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| <b>Title</b>            | Nations in Transit 2012 - Albania                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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## Nations in Transit 2012 - Albania

**DRAFT**

**Capital:** Tirana

**Population:** 3.2 million

**GNI/capita, PPP:** US\$8,520

Source: The data above were drawn from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators 2010*.

| Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                                | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| Electoral Process                              | 3.75 | 3.75 | 3.75 | 3.50 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 3.75 | 3.75 | 4.00 | 4.25 |
| Civil Society                                  | 3.75 | 3.50 | 3.25 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.00 |
| Independent Media                              | 4.00 | 3.75 | 4.00 | 3.75 | 3.75 | 3.75 | 3.75 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 |
| Governance *                                   | 4.25 | 4.25 | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  | n/a  |
| National Democratic Governance                 | n/a  | n/a  | 4.25 | 4.00 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4.50 | 4.75 | 4.75 |
| Local Democratic Governance                    | n/a  | n/a  | 3.25 | 2.75 | 2.75 | 2.75 | 2.75 | 3.00 | 3.25 | 3.25 |
| Judicial Framework and Independence            | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4.50 | 4.25 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 4.75 |
| Corruption                                     | 5.00 | 5.25 | 5.25 | 5.25 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| Democracy Score                                | 4.17 | 4.13 | 4.04 | 3.79 | 3.82 | 3.82 | 3.82 | 3.93 | 4.04 | 4.14 |

## 2012 Scores

|                                      |                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Democracy Score:                     | <b>4.14</b>                                     |
| Regime Classification:               | <b>Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime</b> |
| National Democratic Governance:      | <b>4.75</b>                                     |
| Electoral Process:                   | <b>4.25</b>                                     |
| Civil Society:                       | <b>3.00</b>                                     |
| Independent Media:                   | <b>4.00</b>                                     |
| Local Democratic Governance:         | <b>3.25</b>                                     |
| Judicial Framework and Independence: | <b>4.75</b>                                     |
| Corruption:                          | <b>5.00</b>                                     |

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

## Executive Summary:

Albania has been a member of the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) since 2009 and aspires to join the European Union (EU). Despite the fact that Euro-Atlantic integration is widely recognized as the only option for Albania's further democratic development, a lack of agreement between major political forces on crucial reforms has frequently paralyzed politics in the country and delayed progress on this goal.

Local administrative elections in May 2011 were again marred by serious irregularities. A legal battle ensued over the outcome of the Tirana mayoral elections, leading the Central Elections Commission to reverse the initial results and declare Democratic Party candidate Lulzim Basha the winner. The opposition lodged an appeal on the grounds that such procedural changes must be made well in advance of the elections, but it was rejected by the CEC, the only body authorized to resolve election disputes. The European Union and European Commission expressed concerns about the controversy and polarization that resulted from the CEC's actions, especially its rejections of the opposition's appeal.

Albania failed to properly address the 12 key priorities identified by the European Commission for beginning accession talks. As a consequence, Albania's bid for official EU candidacy was rejected for the second time in October 2011. A political conflict in early 2011 escalated into street demonstrations, resulting in casualties. Towards the end of the year, the ruling majority and the opposition smoothed out their differences and agreed to work together on some areas such as electoral and judicial reform and improving the functionality of the parliament. Further, deteriorations of conditions in the justice sector led to the assassination of one judge and official protection orders for 15 others. No noticeable progress was achieved on judicial reform.

**National Democratic Government.** On January 21, the Republican Guard opened fire on a crowd of opposition protesters, killing four people and wounding dozens more. No cross-party consensus was reached to facilitate crucial reforms in 2011, nor was a qualified majority achieved for approving new legislation. Local administrative elections did not meet international standards – a major factor behind the rejection of Albania's application for European Union candidacy. *Therefore, Albania's national democratic governance rating remains at 4.75.*

**Electoral Process.** Local administrative elections on May 8 were the most important electoral event of 2011. The electoral campaign was marred by a large number of violent incidents, and public administration officials were reportedly forced to participate in campaigning, especially in Tirana. The close electoral battle in Tirana revealed the significance of every single vote and increased overall public interest in electoral participation. However, the fact that the election dispute had to be settled through a legal battle – one in which the judiciary was under constant pressure to favor the ruling party – highlighted the lack of political will to organize free and fair elections. *As a result, Albania's electoral process rating worsens from 4.00 to 4.25.*

**Civil Society.** Albania's civil society sector remains weak and struggles to find space for meaningful activity in a highly politicized environment. Even civic activists appear to view running for office as the only real way to influence policymaking; a large number of them competed in local elections in 2011, especially in elections to municipal councils. Workers' unions in Albania remain weak due to the presence of a large informal economy and the fact that very few large companies operate in the country. *Albania's civil society rating remains at 3.00.*

**Independent Media.** Freedom of expression is generally respected in Albania, but progress in increasing media independence and professionalism has stalled. Because it requires extensive human and financial resources, investigative journalism continues to be underdeveloped. Online media helped to provide a more complete and independent picture of the January 21 events than traditional media, which focused entirely on the exchange of accusations between opposing political forces. Changes of ownership at the most influential media enterprises led to the firing of the editorial director at one of the last critical newspapers in the country. State-sponsored advertising was increasingly monopolized by progovernment media. *Albania's independent media rating remains unchanged at 4.00.*

**Local Democratic Governance.** The ongoing decentralization process has proceeded slowly with few political and financial resources allocated to local institutions. Current administrative and territorial divisions no longer reflect the country's development patterns, rendering local governance structures fragmented and ineffective. Financial dependence on the central government remains high, as locally-collected revenue is limited and local

governments rely heavily on investments from the central government to finance infrastructural development. Confrontations between opposition-dominated local governments and local representatives of the central government occurred frequently in the first half of the year. Following the election of Lulzim Basha as mayor of Tirana, some 20 departmental directors and high-level staff resigned in protest, while mid and entry-level staff were subsequently laid off by the new administration *Albania's rating for local democratic governance remains unchanged at 3.25.*

**Judicial Framework and Independence.** Albania's judicial institutions continue to suffer from political interference, financial instability, and corruption. Enforcement of court decisions is weak, and the year saw no progress in revising and adopting critical judicial reforms. In 2011 Prime Minister Sali Berisha publically challenged the state prosecutor's right to detain several members of the Republican Guard accused of involvement in the January shootings. It took two weeks of international outcry for state police to detain the guards in question. Investigations into the January events were proceeding very slowly at year's end. On September 9, Skerdilajd Konomi, a judge known for his integrity and professionalism, was assassinated in a car explosion in the city of Vlora. A record number of 15 judges were put under police protection in 2011. *Due to blatant undermining of the state prosecutor's authority and failure to make headway on judicial reforms, Albania's judicial framework and independence rating worsens from 4.25 to 4.50.*

**Corruption.** Corruption remained deeply entrenched in all sectors of life in Albania, negatively affecting the country's economic and political development as well as the consolidation of democratic institutions. While some efforts to combat low and mid-level corruption have been successful, high-level corruption remains largely untouched. Growing political interference in institutions, legal immunity for a wide range of officials, a lack of transparency in accessing information, and insufficient self-regulating mechanisms all complicated efforts to improve the situation of corruption in 2011. Albanian Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta resigned in early January following the publication of a video allegedly showing him and former minister of economy Dritan Prifti discussing corrupt deals. The case motivated public demonstrations and dominated political discourse throughout the year. The government made some progress on drafting and implementing policies to fight corruption with the approval of a new

anticorruption action plan for 2011-2013. *Albania's corruption rating remains at 5.00.*

**Outlook for 2012.** The year 2012 will mark one hundred years of independence since the establishment of the modern state of Albania. Resolving the ongoing political and institutional crises before preparations begin for the 2013 presidential election campaign will be crucial for ensuring a stable election environment. The president, who has considerable influence over the judiciary, will be elected for the first time by the Assembly through a simple majority vote. The general prosecutor will finish its current mandate and the newly elected president will nominate a new appointee to be approved by the Assembly.

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