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Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

Post-monitoring dialogue with Albania

**Information note by the co-rapporteurs on their fact-finding visit to Tirana
(30 March to 1 April 2026)**

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¹ Document declassified by the Monitoring Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2026.

1. Introduction

1. With the adoption of [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Albania, the Assembly resolved to close the monitoring procedure in respect of Albania and engage in a post-monitoring dialogue with the country, with the objective of addressing the remaining concerns outlined in the resolution. In line with our mandate under the post-monitoring dialogue, our visit therefore focussed on the concrete recommendations made by the Assembly in [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#).

2. During our visit we met with, inter alia: the Speaker of the National Assembly; the Deputy Prime Minister; the Minister of Justice; the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of the Interior; the Minister of State for Anti-Corruption and Public Administration; the President of the Constitutional Court; the Head of the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor (SPAK); the Chairpersons and members of Committees on "Legal Affairs and Public Administration" and on "Human Rights and Public Media" of the Albanian Parliament; the co-chairs of the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform; individual meetings with the leadership of the Socialist Party as well as the Democratic Party and representatives of its Alliance for a Magnificent Albania: the Freedom Party, Unity for Human Rights Party and Republican Party of Albania; the Audio-visual Media Authority; the board of the Public Broadcaster; the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination; the Deputy Ombudsperson; the Chairperson of the Minority Council; as well as representatives of civil society and of the diplomatic community in Tirana. The programme of our visit is attached to this note in Appendix 1.

3. We would like to thank the Albanian delegation and Albanian Parliament for the excellent programme and hospitality, and the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Tirana and her staff for the support given to our delegation. The statement issued at the end of our visit is attached in Appendix 2.

2. Recent political developments and political climate

4. Regrettably, the political climate in Albania remains highly polarised and contentious. This undermines normal cooperation and dialogue between the opposition and the ruling majority, which continues to affect the proper functioning of the country's democratic institutions. This is exacerbated by the extremely acrimonious personal relationship between the leaders of the ruling Socialist Party (SP), Prime Minister Edi Rama, and the main opposition party, the Democratic Party (DP), Mr Sali Berisha. The political polarisation risks the politicisation of the post-monitoring dialogue, with all parties trying to construe this ongoing dialogue in accordance with their respective political agendas. We emphasised that our visit was part of an ongoing dialogue to ensure the Assembly's recommendations are satisfactorily implemented and was not an end in itself. This visit marked the beginning of this process, not its conclusion, and we plan to conduct another visit in late 2026 or early 2027.

5. On 11 May 2025, parliamentary elections took place in Albania. They were observed by the Parliamentary Assembly as part of the International Elections Observation Mission (IEOM), that consisted of PACE, the EP, OSCE-PA and the OSCE/ODIHR. According to the IEOM, the elections were competitive and well conducted but took place in a highly polarised environment where contestants did not enjoy a level playing field. Although candidates could campaign freely, the campaign was marred by reports of vote buying as well as the abuse of administrative resources, including allegations of pressure on certain groups of voters (particularly civil servants). As with previous elections, the observers noted that the legal framework for elections in principle provides an adequate basis for democratic elections if it is indeed implemented in good faith by all stakeholders. The observers therefore called upon the authorities, and in particular the incoming parliament, to address the shortcomings and ambiguities in the electoral framework that hinder its implementation. In a welcome development, voting abroad was introduced for the sizeable Albanian diaspora for the first time during these elections, in line with the judgments of the Constitutional Court of Albania and thus addressing an important recommendation in [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#). However, the process was organised in an overly complex manner to allay fears of electoral fraud, which negatively affected public trust.

6. The SP, led by Prime Minister Edi Rama, won the elections for a fourth consecutive time, obtaining 53.3% of the votes and giving it 83 seats in the 140-seat Albanian Parliament. The Alliance for a Magnificent Albania, led by the Democratic Party of Mr Sali Berisha, obtained 46.5% of the vote, securing 53 seats, while the Albania Becomes Movement received 4% of the vote, earning them one seat. in the new parliament. All other parties failed to pass the 1% threshold.

7. The Democratic Party strongly contested the validity of these elections, pointing to reports by election observers of vote buying and abuse of administrative resources which distorted the level playing fields between the contestants. The disagreement over the electoral results fortunately did not reignite the systemic political crisis and the parliamentary boycotts that have plagued Albania's recent political landscape. All elected parties took up their mandates and entered parliament. On 27 October 2025, the ruling majority and the opposition

reached an agreement to establish parliamentary ad hoc committees on electoral and territorial administrative reform. Both committees are co-chaired by the SP and the DP. However, this did not diminish the extremely polarised political climate or the charged and acrimonious discourse between SP and DP and their leadership.

8. Despite the polarised political climate, the reform programmes have continued unabated, driven by the ongoing accession negotiations with the European Union. In its 2025 enlargement report on Albania, the European Commission welcomed the firm political commitment of the Albanian authorities to EU integration but noted the reform process would need to be stepped up to maintain the current momentum in the accession process. The report noted the recent parliamentary elections were held competitively but regretted the shortcomings noted by observers, in particular regarding the abuse of administrative resources and the lack of a level playing field for all electoral contestants. It urged the authorities to fully address the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations in this respect. It regretted that the political polarisation and lack of genuine political dialogue and consultation were hindering the work of the parliament. With regard to the judiciary, the European Commission highlighted the success of the ongoing vetting process of judges and prosecutors, which should conclude in 2026. However, it stressed that sustained “reform efforts are needed to continue to strengthen the judicial system and maintain high standards of integrity after the completion of the vetting process”. It furthermore expressed concern about the continuing prevalence of widespread corruption in connection to the still limited impact of the institutional anti-corruption structures. With regard to freedom of expression, the European Commission expressed its concern about the situation of the media which continues to suffer from a high concentration of media ownership, as well as “intimidation and precarious working conditions for journalists”.

9. By December 2025, Albania had opened negotiations on all 33 accession chapters. In May 2026, the European Union concluded that Albania had met the interim benchmarks for the fundamentals cluster, which includes notably the functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform, the rule of law chapters and economic criteria. This allowed the EU and Albania to start closing negotiating chapters and, on 14 July 2026, the European Union and Albania provisionally closed the chapters on science and research, education and culture as well as external relations.²

3. Electoral and administrative reform

10. As mentioned, the legal framework provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections, if implemented in good faith and in its entirety. However, unresolved shortcomings and ambiguities reduce its clarity and create uncertainty in its implementation in both letter and spirit. While a number of the recommendations from the international community following previous elections were implemented, several remain to be addressed. In other occasions, new changes to the electoral code affected its effective implementation. While the 2024 amendments to the electoral code removed the possibility for party leaders to run in multiple districts, they also established a mixed open-closed list system that increased the control of party leaders over the composition of party lists while significantly reducing voter influence over the final allocation of mandates. These amendments were adopted through a consensus between the SP and DP, highlighting the long-standing tendency of the main parties to play with the rules rather than play by the rules.

11. To address the shortcomings noted, the Assembly, the EU and the OSCE have called upon the authorities to initiate comprehensive electoral reforms. At the same time, the Assembly has urged the stakeholders not to reopen the continuous discussions about the electoral system itself or to return to the old habit by all sides of trying to change the electoral legislations to gain improper electoral advantage.

12. Following the 2025 parliamentary elections, the Albanian parliament established ad hoc committees on electoral and administrative territorial reform. Each committee comprises 16 members: seven from the SP, seven from the DP, and two from the Alliance for Change and the Freedom Party. The committees will be co-chaired by one member from the SP and one from the DP. Mr Damian Gjikhuri (SP) and Mr Oerd Bylykbashi (DP) were appointed as co-chairs of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Electoral Reform. Both are former members of PACE. They have co-chaired several past *ad hoc* committees on electoral reform and know each other very well, which benefits the functioning of the *Ad Hoc* Committee.

13. The *ad-hoc* committee is tasked with addressing the main shortcomings and the recommendations made by the IEOM and OSCE/ODIHR elections observation missions, as well as those made by the Venice Commission concerning political party financing, election administration, campaign regulation and election complaints mechanisms. The first result of its work was a draft law on the Financing of Political Parties. As agreed with the stakeholders, on 27 April 2026 the speaker of the Albanian parliament requested an opinion

² [Enlargement: Albania and EU provisionally close negotiations on science and research, education and culture, and external relations - Consilium](#)

of the Venice Commission on this law. This opinion, prepared jointly with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe, was adopted by the Venice Commission at its plenary meeting on 12 and 13 June.

14. In its opinion, the Venice Commission noted several positive aspects in the draft law. Compared to Albania's previous legal framework, the new draft is much more detailed, aiming to strengthen transparency and accountability through improved reporting and disclosure requirements. Inter alia, it introduces an electronic platform for real-time financial reporting, restricts cash donations, sets clearer limits on donations and prohibited sources (including foreign entities and companies with state contracts), and enhances oversight powers for the Central Election Commission (CEC). These changes reflect international standards and respond to longstanding concerns about opacity and corruption risks in party funding.

15. At the same time, the opinion identified several important areas for improvement. A key issue in this respect is the separation between regular party funding and campaign finance, which is still governed by the separate legislation, namely the Electoral Code. Without harmonisation, inconsistencies and loopholes may arise, such as unclear rules for third-party financing, uneven definitions of prohibited funding sources and differences in reporting or sanctions, which could undermine the effectiveness of the new law. The Venice Commission therefore strongly recommends that Albania ensure the two legal frameworks operate coherently and do not leave gaps, particularly during election periods when financial transparency is most critical.

16. The law's definitions are another area of concern. Key concepts, such as "donation," "loan," "in-kind contribution," and "third party," are not sufficiently defined, leaving room for ambiguity and potential circumvention. The Venice Commission noted that indirect financing, such as money channelled through affiliated organisations or third-party actors, remains largely unaddressed. The law should comprehensively regulate these risks, requiring detailed reporting and oversight not only of direct party income but also of related transactions and expenditures, especially in digital media.

17. Effective oversight hinges on more than just legal provisions; it also demands resources, independence, and inter-agency cooperation. Therefore, the Venice Commission welcomed the creation of a dedicated structure within the CEC for monitoring party finances. However, it urged the authorities to clarify its mandate, ensure adequate staffing and resources, and build mechanisms for cooperation with agencies like tax authorities and anti-money laundering offices. The independence of auditors must also be guaranteed, preventing conflicts of interest and ensuring robust control.

18. When it comes to sanctions, the Venice Commission welcomed the move toward clearer and higher fines but warned that exclusion from elections for repeated reporting failures may be disproportionate, undermining political pluralism. It underscored that sanctions must be balanced and accompanied by procedural safeguards, further reinforcing the importance of due process and proportionality. Lastly, it stressed the need to balance transparency with data protection for donors, and to foster an inclusive law-making process, allowing meaningful consultation with stakeholders and civil society.

19. The Venice Commission therefore concluded that the draft law demonstrates commendable progress toward European standards, offering the promise of a fairer, more transparent party finance system. It also emphasised that genuine effectiveness depends on closing remaining loopholes, clarifying provisions, harmonizing with campaign finance regulations, and ensuring strong, independent oversight. The Commission therefore encourages the Albanian authorities to refine the law, in close consultation with the stakeholders, and align reforms of the Electoral Code to establish a fully consistent legal framework for political party financing.

20. Electoral reform and the Territorial Administrative reform are politically closely interrelated as both affect the division of power in the country. The most recent territorial administrative reform in Albania took place in 2015 and reduced the number of municipalities from 374 to 61 while creating 12 regions. The reduction in the number of municipalities, allowing for the establishment of strong local government institutions, was supported by the country's international partners, including the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. However, the exact number of municipalities, as well as the municipal boundaries, continued to be a point of debate between opposition and ruling majority, with the opposition favouring an enlarged number of municipalities and the ruling majority a further reduction in number. In [Resolution 2544\(2024\)](#) the Assembly considers that *"it is important that any changes to the number of municipalities or the municipal borderlines should be based on a broad consensus between the different stakeholders, while respecting the logic of the reform to create strong and effective local government providing services that are close to the citizens"*.

21. Regrettably, the *ad hoc* committee on territorial reforms did not achieve any concrete results, reportedly due to a very polarised and contentious atmosphere and boycotts of its sessions. In the absence of a

consensus, the ruling majority published its own draft 'Administrative-Territorial Reform 2.0' in which it proposes reducing the number of municipalities from 61 to 48 by merging 28 underperforming municipalities into 13 new ones. The opposition decried this proposal as an attempt by the ruling majority to consolidate its power over local government. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has in general emphasised that any consolidation of municipalities should not lead to centralisation of services as that could weaken local government.

22. It is evident that the highly polarised political environment and the main political parties' zero-sum political strategies, coupled with frequent obstruction of parliamentary bodies' work and a lack of clear appreciation of the respective roles of the ruling majority and the opposition in a democratic society, are hindering parliamentary oversight and the country's system of checks and balances. In [Resolution 2544\(2024\)](#), the Assembly therefore called on all parliamentary parties to appoint, on the basis of a broad consensus, a new Ombudsperson and a new Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination.

23. The term of office of the previous Ombudsperson had expired in 2022. This post remained vacant until 12 December 2025, when the parliament finally appointed Mr Endrit Shabani as the new Ombudsperson albeit solely with the votes of the ruling party MPs.³ Mr Shabani's candidature had originally been endorsed by the Democratic Party⁴ and had been supported in the Legal Affairs Committee of the Albanian parliament. However, the DP at the last moment withdrew its support. Mr Shabani has publicly challenged the dominance of the two main political parties over Albanian politics and ran individually in the 2025 elections with his party "Nisma Thurje", which won one seat in the current parliament. The current Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination, Mr Robert Gajda, was appointed in 2018 for a one time renewable 5-year term. At the time of our visit, the political parties had not been able to agree on his replacement or the renewal of his term.

4. Minority rights

24. The main legislative framework governing the rights and protection of national minorities is the Law on the Protection of National Minorities which was adopted on 13 October 2017. In this law, Albania recognises nine national minorities: Aromanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, Greek, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Roma and Serb. While this law in general provides for an adequate legal framework for the protection of minorities, it depends on secondary legislation for its implementation. Until the adoption of [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), nine out of twelve by-laws were adopted, while three by-laws, which are considered the most important and sensitive, were lacking. These are the by-laws governing the right to self-identification; the right to education in minority languages and their use in communication with authorities; as well as the procedure for the recognition of national minorities. In [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), the Assembly urged the Albanian authorities to adopt, in close consultation with the relevant Council of Europe bodies, these three by-laws to the 2017 Law on the Protection of National Minorities.

25. Following the adoption of [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), the Albanian authorities declared the drafting and adoption of these by-laws to be a priority. The three missing bylaws were subsequently drafted quickly with the assistance of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe also provided an independent expert assessment of the three bylaws after they were drafted by the authorities. This assessment concluded that these bylaws fully comply with applicable European standards. However, the expert also formulated several recommendations which could help to strengthen the impact of the provisions of these laws. These recommendations were fully addressed in subsequent amendments to the by-laws when they were adopted.

26. A number of the rights provided for in the Law on National Minorities in the municipalities where minorities have a considerable presence, such as the right to education in minority languages, or the use of minority languages in interactions with the local authorities, are conditional on the minority in question amounting to more than 20% of the population in that municipality. However, the 20% threshold constitutes an insurmountable barrier in practically all 61 municipalities, preventing effective access to these rights. Only in three municipalities does the number of persons belonging to national minorities meet the 20% threshold (Dropull, Finiq and Pustec). No other national minority outside these three municipalities are likely to benefit from the rights provided in the Law on the Protection of National Minorities. The authorities have indicated that municipalities would have some flexibility in the interpretation of the 20% threshold, but there is no legal obligation to do so, nor would central government funds for such actions be available in that case. The Assembly therefore recommended in [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#) that the authorities lower considerably, and flexibly interpret, the requirement that a national minority needs to represent more than 20% of the local population before minority rights and services are legally guaranteed at the municipality level.

³ In the previous parliament no party had the required number of mandates to appoint the ombudsperson unilaterally.

⁴ Several DP MPs had signed his candidature.

27. The expert assessments of the three bylaws note that the very high threshold of 20%, as outlined in the Law on National Minorities, remains in place. This could affect the efficient implementation of the three bylaws. However, during our visit, all the experts and national minority representatives we met considered the 20% threshold issue to be no longer important, as the flexibility granted to municipalities to provide the rights set out in the law, even if the 20% threshold is not met, addresses it.

28. Official data with regard to the LGBTQIA+ population is largely lacking. However, this community faces discrimination and stigmatisation in Albanian society which prevents its members from obtaining effective equality. In 2015, in a development that should be welcomed, the Albanian Parliament adopted a resolution on the protection of the rights and freedoms of LGBTQIA+ people and adopted a series of amendments to the Labour Code that prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender. Contrary to European standards, Albania still does not allow for the registration of same sex partnerships. Neither does it allow people to change their name and gender in the civil registry, which prevents these persons from fully obtaining their civil rights. This should be addressed as a matter of priority.

29. In a welcome development, on 27 November 2025 the Albanian Parliament adopted the Gender Equality Law, which was developed in close co-operation with the Council of Europe and the European Union. Its adoption brought the legal framework for gender equality in line with European standards as well as the EU acquis on this matter, which is a requirement for EU accession.

30. On 30 December 2025, several civil society groups, many of them aligned with the Democratic Party, challenged the Constitutionality of this law before the Constitutional Court. The Court accepted the request to review the legislation's constitutionality and held its initial public hearing on 12 March 2026.

31. In addition to challenging the Law on Gender Equality in the Constitutional Court, these groups have also set up an Initiative Committee to hold a referendum on repealing the law. However, the proposed referendum questions go far beyond the issue of repealing the Law itself. Several legal experts have argued that such questions cannot be put to a referendum, as Article 151 § 2 of the Albanian Constitution states that matters relating to fundamental rights and freedoms cannot be put to a referendum. Nevertheless, on 12 January 2026, the Central Election Commission (CEC) permitted the collection of signatures for the following questions: "Do you want the law to recognise only two genders: male and female?"; "Do you want the law to recognise marriage only between a man and a woman?"; "Do you want the law to recognise a child's right to be raised by a mother and a father?".

32. These developments are of concern and ILGA Europe has noted that these initiatives have increased anti-LGBTQIA+ and homophobic discourse in Albanian society and the media.

5. Fight against corruption

33. The fight against the widespread corruption in Albania remains a top priority within the country's European integration process. The key institutional structure to fight corruption is the Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK). SPAK is comprised of the Special Prosecution Office (SPO), the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and two Specialised Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Courts. SPAK is tasked with investigating and adjudicating high-level cases of corruption and organised crime.

34. Allegations of high-level corruption and criminal investigations initiated by SPAK against high level members of both ruling majority and opposition have dominated the political environment.

35. On 10 February 2025, Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj, a prominent member of the Socialist Party, was arrested on charges of corruption and money laundering. He was subsequently dismissed as Mayor by the Committee of Ministers of Albania, after which new elections were called. However, the Constitutional Court overruled his dismissal and the elections were cancelled. On 10 September 2025, SPAK closed the investigation and sent the case to court. Despite concerns about the constitutionality of his continuing detention, including by Albania's constitutional Court, Mr Veliaj remains in pre-trial detention. His lengthy pre-trial detention has been criticised by many of his supporters and independent interlocutors and has put the spotlight on the high rate and long length of pre-trial detentions in Albania.⁵

36. In October 2025, SPAK filed criminal charges against Ms Belinda Balluku, the Minister for Infrastructure and Deputy Prime Minister, for manipulating public tenders⁶ and requested the lifting of her parliamentary

⁵ [Albanian Daily News : Council of Europe raises alarm over widespread use of pretrial detention in Albania.](#)

⁶ On 4 June 2026, SPAK filed additional charges for passive corruption and Laundering of proceeds of crime or criminal activity.

immunity. The High Court Against Corruption and Organised Crime subsequently suspended her from her roles as Minister of Infrastructure and Deputy Prime Minister. The government appealed this decision to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the anti-corruption court did not have the constitutional powers to suspend a minister. However, as the Constitutional Court is currently evenly split (it has 8 members and one vacancy), the suspension remained in place and Ms Balluku was subsequently dismissed from her post. On 12 March 2026, parliament voted against lifting Ms Balluku's parliamentary immunity, with a vote that was split along party lines. The outcome of the vote was decried by the opposition and has created a perception of impunity that is not in line with the high expectations of Albanian society and its international partners. The ruling majority argued that SPAK's pre-trial investigation could continue unhindered without stricter measures being imposed on Ms Balluku beyond the existing travel ban.

37. The ruling majority subsequently proposed draft legislation to amend article 242 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Albania that would in effect prohibit the relevant Courts from suspending the President, Prime minister, deputy Prime ministers, ministers, Ombudsman, Head of the High State Audit Office, and members of the Constitutional Court by providing them with the same level of immunity as elected officials, such as MPs, mayors, and members of municipal councils. The introductions of these amendments raised concerns among the international community including the European Commission, who during our visit expressed its expectations that the Council of Europe would provide an analysis of these amendments. Without wishing to pass a judgment on these amendments, we do consider that any legislation that could strengthen the immunity of high-level executive officials against corruption investigations raises questions and is potentially problematic. We therefore originally proposed to the Monitoring Committee that they request a Venice Commission opinion on these amendments. However, the Venice Commission informed us that an analysis of these amendments was planned as part of an upcoming expertise by the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) of the Council of Europe on the draft Criminal Code. Assuming that this expertise would be published soon and would indeed cover the amendments to Article 242 of the Criminal Procedure Code, we agreed to withhold our proposal for the time being. The report has not yet been published, but we expect to receive it in the near future.

38. On 11 December 2024 the leader of the Democratic Party, former Prime Minister Sali Berisha, (who has previously been investigated and was put under house arrest in December 2023), was officially charged with corruption⁷ by Albania's Special Prosecutor of the SPAK, who has demanded Mr Berisha's arrest. While the Court proceedings against him are continuing, his house arrest was lifted on 21 January 2026 by the Constitutional Court who found that the conditions for continued pre-trial detention were no longer met. In October 2024, former President Ilir Meta, current leader of the Freedom Party was arrested by SPAK on suspicion of corruption and money laundering. He was formally charged with these crimes on 27 May 2025 and his trial is ongoing.⁸

39. The establishment and functioning of SPAK are generally considered a success story, underscored by the numerous cases brought against high-ranking government officials, judges, and politicians from both the majority and opposition parties, as detailed in the section on recent political developments. As a result of its actions against high-level political figures from both ruling majority and opposition, SPAK has frequently been attacked by both sides of the political spectrum for being a political instrument in the hands of the other. While these attacks could be seen as a sign of SPAK's success and impartiality, it is important to ensure that they are not allowed as a pretext to prevent SPAK from carrying out its work unhindered and free from political pressure. This is especially important in relation to the appointment processes for the Heads of SPAK and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI).

40. The current monetary threshold for cases to fall within SPAK's mandate is around €500, which is very low. This raises fears that SPAK and NBI could be inundated, affecting their effectiveness in investigating high-level corruption in the country. In [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), the Assembly therefore recommended raising this monetary threshold but it has so far remained unchanged. During our visit, several interlocutors, including the Head of SPAK himself, informed us that the impact of this low threshold was far less significant than originally expected, and it is no longer considered a priority.

41. High-level corruption cases are understandably often complex and time-consuming. However, the lengthy pre-trial detention of some of the high-level individuals investigated by SPAK, such as former President Meta and Tirana Mayor Veliaj, highlights not only the excessively long average pre-trial detention period in Albania but also increases political pressure on SPAK which could undermine its work. It is important that cases are concluded more quickly and efficiently by all structures involved. In a positive development, the Supreme Court has recently started to address the issue of lengthy pre-trial detentions with the aim of reducing

⁷ [Albania's Former PM Berisha Charged with Corruption | Balkan Insight](#).

⁸ [Albanian ex-President Ilir Meta charged with corruption and money laundering | AP News](#).

both the number of people held in pre-trial detention and the length of time for which they are held , by inter alia promoting alternative methods of restraint.

42. On 21 March 2025, GRECO published its second compliance report on Albania as part of the Fifth evaluation round. It concluded that Albania had made significant progress in implementing its recommendations. GRECO welcomed that 18 of the 24 recommendations had been satisfactorily implemented, and that 5 of the remaining 6 had been partially implemented. GRECO therefore decided to terminate the Fifth-Round compliance procedure in respect of Albania

43. In relation to the issues noted in [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), GRECO welcomed the fact that there are no longer any political appointees on the Ethics Committee and that its powers have been extended to include the Prime Minister. However, there are still no adequate legal provisions to address violations found by the Ethic Committee to have been committed by the Prime Minister. GRECO noted with satisfaction that all Ministries have now drafted and put in place integrity plans, which are supplemented by action plans and integrity risk assessments.

44. A dedicated legal framework to ensure the transparency of lobbying and the interactions between lobbyists and government officials was adopted in December 2024. A Law on Conflicts of Interest has been drafted with the help of Council of Europe experts. Regrettably, at the time of writing this law has not yet been adopted by the Albania parliament. Given its importance we urge the Albanian parliament to now adopt this law without further delay.

45. A key mechanism to establish the independence and integrity of the judiciary in Albania has been the vetting procedure⁹ for judges and prosecutors which has been implemented by the Albanian authorities under the supervision, and with the assistance, of the international community. The vetting of judges and prosecutors in the first instance has been successfully finalised, with an appeals process expected to be concluded by 17 July 2026.¹⁰

46. After the finalisation of the internationally supervised vetting procedure, the responsibility for integrity and accountability checks of judges and prosecutors, including at the moment of their appointment and promotion, lies with the High Council of Justice, the High Prosecutorial Council, the Justice Inspector and HIDAACI. Interlocutors, including the European Commission have expressed some concerns about the commensurate availability of resources and existence of the necessary procedural aspects in these institutions to satisfactorily execute these new tasks and responsibilities.

47. This is compounded by concerns about the appointment process for the non-judge members on the High Prosecutorial and Judicial Councils. The appointment process is vulnerable to politicisation and lacks the same rigorous integrity checks which are in place for the judge and prosecutor members on these Councils. Nevertheless, as noted in the 2025 enlargement report of the EU in regard to Albania, judicial independence is considered overall satisfactory, despite continuing attempts of public figures and politicians from all sides to interfere in the judicial processes.¹¹

6. Media environment

48. Regrettably, despite limited progress on some issues, the media environment in Albania overall remains problematic. In Reporters Without Borders' 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Albania moved up from 99th place (with a score of 54.10) to 80th place (with a score of 58.18) out of 180 countries. While this is an improvement, its low ranking remains a cause for serious concern.

⁹ To recall, the vetting of judges and prosecutors is conducted by the Independent Qualification Commission (IQC), which consists of 12 members appointed by the parliament based on the recommendations of the International Monitoring Operation which is led by the European Commission in close co-operation with the United States. In addition to the IQC, there is one Specialised Qualification Chamber (SQC), consisting of 7 judges appointed in the same manner as the IQC, to which decisions of the IQC can be appealed. There are two Public Commissioners (PCs) who represent the public in these proceedings and who can appeal IQC decisions to the SQC. The International Monitoring Operation monitors the proceedings in the IQC and can recommend the PCs to appeal IQC decisions. The IQC works in 4 panels of 3 members. All judges and prosecutors are assessed on the basis of three criteria: justification of assets, background check and legal proficiency. If a candidate does not pass the analysis of his or her assets, he or she will not be subjected to a background check or assessed for legal proficiency. Similarly, a candidate that fails the background check will not be assessed for legal proficiency.

¹⁰ The legal deadline foreseen in the Albanian Constitution.

¹¹ As an example, both SP and DP have attacked SPAK investigations as being politically motivated in favour of their political opponents.

49. Media ownership in Albania has historically been highly concentrated and divided along party political lines. In January 2026, the Albanian Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Audiovisual Media, introducing new provisions aimed at strengthening the transparency of media ownership. These amendments require media outlets to disclose detailed ownership information, including the identities of beneficial owners, and provide for the creation of a national media ownership database. According to the well-respected Tirana based thinktank “Center Science and Innovation for Development” (SCiDEV), these amendments to the audiovisual media law, if implemented in good faith, represent a significant step forward in enhancing the transparency of ownership structures, beneficial ownership and public funding of media, as well as aligning with European standards, including the European Media Freedom Act.

50. In [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), the Assembly called for the full decriminalisation of defamation and for a cap on the disproportionately high fines and excessive amounts of compensation which may be awarded for defamation. On 27 January 2026, the Albanian Parliament adopted a package of amendments to the current Criminal Code. These amendments provide for the partial decriminalisation of defamation by exempting journalists who are either 'registered' or 'recognised' from criminal liability. These amendments strengthen criminal-law protection against violence and serious threats targeting journalists. Regrettably these amendments do not remove insult as a criminal offence, thus preserving the possibility of criminal sanctions for certain forms of expression. In addition, these amendments do not address the disproportionately high fines and excessive amounts of compensation that can be awarded for defamation, while introducing a requirement to be registered and recognised in order to be protected by this law, which is of concern.

51. In the context of drafting the new Criminal Code, a working group consisting of representatives of the ruling majority, the opposition, civil society and other media stakeholders, and mediated by the Council of Europe, recommended the full removal of the criminalisation of defamation and insult from the new Criminal Code that is being drafted with the help of the international community. All working group members agreed with this recommendation. Regrettably, however, this consensus position was rejected by the ruling majority when the draft for the new Criminal Code was adopted in Committee. Not only does the current draft Criminal Code fail to decriminalise defamation and insult, it actually widens the scope of these offences, imposing considerably harsher punishments and fines for transgressions. Furthermore, the current draft of the new Criminal Code does not address the disproportionately high amounts of compensation that can be awarded by the courts.

52. We are aware that other Council of Europe member States criminalise, to some extent, defamation and insult. However, in Albania the criminalisation of defamation and insult is undermining media freedom and pluralism. We therefore call upon the authorities to fully implement the consensual text agreed upon in the Council of Europe mediated working group, to which both opposition and ruling majority members in that group had committed themselves to.

53. In [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#), the Assembly called upon the authorities to enact proper legislation to counter the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) against journalists, media outlets and civil society organisations. According to several studies, including by SciDev in November 2024, the legal framework in Albania continues to lack robust safeguards against SLAPPs.

54. The ruling majority has strongly criticised the Public Broadcaster in Albania (RTSH), even threatening to close it down. Media organisations have called for a thorough reform of the public broadcaster in line with European standards. However, they also argued that measures such as funding withdrawal or institutional closure would undermine editorial independence and contradict EU principles, particularly in the context of Albania's accession process. Instead, they argue, reform should focus on strengthened oversight, transparent accountability, improved governance and safeguards for editorial autonomy, ensuring that RTSH continues to fulfil its democratic role of providing impartial information, cultural programming and inclusive public debate, while rebuilding public trust. This is closely related to the sensitive issue of the impartiality of the Albanian Media Agency (AMA). In its 2025 Rule of Law report, the European Commission emphasised the need for continuing efforts to strengthen the independence of AMA.

55. On 12 March 2026 SciDEV and BIRN published their 2025 annual report on “Tracking Albania's progress on Media Freedom and Journalistic Safety in line with European union Standards”.^{12 13} According to this report, Albania made progress in aligning its media environment with European Union standards in 2025, particularly with regard to its institutional frameworks for media regulation. Preparatory steps were taken to improve the European Media Freedom Act and the Digital Services Act. Furthermore, consultation platforms

¹² [Annual Report 2025: Tracking Albania's Progress on Media Freedom and Journalistic Safety in Line with European Union Standards - SCiDEV](#).

¹³ [Full Report](#).

brought together media stakeholders and government institutions, resulting in draft legislative proposals related to the protection of journalists and reform of defamation laws.

56. However, significant concerns remain. The gap between formal legal alignment and the practical impact of reforms is still considerable. Major challenges include persistent market concentration, opaque media ownership, a lack of enforceable safeguards for pluralism, and continued political and economic pressure on journalists. Survey evidence shows that 68% of respondents have experienced restrictions on their ability to report freely, with political actors being the main source of pressure. Safety concerns also remain high, with 40.6% of journalists reporting threats or intimidation. Despite the existence of institutional protection mechanisms and contact points within law enforcement agencies, awareness of these measures is low, as is trust in them, and reporting rates of incidents have declined.

57. The May 2025 parliamentary elections served as a stress test for institutional commitments to media freedom. Around 70% of journalists covering the campaign faced difficulties accessing information, nearly half reported that pre-prepared materials from political actors limited editorial independence, and 24% experienced direct pressure or threats. Disinformation - often amplified through unofficial or anonymous online sources - exacerbated these challenges, with both women journalists and candidates particularly targeted by hate speech and AI-generated disinformation. These patterns suggest that the electoral period intensified existing pressures, limiting effective pluralism and the capacity for independent coverage, underscoring the systemic vulnerabilities within the Albanian media landscape.

58. Since the outbreak of the so-called Flamingo Revolution,¹⁴ journalists have reportedly faced obstruction, attacks and police interference when reporting on these demonstrations. These limitations on their work have been compounded by the use of crowd-control measures, and protest-related criminal procedures. At the time of writing, the Safe Journalists Network has registered 27 threats and actual attacks in 2026, of which 15 were registered in June and July alone.¹⁵ The Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists has so far issued 6 alerts for Albania in 2026, one of which remained unanswered¹⁶ at the time of writing.

¹⁴ 'Flamingo Revolution': Albanian protests swell against Trump-linked resort - France 24.

¹⁵ [Albania's Flamingo Revolution](#): Journalists must be protected.

¹⁶ Albania | Safety of journalists [platform](#).

Appendix 1

**Programme of the fact-finding visit to Tirana
(30 March to 1 April 2026)**

Co-rapporteurs **Mr Ionuț-Marian Stroe**, Romania, Group of the European People's Party
Mr Paweł Jabłoński, Poland, European Conservatives, Patriots & Affiliates

Secretariat **Mr Bas Klein**, Deputy Head of Secretariat, Monitoring Committee

Main topics:

- Recent Political Developments
- Progress in addressing the recommendations made in [Resolution 2544 \(2024\)](#)

Sunday, 29 March 2026

Arrival of members of the delegation.

Monday, 30 March 2026

10:00 Briefing on recent developments by the Head of the Council Office in Tirana (*)

10:30 **Roundtable on electoral reform** (*)

KRIIK
 International IDEA
 National Democratic Institute
 Qendresa Qytetare

11:30 **Roundtable on Media Environment** (*)

SCiDEV
 Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)
 Faktoje.al
 Albanian Media Council

12:30 Lunch

14:00 **Roundtable on Equality** (*)

People with disabilities
 Fondacioni "Së Bashku

LGBTI community
 Aleanca LGBT
 Pink Embassy / CRCA

National minorities
Bujar Taho, Expert
Elona Dhembo, Expert

15:00 **Roundtable on fight against corruption** (*)

Albanian Helsinki Committee
 IDM
 Albanian Institute of Political Studies

- 16:30 Meeting with the Chairperson and members of the Albanian Parliamentary Delegation to PACE
- 17:20 Meeting with the Chairperson and members of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs and Public Administration
- 18:05 Meeting with the Chairperson and members of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Public Media
- 18:50 Meeting with the Co-Chairs of the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee on Electoral Reform

Tuesday, 31 March 2026

- 10:00 Meeting with the international community/Ambassadors (*)
- 11:30 Meeting with the Speaker of the Parliament: **H.E. Mr Niko Peleshi**
- 13:05 Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs: **H.E. Mr Ferit Hoxha**
- 14:00 Meeting with the Minister of Justice: **Mr Toni Gogu**
- 14:45 Joint Meeting with the Freedom Party; Unity for Human Rights Party; Republican Party of Albania
- 16:00 Meeting with the Minister of State for Anti-Corruption and Public Administration: **Ms Adea Pirdeni**
- 16:45 Meeting with the Minister of Interior: **Mr Besfort Lamallari**
- 17:30 Meeting with the Democratic Party Parliamentary Group: **Mr Gazment Bardhi** and **Mr Sali Berisha**
- 18:15 Meeting with the Socialist Party Parliamentary Group: **Mr Taulant Balla**
- 19:00 Meeting with the Board of Public Broadcaster

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

- 08:15 Meeting with the Chair of the Constitutional Court: **Ms Fiona Papajorgji**
- 09:00 Meeting with the **Head of SPAK**
- 10:30 Meeting with the Audio-visual Media Authority of Albania: **Ms Armela Krasniqi**
- 11:30 Meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Albania **Ms Albana Koçiu**
- 12:30 Joint meeting with Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination; the Deputy Ombudsperson and the Chairperson of the Minority Council

Departure of members of the delegation.

(*) Meetings organised by Council of Europe Office in Tirana.

Appendix 2**Post-monitoring dialogue with Albania: PACE monitors welcome constructive discussions with all stakeholders**

Following a visit to Tirana from 30 March to 1 April 2026, the co-rapporteurs of PACE for post-monitoring dialogue with Albania, Ionut Stroe (Romania, EPP/CD) and Pawel Jabłoński (Poland, ECPA), have welcomed the constructive discussions with the authorities and all other stakeholders about the implementation of the Assembly's remaining recommendations. "We acknowledge the considerable progress made in several key areas but also recognise that concerns remain in a number of areas that require our ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders," said the co-rapporteurs.

They particularly welcomed the adoption of the three by-laws needed to implement the 2017 Law on National Minorities, as well as the marked and tangible progress achieved by the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SPAK) in fighting high-level corruption. In this regard, they urged the authorities to refrain from taking any actions or making any decisions that could undermine the efficiency of the SPAK's work, such as increasing the immunities of public officials.

At the same time, regarding the media environment, the rapporteurs expressed their disappointment at the ruling majority's reluctance to fully decriminalise defamation and insult, as recommended by the Assembly and Albanian media organisations. They also expressed concern about the deeply-rooted hostility and polarisation between the country's main political forces, which is affecting the reform process. The co-rapporteurs therefore called on all political forces to overcome their differences and work together for the country's continued European integration, of which implementing the Assembly's remaining recommendations is an important part.

The co-rapporteurs intend to visit the country at the end of 2026 or the beginning of 2027.

Albania was under the Assembly's full monitoring procedure from 1995 to 2024, after which it passed to the stage of "post-monitoring dialogue", a less intensive procedure involving a limited number of remaining issues.