

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

implementation in 2024. These projects cover a variety of topics such as the rights of Indigenous peoples, children's rights and the fundamental rights of people in detention. In addition, four projects funded by the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities instrument (OSC-AL) successfully continued in 2024. Their areas of work included revitalising civil society as a development actor and improving the living conditions of homeless kids in Brazzaville. Through the bilateral NDICI envelope, the EU is also supporting civil society's contribution to gender equality for an inclusive economic and social development (EUR 5 million). Furthermore, the 'Police +' project (EUR 5 million), aimed at improving respect for human rights by the police in pilot police stations, continues making progress. The EU, in the context of promoting social and economic rights, supported the informal private sector through projects targeting local economic initiatives. The EU also engaged with young people through the launch of an initiative that aims at establishing a Youth Advisory Group.

5. Multilateral context: The Republic of the Congo is party to several key human rights treaties but it has not ratified the CPED or the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aimed at abolishing the death penalty, despite abolishing the death penalty in 2015. In 2024, the country ratified the Optional Protocol to the CAT.

The fourth cycle of the UPR for Congo took place in January 2024. The country received 200 recommendations and noted almost all of them. Reports from civil society groups signalled the low level of implementation of the recommendations from the previous UPR in 2018. The Ministry of Justice has drafted an action plan to implement the recommendations of UPR 2024. The country's priorities on human rights in UN fora did not match the EU's.

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: Overall, the human rights situation has slightly improved. However, as indicated in the UPR undertaken in 2024, some challenges remain such as access to basic social services, prison overpopulation, gender inequalities and unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources especially in rural areas, violations of freedom of expression and assembly and attacks on civic space as well as persistence of child labour. 2024 also saw significant tensions in Abidjan following evictions by the Ivorian authorities. Last summer, Côte d'Ivoire experienced an unprecedented anti-LGBTI movement in the form of an online campaign, followed by dozens of acts of violence.

Civil society remains fragile and needs support in terms of structuring, capacity-building, and independence. Following the Civil Society Organisations Ordinance, adopted in June 2024 to replace the 1960 Law on Associations, several CSOs have seized the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, sharing their concerns about the shrinking of the right of association.

In view of the presidential elections scheduled for October 2025, Côte d'Ivoire undertook the revision of the electoral list, an essential step to ensure inclusiveness of the electoral process. Although almost one million new voters were registered, the target of registering more than four million voters was not met - a significant deviation from the initial forecast. The International Electrotechnical Commission plans to publish the provisional list by end February, followed by a period of litigation. The final list will be drawn up three months before the elections.

2. EU action - key focus areas: In terms of cooperation and in line with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 and the Country Strategy for Human Rights and Democracy 2021-2024, eight strategic and operational priorities identified have been implemented: tackling child labour, child trafficking and forced labour; contributing to the eradication of torture and improving detention conditions; preventing GBV; strengthening the rule of law, the independence and functioning of the judiciary, and supporting the integrity of electoral processes; strengthening the role of CSOs; contributing to equal opportunities for women and men and fighting against all forms of discriminations; improving access to public services, including through digital technologies; and promoting freedom of expression and countering disinformation and hate speech.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: EUDEL has regular meetings with CSOs as well as with Côte d'Ivoire authorities and political parties. The EU and Côte d'Ivoire hold annual Partnership Dialogues, the latest in December 2024. Several topics related to the human rights situation, good governance, as well as the rule of law and the fight against corruption were discussed. During this Dialogue, parties were able to reaffirm their commitment towards shared values and interests.

The EU, with support of the EU MS represented in Côte d'Ivoire, carried out several formal démarches on human rights and democracy issues in 2024 in the framework of the 79th UNGA and the 55th session of the UNHRC.

4. EU financial engagement: EU cooperation focuses on human capital with actions on technical and vocational education and training; social protection and migration; sustainable and inclusive growth with actions on business environment, agriculture, and low-carbon transition; as well as democratic governance, peace and security and digital governance. The European Union has developed a wide range of projects to support its political engagements towards Côte d'Ivoire. In 2024 and among other, the EU defined an 'elections package' which will support the country in holding transparent and inclusive elections in 2025 (presidential) and 2026 (legislative). The EU also supports CSOs and launched a new support project in January 2024 in close cooperation with the five Regional Civil Society Support Centres.

5. Multilateral context: Côte d'Ivoire is a member of the Human Rights Council (2024-2026) and has ratified almost all international UN and AU instruments. The Government has adopted policies to combat child labour and trafficking in human beings. The ratification procedure for the Second Optional Protocol to the IICPR, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, has been finalized. However, implementation of international instruments and reporting requires further improvement. There are no specific legislative provisions governing compensation to victims of torture. The national mechanism for the prevention of torture, which was to be established in March 2024 in accordance with Côte d'Ivoire's international obligations, has not yet been established.

Côte d'Ivoire participated in the UPR exercise in 2024. Multiple recommendations have emerged from the UPR, including recommendations on the prison living conditions, on gender equality, as well as on children's rights, education, civil and political rights, including the right to demonstrate and associate, and LGBTI.