



Albania and the European Integration

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Abstract

This study delves into the evolution of Albania's European integration process, focusing on various critical aspects. We examine the legislative and institutional reforms undertaken by Albania to meet the Copenhagen criteria and European Union standards. Specifically, we scrutinize the sectors of justice, public administration, and fundamental rights, assessing both progress made and lingering challenges. Furthermore, we explore the economic impact of European integration on Albania, evaluating how opening up to European markets and adopting common norms have influenced economic growth, employment, and the country's competitiveness. We also analyze social dynamics, examining how the integration process has shaped Albanian society, impacting culture, education, and social cohesion. From a geopolitical perspective, we consider Albania's strategic position in the Western Balkans and how this may affect regional dynamics and the country's role within the European Union. Finally, we discuss future prospects, exploring remaining challenges and outlining the opportunities that European integration could offer to Albania politically, economically, and socially.

Keywords: Albania, European integration, impact, society

1. Introduction

Albania, a long-standing candidate for European Union (EU) membership, has embarked on a path of legislative reforms aimed at aligning its legal framework with European standards.

This article explores Albania's legislative evolution in the context of the European integration process, analyzing the main laws and regulations adopted to meet the requirements for EU accession.

Starting with a historical overview of Albania's relationship with the EU, it examines the impact of legislative reforms on the economy, governance, and fundamental rights in the country. Through a detailed analysis of key laws and progress made, it outlines Albania's path towards European integration and identifies future challenges and opportunities.

Albania initiated the European integration process in 2003¹, officially submitting its application for EU membership in 2009.

¹ 2003-2006: *Initiation of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAA)* Albania officially began the process of European integration in 2003 with the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. This agreement laid the groundwork for closer cooperation between Albania and the EU, outlining priorities and necessary reforms to approach the requirements for accession.

Since then, the country has made significant efforts to reform its legislative framework to meet the Copenhagen criteria and other requirements for accession. This article examines Albania's legislative-normative context in relation to its path towards European integration, highlighting the main laws and challenges faced along the way.

Albania has made significant progress in revising and adopting new laws and regulations to align its legal system with that of the European Union. Key areas of intervention include justice, security, human rights, the environment, and the economy. For example, the adoption of the competition law in 2013 represented a significant step towards harmonizing Albanian economic policies with European ones, promoting competition and transparency in the internal market.

One of the most significant reforms has been in the justice sector, with the adoption of laws aimed at strengthening the independence of the judiciary and combating corruption. The judiciary law and the penal code have undergone extensive revisions to ensure compliance with European standards on human rights and legality. Similarly, in the field of fundamental rights, Albania has adopted anti-discrimination laws and promoted social inclusion and gender equality.

2. Discussion

Over the years, Albania has made notable progress in various areas of reform to align with EU requirements. One of the key areas of focus has been the judiciary, where Albania has implemented significant reforms aimed at enhancing the independence, efficiency, and accountability of the judicial system. These reforms have included the adoption of new laws and measures to combat corruption, improve legal procedures, and strengthen the rule of law².

Additionally, Albania has undertaken extensive efforts to align its economic and regulatory framework with EU standards.

This has involved reforms in areas such as competition policy, trade regulations, and investment laws to create a more conducive environment for economic growth and development.

Furthermore, Albania has made strides in promoting human rights, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, all of which are essential aspects of EU membership. The adoption of anti-discrimination laws, measures to promote gender equality, and initiatives to protect the environment demonstrate Albania's commitment to upholding European values and principles.

Despite these efforts, Albania continues to face challenges on its path to European integration. Issues such as corruption, organized crime, and institutional weaknesses remain significant hurdles that need to be addressed effectively.

Moreover, public support for EU membership in Albania has fluctuated over the years, underscoring the importance of continued engagement and dialogue between the government, civil society, and the public.

Looking ahead, Albania remains committed to advancing its European integration agenda and achieving full EU membership. The country's ongoing reforms and dedication to meeting EU standards demonstrate its readiness to embrace the responsibilities and opportunities that come with EU accession. While the road ahead may be challenging, Albania's steadfast commitment to European integration reflects its aspiration to build a stable, prosperous, and democratic future as an integral part of the European family.

Albania has undertaken extensive reform of the judicial system to ensure independence, efficiency, and impartiality of judicial institutions. This process involved revising laws on the judiciary, organizing courts and legal proceedings, as well as establishing independent oversight and control bodies to prevent corruption and ensure respect for human rights.

Albania has adopted laws and measures to combat corruption at all levels, including the public sector, the judiciary, law enforcement, and the private sector. These reforms have introduced new monitoring and punishment mechanisms for misconduct, as well as promoting transparency and accountability in public institutions.

To foster economic integration with the EU, Albania has reviewed and adopted new laws in the fields of competition, technical standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, as well as fiscal and investment policies. These reforms aim to promote the free movement of goods and services, improve the business environment, and attract foreign direct investment.

Albania has enacted anti-discrimination laws and adopted measures to promote social inclusion, gender equality, and minority rights. These reforms are aimed at ensuring respect for fundamental rights and civil liberties, in line with European standards and international obligations.

In line with EU objectives on environment and sustainable development, Albania has introduced regulations for the

² Law nr. 84/2016 "Per rivleresimin kalimtar te Gjyqtareve dhe Prokuroreve ne Republiken e Shqiperise"

protection of national parks, sustainable management of natural resources, pollution reduction, and promotion of renewable energies. These reforms aim to preserve the country's environmental heritage and promote fair and sustainable economic development.

These reforms represent only some of the major legislative initiatives undertaken by Albania in the context of its European integration process. Their goal is to modernize and harmonize the country's legal framework with EU standards and regulations, to facilitate accession and promote socio-economic and democratic development in Albania.

Despite the progress made, Albania still faces several challenges on the path to European integration. These include widespread corruption, an inefficient judicial system, and organized crime. However, the country also enjoys unique opportunities to strengthen its commitment to the EU, such as the economic potential of the European single market and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, Albania has made commendable strides in reforming its legislative framework to align with European Union standards and requirements. The journey towards European integration has seen significant achievements, particularly in crucial areas such as judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, economic legislation, and human rights protection. These reforms reflect Albania's commitment to modernization, democratization, and the promotion of European values.

However, it's essential to acknowledge that challenges persist on the path to EU accession. Corruption remains a systemic issue that requires sustained efforts and vigilant enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Additionally, the judiciary system requires further strengthening to ensure its independence, efficiency, and accountability. Addressing these challenges will be critical to enhancing Albania's credibility and readiness for EU membership.

Looking ahead, Albania stands at a pivotal juncture with both challenges and opportunities on the horizon. Continued dedication to implementing reforms, fostering good governance, and upholding the rule of law will be essential. Furthermore, leveraging regional cooperation and engaging constructively with EU institutions will enhance Albania's integration prospects and contribute to stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

Ultimately, the successful integration of Albania into the European Union is not merely a legislative or administrative process but a transformative journey towards greater prosperity, democracy, and European unity. It requires collective efforts from policymakers, civil society, and the Albanian people to overcome obstacles and realize the shared vision of a prosperous and inclusive future within the European family.

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