

EU ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD 2023 COUNTRY UPDATES

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Enlargement countries

Republic of Albania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Albania's legal framework sets out an overall good basis for the protection of fundamental rights. However, implementation of the legal and policy frameworks needs to intensify. The political scene continued to be marked by political polarisation. Local elections on 14 May 2023 were conducted in a generally calm manner. However, concerns relate to the misuse of state resources, claims of pressure on public sector workers and voters, and allegations of vote buying. The delays and politicisation of the appointments of the Ombudsperson and of the new Anti-Discrimination Commissioner weaken these institutions. Progress was made on the use of alternatives to detention. There was some progress on the rights of persons with disabilities regarding the reform of the biopsychosocial assessment, which is now implemented country-wide. The intersection of business and political interests, the lack of transparency of funding sources, the concentration of media ownership, intimidation and precarious working conditions continued to hamper media independence, pluralism and the quality of journalism. The process of first registration of property and other transitional processes need to advance in full transparency, including by tackling corruption. On the protection of minorities, the adoption of the remaining implementing legislation did not advance. Furthermore, Albania needs to put in place strong legal and institutional safeguards to prevent breaches of personal data. With regard to communist-era missing persons, continued political will is important to increase the number of cases solved and to raise public awareness of the issue.

The efficiency of the judicial system and access to justice continued to be affected by the long timescale of proceedings, increased workload and high backlog of cases, which remains particularly high in appeal and first instance courts. Despite some progress and continued efforts in fighting corruption, overall, corruption is prevalent in many areas of public and business life and preventive measures continue to have a limited impact, particularly in vulnerable sectors. Discrimination against LGBTI persons is still very prevalent in Albanian society. The 12th Tirana Pride took place peacefully on 20 May 2023. Public awareness and acceptance of LGBTI persons remains low. While civil society is generally free, shortcomings affect the ability of civil society organisations (CSOs) to contribute to policy development processes. The role of civil society, including in the EU accession negotiation process, needs to be strengthened.

For more information, please refer to the European Commission's: [Albania Report 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-commission.europa.eu/en/albania-report-2023).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to monitor the protection and entrenchment of democracy and human rights, with particular attention to access to justice, independence of media and freedom of expression, protection of minorities and vulnerable groups as well as registration of properties and transitional ownership rights. The EU also followed developments in the areas of citizenship rights, gender equality, right to life, prevention of torture and ill-treatment in the prison systems, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Regular political dialogue has continued mainly in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The EU - Albania Stabilisation and Association Council took place on 16 March 2023, for the first time in Tirana. These meetings provided an opportunity to take stock of the progress that Albania made in the preparations for EU membership, with a focus on rule of law aspects, including fundamental rights. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities. While putting EU-related reforms at the centre of its legislative and policy planning, the government needs to refrain from measures that are not in line with EU standards. The European Commission continued the screening process and published the Screening Report for Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, encompassing functioning of the democratic institutions and the fundamental rights.

4. EU financial engagement: In 2023, the EU continued the implementation of a wide array of projects in the field of human rights and democracy. The funding allocation from the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance 2021 – 2027 (IPA III) of EUR 80.6 million has been supporting actions to advance the right to an independent tribunal, consolidation of democracy, supporting the country on fundamental rights, as well as access to water, the right to education and access to employment of young people. With the support of the Programme on Social Inclusion (EUR 70.65 million) under IPA III, continued providing support to families in vulnerable situations, including those affected by COVID-19 crisis, Roma and Egyptian families, and older persons.

There were no on-going projects under the Thematic Programme for Human Rights and Democracy.

Under the IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme, seven projects continued in 2023 focusing on active citizenship, support to civil society, investigative journalism and social reuse of confiscated assets for a total budget of EUR 5.1 million. Five other projects started in 2023 to support CSOs in the areas of good governance and rule of law, including support to CSOs in the Fundamentals Cluster under the accession negotiations, fight against corruption, budget transparency and justice accountability, for a total of EUR 2.3 million.

Cooperation with the Council of Europe continued under the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye – Phase III with a total budget of EUR 5 million for Albania (out of EUR 41 million for Western Balkans) focusing on promoting equal treatment, freedom of expression and social inclusion. In Albania, the programme enabled to launch the Central Election Commission's Electronic Platform on Financial Monitoring and Reporting, in the run-up to the 14 May local elections, with a view to facilitate the monitoring of the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns.

5. Multilateral context: Albania continued its dialogue and cooperation with European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies, notably in the context of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Albania was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2022 and 2023 and was elected, in October 2023, to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term. Albania has an observer status in the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.