

Screening report

Albania

Cluster 6 – External Relations

Chapter 30: External relations

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 26 September 2023

Bilateral meeting: 17 November 2023

Chapter 31: Foreign, Security and Defence Policy

Date of screening meetings:

Explanatory meeting: 27 September 2023

Bilateral meeting: 16 November 2023

PREAMBLE

After the first Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations with Albania in July 2022, the Commission immediately launched the screening process.

The screening is based on the enhanced enlargement methodology, which was adopted in 2020 and organises the negotiating chapters in thematic clusters in order to inject dynamism into the negotiating process and to foster cross-fertilisation of efforts beyond individual chapters. These thematic clusters bring together the chapters / areas according to broader themes and will allow a stronger focus on core sectors. Within each individual cluster, screening is carried out through meetings on a chapter-by-chapter basis. The substance of those clusters and chapters, as set out in Annex II of the negotiating framework, mirror the requirements for membership stemming from the Copenhagen criteria.

This report provides an assessment of where Albania stands in terms of alignment and capacity to apply the acquis in cluster 6. The negotiating framework also refers to the possibility of accelerated integration. At the bilateral meetings Albania has requested participation in certain areas before accession. This report provides the Commission's opinion and answer to these requests.

Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain essential elements of the enlargement process.

It is important to continue the dialogue with civil society and other stakeholders, with the aim of ensuring the support of citizens for the EU accession process. Albania is expected to strategically communicate the benefits and obligations of the accession process to its public.

A) INTRODUCTION

The enhanced enlargement methodology¹, as reflected in the Negotiating Framework with Albania, puts the negotiating chapters of the EU *acquis* into clusters. The **External Relations** cluster includes two chapters of the EU *acquis*:

- Under Chapter 30, **External Relations** covers EU legislation in the area of **the common commercial policy** stemming from both the EU's multilateral and bilateral trade commitments, and from a number of autonomous preferential trade measures. It also covers the EU's **humanitarian aid and development policy**.
- Under Chapter 31, **Foreign, Security and Defence Policy** covers the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and is based on legal acts, including legally binding international agreements, and on political documents.

The chapters under the **External Relations cluster** should not be seen in isolation, as several have **commonalities and so interact with each other** to be mutually reinforcing. For example, **External Relations** and the **Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy** are closely related in defining and shaping the EU foreign action.

This **screening report is structured** according to the **respective areas and chapters** of the cluster. Each area/chapter starts with a short overview of the **main content of the EU *acquis* / European standards**. Each thematic area within a chapter then first summarises the **country's presentations and the outcome of the expert discussions** at the bilateral screening meeting, followed by the **Commission's assessment** in chapter 30 and **assessment** in chapter 31.

In the last **section**, from its findings the Commission draws **recommendations for the next steps in the accession negotiations process in the present cluster**.

Albania stated that it accepts the *acquis* in the chapters of cluster 6. It reserved however the right to request transitional arrangements in certain limited areas of the *acquis* in this cluster at a later stage in the negotiations.

¹ COM(2020) 57 final

B) CHAPTER 30 – EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The EU has a **common commercial policy** towards third countries, based on multilateral and bilateral agreements and autonomous measures. There are also EU rules in the field of **humanitarian and development policy**.

Art. 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union² sets out the rules on EU common **commercial policy**. The EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy consists mainly of directly binding EU legislation which does not require transposition into national law. This EU legislation results from the EU's multilateral and bilateral trade commitments, as well as from a number of autonomous preferential trade measures and specific trade rules. In the area of export, credits and export controls of dual-use goods, some elements of the *acquis* require earlier preparations in order to have fully capable administrations from the day of accession. Applicant countries are required to progressively align their policies towards third countries and their positions within international organisations (particularly the World Trade Organisation [WTO]) with the policies and positions adopted by the Union.

In the area of **humanitarian aid and development policy**, EU Member States need to comply with EU legislation and international commitments and ensure the capacity to participate in the EU's development and humanitarian policies. Candidate countries are required to progressively align their policies towards third countries and its positions within international organisations with the policies and positions adopted by the Union and its Member States.

I. COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

I.A INSTITUTIONAL ELEMENTS

a. Country presentation

The Directorate of Foreign Trade Affairs under the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE)³ is the main policy-making authority responsible for formulating and implementing trade policies, including those relating to free trade agreements and the WTO. It consists of three units headed by a director. The department has a total of nine staff of which two are currently being recruited. Albania plans to strengthen the administrative capacities of its Foreign Trade Affairs Directorate and to put more emphasis on the training of its staff. It also plans to conduct impact analyses and raise awareness among the business community regarding the impacts and benefits of the EU integration in this field.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy. The country needs to apply all the directly binding EU legislation in this field by the date of accession.

While the institutional set-up and coordination mechanism are in place, some of the positions at the Ministry's Trade Directorate remain unfilled. Administrative capacity needs to be enhanced to ensure that its international agreements are brought in conformity with the EU *acquis* and that all directly binding EU legislation is effectively applied by the date of accession. Awareness-raising activities are required to increase the skill levels of the staff and inform the business community about the impacts and benefits deriving from the application of the EU common commercial policy upon accession. The work of the

² Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Protocols Annexes to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Declarations annexed to the Final Act of the Intergovernmental Conference which adopted the Treaty of Lisbon, signed on 13 December 2007, OJ C 202, 7.6.2016, p. 1–388.

³ Since January 2024 the functions of the former Ministry of Finance and the Economy have been divided between the Ministries of Finance on the one hand and of Economy, Culture and Innovation, on the other.

National Trade Facilitation Committee in drafting the Action Plan on (2024-2027) in consultation with its permanent members from the government institutions and private sector needs to be enhanced.

I.B MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY – WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

a. Country presentation

Within the multilateral framework of the common commercial policy, Albania continues to keep its trade policy aligned with that of the EU in the WTO. The country became a WTO member on 8 September 2000. Regarding goods, all of Albania’s WTO-agreed tariffs are bound *ad valorem* and tariff reductions were phased out by 2009. The WTO bound rates range mostly between 5% and 15% (20% for sensitive products). The most favoured nation (MFN) average applied rate was 3.6% in 2022, 7.7% for agricultural products and 2.9% for industrial products.

Regarding services, under the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), Albania has undertaken broad Market Access and National Treatment Commitments, although Mode 4 “Movement of natural persons” has some limitations included in the horizontal part of the schedule of specific commitments which affect all services sectors included in the Schedule.

Since accession, Albania has accepted three multilateral instruments: in 2009 the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), in 2016 the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), and in 2023, the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. It is also a party to the plurilateral agreements on Trade in Civil Aircraft and Information Technology (ITA). In addition, the country is an observer and negotiating accession to the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA). Albania also participates in joint initiatives such as the joint initiative on Services Domestic Regulation; the E-commerce moratorium; and the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD). Since its membership, Albania has not had any dispute settlement case within the WTO.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **aligned** in its foreign trade policy with that of the EU in the WTO. It has not had any dispute settlement case within the WTO since its membership. The country still needs to conclude its accession to the GPA.

I.C REGIONAL/BILATERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

a. Country presentation

Within the bilateral and regional framework of the common commercial policy, Albania applies five Free Trade Agreements (FTAs): with the EU under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) since 2006; the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) since 2007; Türkiye since 2008; the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 2010; and the United Kingdom within the Partnership, Trade and Cooperation Agreement since 2021. The EU and CEFTA are by far Albania’s biggest FTA partners, covering 60% of its imports and over 90% of its exports. All the FTAs include a denouncement or withdrawal and expiration clause to ensure that the agreements can be denounced by the date of EU accession. There are no ongoing negotiations for new trade agreements nor any dispute settlement case with the country’s FTA partners.

Albania maintains 46 bilateral investment treaties of which 23 with EU Member States. Albania plans to terminate each bilateral investment treaty or to align them with the EU *acquis* by the date of accession.

b. Commission assessment

Albania currently applies five Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), all of which include a termination clause. The country needs to denounce all its Free Trade Agreements on the last day before accession and apply the EU common customs tariff for all products and services.

Albania has 46 bilateral investment treaties. The country has started renegotiating the investment treaties to fall in line with EU rules. All non-preferential agreements will need to be brought in line with the EU *acquis* by the date of accession. The country needs to terminate all bilateral investment treaties (including the effects of any sunset clause) concluded with EU Member States on the last day before accession. From the day of accession, Albania also needs to implement Regulation (EU) 1219/2012 establishing transitional arrangements for bilateral investment agreements between Member States and third countries.

I.D THE EU'S AUTONOMOUS TRADE PREFERENTIAL REGIMES

a. Country presentation

Albania does not apply a Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) but is a beneficiary of the GSP of other countries⁴. The country also benefits from the EU's unilateral autonomous trade preferences on certain agricultural products laid out in Regulation (EU) 2024/823 on exceptional trade measures for countries and territories participating in or linked to the Stabilisation and Association Process, which applies until the end of 2025. The legal framework for autonomous measures in the national legislation is laid down in the Union Customs Code⁵ and in its Implementing Provisions⁶.

b. Commission assessment

Upon accession, Albania will cease to benefit from the GSP of the current list of donor countries and will need to apply the EU's GSP⁷ and autonomous trade measures.

I.E TRADE SPECIFIC RULES

a. Country presentation

The legal and institutional framework for **export control of dual-use goods** is regulated by the Law on the State Control over the Import-Export Activity of Military Equipment and Dual-use Goods and Technologies⁸, and by two Council of Ministries Decisions⁹. The legislation governing the list of dual-use items is aligned with Annex I of Regulation (EU) 2021/821 setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items. The country plans to adopt legislation aligning with the new features of the Regulation (EU) 2021/821 in 2025 and to update the National Control List of dual-use items, including military items with the latest EU lists. Finally, it plans to make the e-licencing software operational and connected with the government portal in 2024.

In terms of the institutional set-up and administrative capacity, the Ministry of Defence leads the policy-making in this field, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior. The Albanian State Export Control Authority (AKSHE) under the Ministry of Defence is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of export controls, in cooperation with the Customs. AKSHE is composed of two departments covering legislation and licensing, and inspection and assessment; it employs 19 officers.

There is no legislation governing the **screening of foreign direct investments (FDI)** in Albania. In this regard, Albania will assess the alignment needs and modalities by the end of 2026.

As of 2024, there is no medium and long-term **export credit** support programmes nor government-backed

⁴ Donors are Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the USA.

⁵ Article 63, point 3.

⁶ Articles 121-147.

⁷ The EU GSP is governed by Regulation EU 978/2012, which has been extended until December 2027.

⁸ No. 46/2018 dated July 23, 2018.

⁹ Decision No. 31, dated 22 January, 2020, on Organization, functioning and status of State Export Control Authority, the procedure on sharing of information and gathering opinions with other Institutions involved in international transfer of controlled goods, and the procedures defining the issues of state guarantees and controls; and Decision No. 668, dated 91, 26.02.2019 On the Adoption of the Updated List of Military Goods and the List of Dual-use Goods and Technologies subject to State Import-Export Control."

export credit agency in Albania. The Investment and Development Agency (AIDA) has the potential of serving as an export credit agency in charge of implementing export credit programmes. Therefore, the country plans to assess the relevance and implications of the EU export credit rules to its national regulatory framework and the need to adopt new legislation in this field by 2026.

By the time of accession, Albania is committed to be ready to apply relevant EU trade rules specific to conflict minerals, shipments of waste, the International Procurement Instrument and the Anti-Coercion Instrument.

b. Commission assessment

Albania is **partially aligned** with the dual-use export control *acquis*. The country's legal framework is aligned with Council Regulation (EC) No 428/2009. Its legislation governing the list of dual-use items is aligned with Annex I of Regulation (EU) 2021/821. Albania still needs to align its legislation with Regulation 2021/821 and continue the regular update of the National Control List of dual-use goods in line with the latest EU lists. The country also needs to ensure the necessary administrative capacity to enforce controls. The e-licencing software needs to be made operational and connected with the government portal to ensure efficient implementation of the licencing within the customs administration.

An early accession to the **Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)**, the **Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG)** and the **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** would complement this engagement. Additionally, Albania is invited to consider the possibility of becoming an adherent to the **Australia Group (AG)**¹⁰, as a positive step towards alignment with the EU *acquis* and towards future AG membership.

Currently Albania, according to their own statement, does not operate **any medium or long-term export credit scheme**, which would be subject to regulations under this chapter.

The country needs to apply the evolving EU trade *acquis* from the day of accession, in this regard, the competent authority responsible for application and enforcement needs to be informed and trained; awareness campaigns also need to be organised for the benefit of trade operators.

I.F TRADE DEFENCE INSTRUMENTS

a. Country presentation

Albania is a member of three WTO agreements governing Anti-dumping, Countervailing, and Safeguards measures. Albania has not had any anti-dumping nor anti-subsidy cases at the WTO Dispute Settlement Body. Its trade defence instruments governed by the Law on antidumping and countervailing measures¹¹ and the Law on Safeguard Measures on Imports¹² comply with the EU and WTO rules. Albania plans to repeal the national laws upon accession. At the policy-making level, there is no dedicated structure on antidumping at the Ministry responsible for trade, besides the unit on trade issues. Albania plans to increase administrative capacities and skill levels of the staff through trainings and other capacity building measures. Moreover, the country plans to raise awareness among the business community of the legislation and application of trade defence instruments.

b. Commission assessment

Albania needs to ensure effective enforcement of EU trade defence measures upon accession.

I.G SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – THE COMMON COMMERCIAL POLICY

¹⁰ The Australia Group offer the possibility for non-members to unilaterally adhere.

¹¹ No.9796 dated 23.7.2007.

¹² No. 9790 dated 19.7.2007.

Overall, Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* in the field of the common commercial policy. The country needs to increase its administrative capacity to effectively apply the EU rules in this field at the time of accession. Albania continues to align its foreign trade policy with that of the EU in the WTO. Albania needs to denounce all its free trade agreements and bring into conformity with the EU *acquis* all its non-preferential agreements on the last day before accession, by which time it needs to apply the EU external tariff for all products and the EU trade liberalisation in services. Albania needs to align its legal framework with Regulation (EU) 2021/821. The country also needs to ensure the necessary administrative capacity to enforce export controls and make the e-licencing software operational to ensure efficient implementation.

II. FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS

II.A KIMBERLEY PROCESS

a. Country presentation

Albania plans to assess alignment needs and identify competent authorities responsible for implementation. There is no national regulation related to elimination of trade in rough diamonds. Albania is not a member of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme regulating the international trade in rough diamonds. Albania presents trade data according to which there has been no import or export of rough diamonds falling under the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System within Regulation (EC) 2368/2002 in the past five years. Albania has in place institutions with experience of export controls, such as Export Control Authority.

b. Commission assessment

Upon accession, Albania will be part of the Kimberley Process by virtue of its membership of the EU and as such shall apply the rules governing the Kimberley Process at the time of accession. The country has no domestic legislation in place and lacks an accredited authority responsible for implementation. If, upon accession, Albania does not set up a competent authority, it would rely on one of the seven existing Kimberley Process competent authorities within the EU. In this context, it needs to get familiar with and apply the ‘Guidelines on Trading with the European Union (EU) A practical guide for Kimberley Process Participants and companies involved in trade in rough diamonds with the EU’¹³.

II.B ANTI-TORTURE REGULATION

a. Country presentation

Concerning the anti-torture legislation, Albania is a member of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Torture Convention) as well as of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its additional protocols. In 2023, it adopted the Law on Trade Control of Products that may be Used for Capital Punishment, Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishments¹⁴, which establishes a legal and institutional framework for the export controls of goods that could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The provisions containing cooperation between Member States, exchange of information and Annexes I-V are not yet aligned with Regulation (EU) 2019/125, the Anti-Torture Regulation. The changes in the control list are to be regulated by bylaws. The country plans to approve the control list in line with Annexes II-IV by the end of 2023 and the procedures for authorisation processes in 2024. In addition, the e-licencing software is set to become

¹³ C(2021) 4480 final of 25.6.2021 available here: https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/guidelines_on_trading_with_the_european_union.pdf.

¹⁴ Law No. 27/2023 dated March 2023.

operational in 2024.

In terms of the institutional set-up, the Ministry of Defence leads the policy-making in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior. The Albanian State Export Control Authority (AKSHE) under the Minister of Defence is responsible for implementation and enforcement in cooperation with the Customs.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has set up a legal and institutional framework, which **partially aligns** with Regulation (EU) 2019/125. The national provisions provide for partial alignment with the EU *acquis* on trade in certain goods that could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The country lacks alignment with the Annexes of the said Regulation that define the scope of goods either prohibited or subject to controls when exported to third countries. Full alignment needs to be made with the EU Anti-Torture Regulation, and efficient enforcement of the rules needs to be ensured upon accession.

II.C SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS

Albania will need to apply the rules governing the Kimberley Process at the time of accession.

Albania is **partially aligned** with the EU *acquis* on anti-torture. The country still needs to align its legal framework with the remaining provisions of Regulation (EU) 2019/125. Efficient enforcement of the rules in this field needs to be ensured upon accession.

III. EXTERNAL ACTION POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania is committed to embedding the objectives, principles and values governing EU activities in this field in its foreign policy structures.

There is no specific domestic **policy or regulatory framework on development cooperation and aid** in place. The country does not have any aid budget for developing countries nor an agency responsible for development cooperation. Albania plans to establish a legal and policy framework covering international cooperation and development in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The country has set up an Inter-institutional Working Group (IWG) tasked to draft a regulatory framework for international cooperation, development and humanitarian aid, which is expected for mid-2024.

In the field of international **nuclear safety cooperation**, Albania is committed to apply the Euratom Treaty and its safeguards upon accession. Safeguards are currently covered under the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and its Additional Protocol. The country does not have any type of nuclear installations, while nuclear materials, that have been previously used in research activities, are subject to the IAEA safeguards.

Albania welcomes the **new partnership agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)** and states that it is committed to the common principles and objectives governing the agreement and relations with the OACPS.

Albania further acknowledged the importance of the **partnership between the EU and the African Union**, as renewed at the 6th EU-AU Summit (Brussels, 17-18 February 2022), as well as of the EU's Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package.

Albania welcomes the EU policy objectives and developments governing the **Eastern Neighbourhood Policy** as well as the 2022 June Council Conclusions, which granted the status of candidate country to Ukraine and to the Republic of Moldova and recognised the European Perspective for Georgia. It has a

good political relation with all the three countries and is willing to share its experience of the EU integration process with them. Albania also confirms its alignment with the EU policy towards Belarus in response to the 2020 elections as well as with the EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Albania supports the objectives laid down in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean in the framework of the **EU Southern Neighbourhood Policy** with the aim to reinforce cooperation, dialogue and partnerships, and address the challenges and peace processes in the Mediterranean region. It aims to continue playing a positive role by building partnerships at bilateral and multilateral levels. As a member of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) since its foundation in 2008, Albania is committed to continue its full engagement with the organisation and play a supportive and constructive role in building successful partnerships with all the UfM member states.

Albania is committed to the implementation of the **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Report 2023 ranks Albania 54th with a score 73.5 out of 100. The Albanian Parliament unanimously approved a resolution in 2017 confirming the commitment to the 2030 Agenda¹⁵. The country's National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2030 is aligned with the 2030 Agenda and contains the link between the SDGs and the country's development priorities until 2030. The Albania-UN Cooperation Framework 2022-2026 provides for a joint work programme with a focus on human capital development and social inclusion, sustainable economic growth, resource management, governance, rule of law, human rights, and gender equality. A working group, which has been established on the basis of the Prime Minister's Order¹⁶ and is led by the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Assistance Coordination (SASPAC), is tasked to prepare a roadmap for achieving the 2024-2030 SDGs targets and coordinate the actions relating to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, Albania is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding its international partnerships. Although the country lacks a domestic policy and regulatory framework for development cooperation, positive progress towards the establishment of development policy in the context of the EU accession has been demonstrated. Albania is encouraged to develop a legal framework covering international cooperation and development policies in accordance with EU policies and principles as well as international commitments. Such steps include strengthening administrative capacities and the establishment of a development agency.

c. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – EXTERNAL ACTION POLICY

Overall, Albania is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding its international partnerships. The country lacks the regulatory and policy framework for development cooperation and is encouraged to establish a legal framework covering international cooperation and development policy aligning with EU policies and principles.

IV. HUMANITARIAN AID POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania is committed to the EU policies and principles governing the provision of humanitarian aid.

Albania is a beneficiary and provider country of foreign aid. Humanitarian aid is governed under the umbrella of civil protection and apt in the circumstances. There is no legal framework in place providing for a definition of humanitarian aid, no dedicated budget nor agency for humanitarian aid. The 2001 Law

¹⁵ "On the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 Agenda of the United Nations" dated 04.12.2017.

¹⁶ Prime Minister's Order No 76/27.06.2023.

on Non-Profit Organizations recognises the potential activities of such organisations in the field of humanitarian aid and allows them to carry out development and humanitarian aid activities in Albania and elsewhere. National provisions on material reserves of the state can be found in Law on the Material reserves of the state¹⁷. The Council of Ministers takes *ad-hoc* decisions, case by case, on contributions to civil emergencies and natural disasters that occur internationally. The Inter-ministerial Committee on Civil Emergencies is the main responsible institution for coordinating actions of state institutions and private entities, as well as material and financial resources for dealing with natural disasters¹⁸. In 2022, two decisions of Council of Ministers addressed humanitarian aid for Ukrainian citizens coming to Albania due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and on the financial aid to be provided to the Ukrainian government for the country's reconstruction. The country has set up an Inter-institutional Working Group tasked to draft a regulatory framework including for humanitarian aid, which is expected for mid-2024.

b. Commission assessment

Overall, Albania is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding the provision of humanitarian aid. The country lacks however a domestic policy and regulatory framework for humanitarian aid. The Law Governing the Activities of Non-Governmental Organisation makes it clear that the latter exercise their activities in a manner independent from State organs and interests, while allowing those organisations to carry out development and humanitarian aid activities also outside the country. The country has provided support on an *ad hoc* basis to Ukraine in terms of accepting displaced persons arriving from Ukraine to Albania as well as in terms of the financial aid for reconstruction. Albania is encouraged to develop a legal framework covering humanitarian aid to non-EU countries in accordance with EU policies and principles.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – HUMANITARIAN AID POLICY

Overall, Albania is committed to the EU policy and principles guiding the provision of humanitarian aid. The country lacks the regulatory and policy framework for humanitarian aid and is encouraged to establish a legal framework covering humanitarian aid policy to third countries aligning with EU policies and principles.

V. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION - EXTERNAL RELATIONS

a. Country presentation

Albania has provisions criminalising corruption encoded in its Criminal Law. Further primary legislation governing the prevention and detection of corruption can be found in several specific laws, including in customs legislation¹⁹. The code of Ethics of the Ministry of Finance and Economy defines the general rules of behaviour of customs employees during the performance of their duties, as well as their behaviour towards the public, colleagues, managers, officers as well as to the other civil servants.

In terms of the institutional framework, the Directorate of Anticorruption and Professional Standards within the Ministry of Finance and Economy is responsible for the prevention, detection and administrative investigation of violations of customs employees and holding them accountable for possible cases of violations of the code of ethics in the customs service. For cases where elements of the criminal offense are

¹⁷ No. 9900, dated 04/10/2008.

¹⁸ Law 45/2019.

¹⁹ Law no. 120/2021 on Amendments and supplements to the Law no. 9917, dated 19.05. 2008 on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (the “AML Law”) (the “Amendments”); Law 60/2016 on whistle-blowers and whistle-blower protection; Law no. 9643 on public procurement, dated 20 November 2006; Law no. 9367, dated 07 April 2005, “On the prevention of the conflict of interests in the exercising of public functions” (the “Conflict of Interest Law”) as amended; Law No. 44/2015 “Code of Administrative Procedures”; Customs Code, Law No 102/2014, dated 31.07.2014; Law No. 61/2012, dated 24.05.2012 “On Excise in the Republic Albania”; Law No. 152, dated 30.05.2013 “On Civil Servant”, amended; Law No. 9461, dated 21.12.2005 “On the Combined Nomenclature of Goods and Customs Tariff”; Ethic Code, Order No. 90, dated 18.11.2014; Coordinator’s Network, Order No 106, dated 25.07.2019.

suspected, the cases are forwarded to the competent structure in DIO. The heads of all the organisational units are obliged to report to the Anticorruption or Investigation Directorate upon the existence of serious forms of violation of the customs code or the code of ethics.

In 2022, the Directorate investigated 217 cases compared to 272 cases in 2021. Six of the cases in 2022 were referred to the prosecution compared to 27 cases in 2021. 21 customs violations were linked to administrative offences, while 19 customs violations concerned smuggling.

As of March 2022, the Customs Administration offers parts of its services to businesses through the E-Albania platform, including simplified declaration, status of transit declaration, status of import-export declaration, balance and advance account, as well as confirmation of payments made by subjects in the customs account. The country plans to implement anti-corruption training programmes for employees and customs administrations, improve the efficiency and effectiveness through further digitalisation, deepen inter-institutional cooperation with the institutions with whom the General Directorate of Customs has an agreement.

b. Commission assessment

Albania has a legal framework in place for fighting corruption in its criminal law as well as the laws governing the prevention and detection of corruption in specific provisions in the field of customs. The Ministry of Finance and Economy in charge of foreign trade policies has also adopted the code of ethics and general rules of behaviour of customs employees. The institutional structures are in place to prevent, detect and investigate suspected administrative offences and forward suspected criminal cases to competent bodies. Albania needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has a legal framework in place for fighting corruption in its criminal law as well as the laws governing the prevention and detection of corruption in specific provisions in the field of customs. The country needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

C) CHAPTER 31 – FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are based on legal acts, including legally binding international agreements, and on political documents. The *acquis* consists of political declarations, decisions and agreements. Member States must be able to support political dialogue in the framework of CFSP, to align with EU statements, to take part in EU decisions and to apply agreed EU restrictive measures.

I. INSTITUTIONS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS

a. Country presentation

As regards the institutional and legal framework to carry out foreign and security policy, the Parliament is responsible for approving international agreements as well as policy programmes of the Council of Ministers and its composition. The President represents the country and has a duty to appoint/release plenipotentiaries to other states and international organisations on the proposal of the Prime Minister. The Council of Ministers is responsible for formulating and implementing foreign policy strategies, which are exercised by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEFA). The Prime Minister, as the head of government, outlines and presents the principal directions of general state policies and ensures that the policies, approved by the Council of Ministers are implemented by the relevant authorities.

In 2023, MEFA had a total of 169 staff of which 105 are career diplomats. Albania's diplomatic and consular network amounts to 364 staff of which 167 are career diplomats. These are stationed in 38 embassies, six general consulates and seven permanent representations (including one to the EU and one to NATO).

Albania does not have a formalized post of European correspondent. The Directorate for EU Affairs within the MEFA, which is responsible for the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) approximates this function. Albania is committed to appointing a European correspondent in the future.

Key legal instruments and policy documents include the Constitution and a number of laws. Albania has established strategic partnerships with Italy (2010), USA (2015), France (2017), Croatia (2018) and Türkiye (2021). There is also a strategic partnership between Albania and Kosovo*.

b. Assessment

Albania has the necessary institutional and legal framework to carry out its foreign and security policy. Albania is on track to prepare for the efficient and timely implementation of the EU's common foreign and security policy and will be able to adapt its administration and capacities in the future. Albania in particular will need to appoint a European correspondent ahead of accession.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS - INSTITUTIONS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Albania is on track to prepare for the efficient and timely implementation of EU's CFSP. It will need to appoint a European correspondent before accession.

II. POLITICAL DIALOGUE

a. Country presentation

The political dialogue between the EU and Albania has expanded in intensity and level of interaction in

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

recent years. Albania maintains regular political dialogue with a number of third countries in various bilateral and multilateral formats, focusing on its immediate neighbourhood with the aim of building better bilateral and regional relations. Other significant political dialogues have taken place with Türkiye, Eastern European and Central Asian countries, the US, Canada and the UK. An intensification of contacts took place in relation to Albania's non-permanent mandate at the UN Security Council (2022-2023). Albania enjoys strategic partnership with key countries. Political dialogues and interactions with like-minded countries in the MENA region, in Asia and Latin America continue to develop. With the other countries of these regions, Albania focused on advancing economic exchanges. Regarding Russia and Syria, Albania's positions closely follow those of the EU also in terms of reduced contacts. Albania has severed relations with Iran. Albania aims to further enhance its political dialogue with the EU also in multilateral contexts. It looks for an active participation in several regional initiatives, including through assuming the chairmanship of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (January-June 2024), the South East European Cooperation Process (July 2024-June 2025), the Central European Initiative in 2024 as well as the Asylum, Refugees and Migration Initiative (July 2024-June 2025). Albania is also a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

Albania is committed to protect and promote all human rights and further improve them in line with the international commitments under United Nations system, European Union legislation and Council of Europe documents and policies. Albania has acceded and ratified all the main United Nations human rights conventions, as well as those of the Council of Europe.

b. Assessment

The EU-Albania political dialogue has been instrumental for Albania to maintain a full alignment with the EU's CFSP, including in multilateral fora, and to project a constructive approach in its region, which is important to help foster regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. The Commission takes positive note of Albania's efforts to intensify its political dialogue and outreach to third partners, in particular in the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, as well as its active role in the region and in regional initiatives/formats, taking positions aligned with the EU values and foreign policy interests. This proved particularly instrumental to the successful UNSC membership of Albania in 2022-2023, where it reinforced the EU's stance on issues of major international relevance (above all, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine). Albania also maintains a proactive engagement in international human rights fora with recent election to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2024-2026 and the Chairmanship-in-Office of OSCE in 2020 as well as engaging with the Universal Periodic Review and treaty bodies.

c. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The EU-Albania political dialogue is instrumental for Albania to maintain a **full alignment** with the EU's CFSP, including in multilateral fora, and to project a constructive approach in its region, which is important to help foster regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. The EU takes positive note of Albania's proactive engagement in international human rights fora with recent election to the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2024-2026, tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2022-2023 and Chairmanship-in-Office of OSCE in 2020 as well as engaging with the Universal Periodic Review and treaty bodies. Its priorities in the field of human rights should continue to align with EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024).

III. COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

III. A COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania has and is committed to **full alignment** with the EU's CFSP.

Albania has put in place a legal framework for the conduct of CFSP. The Council of Ministers formulates

and implements foreign policy strategies. The Minister responsible for MEFA ensures the alignment with the CFSP decisions in line with the government's objectives and Albania's obligations under the SAA. The Committee on International Restrictive Measures, is responsible for recommending the proposal for imposing, amending or lifting international restrictive measures based, among others, on the Council of the EU's decision on restrictive measures.

As regards accelerated integration, Albania requested to continue biannual informal CFSP dialogues at senior officials / political directors' level; to engage in regular strategic debates on the Western Balkans at the Foreign Affairs Council and to be invited to informal debriefings on the main outcomes of relevant Foreign Affairs Council and Political and Security Committee meetings; continued engagement to addressing human rights in multilateral fora; to host regular visits including at high level and foster EU presence and visibility in the region; for the EU to continue to provide capacity-building and technical support on CFSP to its Western Balkans partners including Albania through TAIEX and twinning measures; training for Albania's young diplomats.

b. Assessment

Albania has maintained a 100% rate of alignment with the declarations of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and relevant Council decisions, including restrictive measures since 2017. This included all EU restrictive measures following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Albania generally aligns with the EU's positions in international organisations.

As regards accelerated integration, the High Representative in close liaison with the Commission looks favorably on continuing to conduct biannual informal CFSP dialogues at senior officials / political directors' level; to continue to engage in regular strategic debates on the Western Balkans at the Foreign Affairs Council and for Albania to be invited to informal debriefings on the main outcomes of relevant Foreign Affairs Council and Political and Security Committee meetings; continued engagement to addressing human rights in multilateral fora; to conduct regular visits including at high level and foster EU presence and visibility in the region; to continue to provide capacity-building and technical support on CFSP to its Western Balkans partners including Albania through TAIEX and twinning measures. The High Representative in close liaison with the Commission will further explore training for Albania's young diplomats.

III.B RESTRICTIVE MEASURES

a. Country presentation

Albania has committed to continuous and sustained support to EU positions on international matters.

The Law no. 72/2019 on International Restrictive Measures serves as the legal basis for the application and implementation of EU acts, resolutions adopted by UNSC, binding acts adopted by other institutions of which Albania is a member. Based on this legislation, the Council of Ministers and the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs as well as the Committee on International Restrictive Measures have specific roles in Albania's sanctions policy. A number of other institutional actors, at the policy and law enforcement level, such as different public institutions, state police, customs authorities, the Bank of Albania have specific roles as competent authorities in the implementation and enforcement of sanctions.

Albania has a 100% alignment rate with EU decisions on restrictive measures and implements them fully in its territory. To date, there are no breaches of the obligations to implement sanctions by the responsible institutions and no circumvention of sanctions has been detected in Albania.

The Council of Ministers together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance regarding the terrorist financing designations and sanctions, take the necessary measures to implement asset freeze measures of designated persons and entities. Various competent authorities implement directly the sanctions, such as the Ministry of Finance, the national bank, customs authorities and other relevant ministries etc. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs plays a coordinating role by ensuring the full

alignment procedure. It chairs the Committee of International Restrictive Measures, and it has specific obligations as stipulated by the Law with regard to the legal procedure, the maintenance of the public register on the sanctions as well as the reporting role on the implementation of sanctions in Albania.

b. Assessment

As regards implementation of restrictive measures, Albania has a number of good practices in place such as the existence of a coordinating committee, the central role played by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and regular reporting on implementation by competent authorities to the MEFA and the Council of Ministers. The activities performed by the customs authorities for export control measures are appropriate. The planned capacity building for competent authorities is a good initiative and should continue given the complexity of sanctions implementation. Given the complexity of restrictive measures, the full and correct implementation will need to be continuously monitored and verified before accession.

III.C CONFLICT PREVENTION

a. Country presentation

Regarding conflict prevention, Albania cooperates with the EU, within NATO, the UN, and other international organisations. Albania supports all EU strategies on conflict prevention as well as all EU measures in the area of conflict prevention, with particular attention towards the EU Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises, the EU Global Strategy and the Strategic Compass. Albania has an established mechanism for the identification of risks and conflict prevention priorities. Albania considers the Western Balkans as its main priority in the area of conflict prevention and is interested in developing common risk and threat prevention mechanisms in the region. The country also supports the principle of preventive engagement. Albania participates in various conflict prevention and crisis management initiatives, including EU funded missions and operations.

b. Assessment

During its mandate as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Albania vocally addressed the importance of promoting peace and security through resolution of crises, peaceful conflict settlement and mediation. Albania has continued supporting EU measures on conflict prevention. Albania's legislative and technical framework on conflict prevention is partially aligned with the EU *acquis*. Albania should further bridge the gap between early warning and early action and link analysis with diplomatic action and programming aimed at mitigating the risks of conflict identified in the spirit of the integrated approach. Albania should also strengthen its engagement on conflict prevention with UN agencies, and develop specific training programs on peacekeeping, crisis management and conflict prevention, to achieve high quality and modern professional skills in this domain.

III.D NON-PROLIFERATION

a. Country presentation

Albania has signed up to all major conventions and aligns with EU policy on **weapons of mass destruction** (WMD) in international fora²⁰ and aspires to become a member of Wassenaar Arrangement. Albania has a WMD strategy and an action plan since 2020. Legislation and institutions are in place. Albania does not possess WMDs and is committed not to develop or support any activity that leads to their proliferation.

²⁰ Albania is state party to all major international agreements concerning non-proliferation of WMD: Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1990); Chemical Weapons Convention - Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of Chemical Weapons, and their Destruction (1993); Arms Trade Treaty (2014); Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (1993); Treaty on Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban (2003); UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004); Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (1987).

Albania has undertaken to create and improve national mechanisms that are interoperable with international ones and an efficient system for preventing, stopping and controlling actions related to the proliferation of WMDs.

On **small arms and light weapons** (SALW), Albania has joined the major international agreements, such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and its International Tracing Instrument, and the Firearms Protocol. Since 2002, Albania has cooperated regionally on enhancing arms control within the framework of the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearing House for the Control of SALW and since 2018, also the Regional Roadmap Against Illicit Arms Trafficking. Albania has a national SALW strategy and an inter-institutional SALW Commission to co-ordinate national and regional efforts. Albania's national strategy on SALW is aligned with the 2018 Regional Roadmap Against Illicit Arms Trafficking and with the EU action plan on firearms trafficking 2020-2025. A SALW action plan, based on the SALW strategy, is developed until 2024. Albania also has a Firearms Focal point. Since the signing of the Regional Roadmap for the Control of SALW in the Western Balkans in 2018, under this initiative, Albania has integrated the multidimensional approach of the Roadmap in the national policies for the SALW control and enhanced its regional and international cooperation through the active participation to EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) security initiative.

The improvement of security conditions of storage and stockpiles of arms and ammunition is ongoing in accordance with international standards and through external assistance. The national electronic registry system has registered and checked 80% of legal civilian small arms and light weapons.

b. Assessment

Albania is state party to all major international agreements concerning non-proliferation of WMD. While Albania's legislative and institutional framework is largely in line with the EU *acquis*, on dual use items, the new features of Regulation 2021/821 setting up a Union Regime for the Control of Exports, Brokering, Technical Assistance, Transit and Transfer of Dual-Use Items should be implemented. An early accession to the Wassenaar Arrangement would complement this engagement. Albania does not own any WMDs and does not plan to develop or support any activity that leads to their proliferation. It has signed up to important international conventions on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and has set up policies and structures to implement them.

Illicit arms and illicit arms trafficking continue to be a challenge in Albania, which Albania actively addresses. Albania has joined the main international conventions on SALW. It has the appropriate legal and institutional framework. Albania provides a positive contribution to the Western Balkans Roadmap, the major arms control regional initiative, helping to keep arms control high on the agenda and has attracted external assistance in the form of training and finance so as to improve the legal system and increase the capacity of the police and border and security forces to deal with arms control and prevent illicit arms trafficking. Albania is encouraged to continue this constructive engagement with the Roadmap. The Albanian electronic registry system of arms is a very important contribution to Albania's capacity to control arms and investigate illicit arms and crimes involving arms. Registration of arms should continue as should the remaining upgrades of storages.

III.E COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

a. Country presentation

Albania generally aligns with EU positions in international organisations (UN General Assembly, United Nations Security Council (UNSC), OSCE, Council of Europe (CoE)). As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council 2022-2023, the country has actively engaged in promoting and defending the rules-based international order; countering extremism and terrorism and promoting the inter-religious dialogue; gender equality and the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda; improving the working methods of the UNSC; and linking climate and security. Albania has also been particularly active in holding

the Ukraine file on the agenda of the UNSC, in order to ensure accountability for the crimes committed by the Russian Federation.

Similarly, Albania supported and funded the OSCE Moscow Mechanism in Ukraine, as an important instrument in documenting evidence that may be useful to end impunity for the crimes suffered by Ukraine. In 2023, the country was elected as member of the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2024-2026, which prevented Russia to be elected again after its membership was suspended in 2022, and Albania was also elected as member of the Executive Board of UNESCO for the period 2023-2027. In 2024, Albania was elected to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) for the period 2025-2028 and to the Executive Board of UN Women for the term 2025-2027. It has also become a state party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

With regard to cooperation with the International Criminal Court, Albania is considering becoming a state party to the Kampala Amendments on the Rome Statute.

b. Assessment

Albania's priorities as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2022-2023 were in line with and supported important EU priorities. Albania has closely cooperated and coordinated with the EU and with the EU Member States in the UN Security Council, including on the international response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. While Albania generally aligns with the EU's positions in international organisations, implementation of a fully common approach is yet to be achieved.

Albania maintains a bilateral immunity agreement with the United States, granting US citizens exemptions from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. In doing so, it does not comply with the EU common positions on the integrity of the Rome Statute or with the related EU guiding principles on bilateral immunity agreements. Alignment with the EU position is therefore needed.

III.F SECURITY MEASURES

a. Country presentation

Albania has put in place legislation for the protection of classified information, the organisation of the National Security Authority and the international agreements in place, including the 2016 Security of Information Agreement with the European Union. In 2023 Albania updated its legislation on the protection of state secrets and is progressing in the adoption of its implementing acts. In 2022, an EU assessment visit assessed the implementation of the security requirements of the Security of Information Agreement with the EU. Albania is ready to implement any recommendation deriving from the final report.

b. Assessment

The EU and Albania have concluded in 2016 a Security of Information Agreement (SIA) on the mutual protection of classified information. Its legislation and institutional framework are overall compatible with EU standards and Albania has improved the implementation of the security of information agreement with the EU over the recent years.

III.G HYBRID THREATS

a. Country presentation

Albania has engaged in the hybrid risk survey with the EU. The follow up to this is on-going, with some recommendations still to be addressed. An important element of the new national security strategy is to counter hybrid threats. As per Albania's national approach, hybrid threats encompass a broad range of activities with malicious intent. The new national security strategy promotes an inter-institutional collaborative approach between the structures that contribute to the protection of national security. It will also cover most of the risks identified in the Hybrid Risk Survey conducted with the EU. The large-scale cyber-attack that targeted Albania in 2022 clearly demonstrated the need to prioritise cybersecurity. Albania identifies the advancement of democratic institution building as a key way to protect the country from

hybrid threats. Regarding critical infrastructure protection, Albania's efforts have recently focused on increasing resilience to cyber threats, while national legislation is partly aligned with Directive 2008/114/EC on European Critical Infrastructures.

b. Assessment

Albania's national security strategy takes into account both the current threat context and relevant conceptual approaches to countering hybrid threats. Once adopted, this policy document should be followed by corresponding implementation actions to update national legislation and the administrative approach. Albania has identified current gaps and needs in specific areas and has partially set out possible actions to address these. In the area of critical infrastructure protection, there is an emphasis on cybersecurity and cyber-resilience and a good awareness of the NIS2 Directive²¹. However, there is only partial alignment with the EU *acquis* and attention should now be paid in particular to the new Critical Entities Resilience Directive²².

III.H FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE (FIMI)

a. Country presentation

Albania has experienced an increase in malicious influencing activities aimed at undermining politics and social cohesion, such as spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories and illegal financing. Albania has developed an institutional framework covering different aspects of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), with the Media and Information Agency (MIA), the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) as the main institutional actors.

The recently amended Law No. 97/2013 on Audiovisual Media includes provisions that require broadcasting entities to maintain more balanced, professional, and ethical reporting of content, including the verification of facts. However, the Albanian legislation does not define “disinformation” as a concept or the general “distortion of information” and there are no specific provisions that directly deal with disinformation during election campaigns and monitoring of the online media. The monitoring of online media does not fall within the jurisdiction of the audiovisual media regulatory authority. However, steps have been taken with legal changes to prohibit videos with illegal content on online platforms. Albania does not yet have a comprehensive strategy to fight FIMI, but it is committed to continue aligning with EU legislation on the matter.

b. Assessment

Albania does not yet have a comprehensive strategy to fight FIMI. Albania needs to continue efforts on closing space for foreign interference and information manipulation, including disinformation and take actions towards building societal resilience against it and other forms of hybrid threats.

Authorities should develop and implement a strategic framework for closing space for FIMI and effectively countering it, in line with the EU best practice, based on a whole-of-government approach and on creating an environment in which civil society and media can contribute, securing, among other elements, an environment for independent media reporting.

III.I EUROPEAN PEACE FACILITY (EPF)

a. Country presentation

Albania benefits from a 2022 European Peace Facility (EPF) assistance measure aiming to strengthen the

²¹ Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive).

²² Directive (EU) 2022/2557 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on the resilience of critical entities and repealing Council Directive 2008/114/EC.

capacities of the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF), a regional organisation of which Albania is a member.

b. Assessment

Albania also benefits from another European Peace Facility assistance measure agreed in 2024 and aimed to enhance the operational effectiveness of the Albanian Armed Forces. As a recipient of EPF support, Albania understands EPF governance and the necessary administrative and financial requirements for an efficient implementation of EPF support. The EPF support under these assistance measure will also facilitate the country's future participation in EU CSDP military operations or the military aspects of peace support operations. As a future contributor to the EPF, Albania needs to ensure that it is able to participate efficiently in the financial and budgetary processes and calls for contributions.

The EU is exploring the possibility to further strengthen military and defence cooperation with Albania. Consultations are ongoing on possible future EPF support to the provision of non-lethal equipment.

III.J SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Albania has a 100% rate of alignment with declarations of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and relevant Council decisions, including on restrictive measures. Albania has the necessary structures to implement restrictive measures, but there is scope for the planned capacity-building measures. Albania does not own any WMDs and does not plan to develop or support any activity that leads to their proliferation. Illicit arms and illicit arms trafficking continue to be a challenge in Albania; registration of arms should continue as should the remaining upgrades of storages. Regarding security measures, the existing legal framework is overall compatible with EU standards. Albania is expected to adopt a new policy framework and the respective implementing legislation to target hybrid threats as well as a new comprehensive strategy to fight FIMI. As a recipient of EPF support, Albania understands EPF governance and the necessary administrative and financial requirements for an efficient implementation of EPF support. As a future contributor to the EPF, Albania needs to ensure that it is able to participate efficiently in the financial and budgetary processes and calls for contributions.

IV. COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

IV.A CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

a. Country presentation

Albania has the necessary institutional, legal and decision-making framework allowing for participation in international crises management missions and operations. Albania plans to substantially increase its contributions to CSDP missions and operations, namely in operation EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2024. Moreover, Albania expressed readiness to contribute to the EU's Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation ASPIDES for maritime security from the Red Sea to the Gulf and a part of the North-West Indian Ocean.

b. Assessment

Albania has been providing a valuable contribution to civilian CSDP missions. The planned increase of its contribution to military CSDP is welcome.

IV.B PERMANENT STRUCTURED COOPERATION (PESCO)

a. Country presentation

As regards accelerated integration, Albania would be interested to participate in projects under the Permanent Structured Cooperation on defence, to enhance cooperation with the European Defence Agency as well as to cooperate with the European Army Interoperability Centre.

b. Assessment

Regarding accelerated integration, the High Representative, in close liaison with the Commission, considers favourably Albania's participation in PESCO projects. However, as a Member States-driven framework, any requests from third states are firstly evaluated by the individual project.

IV.D SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS – COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Albania continued to participate in EU crisis management missions and operations under the common security and defence policy, notably EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Albania would be interested to participate in PESCO projects.

V. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION – FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

a. Country presentation

Albania has provisions criminalising corruption encoded in its Criminal Law. Further primary legislation governing the prevention and detection of corruption can be found in several specific laws. Albania has also created several key digital systems for monitoring and reporting, such as the Electronically Signed Document Circulation System, the Co-Governance Portal (which allows citizens to file complaints) and the Transparency Programme (to ensure access to public information). Albania will continue to enhancing document security by offering several consular documents completely online, with a QR code stamp for added security and efficiency.

b. Assessment

Albania has a legal framework in place for fighting corruption in its criminal law as well as the laws governing the prevention and detection of corruption. The institutional structures are in place to prevent, detect and investigate suspected administrative offences and forward suspected criminal cases forward to competent bodies. Albania needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.

C. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Albania has a legal framework in place for fighting corruption in its criminal law. The country needs to continue the fight against corruption through effective enforcement of the anti-corruption measures, including preventive measures and awareness-raising.