



Key findings of the 2018 Report on Albania

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Political criteria

Strong polarisation persisted in the political establishment. Parliamentary activities were affected by a prolonged boycott by the opposition in early 2017, which also delayed the appointment of the judicial vetting institutions. In May, an agreement between the main ruling party and the opposition allowed resuming parliamentary activities, triggering some changes to the electoral legislative framework. This was conducive to the smooth organisation of the general elections in June, although a number of OSCE/ODHIR recommendations still remained outstanding. Some progress was made towards improving the functioning of the National Council for Civil Society. Additional efforts are needed to better embed civil society organisations as part of an inclusive policy dialogue.

Albania is moderately prepared in the reform of its **public administration**. Efforts continued, resulting in some progress in the efficiency and transparency of public services delivery, training of civil servants, more transparent recruitment procedures, and the overall strengthening of merit-based civil service procedures. Consolidation of these achievements should advance further, to ensure a more efficient, depoliticised, and professional public administration.

Albania's **judicial system** has some level of preparation. The implementation of comprehensive and thorough justice reform has continued, resulting in good progress overall. The reevaluation of all judges and prosecutors (vetting process) has started. Under the aegis of the European Commission, an International Monitoring Operation has been deployed to oversee the process throughout its implementation. The auxiliary institutions supporting the process have completed their first reports on the proficiency assessments, background checks and asset declarations. The process of re-evaluating all judges and prosecutors (*vetting*) has started and is delivering first tangible results.

Albania maintains some level of preparation in the **fight against corruption**. Good progress was made, notably with the adoption of amendments to the criminal procedure code. A chain of specialised anticorruption bodies, including a special prosecutor office, is being established. The number of final convictions involving junior or middle-ranking officials has increased compared to the previous reporting period. Convictions of high-level officials occurred mostly in the judiciary (judges and prosecutors); however, final convictions for high-ranking officials remain overall very low. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem.

Albania has some level of preparation in the **fight against organised crime**. Overall there was some progress in the reporting period, notably in the fight against cannabis cultivation. Albania needs to build on operational results in this area, intensifying confiscation of assets belonging to criminal gangs and pursuing the destruction of all existing cannabis stockpiles. Amendments to the anti-mafia law and the Criminal Procedure Code have created the conditions for increased efficiency of criminal investigations. Albania participated successfully in international police cooperation, intensifying its interactions particularly with EU Member States. At domestic level, effective police-prosecution cooperation remains to be improved. As regards the track record, there has been little progress in dismantling organised criminal groups. The number of final convictions in organised crime cases remained very low and has only marginally increased. More efforts are needed to tackle **money laundering**, criminal assets and unjustified wealth.

Albania has ratified most international **human rights** conventions and has developed its legal framework in line with European standards. Enforcement and monitoring of human rights protection mechanisms remain to be strengthened. As regards **freedom of expression**, Albania has some level of preparation/is moderately prepared. There has been some progress in strengthening the independence of the regulatory authority and public broadcaster but transparency of state advertising in the media remains to be enhanced. Progress remains to be made in the area of property rights with the update of the current legislation and reinforcement of institutional coordination. Institutional mechanisms to protect the rights of the child and to tackle gender-based violence remain poor. Important steps were made to improve the legal framework for the respect for and protection of minorities but relevant secondary legislation needs to be developed. Living conditions for Roma and

Egyptians need to be improved.

Albania has continued to participate actively in **regional cooperation** and maintain good neighbourly relations. Important steps have been taken to address bilateral issues with Greece.

The number of unfounded asylum applications lodged by Albanian nationals to EU Member States and Schengen associated countries has remained high. Albania showed commitment and adopted a number of measures, including strengthened bilateral cooperation with relevant EU Member States. These measures yielded positive results. Further decisive actions have to continue, including in the framework of the post-visa liberalisation monitoring mechanism, to effectively address this phenomenon.

Economic criteria

Albania has made some progress and is moderately prepared in developing a functioning market economy. The public debt-to-GDP ratio and the current account deficit have been reduced. Economic growth increased further and unemployment decreased but is still high. Non-performing loans (NPLs) in the banking sector have been reduced, but bank lending to businesses remains sluggish. Reforms crucial to improving the business environment progressed but require further efforts, including reduction of the informal economy. The comprehensive judicial reform advanced but needs to be fully implemented. The new bankruptcy law entered into force and should strengthen the insolvency regime. However, business-relevant regulations remained cumbersome and shortcomings in the rule of law continued to hamper businesses and deter investments.

Albania has made some progress and has some level of preparation in terms of capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. Specifically, progress was made on energy and transport infrastructure and digitalisation, although shortcomings remain which hinder Albania's competitiveness and trade. The quality of education needs to be raised at all levels, not least to better equip people with skills that the labour market needs. Foreign trade remains below potential and sectorally concentrated. Albania's capacity for research, development and innovation remains low.

EU legislation

Albania continued to align its legislation to EU requirements in a number of areas, enhancing its **ability to take on the obligations of membership**. The country is moderately prepared in many areas, such as in financial control, education and culture, or has some level of preparation, including in the areas of public procurement and statistics. Albania will need to continue its efforts as regards the overall preparations for adopting and implementing the EU *acquis*. It should continue work on the development of the transport and energy networks, also with a view to improving connectivity throughout the region. The administrative capacity and professional standards of bodies which would be charged with the implementation of the *acquis* need to be strengthened and the independence of regulatory bodies safeguarded. Enhancing transparency and accountability, in particular ensuring the effective, efficient and transparent functioning of the public procurement system and public finance management, remains essential. Albania has continued to fully align with all EU common foreign and security policy positions and declarations.

Key dates

June 2003: Thessaloniki Summit; the EU perspective for the Western Balkans is confirmed

June 2006: The Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU is signed

April 2009: The Stabilisation and Association Agreement enters into force. Albania presents its application for membership of the EU

November 2010: The Commission issues its Opinion on Albania's application for EU membership, including a set of 12 key priorities to be fulfilled in view of opening of accession negotiations

December 2010: Visa-free travel to Schengen area for citizens of Albania

June 2014: The European Council grants Albania the status of candidate country for EU membership

February 2018: The European Commission adopts its strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'

April 2018: The European Commission recommends that the Council decides that accession negotiations be opened with Albania in light of the progress achieved, maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum.

More info:

Report on Albania: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417->

[albania-report.pdf](#)

More information at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/package/index_en.htm

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