together representatives of civil society, the private sector, academia and legal professionals to identify practical challenges and priorities for the effective implementation of the new framework. Particular attention was given to strengthening institutional capacities, raising awareness among data controllers and processors, and ensuring practical compliance with the new legal requirements. Drawing on Slovak experience, participants also discussed challenges arising from the interaction between national legislation, GDPR requirements and technological developments, highlighting the importance of clear practical guidance and stronger cooperation among institutions and relevant stakeholders. The session provided a platform for identifying concrete measures to support the effective implementation of the new framework and Albania's alignment with European data protection standards.

- Policy Recommendation point (9): Awareness among non-state actors, data controllers and processors, civil society organisations and citizens regarding personal data protection should be strengthened and diversified through a three-step approach: awareness, targeted training and effective implementation. Awareness activities should use different channels, including publications, meetings, information sessions and traditional and digital media, while training should be tailored to the needs of specific actors and sectors.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data has introduced a more structured approach to awareness-raising, professional training and implementation of personal data protection requirements. In 2025, the Commissioner adopted a Training and Awareness-Raising Plan [15], specifically aimed at increasing the knowledge, awareness and institutional responsibility of data controllers and processors regarding their legal obligations, good practices and the proper management of personal data processing.

-Concrete capacity-building measures were also undertaken through cooperation with the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA). Seven awareness-raising activities were organised, reaching approximately 250 civil servants, with the aim of strengthening knowledge on the right to information and personal data protection.

-The Commissioner also developed, in cooperation with the University College of Business, a dedicated training and qualification module for Data Protection Officers (DPOs). During 2025,

[15] https://idp.al/raporte-vjetore/#flipbook-df_27723/11/

more than 100 DPOs received certification, while 339 public-sector and 135 private-sector controllers confirmed the appointment of a responsible data protection officer.

-The implementation component has also been supported through compliance monitoring. In particular, the Commissioner conducted nine thematic investigations focusing primarily on private ICT service providers and the banking sector, examining the establishment and management of Information Security Management Systems for personal data protection. These investigations resulted in 10 recommendations, while three decision-making procedures remained ongoing. These measures indicate that the recommendation has progressed beyond general awareness-raising towards a more systematic combination of awareness, professional training and monitoring of implementation.

- Policy Recommendation point (10): Since the new law on Personal Data Protection brings several innovations and introduces new rights, such as the Right to be Forgotten or the Right to Data Portability, it is recommended to organise information activities/sessions for the responsible interest groups, but also for those groups affected by these changes and innovations. In this way, it will be achieved: 1) informing interest groups about these rights, and 2) clarifying the role, responsibilities, and rights of both the affected parties and controllers or other actors to guarantee them.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially addressed. The Commissioner has taken steps to raise awareness of the rights introduced by the new personal data protection framework. The 2025 activities included awareness-raising initiatives aimed specifically at data subjects and vulnerable groups, including children and victims of trafficking. These activities brought together representatives of relevant state institutions, civil society organisations and associations working in the field of child and victim protection, and provided an opportunity to discuss legal requirements, challenges and good practices in personal data protection.

At the institutional level, the training and qualification programme for Data Protection Officers also contributes to clarifying the responsibilities of controllers and processors under the new framework. The certification of more than 100 DPOs provides an important mechanism for ensuring that institutions and private-sector entities have personnel with specific knowledge of their obligations. However, the available evidence does not provide sufficient information to confirm that dedicated information activities have been systematically organised on each of the new individual rights, particularly the Right to be Forgotten and the Right to Data Portability, or that these activities have comprehensively targeted both data subjects and controllers.

- Policy Recommendation point (11): A dedicated awareness and information campaign should also be carried out with those sectors and operators that collect and process sensitive personal data, such as genetic, biometric, sexual orientation data, or others, which should be treated with special care and have high security supervision.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially addressed. The Commissioner has increased its engagement with sectors that process significant volumes of personal and potentially sensitive information.

-The 2025 monitoring activities included nine thematic investigations, primarily involving private entities operating in the ICT and banking sectors, with a particular focus on Information Security Management Systems and the protection of personal data. In addition, the training and awareness framework covers controllers operating in a broad range of sectors, including telecommunications, banking, insurance, healthcare and education.

-The Commissioner also conducted awareness-raising activities with particularly vulnerable groups, including children and victims of trafficking, demonstrating increased attention to contexts where the protection of personal data can have heightened importance. These measures contribute to strengthening awareness and compliance among sectors and groups exposed to higher data-protection risks. Nevertheless, the available evidence does not clearly demonstrate the implementation of a dedicated awareness campaign specifically addressing the processing of sensitive categories of personal data, such as genetic, biometric or sexual-orientation data.

Consequently, the recommendation can be considered partially addressed, with existing training and monitoring activities providing a basis for further sector-specific awareness and guidance on the enhanced safeguards required for sensitive personal data.

- Policy Recommendation point (7): Strengthening and increasing digital knowledge for all staff of responsible institutions, especially with a particular focus on institutions at the local level. This would facilitate the process of data collection, processing, and protection, thanks to technological knowledge and reducing the possibility of mistakes or violations due to them.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially addressed. The Commissioner has taken several measures aimed at strengthening the professional and technical capacities of personnel responsible for personal data protection.

-The development of the dedicated training and qualification module for Data Protection Officers, together with the certification of more than 100 DPOs during 2025, represents an important institutional investment in specialised capacity.

-The Commissioner's 2025 Training and Awareness-Raising Plan also included strengthening professional capacities in relation to the Information Security Management System (ISMS) and the correct management of personal data processing.

-Furthermore, the nine thematic investigations carried out among ICT and banking-sector controllers focused specifically on the creation, maintenance and administration of information security systems, resulting in 10 recommendations for improvement.

-Cooperation with ASPA additionally contributed to strengthening the knowledge of public officials, with approximately 250 civil servants participating in seven awareness-raising activities on access to information and personal data protection.

However, while these measures demonstrate clear progress in strengthening institutional and digital capacities, the available evidence does not establish a specific or sustained focus on local government institutions or demonstrate that capacity-building activities have been systematically extended to staff at the local level. The recommendation is therefore assessed as partially addressed. Further targeted training for local authorities and other institutions with responsibilities for personal data processing would help ensure that the improvements in professional capacity are consistently reflected across all levels of public administration.

Overall assessment for policy recommendations point (7), (9), (10) and (11):

Taken together, the measures reported by the Commissioner demonstrate substantial progress in strengthening Albania's personal data protection framework, particularly through the professionalisation of Data Protection Officers, structured training and awareness activities, cooperation with public administration training institutions, and increased monitoring of compliance. The evidence is strongest in relation to the broader awareness-training-implementation approach, which can be considered addressed. At the same time, more targeted action would be needed to fully address the recommendations concerning specific new data-subject rights, sensitive categories of personal data, and digital capacity-building at the local level.

- Policy Recommendation point (12): A higher form of cooperation and coordination is suggested also with traditional and online media, for two main purposes: 1) to increase information and awareness to the general public through TV programmes, interviews and 2) to increase the capacities and information of the media operators themselves, who are an important actor that must guarantee the protection of personal data. Greater cooperation is suggested for the Commissioner also with the Audiovisual Media Authority, both in monitoring the content reported in the media and in the possibility of conducting training and information sessions for media operators.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. In November 2025, the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data adopted Instruction No. 07, dated 20.11.2025, "On the Protection of Personal Data in Written, Electronic and/or Audiovisual Media and Exemptions for Specific Processing Purposes." [16] The Instruction provides media operators with a clearer and more comprehensive framework for understanding their responsibilities in relation to the protection of personal data.

It defines the roles and responsibilities of journalists, editors and media publishers and establishes rules for the lawful processing and publication of personal data in journalistic activities, while clarifying the balance between freedom of expression, the public's right to information and the right to privacy and data protection.

The Instruction addresses a range of practical issues directly relevant to media reporting, including

[16] https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Udhezim-nr.-07-date-20.11.2025-Per-Mbrojtjen-e-te-dhenave-personale-ne-median-e-shkruar-elektronike-dheose-audiovizive-si-dhe-per-jashtimet-per-qellimet-e-posacme-te-perpunimit-_.pdf

the processing of sensitive personal data, the protection and best interests of children and minors, reporting on criminal proceedings, the use and publication of images, recording devices, the right to be forgotten and de-indexing, as well as the obligations of media operators when errors or inaccurate information are identified.

It also clarifies the circumstances in which specific data protection obligations may be exempted for journalistic purposes and establishes the obligation of journalists, editors and publishers to comply with the applicable legal framework.

By providing specific guidance on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of media professionals, the Instruction contributes to strengthening the capacity and awareness of media operators regarding personal data protection and offers practical guidance for handling sensitive information in the course of journalistic work. It therefore represents a concrete response to the recommendation to strengthen cooperation with and support the capacity-building of traditional and online media, particularly given the important role of media actors in safeguarding personal data while exercising freedom of expression and the public's right to information.

Addressing Challenges in the Implementation of the Right to Information: Capacity Gaps, Unsupported Refusals, and Key Obstacles

13 November 2025

This Working Group session, organised in cooperation with the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, focused on the challenges in implementing the right to information and strengthening transparency and accountability in Albania. The discussion addressed key practical obstacles, including unsupported refusals, institutional capacity gaps, proactive transparency and the responsibilities of public authorities under the new legal framework. The exchange also explored European practices, drawing on Slovakia's experience with access to information, transparency of public contracts and oversight mechanisms. Representatives of public institutions, civil society and international experts discussed ways to improve the effective implementation of the right to information and strengthen cooperation between public authorities and non-state actors.

- Policy Recommendation point (12): Expansion of the scope of authorities required to provide public information, including:
 - public entities established by law or funded by the state (universities, hospitals, museums);
 - health insurance companies;
 - companies where the state holds majority ownership or controls the board;
 - and as of 2025, NGOs receiving public funds. Suggestion from participants: political parties, private universities, and private hospitals should also be included, as they provide services of public interest.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The 2025 Annual Report of the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data [17] indicates increased attention to transparency in the health sector, particularly in public university and regional hospitals. The Commissioner identified these institutions as essential providers of public services and emphasised the importance of ensuring citizens' clear, timely and comprehensive access to information concerning health services, institutional programmes and decisions. As part of these efforts, the Commissioner issued 12 recommendations to improve the implementation of Transparency Programmes by the relevant institutions. This represents progress in strengthening the practical implementation of transparency obligations among public service providers, particularly hospitals. However, the reported measures primarily concern improving compliance and proactive transparency within institutions already covered by the existing framework, rather than expanding the scope of entities subject to public information obligations. No specific developments were identified regarding the inclusion of the additional categories proposed by the recommendation, such as political parties, private universities, private hospitals or other private entities providing services of public interest. Further efforts are therefore needed to assess and potentially broaden the legal scope of entities subject to transparency and access-to-information requirements.

- Policy Recommendation point (8): Transparency is not achieved merely by publishing information – it must be: clear, organized, easy to identify. The current practice of uploading documents in unstructured ways (e.g., unnamed documents, scan documents just as picture page by page and not as a single document) makes public access difficult.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: In December 2025, the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data adopted Order No. 280/2025, approving the Model Transparency Programme for Public Authorities [18], alongside Order No. 281/2025, approving the Model Transparency Programme for Local Self-Government Units [19]. The new models establish a more structured framework for the publication and presentation of public information, with the aim of improving its accessibility and usability for citizens, civil society, media and public institutions. The model for local government also introduces a dedicated section on the activities of Municipal Councils and extends its application to Regional Councils, strengthening transparency around local decision-making. The Model Transparency Programme for Public Authorities further requires the systematic publication of information concerning institutional decision-making and provides for expanded access to information related to Albania's European integration process, including strategic documents, reports on the implementation of relevant obligations, European Commission monitoring, audit and evaluation reports, and other documents reflecting progress in the integration process. All public authorities were required to implement the new models by 31 March 2026. These developments represent a concrete response to the recommendation, moving beyond the simple publication of information towards a more structured, systematic and user-oriented approach to proactive transparency.

[18]<https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Urdher-nr.-280-miratimi-Programi-model-i-transparences-per-autoritetet-publike.pdf>

[19]<https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Urdher-nr.-281-miratimi-Programi-model-i-transparences-per-Njesite-e-Vetegeverisjes-Vendore.pdf>

Progress on achieving the interim benchmarks of Chapter 23

17 February 2026

This Working Group session, organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice focused on Albania's progress in meeting the interim benchmarks for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights. The discussion brought together representatives of public institutions, civil society, academia and legal professionals to assess ongoing justice reforms and the implementation of commitments related to fundamental rights. Particular attention was given to strengthening access to justice, protecting victims of crime, including vulnerable groups, enhancing institutional transparency, and ensuring meaningful stakeholder participation in the reform process. The session also provided an opportunity to discuss the Crime Victims Awareness Week and the development of the OGP National Action Plan 2026–2030, highlighting the importance of coordinated action between institutions and non-state actors. Participants exchanged views and put forward recommendations aimed at further strengthening the implementation of Chapter 23 reforms and ensuring that Albania's progress is both effective and aligned with EU standards.

- Policy Recommendation point (9): Despite the awareness-raising campaigns conducted, including those organised during the Crime Victims Awareness Week, it is important that clear and accessible information remains available on a continuous basis through close cooperation with organisations working in the field. Information and communication efforts should be adapted to the specific circumstances and needs of vulnerable groups and should utilise a variety of communication tools, including digital information, brochures, leaflets, and in-person outreach activities, while also ensuring coverage of rural and remote areas.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. The publication in July 2026 of the Manual on Free Legal Aid [20] by the Ministry of Justice represents a concrete step towards addressing this recommendation. The manual is designed as a practical information resource and provides beneficiaries with accessible explanations of what free legal aid is, who is eligible, what services are available, where individuals can seek assistance, what procedures they need to follow, and how they can establish contact with the relevant structures. The availability of this information through the Ministry of Justice's official webpage contributes to ensuring that information on legal aid is not limited to individual awareness-raising campaigns or one-off activities, but remains continuously accessible to potential beneficiaries.

The structured presentation of practical information also makes the system easier to navigate for individuals who may not have prior knowledge of the legal aid framework. At the same time, the available evidence relates primarily to the online availability of information and does not yet demonstrate whether the manual has been complemented by systematic dissemination through printed materials, in-person outreach, or targeted activities in rural and remote areas. Further

[20] <https://20.170.114.69/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/Manual-DNJF-2.pdf>

dissemination through local authorities and civil society organisations could therefore strengthen its reach among vulnerable groups with limited access to digital information. Overall, the recommendation can be assessed as addressed, particularly regarding the establishment of an accessible and continuously available source of information on free legal aid, while continued dissemination and targeted outreach would further strengthen its implementation.

Regulating Lobbying in Albania: Strengthening Transparency, Implementation and Coordination Challenges, and European Standards 22 May 2026

This Working Group session, organised in cooperation with the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, focused on the implementation of Albania's new lobbying framework under Law No. 12/2026 and its alignment with European standards. The discussion brought together public institutions, civil society, academia and other stakeholders to examine key implementation challenges, including institutional capacity, transparency, oversight and public awareness. Particular attention was given to the establishment and functioning of the public lobbying register, the role of the Commissioner's Office, and the need for clear and balanced rules that distinguish lobbying from public interest advocacy. Drawing on Slovak and broader European experience, participants discussed good practices for ensuring transparency and accountability in lobbying, as well as strengthening cooperation between institutions and non-state actors.

- Policy Recommendation point (4): The seven planned secondary acts should provide clear guidance on registration procedures, the operation of the lobbying register, required documentation, and the obligations and responsibilities of all actors involved.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. Following the adoption of Law No. 12/2026 "On Lobbying in the Republic of Albania", the Commissioner has prepared a package of seven secondary acts aimed at establishing the practical framework for the implementation of the new lobbying legislation¹.

The package provides detailed guidance on the key procedures, obligations and responsibilities of the actors involved, including the functioning of the Lobbying Register, registration procedures, reporting requirements, conflict-of-interest management, verification and updating of information, awareness-raising activities, and the documentation to be maintained by lobbyists.

More specifically, the package includes provisions on the structure, administration, updating and publication of the Lobbying Register; the format, content and procedure for submitting and reviewing registration requests; and the form, content and submission of lobbying activity

[21] <https://idp.al/projekt-akte-te-zyres-se-komisionerit/>

publication of the Lobbying Register; the format, content and procedure for submitting and reviewing registration requests; and the form, content and submission of lobbying activity declarations.

It also establishes procedures for the identification, declaration, review and management of conflicts of interest, as well as procedures and deadlines for the verification and updating of information contained in the Register.

In addition, a dedicated instrument regulates the format, topics and timing of information and awareness-raising activities for lobbyists, public officials and the general public, while another defines the categories of mandatory documentation to be retained by lobbyists, together with rules for its administration and retention.

The package is complemented by a Code of Conduct for Lobbyists, further clarifying the standards expected from lobbyists in the exercise of their activities. Taken together, these secondary acts provide a substantially more detailed and operational framework for implementing the new lobbying legislation, translating the general requirements of the law into specific procedures, standardised requirements and defined responsibilities for the actors involved. This development directly addresses the recommendation calling for the adoption of clear guidance on registration procedures, the operation of the lobbying register, required documentation, and the obligations and responsibilities of the different actors.

- Policy Recommendation point (9): Consideration should be given to incorporating the concept of a “legislative footprint” or “lobbying footprint” within the register. This would allow the tracking of influence on decision-making processes, including information on actors involved, objectives pursued, and policy areas affected, thereby improving transparency and understanding of lobbying activities.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. The draft framework for the Lobbying Register substantially addresses the recommendation by introducing a structured system for tracking and linking key elements of lobbying activity (Article 8 of the Law) [22] and Article 6 of the Draft Order

on the Structure, Administration, Updating and Publication of the Lobbying Register [23]. The Register is designed as a public electronic database connecting lobbyists, beneficiaries, lobbying contracts, periodic declarations and reports by public officials on contacts with lobbyists, thereby allowing the relationships between the different actors and stages of lobbying activity to be identified and followed. The framework also introduces search functions that enable users to identify lobbying activities by lobbyist, beneficiary, lobbying topic or issue, public institution targeted, period of activity, and the object of the lobbying activity, including the relevant document, act or decision-making process where identifiable. For each lobbyist, the public profile is similarly intended to

[22] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/LIGJ-Nr.-122026-PER-LOBIMIN-NE-REPUBLIKEN-E-SHQIPERISE.pdf>

[23] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/1.-Udhezim-per-strukturenadministrimin-e-Regjistrimit-te-Lobimit.pdf>

include information on beneficiaries, lobbying topics, institutions or categories of public officials contacted, periodic declarations and relevant reports by public officials. These features provide important elements of what the recommendation referred to as a “legislative” or “lobbying footprint”, by making it possible to trace who is involved in lobbying, on whose behalf lobbying is conducted, what issues are being pursued, which public institutions are concerned, and which decision-making processes are potentially affected. The requirement to link lobbying activities with periodic declarations and reports of public officials further strengthens the traceability of interactions and provides a basis for understanding lobbying activity over time.

- Policy Recommendation point (11): Clear rules should also specify which documents and information submitted to the Commissioner’s office will be publicly available and which will remain confidential, while ensuring compliance with personal data protection legislation and preventing the disclosure of sensitive information.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. The Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data has prepared a draft instruction on the structure, administration, updating and publication of the Lobbying Register [24], which establishes clear rules concerning the categories of information that may be made publicly available and the information that must remain protected.

Article 12 of the draft instruction provides that only categories of data expressly identified as publicly available under the Law on Lobbying may be published in the Register. At the same time, it explicitly prohibits the publication of information where disclosure is not provided for by law, where it could infringe the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals, or where it would conflict with applicable personal data protection legislation.

The draft further establishes a verification mechanism prior to publication, requiring the responsible structure to assess whether information complies with the requirements of the Law and the applicable personal data protection framework before it is made publicly accessible.

Information that is not intended for publication is to be retained and administered by the Commissioner solely for purposes related to registration, verification, control and supervision, rather than being made available to the public. The provisions also establish safeguards concerning the processing and publication of personal data, requiring that such processing be limited to what is necessary and proportionate for achieving the objectives established by the Law and be carried out in accordance with personal data protection legislation.

The draft additionally regulates the retention and accessibility of published information following the deregistration of a lobbyist, providing that publicly available information remains accessible for five years after deregistration, while subsequently ceasing to be publicly accessible.

[24] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/1.-Udhezim-per-strukturenadministrimin-e-Regjistrit-te-Lobimit.pdf>

- Policy Recommendation point (10): Before the register becomes fully operational, clear guidance and instructions should be provided, including templates and standard forms for the submission of information and documentation by lobbying entities and other affected actors.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. The Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data has prepared draft implementing instructions establishing the format, content and procedures for registration in the Lobbying Register [25] and for the submission of lobbying activity declarations [26]. These instruments provide concrete procedural guidance for lobbying entities and other relevant actors prior to the full operationalisation of the Register.

The draft instruction on registration in the Lobbying Register specifies the format and content of the registration request, the method of submission and review, the required supporting documentation, and the decision-making procedure to be followed by the Commissioner. This provides a clear procedural framework for lobbying entities seeking to register and clarifies the information and documentation required as part of the registration process.

In addition, the draft instruction on lobbying activity declarations introduces a standardised form for reporting lobbying activities, approved as an annex to the instruction. It establishes requirements for the declaration to be completed accurately and in full, assigns responsibility to the lobbyist for the accuracy of the information provided, and sets out a procedure for correcting incomplete or inaccurate submissions. The instruction also establishes regular six-month reporting periods and specifies the available methods for submitting declarations, including through the electronic Register once operational, as well as by post or in person. Importantly, the draft also provides a transitional arrangement for the period before the electronic Lobbying Register becomes operational, allowing lobbying activity declarations to be submitted electronically by email, by post or physically to the Commissioner's office. This ensures that procedural requirements can be applied even before the electronic system is fully functional.

- Policy Recommendation point (13): It is essential to conduct a communication campaign targeting lobbyists, civil society organisations, public institutions, and public officials to explain the objectives of the law. The campaign should emphasise that the purpose of the legislation is to increase transparency and integrity in decision-making processes rather than to create a punitive framework. Awareness-raising and information campaigns should also be carried out to clarify newly introduced concepts such as lobbying, lobbyist, beneficiary, public official, and advocacy. This is particularly important for civil society organisations, which require clear guidance on which activities fall within the scope of lobbying and which do not.
- Policy Recommendation point (7): Effective institutional interaction and cooperation with public officials require parallel efforts: - Awareness-raising and information sessions should be

[25] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/2.-Udhezim-per-percaktimin-e-formatitpermabajtjes.pdf>

[26] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/3.-Udhezim-per-percaktimin-e-formes-dhe-dorezimin-e-deklarates.pdf>

- organised to inform public officials and relevant institutions about the law, their obligations and responsibilities, as well as applicable procedures, deadlines, and reporting requirements.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. The Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data has prepared a draft instruction specifically dedicated to the format, topics and periods for conducting information and awareness-raising activities in the field of lobbying [27]. The draft establishes a structured framework for raising awareness about the new lobbying legislation and its practical implementation. The draft provides for the organisation of information and awareness-raising activities targeting lobbyists, public officials and the general public, with the objective of increasing knowledge of lobbying rules, legal obligations and measures aimed at preventing inappropriate influence in lobbying activities. It also requires these activities to be organised in a transparent, objective, inclusive and non-discriminatory manner, ensuring equal treatment of the subjects covered by the law.

Importantly, the draft establishes a regular and institutionalised approach to awareness-raising rather than relying on one-off information activities. The Commissioner is required to approve and publish an annual calendar of information and awareness-raising activities, specifying the format, topics, timing and target groups. The calendar must include activities for lobbyists and public officials, as well as at least one information and awareness-raising activity for the general public each year. Activities may be organised in person, online or in a hybrid format.

The draft also provides that the topics of these activities should be determined on the basis of an assessment of the information and awareness needs of lobbyists, public officials and the general public, while taking into account problems identified during the implementation of the Law. This creates an opportunity for the awareness-raising programme to respond to practical challenges emerging from the application of the new framework.

Furthermore, the instruction foresees cooperation between the Commissioner and public authorities and institutions involved in decision-making processes in the organisation and delivery of these activities. Such cooperation is particularly relevant for ensuring that public officials and other actors directly involved in decision-making understand their responsibilities under the new lobbying framework. The establishment of this framework represents a concrete response to the recommendation by creating an institutional mechanism for continuous information and awareness-raising on the objectives, rules and obligations established by the lobbying legislation. It also provides a basis for clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different actors and for promoting a common understanding of the new regulatory framework among lobbyists, public officials and the wider public.

- Policy Recommendation point (15): The involvement of non-state actors should, however, go beyond information and awareness-raising. Civil society organisations, experts, professional and interest groups should be actively engaged in the implementation and further development of the framework, including through consultations, working groups, information sessions and other participatory mechanisms. Their role should not be limited to receiving information about the legislation, but should also include providing expertise, identifying practical challenges, and contributing their perspectives to the development and interpretation of procedural requirements.

[27] <https://idp.al/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/6.-Urdher-per-percaktimin-e-formatit.pdf>

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Addressed. In 13 August 2026, the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data issued an Open Call for Expressions of Interest [28] to identify professionals interested in joining the structure responsible for implementing and overseeing Law No. 12/2026 “On Lobbying in the Republic of Albania.”

The call explicitly seeks individuals with professional knowledge and experience in areas including law, public administration, political science, governance and public policy, integrity and anti-corruption, transparency and accountability, and personal data protection. Importantly, professional experience within civil society organisations, international institutions, technical assistance projects and other fields related to transparency, good governance and decision-making processes is also recognised as relevant.

This creates a concrete opportunity for external expertise to contribute to the implementation and oversight of the new lobbying framework. In parallel, and particularly relevant to the recommendation, the Commissioner on 31 August 2026 has opened a public consultation process [29] on the package of draft secondary legislation prepared for the implementation of Law No. 12/2026, with the support of experts from the Council of Europe. The package covers key aspects of the lobbying framework, including registration in and administration of the Lobbying Register, publication and reporting of lobbying activities, verification of information, documentation, conflict of interest, the Code of Conduct for Lobbyists, as well as information and awareness-raising activities.

The draft acts have been published through the institution's “Public Notification and Consultation” section, with the consultation remaining open until 4 September 2026. Importantly, the consultation explicitly invites public institutions, civil society organisations, media, the business community, experts and other interested stakeholders to submit comments and recommendations. The Commissioner has also indicated that contributions received during the consultation will be reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated into the final versions of the secondary legislation before their adoption.

This represents a particularly concrete form of engagement of non-state actors, as their role extends beyond receiving information about the new legislation to providing expertise, identifying practical challenges and contributing perspectives to the development of the implementing framework. The combination of the open call for external professional expertise and the structured public consultation of the draft implementing acts therefore demonstrates that mechanisms are being established for non-state actors to participate in both the implementation and further development of the lobbying framework.

[28] <https://idp.al/2026/08/13/thirrje-per-shprehje-interesi/>

[29] <https://idp.al/2026/08/31/konsultim-publik-per-projektetet-nenligjore-ne-zbatim-te-ligjit-nr-12-2026-per-lobimin-ne-republiken-e-shqiperise/>

ADRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 24

Roadmap for Rule of Law - Priorities regarding Chapter 24 according to the Rule of Law Roadmap 07 December 2023

The first session of the WG for Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom, Security has been organized by European Movement Albania in cooperation with Ministry of Interior of Albania. This session took place while the work on the Rule of Law Roadmap¹ was undergoing (a draft had already been prepared and published for consultations) but the activity objective was to offer the opportunity to CSOs and other actors to provide their policy recommendations and suggestions for the measures foreseen by this Roadmap, as this strategic document was yet to be finalized. It is observed that some of the recommendations extracted during this Session of the Working Group for Chapter 24 have been included on the updated Rule of Law Roadmap.

- Policy Recommendation point (6) that emphasizes the “strengthening of cooperation, coordination and exchange of experiences and information between law enforcement institutions, police structures, the judicial system and the prosecution for a proper synchronization of tasks and procedures, in order to achieve timely concrete results without impediments” it is included as one of the measures to be taken under the subfield Fight against organized crime of the updated Rule of Law Roadmap: “Ensure closer and more effective inter-institutional coordination, notably among law enforcement agencies (LEA), and between LEA and prosecution.”
- Policy Recommendation point (1) focused on the increase of the capacities of State Police in Albania explaining in more details which should be the priorities for strengthening their capacities namely: “-raising the capacities of the staff through various trainings and programs, -increased cooperation with their counterparts in Member States, but also with the institutions and agencies of the EU; -improving technology and setting up digital systems to have more effectiveness and real-time results during their work” has also been included in the subfield Fight against organized crime of the updated Rule of Law Roadmap: “Capacitate law enforcement to implement special investigative measures or new technologies”.

[1] A comparison analysis has been conducted between the draft of the Rule of Law Roadmap that has been published for consultation on the online consultation platform - <https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/653> and the final version of this Roadmap prepared after the finishing of the consultation process (in which this WG sessions were part of) - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RFjiN84I9JmYNWQfLUEqgwwvKzT7S0kbO/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=111999003229908040714&rtpof=true&sd=true

Management of irregular migration and cooperation with frontex – main priorities under the National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030 framework 31 January 2024

The session 2 of the WG for Chapter 24 was organized on 31 January 2024 focused on irregular migration in Albania, under the New Status Agreement with Frontex and introducing of the National Strategy for Migration 2024-2030. This session took place while the work on the Rule of Law Roadmap was undergoing (a draft had already been prepared and published for consultations) and the focus was on the subfields related to irregular migration and its management.

- Policy recommendation point (6) highlights the risk analysis and risk assessment when it comes to managing of irregular migration and border control. This procedure is recommended to be implemented through collaboration and information exchange with Frontex and other EU Members States as stipulated by Policy recommendation point (7). In the updated Rule of Law Roadmap in the subfield of Visa Policy a new measure is added that is aligned with these recommendations: “Conduct a periodic assessment of the situation and risks of abuse of visa-free regime for nationals of third countries which are required a visa to enter the EU, based on national data, as well as information provided by Frontex and the EU Member States’ authorities”.

The Importance of Public Awareness on Money Laundering – Strengthening Cooperation with Non-State Actors 21 May 2025

On 21 May 2025, EMA in cooperation with the Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF), organised a WG session focusing on public education and awareness-raising on money laundering and terrorist financing, with particular emphasis on strengthening the involvement of non-state actors. The discussion examined the implementation of the Public Education Strategy on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism 2025–2027, including its objectives, target groups and planned measures, while highlighting the importance of extending awareness and preventive efforts beyond public institutions to businesses, civil society, media and other relevant stakeholders. The session also explored the practical role that non-state actors can play in identifying and reporting money laundering risks, including through the work of professional “gatekeepers” and the private sector. European experience, including examples from

Slovakia concerning stakeholder participation in the development of anti-money laundering legislation and the reporting of discrepancies in beneficial ownership information, provided a comparative perspective on possible approaches for Albania. The exchange of views and practical examples provided the basis for the policy recommendations formulated through the activity.

- Policy recommendation point (6): Civil society must be engaged not only as an actor that contributes to the fight against money laundering but also made aware of the risk it poses through its potential misuse as a tool for money laundering. It has a dual role – as a protector and as an entity at risk.
- Policy recommendation point (7): Non-state actors such as businesses, media, banks, or independent professionals should be valued for the expertise, capacities, and resources they can offer. To join forces with public institutions, the first step must be to inform and raise their awareness of the benefits of being part of this process.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: According to the 2024 Annual Report [2], the AIF had engaged only 3 NGOs and no media representatives in raising awareness and training activities during the 2020–2024 period, indicating limited outreach to non-state actors. Following the recommendation issued in May 2025, additional efforts were undertaken through activities organized with EMA, including another roundtable on 30 October 2025 and a follow-up mentoring session and another Roundtable on 23 June 2026. These activities engaged approximately 40 NGOs, providing training, raising awareness, and facilitating direct dialogue with relevant institutions, marking a significant improvement in outreach and engagement.

- Policy Recommendation point (3): Regarding the target groups for education and awareness-raising efforts, special attention should be paid to:
 - The business community, which is increasingly being targeted or misused for money laundering purposes. More informative activities and trainings are needed to raise awareness of the relevant criminal offenses and ways to protect economic activity from being misused.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Regarding the business community, concrete steps have been taken to address the recommendation through targeted awareness-raising and practical training focused on risks directly affecting private-sector actors. On 30 October 2025, the National Convention on European Integration organised a Working Group session on “Information and Awareness-Raising on Financial Technology (FinTech) – the Innovations and Risks it Brings in the Context of Combating Money Laundering.” [3]

[2] 2024 AIF Annual Report: https://fiu.gov.al/raporte/#flipbook-df_9512/15/

[3] <https://eurokonventa.al/en/wg-justice-freedom-securitychapter-24-information-and-awareness-raising-on-financial-technology-fintech-the-innovations-and-risks-it-brings-in-the-context-of-combating-money-launder/>

The involvement of representatives from the banking and foreign exchange sectors, alongside the Financial Intelligence Agency, Bank of Albania and other stakeholders, directly targeted actors exposed to the misuse of financial technologies for money laundering and fraud.

The discussion addressed emerging risks, including money laundering, financial fraud, AI and deepfake technologies, thereby responding to the recommendation's call for greater awareness of relevant forms of financial crime. This awareness-raising was further reinforced through a practical mentoring session, focusing on CEO fraud, Business Email Compromise (BEC), identification of red flags, internal controls, and response and mitigation measures. By moving from general awareness to practical guidance on recognising and preventing fraud, the activity provided private-sector participants with concrete tools to protect their organisations from being targeted or misused for financial crime. Together, these activities demonstrate that the recommendation has been addressed not only through information-sharing, but through a combination of targeted awareness-raising and practical capacity-building for business-related stakeholders, directly corresponding to the two measures envisaged in the recommendation: increasing knowledge of financial crime risks and strengthening the ability of businesses to prevent their activities from being misused.

- Students and young people, through cooperation with schools and universities, in order to raise awareness and build knowledge about this phenomenon from an early stage. –

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The recommendation concerning students and young people has been addressed through measures aimed at strengthening the role of universities in building early knowledge and professional expertise on money laundering and terrorist financing. On 23 June 2026, EMA and the Financial Intelligence Agency (AIF) organised a dedicated NCEI Chapter 24 roundtable on “Promoting Scientific Research and Strengthening University Curricula on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing.” [4] The activity directly responded to the recommendation by focusing on how knowledge of money laundering risks can be integrated into university education and professional preparation, rather than being limited to awareness-raising among existing professionals. The discussion addressed emerging areas such as cryptocurrencies, digital assets, modern forms of fund transfers and asset confiscation, highlighting the need for curricula and training programmes to evolve alongside increasingly complex forms of financial crime. Importantly, the discussion also promoted closer and more sustainable cooperation between universities and responsible institutions, including through internships, joint research, specialised training and academic programmes. This approach contributes to building knowledge and expertise among students and future professionals at an early stage, while creating pathways for their continued engagement with the institutional and professional structures working in the field.

[4] <https://eurokonventa.al/en/working-group-for-chapter-24-promoting-scientific-research-and-strengthening-university-curricula-on-money-laundering-and-terrorist-financing-23-june-2026/>

Strengthening Albania's Response to Cybercrime and Child Online Protection: Legal Alignment and Institutional Capacities

15 January 2026

On 15 January 2026, in cooperation with the Albanian State Police, was organised a Working Group session on cybercrime and child online protection. The activity brought together representatives of public institutions, civil society, international partners, legal and media professionals, and experts from Albania and Slovakia to discuss the growing online risks faced by children and the need for stronger prevention, investigation and institutional capacities. The discussion focused on EU-aligned legal and institutional responses, international cooperation, public awareness and early education, as well as the need for stronger coordination among relevant stakeholders. Participants exchanged experiences and identified key areas for further action, providing the basis for the policy recommendations developed through the activity.

- Policy Recommendation point (1): Online child sexual exploitation and cybercrime are evolving phenomena that require continuous institutional adaptation. While important steps have already been taken – including the establishment of a dedicated sector for the investigation of online child sexual abuse material, further strengthening of institutional and operational capacities remains essential.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially addressed. Progress has been made towards strengthening institutional capacities to address online child sexual exploitation and cybercrime. The State Police [5] reported the establishment of a dedicated structure for handling cases of online child sexual abuse and highlighted increased international cooperation in this area. These developments respond to the recommendation concerning the need for specialised institutional and operational capacities. However, significant capacity gaps remain. In particular, the Police identified continued needs for investment in specialised technological tools, professional training and adequate human resources. Given the rapidly evolving nature and increasing technical complexity of cybercrime and online child sexual exploitation, further efforts are needed to ensure the sustainable development and retention of specialised expertise, including in digital forensics, data analysis and cyber investigations. The available information does not yet provide sufficient evidence of progress regarding several specific elements of the recommendation, including the strengthening and sustainable staffing of the 24/7 international contact point, the introduction of a centralised national case-tracking or database system, and the deployment of advanced technological and AI-assisted investigative tools.

[5] This follow up of recommendations was introduced by Police Representative's speech on the Panel for Chapter 24 of the Plenary Session of National Convention on European Integration, held on 19 June 2026 in Tirana

- Policy Recommendation point (7): National awareness campaigns should be developed and regularly implemented, targeting children, parents, teachers, and the wider public. These campaigns should utilize social media platforms, national television, and school-based programs to disseminate accessible information about online risks, reporting mechanisms, and available support services.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially addressed. Six months after the recommendation was issued, the State Police representative [6] reported increased awareness-raising activities in schools and the implementation of campaigns focused on online safety. This represents progress towards strengthening preventive and awareness-raising measures. However, the Police itself identified the education of children, parents and teachers on online risks as an ongoing challenge and priority. There is therefore a need to further institutionalise and regularly implement awareness campaigns, ensuring that they reach all target groups and make use of different communication channels, including social media, television and school-based initiatives.

Strengthening Institutional Capacities and Best Practices for the Functioning of the Asset Recovery Office (ARO) 25 March 2026

On 25 March 2026, in cooperation with the Albanian State Police was organised a Working Group session focused on strengthening the institutional capacities and operational functioning of the Asset Recovery Office (ARO). The activity brought together representatives of state institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society, legal professionals and international partners to exchange experiences and European best practices on asset recovery and confiscation. The discussion addressed key aspects of ARO's effective functioning, including legal and institutional frameworks, inter-agency coordination, specialised training, technical and human capacities, international cooperation and alignment with EU standards. The exchange of Albanian and Slovak experiences provided the basis for identifying areas for further institutional development and for the policy recommendations formulated through the activity.

- Policy Recommendation Point (4): It is recommended to strengthen cooperation and coordination with: justice institutions and specialised structures (SPAK), the courts and the prosecution offices, as well as with fiscal and information agencies...

[6] This follow up of recommendations was introduced by Police Representative's speech on the Panel for Chapter 24 of the Plenary Session of National Convention on European Integration, held on 19 June 2026 in Tirana

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Partially Addressed. The State Police [7] reported that cooperation and coordination with specialised justice and law enforcement structures, particularly the Special Prosecution Office (SPAK), has been strengthened. According to the Police, this cooperation is particularly developed in the area of financial investigations, including in the context of investigations into organised crime and money laundering. This indicates progress in strengthening inter-institutional coordination and in adopting a more integrated approach to addressing financial crime. The reported cooperation with SPAK represents a positive development in addressing the recommendation, particularly regarding coordination between law enforcement and specialised justice structures. Continued efforts are needed to further strengthen and institutionalise such cooperation and extend effective coordination and information exchange to the other relevant institutions and stakeholders identified in the recommendation.

[7] This follow up of recommendations was introduced by Police Representative's speech on the Panel for Chapter 24 of the Plenary Session of National Convention on European Integration, held on 19 June 2026 in Tirana

ADRESSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHAPTER 5

Roadmap for Rule of Law - Priorities regarding Chapter 24 according to the Rule of Law Roadmap, 07 December 2023

This roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement titled “Main issues and involvement of civil society actors” in the framework of the establishment of the Discussion and Consultation Roundtables under the Partnership Platform for European Integration was held in Tirana jointly convened by the European Movement in Albania, and the Agency for Public Procurement, as the central body responsible for the well-going of the public procurement system in Albania. The purpose of this roundtable was to present the public procurement as the regime that can provide for transparency, equal treatment, free competition and non-discrimination in its general principles, to highlight the alignment process of the Albanian legal framework vis-à-vis the EU acquis, and to introduce the public call for membership into the Chapter 5 Roundtable within PPIE as well to further establish this roundtable.

Policy Recommendation Point (1): “Chapter 5 of the EU Acquis encompasses the field of Public Procurement, which includes Classical Procurement, Procurement in utility sectors, Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships, Procurement in Defense and Security, and Administrative Review. Albania has relatively recent legislation in this area, with the Public Procurement Law and the Law on Procurements in the field of Defense and Security being approved in 2020. Meanwhile, the Law on Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) was approved in 2013, undergoing subsequent amendments over time. Despite this, as a dynamic field, there is a need for an ongoing process to align the domestic legal framework with the EU Acquis and the relevant Directives and Regulations for this field. Special attention should be given to the approval and updating of sub-legal acts.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: This recommendation, from the insights gathered during this roundtable, has been partially addressed, and has gained particular importance following the opening of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals and the subsequent set the closing benchmarks for Chapter 5 by the European Commission of, where legislative alignment with the EU acquis constitutes the first benchmark to be fulfilled. As of the June 2026 monitoring period, draft amendments to Law No. 162/2020 "On Public Procurement" are being finalised in consultation with SIGMA and are expected to undergo public consultation before being submitted to the European Commission. In addition, the adoption of Law No. 88, dated 12 December 2025, "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships," represents a significant step towards further aligning Albania's

legal framework with the EU acquis in the field of concessions and public-private partnerships. At the same time, work is continuing on amendments to Law No. 36/2020 "On Procurement in the Field of Defence and Security." On 9 April 2026, the European Commission submitted its comments on the draft law, and work has continued to reflect the comments provided by SIGMA.

Progress has also been recorded at the level of secondary legislation through the adoption of implementing acts further aligning the public procurement framework with EU requirements. Amendments to Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No. 291, dated 15.05.2024, "On determining the monetary thresholds in public procurement procedures", were adopted through DCM No. 331, dated 15.05.2026. In addition, amendments to DCM No. 457, dated 09.08.2021, "On the approval of the Common Procurement Vocabulary" were adopted through DCM No. 419, dated 10.06.2026, updating the applicable CPV framework. A draft Decision of the Council of Ministers "On the approval of rules for the evaluation, award, modification and transfer of concession/public-private partnership contracts" has been prepared and reviewed by SIGMA. Following the incorporation of SIGMA's comments and relevant reflections, the draft was resubmitted to SIGMA on 16 June 2026 with a view to obtaining a positive assessment and it is expected to be submitted to the European Commission [4].

Policy Recommendation Point (2): "It is crucial not only to have an aligned and updated legal framework but also to establish an appropriate institutional framework with the necessary human, administrative, and financial capacities to enforce laws accurately, fairly, and efficiently and to be in line with EU standards for public procurement, including transparency, non-discrimination, equal treatment of economic operators, and free and fair competition."

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: This recommendation is partially addressed. In the context of the European integration negotiation process, full administrative capacity is required, and responsibility has been taken to address this. In this regard, a new body has been established, the Centralised Purchasing Operator, through DCM No. 531, dated 7.9.2023, "On the establishment of the state joint-stock company Centralised Purchasing Operator for carrying out special public procurement procedures on behalf of the Prime Minister's Office, ministries, and subordinate institutions." Moreover, a new institution responsible for concessions and public-private partnerships is expected to be established, as provided for by Law No. 88, dated 12.12.2025, "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships". The draft decision establishing this institution is currently being finalised, but it will need an assessment for capacities to be fully functional.

[4] This input was provided during the APP presentation at the Working Group session on Chapter 5, held on 18 June 2026. For further details, please visit the dedicated section of the National Convention on European Integration Working Group on Public Procurement (Chapter 5) website to find the presentation: <https://eurokonventa.al/en/wg-public-procurement-chapter-5-2/>

Policy Recommendation Point (3): “Drafting a New National Strategy for Public Procurement after the completion of duration of the Strategy for the period 2020-2023 is highly recommended.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: This recommendation to adopt a new National Strategy for Public Procurement after the completion of duration of the Strategy for the period 2020-2023 is fully addressed with the new National Strategy for Public Procurement adopted with the Council of Ministers Decision no.304, dated 22.5.2024.

Policy Recommendation Point (4): “This Draft Strategy should have clear and achievable objectives for the planned period, with particular attention to budgetary considerations and human resources.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is fully addressed. The strategy already specifies a budget table, where 93.23% of the projected costs are allocated to achieving Policy Objective 2 – Environmentally, Socially, and Innovatively Sustainable Procurement [5]. At the same time, nearly half of the activity plan: 58% (14 out of 24 activities) is expected to be carried out using the internal human and administrative capacities of the institutional structures involved in implementation, while 10 activities require the mobilisation of additional financial and human resources [6].

Policy Recommendation Point (5): “Coordination among institutions involved in drafting this strategy is crucial, with the Public Procurement Agency being the main responsible institution for Chapter 5. Collaboration with other institutions, such as the Public Procurement Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Ministry of Defense, Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO), and the Central Purchasing Agency, is vital.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is fully addressed. In both its drafting and implementation, APP has involved a range of institutions, including the Public Procurement Commission, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, the Ministry of Defense, the Concessions Treatment Agency (ATRAKO), and the Central Purchasing Agency, among others. Furthermore, a dedicated committee for its coordination and management is established [7].

[5] Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania no. 89, DCM no. 304 “On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027”, dated 22.5.2024, pg. 10154. <https://www.qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2024/89/1961ec46-defd-44fb-878f-669ff7901820;q=Strategjia%20per%20Prokurimin%20Publik>

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid, pg. 10139.

Policy Recommendation Point (6): “Involvement of non-state actors, such as civil society experts, business sector representatives, trade chambers, academic staff in the High Education Institutions and interest groups, is key for consulting and discussing this draft strategic document along its compilation and final approval. Inclusion can occur through physical public meetings or online participation via the Electronic Register for Public Consultation and correspondence via email.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The Draft National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 was discussed with these stakeholders during a roundtable session held on January 16th, 2024, as part of the Working Group for Chapter 5 of the National Convention for European Integration, established within the framework of this project. To ensure transparency and gather diverse perspectives, the Draft National Strategy underwent a public consultation process. As the present recommendation highlights, the Draft National Strategy was made accessible on the main website of the Public Procurement Agency and the electronic register for notifications and public consultations as well.

Policy Recommendation Point (7): “The roundtable for Chapter 5 should be active and convened at least once a month, as stipulated in the relevant order for the establishment and functioning of the Partnership Platform for European Integration.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: This recommendation directed to the Agency of Public Procurement is partially addressed, and being duly considered, underscoring the importance of consistent engagement and regular activity of the roundtable for Chapter 5. Following the initial roundtable on December 7th, a subsequent session was convened on January 16, 2024, in accordance with this recommendation. Other roundtables have taken place such as Revision of the Law "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)", and best European practices on 29 February 2024; Roundtable on New National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027 on 19 September 2024, on Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework on 10 June 2025, Status of Chapter 5 in the negotiation process on 27 February 2026 and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the public procurement system among others on 18 June 2026. All these roundtables were organised in collaboration with the National Convention for European Integration within this project. However, the PPIE regulation indicates that roundtables should be held frequently, at least once a month. This frequency has been maintained in general terms given the scope of the chapter and its limited level of expertise in the country.

Policy Recommendation Point (8): “The selected discussion topics should be in accordance with recent developments in the field of Public Procurement and be based on the requirements and criteria identified during the screening process for this chapter.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is fully addressed in all roundtables held to date by the Agency for Public Procurement. For example, this includes discussions on the new National Strategy as it was being consulted with different actors, and to meet the European integration process requirements, the roundtables on fulfilling provisional closing benchmarks were held.

Policy Recommendation Point (9): “Institutional transparency for sharing all necessary documents, materials, and information with roundtable members is very significant to keep them informed in a timely manner about ongoing developments and topics for discussion”.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is fully addressed as it encompasses providing presentations and disseminating key documents such as the Draft National Strategy on Public Procurement 2024-2030 and the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026 (with a key focus to Chapter 5 priorities) to roundtable members and other participants. Furthermore, following the organisation of the roundtables, relevant presentations, including information on progress achieved towards meeting the closing benchmarks, were circulated among the roundtable members.

Policy Recommendation Point (10): “Recommendations and summaries of discussions during the roundtable meetings should be distributed to roundtable members, as well as a follow-up on these recommendations, whether accepted or rejected along with explicit justifications. This approach will motivate roundtable members to actively participate and contribute meaningfully to these meetings.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It has been partially addressed through the holding of roundtables and subsequent discussions during them. However, the recommendations from these roundtables should also be published on the official website of the Agency for Public Procurement for greater transparency and justifications for their potential implementation.

Policy Recommendation Point (11): “It is recommended that the roundtable membership be updated on a regular basis, if only to expand its membership base but primarily to diversify the involved interest groups, making it as inclusive as possible.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed as the Agency for Public Procurement has published a new call for membership on 9th June 2025 [8] on their official website but the membership remains unchanged [9], implying that new calls shall be more frequent.

Policy Recommendation Point (12): “Active participation during meetings and discussions is recommended. Their physical presence during activities is important, as well as their concrete contribution to discussions and recommendation-giving, whether in writing or verbally.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially met. While members have contributed verbally to discussions and recommendations have incorporated their input, not all members have consistently attended the roundtables. The sessions have also been enriched by the participation of other actors who are not officially members.

[8] <https://www.app.gov.al/integrimi-evropan/kapitulli-5/ppie/publikime-p%C3%ABr-hapjen-e-thirrjes-p%C3%ABr-aplikime-n%C3%AB-tryez%C3%ABn-e-ppie/>

[9] <https://www.app.gov.al/integrimi-evropan/kapitulli-5/ppie/an%C3%ABtar%C3%ABsia-e-tryezave-ppie/>

Founding Roundtable of the Partnership Platform for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement held on January 16th, 2024

The table below was compiled by the staff of the Agency for Public Procurement on 14 October 2024. It serves as a monitoring tool for tracking the implementation of the recommendations arising from the discussions held during the Roundtable of Chapter 5 – Public Procurement - Session II, on the topic "Founding Roundtable of the Partnership Platform for Chapter 5 - Public Procurement", held on January 16, 2024. During this roundtable, two strategic documents were presented, namely the Draft National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027, as well as the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026 focusing on objectives and strategies for Chapter 5.

Nr.	Recommendat-ions from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
1	the compilation of new legal packages in the field of public procurement not only in accordance with European standards, but also taking into consideration the Albanian context, such as the case of subcontracting up to 50% in order to minimise liability	YES	The given recommendation has been taken into account in NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Policy Goal 1. Efficient and effective procurement process <u>Objective 1.1. Further improvement of the legal framework</u> Activity 1.1.2. Review of by-laws in accordance with the public procurement law • Analysis of legislation; • Compatibility table; • Drafting and approval of amendments to la no. 162/2020, "On public procurement" in the Assembly;
2	active participation of non state actors in awareness raising activities organised not only by APP, but also by other responsible institutions, mainly within the framework of Integrity Plans	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of the Policy 1. Efficient and effective procurement process: <u>Objective 1.4 Strengthening implementation capacities</u> Activity 1.4.2. Raising awareness: • Publication of instructions, recommendations, announcements, and guides on the APP website • Drafting and publication on the APP website of the commentary to the law no. 162/2020:

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
		YES	Policy Goal 2. Sustainable and innovative procurement <u>Objective 2.2. Improving the electronic procurement system</u> Activity 2.2.1. Improvements to the legal basis • Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. • Publication on the APP website of various manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes: as well as in Policy Goal 3. Integrity and legality of public procurements <u>Objective 3.1. Ensuring integrity in the public procurement process</u> Activity 3.1.1. Organisation of awareness events • Organisation of 2 meetings with the aim of raising capacities and awareness for integrity in the field of public procurement: • Organisation of 2 awareness events on deals in offers. • Training of 50 employees on integrity.
3	involvement of civil society actors on issuing new acts intended to improve the process transparency and to inform them starting from the announcement up to the contraction of public procurement processes in order to play the role of a "watchdog" group	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of the Policy 1. Efficient and effective procurement process <u>Objective 1.4. Strengthening of implementation capacities</u> Activity 1.4.2. Raising Awareness • Publication of instructions, recommendations, announcements, and guides on the APP website • Drafting and publication on the APP website of the commentary to the law no. 162/2020

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
		YES	as well as in Policy Goal 3. Integrity and legality of public procurements <u>Objective 3.2. Legal security of complaints review</u> Activity 3.2.1. Increasing capacities for reviewing complaints • Organisation of 5 trainings • Approval of the special training manual on an annual level, with higher education institutions and international partners • Organisation of 3 trainings with economic operators and contracting authorities related to the problems found during the examination of complaints, with the aim of solving them
4	continuation of the implementation of Integrity Plans by other accountable institutions as well, except ministries, ensuring a wide scope of integrity security, since the risk of corruption is felt significantly in public procurement processes	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement <u>Specific objective 3.1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process.</u> Activity 3.1.3. Inter-institutional cooperation for the fight against corruption. • Cooperation agreement between the ministry responsible for anti-corruption and the Public Procurement Agency. • Drafting in cooperation with the ministry responsible for anti-corruption the integrity model plan for all authorities.
5	organising activities in cooperation with the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement <u>Specific objective 3.1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process</u>

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
	(HIDAACI) and the drafting of joint recommendations between HIDAACI and PPA, in the fields of interest on public procurement sensitive issues	YES	Activities 3.1.2. Preparation of materials for raising awareness Joint APP - HIDAACI document on the integrity of employees in public procurement.
6	organisation of future informative sessions focusing in avoidance of underhanded offers in cooperation with the Albanian Competition Authority (ACA)	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in the NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Purpose of Policy 3. Integrity and legality of public procurement <u>Specific objective 1. Ensuring Integrity in the Public Procurement process</u> Activity 3.1.1. Organization of awareness events: - Organisation of 2 meetings with the aim of raising capacities and awareness for integrity in the field of public procurement:-Organisation of 2 awareness events on bids deals. - Training of 50 employees on integrity.
7	increased contracting authority facilitation of public procurement procedures using the electronic procurement system, which interconnects all the PP's systems, and two concurrent plans are highlighted: substantive changes implying adjustments as a result of the system interaction with the economic operators to increase the exposure to higher control measures, as well as technical system changes with the addition of functionalities such as red flags, which signal corruptive practices, in order to	YES	The given recommendation was taken into account in NPPS 2024-2030 and specifically in: Policy Goal 2. Sustainable and innovative procurement <u>Specific objective 2.2. Improvement of the procurement system</u> Activity 2.2.1. Improvements to the legal basis: - Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. - Publication on the APP website of various manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes Activity 2.2.2. Improvement of the electronic procurement system: - Drafting and approval of legal and bylaw acts. - Publication on the APP website of various

Nr.	Recommendations from the Roundtable of Chapter 5, Session II	Addressing status in the NPPS 2024-2030	Comments/Justifications
	to bring improvement of the overall procurement system in Albania	YES	• manuals related to the use of advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes • The interaction of the electronic procurement system with other public systems; • Connection with e-procurement system and use of the contract management system; • RED FLAGS / Adding red flag functionality to the Electronic Procurement System to avoid corrupt practices; • Adding functionality to the system to highlight the use of environmental and social criteria. • Using advanced artificial intelligence technology and robotic processes • Establishment of the "e-Catalogue" system (Electronic Catalogue)

Revision of the Law "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)", and best European practices, 29 February 2024

The main objective of holding this Roundtable was to facilitate the exchange of views and suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the vision and objectives of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024-2027, approved by Decision No. 304, dated May 22, 2024, "On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027." In this light, the following recommendations were addressed upon holding this roundtable:

Policy Recommendation Point (3): "Any uncertainties and inconsistencies in the current legal framework should be addressed by the potential revised law by giving precise definitions and guidelines. To guarantee the efficient execution and enforcement of the law due to be amended, it is imperative to provide precise definitions for crucial terms like contracting authorities, concessions and PPPs, operational risks, exemptions, and contract duration. Improved comprehension and adherence among interested parties, such as governmental bodies."

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: Concerning the need for clear and precise definitions of essential terms, including operational risks and contract, has been fulfilled through the adoption of the new Law No. 88/2025 "On Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)."

Policy Recommendation Point (5): "The allocation and management of risks in Concessions and PPP projects should be clearly outlined in the foreseen amendments. This includes determining and reducing any risks related to the financing, operation, and maintenance of the project as well as its delivery. In order to ensure that risks are assigned to the party best suited to manage them, the legal framework should provide procedures for open and honest risk sharing between partners in the public and private sectors. Furthermore, the law needs to specify how risks are to be assessed, tracked, and minimized over the course of the project."

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. It is noted that the new Law No. 88/2025 substantially responds to this recommendation by introducing mandatory project risk assessment as part of the feasibility and appraisal process, strengthening fiscal risk oversight, establishing dedicated contract monitoring mechanisms, and aligning the legal framework with Directive 2014/23/EU, which requires risks to be allocated to the party best able to manage them. While the law significantly improves the framework for risk allocation, assessment and monitoring throughout the project lifecycle, the detailed methodologies for risk mitigation and risk-sharing procedures are expected to be further developed through implementing legislation and standard contractual guidance.

Policy Recommendation Point (6): "Enhance the concessions and PPP framework's accountability and transparency mechanisms to foster public confidence in the procurement process. The revised legislation needs to mandate the full disclosure of project details, such as financial arrangements, contract terms, and performance indicators. To improve transparency and allow for meaningful

public scrutiny, it is important to make project documentation and decision-making processes accessible to the public. To hold stakeholders responsible for their choices and actions throughout the project lifecycle, strong accountability procedures should also be put in place.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: The revised Concessions and PPP framework substantially strengthens transparency and accountability mechanisms by introducing clearer institutional responsibilities, enhanced oversight, improved project preparation procedures and stronger monitoring throughout the project lifecycle. The framework also improves public access to information related to PPP projects. However, the recommendation is only partially fulfilled regarding the systematic disclosure of all project documentation, including detailed financial arrangements, contract terms and performance indicators. Further implementing measures and transparency practices would be needed to ensure comprehensive public scrutiny and accountability.

Policy Recommendation Point (7): “Concessions and PPP projects must be implemented and overseen effectively, which requires a strong institutional foundation. Key institutions involved in the handling and oversight of concessions and PPPs should have their roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the law which is about to be amended. This includes the organizations in charge of project monitoring, regulatory compliance, dispute resolution, and oversight of procurement. Improved accountability, openness, and efficiency in concession and PPP project management will result from strengthening the institutional framework.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. The revised Concessions and PPP framework strengthens the institutional foundation for effective project implementation and oversight by defining the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders involved in project preparation, approval, procurement, monitoring and supervision. It enhances coordination, accountability and fiscal oversight mechanisms and provides a clearer governance structure aligned with EU principles. Some elements, including detailed operational procedures for institutional coordination, dispute resolution and regulatory oversight, will require further development through implementing measures and effective institutional capacity building.

Policy Recommendation Point (8): “The revised law should incorporate principles of sustainability and environmental responsibility into concessions and PPP projects. This includes promoting eco-friendly practices, encouraging investments in renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency, and integrating environmental considerations into project planning and implementation. The revised law should incentivize private sector participation in sustainable infrastructure projects and prioritize investments that contribute to environmental conservation and climate resilience.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. The revised Concessions and PPP framework provides a stronger basis for considering environmental aspects in project preparation and implementation and operates alongside Albania’s environmental protection and permitting requirements. However, sustainability and climate-resilience principles are not yet fully integrated as mandatory elements of the PPP framework.

Additional measures, including sustainability criteria in project selection, climate-risk assessment, green procurement requirements and incentives for renewable energy and environmentally sustainable infrastructure, would be needed to fully address the recommendation.

Policy Recommendation Point (9): “Throughout the revision process, meaningful stakeholder engagement is necessary to make sure that the revised law represents the various interests and viewpoints of different stakeholders. This entails proactive interaction with academic institutions, businesses, civil society organizations, and other pertinent actors. Opportunities for stakeholder participation in the revision process should be made available through workshops, public hearings, and consultations. Through proactive stakeholder engagement, policymakers can foster greater ownership and acceptance of the revised law and build consensus around them”.

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed as the draft law was published through the online consultation register, and the comments received were documented, including whether they were accepted or not. However, broader and more inclusive engagement efforts were needed, including additional public outreach activities to raise awareness of the proposed amendments, facilitate discussion among stakeholders, and ensure that diverse views were adequately considered throughout the revision process.

New National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024 2030 and its Action Plan 2024-2027 held on September 19th, 2024

The main objective of holding this Roundtable was to facilitate the exchange of views and suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the vision and objectives of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024-2027, approved by Decision No. 304, dated May 22, 2024, "On the approval of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024–2030 and its Action Plan for implementation 2024–2027." In this light, the following recommendations were addressed upon holding this roundtable:

Policy Recommendation Point (2): “Within the framework of continuous monitoring, it is recommended to create a mechanism for the regular evaluation of the National Strategy and its Action Plan, to ensure that the objectives and goals are aligned with new developments and market needs. Furthermore, it is important that the monitoring indicators of the Strategy are accurate and realistic, to ensure that they serve as a valid guide for understanding the actual situation of implementation and the impact brought by the application of reforms. To enhance transparency and civil society engagement, it is recommended that monitoring reports should be published on the official website and accompanied by informative campaigns to inform stakeholder groups.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. With the approval of the new Strategy through Council of Ministers Decision no. 304, dated 22.05.2025, and the publication of the annual Monitoring Reports (Jan–Dec 2024 [10] and Jan-Dec 2025 [11]) on its official website the APP demonstrates that the evaluation mechanism is functioning. The monitoring indicators are systematically organised by objective, activity, and key performance indicator (KPI). For 2024, the evaluation concluded that 5 out of 6 KPIs were achieved, while one indicator (KPI 5 – increased use of environmental and social criteria) lacked sufficient data. Meanwhile, for 2025 the evaluation assessed that once again 5 out of 6 KPIs were achieved with KPI 3 - Better quality for goods, works and services (price/quality criteria) being the sole one not achieved. The report states that the indicator was not achieved in 2025 because the percentage decreased compared with 2024, from 41.00 % to 24.77 %. The reports also provide a breakdown for each policy objective, specifying whether the planned activities were fully achieved, partially met, or not met. However, while the reports are available to the public published in the official website of APP, it is less clear to what extent informative campaigns have been carried out to actively disseminate the findings and engage diverse stakeholder groups, despite numerous awareness-raising activities that have already been carried out under Specific Objective 3.1: Ensuring integrity in the public procurement process.

Policy Recommendation Point (5): “To improve and optimise the public procurement system in Albania, inter-institutional cooperation must be strengthened by engaging important institutions such as:

- The Competition Authority, which is essential for ensuring a regulated market and fair competition. This cooperation will help identify best practices and create an environment that encourages competition in public procurement.
- Close cooperation is also necessary with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, especially for social procurement and the quality standards that must be adhered to in this area, thus contributing to the improvement of public services.
- Additionally, it is essential to develop ongoing cooperation with the National Agency for Information Society (AKSHI) to improve the electronic procurement system. This will ensure that Albania benefits from the advantages of modern technology in public procurement.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is fully addressed.

a) With regard to cooperation with the Competition Authority, there is documented evidence of formal collaboration, including a longstanding memorandum of understanding between the two institutions.

[10] For further information on the 2024 monitoring report, please see at <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[11] 2025 monitoring report of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 available at this page <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=f3d7c59f-ecc4-4493-8e52-5aa7c7356905>

The Annual Report 2024 [12] notes that the APP referred two cases to the Competition Authority for investigation, as potential indications of collusive bidding, meanwhile the Annual Report 2025 [13] states that APP has continued to communicate with this institution during this year as well, by referring for investigation a case submitted to the PPA as an indication of possible bid-rigging agreements. In addition, the 2024 and 2025 Monitoring Reports of the National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030 highlights that the Competition Authority has organised a series of workshops focused on promoting competition, further reinforcing cooperation in this area. [14]

b) Since APP approved a verification plan in May 2025 related to canceled procedures, highlighting the respective contracting authorities, details of the canceled procedures (object, estimated budget, type of procedure, references in the electronic procurement system, number of bidders, etc.), and the reasons for cancellation, it has communicated and collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, based on statistical data showing that the health sector recorded the highest number of canceled procurement procedures during 2024. [15]

c) Regarding AKSHI (National Agency for Information Society), cooperation on the e-procurement system continues with APP. Referring to the cooperation agreement (SLA) between AKSHI and APP, as well as Contract No. 64 dated 30.07.2023 signed between AKSHI and the maintenance company for the “Maintenance of the Electronic Procurement System,” APP has taken steps to address the issues identified in the maintenance company’s recommendations, within the scope of its competencies. [16] Additionally, concerning the new public procurement system, work has continued on drafting the terms of reference by AKSHI, with APP collaborating by providing input on the system’s needs and the specific elements it should include. [17]

[12] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 215., <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

[13] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2025 <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=47d8ba7e-efb1-4ae2-b67c-e7de16a731b8>

[14] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2024, Tirana, 2025, pg. 36. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[15] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2025, Tirana, 2025, pg. 54. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=f3d7c59f-ecc4-4493-8e52-5aa7c7356905>

[16] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 175., <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

[17] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2025, Tirana, 2025, pg. 9. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=f3d7c59f-ecc4-4493-8e52-5aa7c7356905>

Policy Recommendation Point (6): “Increasing the professionalism of the administration and the capacities of the institutions responsible or operating in this field should be a top priority. This can be achieved through collaboration with the Academy of Political Studies and Administration (ASPA) and the Directorate of Public Administration (DAP) to implement training and curricula tailored to the standards and developments of the European Union. Investing in professional development will contribute to creating a more qualified and efficient administration. Establishing an online training platform for professionals involved in procurement will provide opportunities for continuous professional development. This platform could include courses, seminars, and educational materials that cover best practices and innovations in the field of public procurement. The platform will also provide tools and resources to assist in the implementation of green criteria.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. The professionalism of the administration has improved through cooperation with the Academy of Political Studies and Administration (ASPA) and the Directorate of Public Administration (DAP). A Joint Instruction for an Amendment, dated 30/05/2025, to the Joint Instruction between APP, ASPA, and DAP “On the determination of procedures and criteria for organising training, testing, and issuing certificates in the field of public procurement,” dated 23/12/2024, has been approved [18]. The process of Professionalisation of Public Procurement has continued, with five testing sessions conducted between January and December 2025, resulting in 714 participants tested and 440 certified [19]. However, a dedicated online procurement training platform maintained by APP, offering a full curriculum for procurement professionals, is still not in place. While capacity-building activities exist such as workshops, training modules, and testing sessions, the specific recommendation for an APP-managed online platform has not yet been fully implemented publicly. Some of the training modules conducted over the past 10 years are listed on their official website [20].

Roundtable for Chapter 5 – Public Procurement: Meeting the provisional closing benchmarks within the accession negotiations framework held on June 10th, 2025

The purpose of this roundtable was to discuss the provisional closing benchmarks for this chapter and the recommendations for a monitoring report on the implementation of Public Administration Reform (PAR) principles in public procurement practices within the tourism sector. Related to the second panel focused on the role of civil society as a continuous monitoring actor in the public procurement process, the following recommendations were addressed:

[18] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2025. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=f3d7c59f-ecc4-4493-8e52-5aa7c7356905>

[19] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2025, pg. 18.

<https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=47d8ba7e-efb1-4ae2-b67c-e7de16a731b8>

[20] <https://www.app.gov.al/t%C3%AB-tjera/trajtime/trajtime/> (accessed on 03.09.2026)

Policy Recommendation Point (4): “Civil society should have a more prominent role and greater recognition for the contribution it provides, particularly in the process of drafting strategic and monitoring documents. For example, in the National Public Procurement Strategy 2024–2030 and the Action Plan 2024–2027, adopted by the Council of Ministers in May 2024, the contribution of civil society is mentioned only once, specifically on page 38. This highlights the need for its more structured and meaningful involvement at all stages of the process—from consultation and discussion to drafting and monitoring the implementation of policies. Civil society should be treated as an equal and integral partner in developing a fair, transparent, and inclusive public procurement system.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. Among a list of collaborators in the Annual Report 2024 and 2025, one civil society organization (namely EMA) is listed as such in holding roundtables under the Partnership Platform for European Integration [21]. However, the role of civil society actors as key stakeholders should be more prominently recognised and highlighted.

Policy Recommendation Point (5): “Strengthening cooperation between various central institutions and civil society is essential, which implies not only broader access to relevant documentation but also inclusion in direct discussions with technical staff and decision-makers. Such an approach would enable civil society to gain a deeper understanding of the current situation regarding various challenges encountered, as well as to produce valuable and reliable reports that reflect the implementation of reform standards, as is the case with the Public Administration Reform. In addition, civil society also plays an important role in raising public awareness, where direct cooperation with it can increase knowledge in this highly specific field and contribute to addressing and shaping public perceptions— many of which regard this sector as one of the most exposed to misuse, being the primary sector linked to the management of public funds.”

Explanation on addressing of recommendations: It is partially addressed. The 2024 annual report and the monitoring reports of the national strategy mention civil society participation in an awareness-raising activity titled “Integrity and Risk Elements Throughout Public Procurement Procedures – Open Data in Corruption Prevention.” [22] APP also took part in the plenary session of the National Convention on European Integration on December 19, 2024, which included a dedicated panel on Public Procurement organised by the European Movement in Albania.[23]

[21] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2025, pg. 186.,
<https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

[22] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2024, Tirana, 2025, pg. 35. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=605f49e6-2834-4e4f-8695-882a2b0cbbde>

[23] Agency for Public Procurement. Annual Report 2024 “Achievements – Priorities 2025”, pg. 219.,
<https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=4a9ddc1c-a89f-4862-afc4-d4884a3a2102>

The annual report 2025 states that APP has completed its self-assessment process for Albania, highlighting the progress made under the framework of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative for the period 2023–June 2025, and that cooperation with civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders has supported the adoption of Open Contracting principles, the development and promotion of risk assessment instruments, and the strengthening of public oversight mechanisms. [24] However, civil society actors should be given a more prominent role and clearer recognition for their contribution.

[24] Agency for Public Procurement. National Strategy for Public Procurement 2024-2030, Monitoring Report January – December 2025, pg.29. <https://www.app.gov.al/GetData/DownloadDoc?documentId=f3d7c59f-ecc4-4493-8e52-5aa7c7356905>

CONCLUSIONS

The Republic of Albania has demonstrated commendable progress in aligning its legal and institutional frameworks with the EU acquis, particularly in the domain of public procurement, judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security covered by Chapter 5, 23 and 24 respectively. While Albania's public procurement system reflects significant advancements toward EU integration, continuous efforts are required to address existing gaps. Strategic reforms, coupled with a commitment to transparency and accountability, will not only align Albania's procurement practices with EU standards but also enhance the credibility and effectiveness of its governance systems. These steps are pivotal for Albania's broader accession objectives and for fostering trust among domestic and international stakeholders alike. However, concerns about corruption and favouritism in awarding public contracts persist, posing a significant obstacle to full compliance with EU standards. The EU expects Albania to adopt stronger safeguards against conflicts of interest and ensure that public procurement processes are free from political interference. These reforms are not only vital for Albania's accession prospects but also critical for promoting economic development and public trust in government institutions.

In this line, Chapter 23 of the EU acquis is particularly challenging for Albania, as it encompasses critical areas such as judicial independence, the fight against corruption, and the protection of fundamental rights. For instance, judicial appointments and disciplinary actions still face allegations of political influence, undermining public trust in the system. The independence of key anti-corruption bodies, like the Special Prosecution Office, is another area requiring vigilance. Moreover, Albania's protection of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and minority rights, continues to be a focal point for the EU. These issues not only affect Albania's domestic landscape but also shape its relationship with the EU during negotiations. Meanwhile, Chapter 24 addresses issues related to law enforcement, border security, migration, and asylum policies. Albania has made notable progress in strengthening its police force, combating organized crime, and enhancing border management. However, organized crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking remain persistent challenges that Albania must tackle more effectively. Albania's asylum policies have also come under scrutiny, particularly regarding its capacity to process asylum claims in line with EU standards. While the country has improved its legal framework for handling refugees and migrants, it still faces capacity constraints in managing migration flows, a challenge exacerbated by its geographic proximity to key migration routes. The EU expects Albania to further align its policies with the Common European Asylum System, ensuring humane and efficient treatment of asylum seekers.

Overall, this book, through its detailed and thoughtfully structured recommendations on Chapters 5, 23, and 24, provides an actionable strategic framework for undertaking the essential reforms in areas brought forth by these chapters. It enables readers, from a wide spectrum of policymakers, legal professionals, civil society, to academia, to engage effectively in the process of Albania's integration into the EU and, as such, will strengthen Albania's governance structures on its path toward EU membership.