RESILIO ACCESS
Country Report
Albania

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1. Introduction

Albania's transition towards the rule of law contains a central paradox. While the justice system was once regarded as politically subordinate, it now brings cases against people at the summit of power. Yet each case exposes how dependent the new architecture is on parliamentary restraint, administrative capacity and public confidence. The resilience of rule of law in Albania is characterised by the contest between newly autonomous institutions and the political, economic and informal networks that learned to operate through the old state.

There is a heavy historical burden. The Communist legal system subordinated courts to the party-state; the collapse of state authority in 1997 deepened distrust and the post-communist party system developed around highly personalised leaders, patronage and adversarial control of institutions. The 1998 Constitution established a democratic framework, but the judiciary continued to suffer from corruption, opaque appointments and political influence. By the middle of the 2010s, public trust in the courts had fallen to exceptionally low levels. The 2016 constitutional reform was designed as an extraordinary intervention.[1]

International indicators describe a mixed but coherent picture. The World Justice Project (WJP) has repeatedly identified Albania's weakest dimensions: constraints on government powers, absence of corruption, regulatory enforcement and the performance of civil and criminal justice. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) depicts an electoral democracy whose liberal, deliberative and equality-before-the-law components remain significantly less robust than its formal electoral competition. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index gave Albania 42 points out of 100, placing it 80th of 180 jurisdictions. This demonstrates the persistent gap between competitive elections and equal, predictable enforcement of law.[2]

[1] ConstitutionNet / International IDEA, "Strengthening the Judiciary in Albania: The Story Behind the Success of the 2016 Constitutional Reforms" 2016; Arlind Puka, "Judicial Independence in Albania: From Formal Reform to Structural Change under the EU's 'Fundamentals First'", College of Europe Policy Brief 5/26 (July 2026).

[2] World Justice Project, "Albania: Rule of Law Index 2024", https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2024/Albania/; V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report 2026 and Albania country indicators, https://www.v-dem.net/; Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Albania", 11 February 2025 (all accessed 15 July 2026).

The 2016 reform altered that equilibrium. It created new judicial-governance bodies, introduced comprehensive vetting of magistrates and established the Special Structure against Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK), the National Bureau of Investigation and specialised courts. The reform exposed unexplained wealth, integrity failures and professional deficiencies on a scale that confirmed the depth of the earlier legitimacy crisis. It also led to a severe issue for the transition; magistrates left faster than qualified replacements entered, higher courts temporarily lost operational capacity and backlogs expanded. Albania gained integrity, but for a time lost functionality.[3]

The political environment has remained uneven since the 2016 justice reform. The May 2025 parliamentary election was competitive and professionally administered (including the first out-of-country vote), but observers reported widespread misuse of public resources and institutional power, pressure on public employees and voters, intimidation, polarising rhetoric and media self-censorship. The governing Socialist Party won a fourth consecutive term and a strong parliamentary majority. That result supplied stability for accession reforms but also sharpened the problem of executive predominance and weak parliamentary scrutiny.[4]

Two events transformed these long-running concerns into a vivid rule-of-law drama in 2026. First, SPAK's case against former Deputy Prime Minister and Infrastructure Minister Belinda Balluku reached the centre of the governing establishment. Prosecutors alleged manipulation of major infrastructure tenders. After a specialised court suspended her, Prime Minister Edi Rama criticised judicial overreach and proposed legal changes limiting courts' power to suspend ministers. Balluku was later removed from government, but parliament refused SPAK's request to authorise a custodial sentence and did not lift her immunity. Second, the 'Flamingo Revolution' turned a dispute over a proposed luxury development in and around the Vjosa–Narta and Zvërnec nature reserve into a wider protest over law, land, corruption and democratic voice.[5]

[3] European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter on the Rule of Law Situation in Albania, SWD(2025) 928 final, 8 July 2025; European Commission, Albania Report 2025, SWD(2025) 750 final, 4 November 2025.

[4] OSCE/ODIHR, Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Final Report, 2025; European Union, Interim European Union Common Position, Negotiating Cluster 1: Fundamentals, AD 13/26 CONF-ALB 3/26, 22 May 2026, 4–5.

[5] Edward Mcallister/Fatos Bytyci, "The Probe into Corruption at the Heart of Albania's Government", 19 February 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/probe-into-corruption-heart-albanias-government-2026-02-19/; Jakob Weizman, "Brussels Calls for Justice as Ex-Albanian Deputy Prime Minister Belinda Balluku Faces Arrest", 12 March 2026, https://www.politico.eu/article/brussels-calls-for-justice-as-ex-albanian-deputy-prime-minister-belinda-balluku-faces-arrest/; Rashela Shehu, "Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution': What's behind the Protests?", 27 June 2026, https://www.dw.com/en/albanias-flamingo-revolution-whats-behind-the-protests/a-77710991 (all accessed 15 July 2026).

Albania's strongest resilience resource is the emergence of judicial bodies able to constrain officeholders. Its most important subsidiary resource is a civic sphere capable of making opaque decisions politically costly. Its most dangerous stressor is regime corruption reinforced by clientelism – as well as bribery, the use of public authority, procurement, property rules, appointments and media influence to reproduce political and economic advantage. The question for the future is whether exceptional resilience can become ordinary governance.

2. Analysis of the country case along the RESILIO-ACCESS model

The RESILIO-ACCESS model provides quantitative evidence up to 2024 – the final measured baseline for this report. We then examined developments in 2025–2026 as qualitative stress tests of Albania's rule of law resilience. In 2024, the baseline was characterised by persistent corruption and clientelism, organised crime and indirect media pressure alongside concerns over accountability – despite the growing role of SPAK as an institutional counter-power. In 2025, competitive parliamentary elections were overshadowed by reported misuse of public resources, pressure on public employees and media self-censorship. Ongoing vetting and high-level investigations strengthened accountability while also exposing capacity and political-pressure risks. In 2026, the Balluku investigation, debates over judicial powers, the Flamingo mobilisation and the coastal land controversy transformed long-running governance concerns into public rule-of-law disputes, revealing the interaction of corruption, clientelism, civic mobilisation, media pressure and institutional accountability.

2.1. The most important primary resilience resource: constraints on government powers through judicial independence and accountability

From captured justice to institutional counter-power

Albania's most important primary resilience resource is the capacity of judicial institutions to impose legal consequences on political power. Before 2016, there was an expectation that appointments, careers and sensitive cases would be shaped by political or private influence. The reform dispersed governance functions among the High Judicial Council, High Prosecutorial Council and High Justice Inspector, while SPAK was deliberately insulated from the ordinary prosecutorial hierarchy. The Venice Commission accepted vetting only as a *sui generis* response to an exceptional crisis, stressing that extraordinary purification had to remain compatible with independence and fair process.[6]

[6] European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Final Opinion on the Revised Draft Constitutional Amendments on the Judiciary of Albania, CDL-AD(2016)009, 14 March 2016;

By 2025, around 56 per cent of the 802 magistrates examined had been dismissed, had resigned or had otherwise left office. This demonstrated that distrust was not merely rhetorical and broke the assumption that professional status guaranteed permanence. New governance bodies reduced direct ministerial control of appointments and discipline. Most importantly, SPAK increased the expected cost of high-level corruption; former ministers, mayors, senior officials and even an opposition leader and a former president could no longer assume that political status placed them beyond investigation.[7]

SPAK is therefore more than a prosecution office. It is a credibility mechanism. Its protected mandate, specialised investigators and dedicated courts allow the legal system to absorb pressure that would overwhelm ordinary institutions. The EU's 2026 interim common position (IBAR report) welcomed a growing record of high-level investigations, prosecutions and convictions, and treated the independence and operational capacity of SPAK as central to the closing benchmarks for Chapter 23.

The Balluku test: law reaches the cabinet

The Balluku case is the most revealing stress test so far, as it went beyond former officeholders or opposition figures to a close ally of the sitting prime minister. SPAK alleged interference in tenders for major infrastructure projects worth more than Euro 200 million; Balluku denied the charges. A specialised court ordered Balluku's suspension from office and imposed a travel restriction. SPAK then sought parliamentary authorisation for a stricter custodial measure, as Balluku retained a parliamentary mandate. Parliament's refusal on 12 March 2026 did not end the investigation, but it exposed a constitutional fault line – whether immunity is a narrowly tailored safeguard for parliamentary work or a political veto over coercive measures in a corruption case.[8]

[7] U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, "Judicial Vetting: What Can We Learn from Albania?", 2025, https://www.u4.no/blog/judicial-vetting (accessed 15 July 2026).

[8] Reuters, "Albanian PM Fires Deputy as Corruption Investigation Heats Up", 26 February 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/albanian-pm-fires-deputy-corruption-investigation-heats-up-2026-02-26/; Weizman, "Brussels Calls for Justice"; Genta Hodo, "Albanian Parliament Blocks Arrest of Ex-Deputy PM Balluku", SeeNews, 12 March 2026, https://seenews.com/news/albanian-parliament-blocks-arrest-of-ex-deputy-pm-balluku-1291263 (all accessed 15 July 2026).

The executive response was equally consequential. Prime Minister Rama argued that suspending a minister paralysed an entire institution, announcing legislation to prevent courts from taking such action during an investigation. That concern is not frivolous; pre-trial measures must be proportionate, reasoned and compatible with the presumption of innocence. But changing the rules in direct response to a case involving a senior ally creates the appearance of personalised legislation and risks weakening the separation of powers. The rule-of-law approach should be transparent judicial reasoning, prompt review, respect for parliamentary inviolability only within its proper scope and a prohibition on retaliatory legal change.[9]

The EU had already warned of increasing attempts by high-level politicians and officials to exert undue influence on justice institutions, personal attacks on judges and prosecutors and incomplete implementation of binding Constitutional Court decisions. Independence can be eroded without formally abolishing an institution. Repeated de-legitimisation, selective compliance, pressure over appointments and budgetary obstruction can produce self-censorship inside the judiciary. A resilient system requires that the High Judicial Council (HJC) and High Prosecutorial Council (HPC) defend magistrates publicly and consistently, while magistrates must meet demanding standards of legality, impartiality and explanation.[10]

The capacity trap: clean institutions that cannot deliver

The reform's principal weakness is the gap between integrity and capacity. Vetting removed compromised magistrates faster than the School of Magistrates and appointment bodies could replace them. The Constitutional Court and Supreme Court lost effective quorums for extended periods, the Supreme Court accumulated more than 35,000 pending files, and the durations of civil cases increased from around 250 days to more than 1,200 days in parts of the system. The new judicial map consolidated courts to manage scarce staff, but shifted travel, financial and logistical costs to citizens outside the main urban centres.[11]

This is not a secondary administrative issue – delay can nullify rights, reward the better-resourced party and make public bodies less responsive to judgments. A court that is formally independent but inaccessible or chronically late cannot constrain government effectively. SPAK's success will remain an 'island of excellence' unless its standards of professionalism, coordination and operational discipline spread to ordinary prosecution offices and courts. Judicial independence must be measured through performance as well as institutional design.

[9] Reuters, "Albanian PM Seeks to Stop Judiciary from Suspending Ministers", 16 February 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/albanian-pm-seeks-stop-judiciary-dismissing-ministers-2026-02-16/ (accessed 15 July 2026).
[10] European Union, Interim Common Position, 9–10, 29.
[11] Euronews Albania, "USAID to Assist Albanian Courts with 35,000 Cases Backlog", 30 April 2020, https://euronews.al/en/usaid-to-assist-albanian-courts-with-35-000-cases-backlog/ (accessed 15 July 2026); J. Urías, "From Backlog to Breakdown: Albania's Judiciary at a Cliff's Edge", Verfassungsblog, 26 March 2025.

What resilience requires

The next phase should be consolidation, rather than another redesign. Appointments, promotions and evaluations need fixed deadlines, published criteria and reasoned decisions. The School of Magistrates requires a multi-year workforce plan linked to vacancies and projected retirements. Courts need an integrated case-management system, reliable public data and sequencing of backlog reduction – staffing and administrative support first, interoperable digital tools second and disciplined case management third. The work of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) on efficiency and data management provides an appropriate framework, while the EU's closing benchmarks rightly require Albania to fill about three quarters of vacancies, reduce disposition times and use a functioning integrated system.[12]

Other primary resources depend on this core. Open government is weakened when procurement and land decisions are opaque, equality before the law is undermined when political status changes the practical consequences of investigation, civil justice loses credibility when property judgments remain unenforced. The good practice to preserve is SPAK's protected professional model. The reform priority is to make that model less exceptional by strengthening ordinary institutions rather than diluting SPAK until it resembles the weaker system around it.

2.2. The most important subsidiary resilience resource: civil society and public deliberation

From project-based advocacy to public counter-power

Albania's most important subsidiary resource is the ability of civic actors to turn dispersed grievances into public demands for legality. Civil society has often been fragmented, Tirana-centred and dependent on donor projects. Consultation is frequently formal rather than influential, while social polarisation encourages governments and opposition parties to classify organisations as allies or enemies. Yet civil society has repeatedly filled gaps left by weak parliamentary oversight: monitoring procurement, litigating environmental and property cases, protecting journalists, observing elections and supplying evidence to prosecutors.[13]

[12] European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), "CEPEJ Mission in Albania: Improving the Efficiency of the Judicial System and Optimising Data Management", 28 January 2025; European Union, Interim Common Position, 11, 29–30.

[13] European Union, Interim Common Position, 5; RESILIO-ACCESS, "Overview of Indicators", 2–3.

Its strength lies in combination. Investigative journalists uncover contracts and ownership networks, environmental organisations translate ecological harm into legal claims, local residents provide evidence about land and consultation, lawyers seek interim measures and judicial review, and national or international networks increase the political cost of retaliation. The result is a form of distributed oversight that is difficult for any single institution to perform. It does not replace parliament or courts, but it helps them receive information, public attention and social support.

The flamingo as a rule of law symbol

The 2026 'Flamingo Revolution' is the clearest example. The movement emerged in opposition to proposed luxury developments linked to Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, connected with the Zvërnec coast, Narta Lagoon and Sazan Island. The area is ecologically sensitive and politically symbolic; questions of protected status, land ownership, environmental assessment and strategic-investment privileges converge there. Nightly demonstrations used pink flamingos to make a technical planning dispute visible to the broader public. Participants profiled by the Associated Press emphasised that the protest was not a vehicle for either of Albania's established political camps.[14]

That independence is central to its resilience value. Earlier opposition rallies over the Balluku affair often reproduced Albania's polarised party conflict, descending in some cases into violence. The flamingo protests attracted citizens distrustful of both government and opposition and connected environmental protection with the more general principle that public assets cannot be allocated through opaque exceptions. The movement's core slogan ('Albania is not for sale') condenses several rule of law claims: equal treatment, access to information, public participation, secure property records and review of administrative discretion.

The story also developed beyond symbolic protest. In July 2026, Reuters reported that SPAK was investigating a businessman who had sold land connected with the proposed resort, alleging forged ownership documents and laundering of criminal proceeds; funds from the transaction were frozen. The seller denied wrongdoing and no wrongdoing was alleged against the project's international investors. The episode nevertheless shows why civil mobilisation matters – it can connect environmental scrutiny to property registration, beneficial ownership, money laundering controls and prosecutorial action without presuming the outcome of an investigation.[15]

[14] Zana Cimili, "Meet 3 Members of Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution' Trying to Torpedo a Kushner-Linked Development", 28 June 2026, https://apnews.com/article/3762c3a19d75ed9221fffbe4a3d5bc8f; Shehu, "Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution'" (accessed 15 July 2026).

[15] Fatos Bytyci/Edward Mcallister, "Businessman Who Sold Land for Kushner Resort in Albania Suspected of Faking the Deeds", 11 July 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/businessman-who-sold-land-kushner-resort-albania-suspected-faking-deeds-2026-07-11/ (accessed 15 July 2026).

The movement contributes to resilience in four ways; it increases the reputational cost of bypassing consultation, supplies courts and prosecutors with information and witnesses, broadens the constituency for legal enforcement beyond professional NGOs, and links Albania's EU ambition to concrete domestic rights. Its weakness is that protest is episodic. Protest fatigue, party capture, disinformation and confrontation with police can quickly narrow public support. The test is whether a vivid symbol becomes a durable channel for participation.

Media: amplifier and vulnerability

Media are inseparable from this subsidiary resource. Albania has a plural and energetic information environment, including investigative outlets able to sustain attention on complex corruption cases. But ownership concentration, opaque financing, dependence on state advertising and owners' interests in construction or regulated sectors encourage self-censorship. Journalists face smear campaigns, strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) and verbal or physical attacks. The EU's 2026 assessment calls for transparent ownership and financing, editorial independence, an autonomous regulator and effective anti-SLAPP safeguards.[16]

This mixed environment explains why digital and civic networks matter. They can bypass gatekeepers and rapidly amplify documents or local testimony. They can also spread unverified allegations and intensify polarisation. Resilient public deliberation therefore requires both freedom and verification – access to official records, protection of sources, ethical reporting, transparent platform communication during elections and prompt correction of false claims. Media should be able to scrutinise both government and prosecutors, since support for judicial independence cannot mean immunity from evidence-based criticism.

From protest to procedure

Good practice should institutionalise participation. Draft laws, concession contracts, environmental assessments and implementing acts should be published early in searchable form. Consultation reports should identify the participants, what objections were raised and why proposals were accepted or rejected. Environmental organisations and local communities should have standing and affordable access to interim judicial protection. Public bodies should respond to information requests within statutory deadlines, courts should provide rapid remedies when they do not. These measures would turn mobilisation from an emergency brake into a routine part of lawful decision-making.

[16] European Union, Interim Common Position, 14, 32.

2.3. Most important stressor: regime corruption and clientelism in an interacting risk system

The most significant stressor affecting Albania's governance environment between 2024–2026 has been the interaction between systemic corruption and clientelism. Corruption concerns have remained embedded across public administration, political decision-making and business relations. High-level procurement disputes, strategic investment controversies and land-related cases have placed the relationship between political authority, public contracts and private interests at the centre of rule-of-law scrutiny. Clientelist practices have persisted; party–state relationships, administrative dependence and the use of institutional resources have raised concerns about accountability, electoral fairness and the independence of public institutions.

Organised crime and pressure on media freedom are two other stressors in the high-risk tier. Organised crime remains a structural challenge, particularly trafficking, money laundering and the intersection between illicit finance and legitimate economic activity. Recent investigations of coastal land and property governance have shown how title fraud, criminal interests and investment structures can overlap, although no wrongdoing has been alleged against international investors. Media freedom is under pressure primarily through indirect mechanisms, including ownership structures, financial dependence, unequal access and self-censorship. Concerns related to election-period pressures, attacks against journalists, SLAPPs and restrictions affecting online platforms have contributed to a challenging media environment.

Constraints on civic space and episodic political violence are two medium-level stressors. Consultation mechanisms remain uneven and civil society organisations continue to face challenges in influencing decision-making processes. Protest confrontations (including clashes with police, injuries, arrests and the use of force) have occurred periodically, although physical violence is not a routine instrument of governance.

Mobilisation for autocracy and the use of emergency powers are low-level stressors. Albania has not witnessed sustained protest in favour of an openly authoritarian model of governance. Nevertheless, political polarisation and attacks against institutions may contribute to anti-system rhetoric and weaken democratic resilience. Similarly, emergency powers have not represented a significant mechanism of political pressure during the period under review, with contestation occurring primarily through ordinary legislative processes, administrative discretion and parliamentary majorities.

The RESILIO-ACCESS data identifies regime corruption and clientelism as the central stressor pair as they connect the widest range of arenas: procurement, public employment, elections, property, media financing and parliamentary oversight. Organised crime can exploit the same opaque markets, indirect media pressure reduces detection, weak consultation excludes early warning, violent confrontation can discredit legitimate civic demands or provide a rationale for restrictive policing. Conversely, neither the absence of a state of emergency nor the lack of explicit pro-autocratic mass protest should be mistaken for low overall risk. In Albania, pressure is more often exercised through ordinary discretion, unequal access and personalised institutional conflict.[17]

Procurement as the recurring fault line

Public procurement concentrates the main risks: high values, technical complexity, compressed timelines and substantial official discretion. Albania's incinerator and sterilisation cases, investigations involving the Albanian Road Authority and the Balluku tender allegations all concern variations of the same vulnerability; requirements, deadlines, qualification criteria or contract performance can be shaped to privilege connected actors. Each case must be judged on its own evidence, but the recurrence indicates a systems problem rather than a succession of unrelated scandals.[18]

The Balluku investigation is especially important because it links procurement integrity to separation of powers. If the prosecution succeeds on evidence tested in court, it will demonstrate that political office does not shield tender manipulation. If the accused is acquitted, a transparent and timely process will demonstrate that SPAK is an institution of law rather than punishment by accusation. In either outcome, parliamentary obstruction, retaliatory legislation or political pressure would weaken resilience by shifting the contest from evidence to power.

[17] RESILIO-ACCESS, "Overview of Indicators", 3–5; European Union, Interim Common Position, 4–14, 29–32; Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2024: Albania; OSCE/ODIHR, Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Final Report.
[18] European Commission, Albania Report 2025; Mcallister/Bytyci, "The Probe into Corruption at the Heart of Albania's Government".

Land, tourism and legal exceptionalism

Land and strategic investment form a second fault line. Albania's tourism boom creates legitimate opportunities for growth, infrastructure and employment, while making coastal property, planning changes and protected status exceptionally valuable. Accelerated investment procedures can reduce uncertainty for investors; they can also bypass consultation and make legal exceptions appear tailored to politically connected projects. In the Vjosa–Narta dispute, the government presents high-end tourism as national development – opponents see environmental deregulation and unequal access to public assets. Rule-of-law analysis must avoid prejudging either claim and instead ask whether the rules, ownership records and assessments are public, general, reviewable and consistently applied.[19]

The July 2026 land investigation exposed the role of organised crime. Albania's criminal economy has long sought entry into construction, hospitality and real estate, where illicit proceeds can be mixed with legal investment and opaque ownership. Weak cadastre data and disputed titles increase the value of political access. The appropriate resilience response is rigorous due diligence, verified beneficial ownership, traceable payments and independent environmental and competition review.

Clientelism, elections and media

Clientelism extends into electoral democracy. A governing party that can influence public employment, local administration, permits and benefits can generate political dependence without an explicit cash-for-vote transaction. The 2025 election findings on misuse of state resources, pressure on employees and institutional leverage illustrate how administrative power can distort an otherwise competitive contest. Closed party control over candidate careers further weakens parliamentary oversight, since governing deputies may have stronger incentives to protect the executive than to scrutinise it.[20]

Media financing can complete the circuit. Owners with interests in construction or public contracts can use outlets to protect commercial relationships, state advertising and access can reward favourable coverage, and smear campaigns can increase the cost of investigative reporting. This results in a structure of anticipatory obedience in which journalists, officials and businesses learn which questions are expensive to ask. This is why unbiased media and open government are resilience resources, while government media pressure is itself a stressor.

[19] Cimili, "What to Know about Opposition in Albania to a Trump Family-Linked Resort Project", June 2026; Bytyci/ Mcallister, "Businessman Who Sold Land for Kushner Resort"; The Guardian, "The Guardian View on the Flamingo Revolution", 8 July 2026 (accessed 15 July 2026).

[20] OSCE/ODIHR, Parliamentary Elections, 11 May 2025: Final Report; European Union, Interim Common Position, 4–5.

From spectacular cases to preventive integrity

The policy priority is to move from case-driven anti-corruption to systems-based integrity. Procurement data should be open from planning to final payment, including amendments, subcontractors and beneficial owners. Authorities should use red-flag analytics to identify single-bid procedures, repeated winners, abnormal amendments and split contracts. Asset declarations and conflicts of interest require risk-based verification and deterrent sanctions. Strategic investments should be subject to general criteria and independent review. Whistle-blowers need confidential reporting, protection against retaliation and practical legal support.

Finally, success cannot be measured only by arrests. The EU correctly requires a sustained record of final judgments, asset seizure and confiscation, cooperation by public authorities and referrals to SPAK. Indicators should also measure prevention – procurement competition, publication quality, implementation of audit recommendations, enforcement of conflicts rules and the proportion of court judgments executed. A resilient system reduces the need for heroic intervention as routine institutions can stop the abuse earlier.[21]

3. The effect of the EU accession process

EU accession has been Albania's most powerful external resilience resource. Technical assistance, political conditionality and the promise of membership helped make the 2016 reform possible and protected its institutions during the fragile start-up period. The revised enlargement methodology places the 'fundamentals first' – progress in other clusters depends on credible results in democratic institutions, public administration, the judiciary, anti-corruption and fundamental rights. Albania's EU accession process has moved at a remarkable pace. The country successfully launched negotiations on all 33 chapters within a compact 13-month window from October 2024 to November 2025, quickly following up with the provisional closure of three chapters on 14 July 2026.

Albania must safeguard judicial independence, complete evaluations, fill about 75 per cent of vacancies, reduce backlog and disposition times, operate an integrated case-management system, strengthen both specialised and ordinary anti-corruption institutions, produce final convictions and confiscations, protect media freedom and improve the implementation of fundamental rights. The May 2026 interim benchmark report document is unusually explicit that executive and legislative actors must refrain from interference and implement Constitutional Court decisions.[22]

[21] European Union, Interim Common Position, 30–31.
[22] European Union, Interim Common Position, 29–33.

Conditionality has nevertheless created a compliance dilemma. The EU has been effective at inducing constitutional amendments, new laws and new bodies, but less successful at ensuring that those institutions work predictably after the political moment of adoption has passed. Vetting improved integrity while hollowing out capacity. SPAK achieved visible results while ordinary justice remained uneven. Digitalisation expanded while procurement transparency and data governance continued to raise questions. Albania can appear advanced in negotiations while citizens still experience delay, unequal enforcement and inaccessible decision-making.

The Balluku and flamingo cases should be treated as accession tests. Brussels should defend the lawful independence of prosecutors and courts, insist on due process and scrutinise legal amendments adopted in reaction to pending cases. It should also connect environmental governance, property records, public consultation and media freedom to the Fundamentals cluster, rather than treating them as narrow sectoral questions. A small set of indicators (vacancies, evaluation delays, backlog, judgment enforcement, procurement competition, referrals, final confiscation and access to information) should be tracked over several reporting cycles. That would reward durable functionality rather than institutional theatre.

4. Conclusion

Albania's rule of law resilience is genuine but concentrated. The post-2016 justice architecture (and especially SPAK) has altered the expectations of impunity and shown that legal accountability can reach the country's most powerful figures. Yet the Balluku case demonstrates that the decisive moment comes after an institution acts, hinging on whether parliament respects the investigation, whether political leaders avoid personalised countermeasures, whether the courts explain coercive measures rigorously and whether the wider justice system can deliver timely outcomes.

Civil society and public deliberation are the essential subsidiary resource. The Flamingo Revolution transformed a coastal-development dispute into a national argument about equal law, public assets, transparency and the country's European future. Its long-term value will depend on converting protest into procedures that routinely disclose information, hear affected communities and permit effective judicial review.

The principal stressor is still regime corruption, reinforced by clientelism. Albania will not overcome it through headline prosecutions alone. Resilience requires preventive procurement controls, secure property records, independent media, a merit-based administration and ordinary courts capable of enforcing rights. EU accession can sustain that transition only if it protects domestic counter-powers and measures how institutions work, not merely whether they exist.

About the author

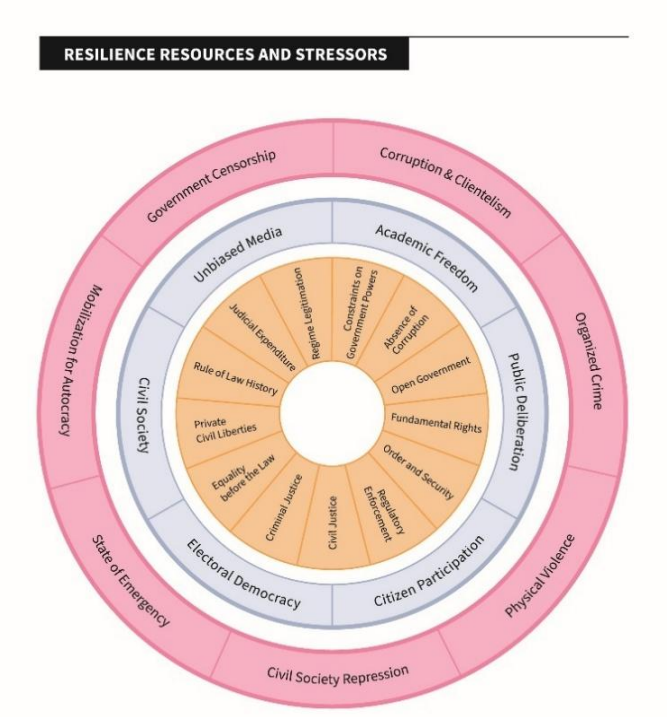
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About the project

RESILIO-ACCESS investigates the resilience of the rule of law in the current (potential) candidate countries for EU accession. The project explores how to measure resilience and how to assess the potential of the EU's enlargement policy toolbox to foster sustainable resilience in the region. Resilience here means the capacity of the rule of law to prevent, cope with, or recover from hazardous events or incremental threats – without losing its core function, structure, and purpose.

About the paper

This paper is part of the **RESILIO-ACCESS Country Reports**, a collection of compact analyses that assess the source of rule of law resilience in EU aspirant countries by using the analytical framework of the RESILIO-ACCESS model.



The RESILIO-ACCESS model is based on *three* dimensions: The system of the rule of law itself provides *primary resilience resources* such as an effective judicial system, the protection of fundamental rights, and democratic elections. These resources are embedded into a social environment with *subsidiary resilience resources* such as civil society, academia, and the media. However, these resources are constantly being challenged by *threats* such as autocracy, corruption, violence, or censorship. The characteristics of each dimension, their interactions and their conditions of resilience resources determine the overall resilience capacity of the rule of law.

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