

2024 Human Rights and Democracy in the World (country reports)

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Enlargement countries

Republic of Albania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Albania's legal framework sets out a generally good basis for respect, protection and fulfilment of fundamental rights. Progress during the reporting period included the adoption of a new strategy for the protection of crime victims, the adoption of the bylaws relevant to the implementation of the framework law on the rights of persons belonging to minorities as well as the preliminary results of the national population and housing census published in June. Implementation efforts need to intensify overall, particularly in the areas of freedom of expression, violence against women and property rights. The electoral framework remained conducive for organising democratic elections. Parliament adopted amendments to the Electoral Code, partially in response to Constitutional Court rulings, thus enabling out-of-country voting by Albanian diaspora, introducing partially open candidates lists (mixed candidate lists) and changes to the party quotient. However, there has been limited progress in addressing outstanding recommendations from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Venice Commission, as the mandate of Parliament's ad-hoc committee on electoral reform expired without any results. Parliament exercised its powers in a mostly satisfactory way. However, its oversight role over the executive remained to be strengthened. Parliamentary activities were affected by strong political polarisation. Confrontation between the ruling majority and a part of the opposition continued to be harsh until March 2024, with the latter disrupting a plenary session with barricades due to alleged restrictions on their rights. Despite the return to normal functioning of the Parliament in March 2024, political polarisation remained high. This continued to negatively impact Parliament's key legislative and oversight roles and extended delays in appointing individuals to key positions, including the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. Civil society organisations (CSOs) operated in a challenging environment, including in relation to registration requirements and limited public funding for CSOs. The structures for consulting civil society were not reinforced to be fully operational. The conditions necessary for effective VAT exemption need to be put in place without further delay.

Albania continued implementing the justice reform and the vetting process, which led to significant improvements in the functioning of the judiciary. The vetting process in first instance has been completed, which is a major milestone. Concerns remained about attempted political interference and pressure on the judicial system and shortcomings in the merit-based appointments of non-magistrate members of the High Judicial Council and the

Togolese Republic

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Togo went through a significant constitutional change which is contested by a large part of the opposition. In April 2024, the National Assembly approved a reform of the Constitution, moving from a presidential to a parliamentary system, transferring all key executive powers to a (new) President of the Council of Ministers. The President of the Republic would have a largely ceremonial role. The timing of the proposal (voted after the end of the mandate of the Assembly) and a perceived lack of transparency and public debate on the main features of the new system triggered discontent by some members of civil society and the opposition. Under the new regime, the President of the Council will be the head of the party with a majority in the National Assembly, and will not be subject to term limits. The Opposition contests these constitutional changes and has called for demonstrations that the Government did mostly not authorize; some political opponents have been arrested as a result but were subsequently released. Meanwhile, across the country, conditions in prisons have not improved, despite efforts of the Minister of Justice in seeking improvement.

Legislative elections took place without any significant incident in April 2024, together with regional elections, and resulted in an overwhelming victory for the party currently in power. However, some important aspects of the electoral process were questioned: the restrictions in the preparation of the electoral list, the setup of constituencies criticised by some as favouring the government party, the refusal of accreditation of impartial observers and the access difficulties for local and international media.

In the last RSF 'state of the media' report, Togo has moved from 70th place in 2023 to 113th in 2024. Independent media are occasionally shut down, and there are allegations that the spyware Pegasus has been used against journalists and human rights activists. Activities of CSOs have become more tightly regulated, notably with the entry into force in April 2023 of a decree requiring NGOs to align their activities to the Government development priorities and to notify local officials of their activities. An additional decree passed in 2024 establishes complex procedures for the work of international NGOs. The terrorist threat in the Northern part of the country, with the need for increase of military presence in border areas, did lead to further limitations and restrictions.

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU action in support of human rights and democracy in Togo focuses on Improving social cohesion and local democracy in the North of the country; promoting freedom of the press and expression, including through the promotion of access to quality information; supporting strengthening of the rule of law and governance; promoting freedom of association of workers, strengthening labour's rights and promoting corporate social responsibility; supporting HRDs; and promoting human rights and gender mainstreaming.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 9 October 2023, the EU and Member States held the 24th Partnership Dialogue meeting with the Togolese authorities. In general, the meeting confirmed the good relations between the EU and Togo and saw some more openness (compared to the previous year) from the Togolese counterpart to discuss human rights-related matters, though without dramatic progress in this field. Togolese authorities stated their availability to consider decriminalising opinions expressed by journalists in social networks and accessing the optional CEDAW Protocol.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2024, EU-financed projects in Togo worked to engage young people and women in citizens' participation and foster social cohesion in the northern Savanes region; prevent violent extremism, promote social cohesion and the resilience of communities in that region; increase the participation and representation of women in Togo's political, social and economic life; and strengthen freedom of expression and freedom of association.

Projects' implementing partners included Plan International Togo, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the PANOS Institute and the *Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement*. Funding for these projects came from the EU's European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and its Foreign Policy Instrument. Over the period 2021 to 2027, EU funding for democracy, human rights and civil society organisations in Togo amounts to EUR 10 million. In 2024 alone, funding for human rights and civil society came to almost EUR 3 million.

In 2024, the EU invited Togolese and European NGOs to apply for funding to help promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Togo, especially respect for the rights of women and girls.

5. Multilateral context: In promoting human rights and democracy, the EU Delegation and Member States Embassies work together to build a conducive political dialogue with both Togolese authorities and other stakeholders in the framework of the Samoa agreement between the EU and ACP countries. The coordination of international engagement in Togo is mainly ensured by the so-called 'Group of the Five' (G5), which includes the ambassadors of Germany, France, and United States, the UN system coordination mechanism, and the EUDEL itself. In 2024, a number of discussions were held under the aegis of the UNHCR and other UN agencies to address the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the North. Last UPR on Togo was in 2022, the next one is scheduled for 2026.

Republic of Uganda

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: In 2024, Uganda's human rights situation featured legislative restrictions, political repression, and limited institutional reforms. State institutions displayed initial signs of independence in human rights monitoring, while control mechanisms combined direct repression with administrative measures to maintain authority over political and civic spaces.

2. EU action - key focus areas: Related to the aspect of unlawful detentions, the EU Delegation was able to provide legal assistance to LGBTI persons and organisations, as well as strategic litigation through funding from the human rights and democracy thematic programme. Furthermore, the EU and Member States pursued strong engagement on civic and political space as the situation continues to deteriorate. In the light of the AU's Theme of The Year 'Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century', 2024 was a symbolic year for the EU as education is one of the largest EU investments to the country. The EU continued not only to contribute to the right to education in Uganda but also promoted respect for land and environmental rights by monitoring closely the impact of oil and gas projects.

Through the Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme, phase II (CUSP II) (co-funded by EU and Germany), 18 civil society organisations from the five regions of Uganda were trained on