



# Integrated Country Strategy

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**Albania**

**FOR PUBLIC RELEASE**

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## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Albania has just marked 30 years since it emerged from one of the most oppressive communist regimes in modern history. We also celebrated 30 years of restored U.S.-Albanian relations – a testament to deep bonds between our people and countries that still thrived despite the regime’s sustained efforts to drive us apart. Today, thanks to the dedication of successive American and Albanian governments, and the will of both peoples, our countries are more aligned than ever. Albania credits USG assistance and engagement in Albania’s historic progress. Albania is now a net contributor to regional and global stability. Albania has been a NATO Ally since 2009, OSCE chair in 2020, and elected member of the UN Security Council for 2022-2023. The Albanian government noted its own history and current NATO membership as basis for its very early offer to accept Afghan evacuees fleeing the Taliban in 2021, and eventual hosting of over 2,200 Afghans. Albania has also been a key likeminded partner in response to Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, including as co-penholder on UNSC resolutions related to the issue, as a NATO Ally, and on unilateral responses condemning Russia and supporting Ukraine.

Albania’s remarkable progress is based on its development as a functioning democracy with increasingly stronger political and judicial institutions, and our assistance and engagement remain critical in this process.

Building on these achievements and the potential for Albania and our partnership, we can now set more ambitious, significant goals. It was important for Albania, and our partnership, for Albania to move from authoritarianism to democracy and from rebuilding itself to contributing outside its borders. Now, it is important for Albania to establish a functional and credible justice sector, to take on corruption and organized crime, and to integrate fully into the Transatlantic community and become a member of the European Union.

Embassy Tirana’s priorities for U.S. policy to achieve these goals are threefold: strengthening Albania’s democracy, modernizing its defense capabilities, and deepening economic ties with U.S. business.

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Democracy: Albania's democratic gains can only be safeguarded with a functional judicial system and resilient, independent institutions that ensure the rule of law. The USG has underwritten Albania's justice reform effort alongside the EU, and this effort directly supports Albania's EU accession path. Our programs target Albania's long-standing, endemic corruption and organized crime challenge, which erode trust in democratic and justice institutions.

Defense: A fully committed NATO Ally, Albania is a close and aligned defense partner with which we work closely on improving defense capabilities and modernization. Our military assistance must continue to make Albania's military more accountable, effective, and capable. The recent establishment of our first two long-term U.S. military presences in Albania, gives us excellent opportunities to build on our assistance and training with real-world defense cooperation, and partner with Albania on security issues regionally.

U.S. Business: Albania's political development and regional economic integration has opened opportunities for U.S. business to invest and grow within Albania's growing economy. While at a low base, U.S. investment in Albania and exports in Albania are up sharply reaching all-time highs in 2021. Two major U.S. business arrangements in the energy sector show the important bilateral and regional potential for economic growth, as well as the positive benefit of high-standard, transparent U.S. investment on Albania's economic development. Combatting corruption and addressing money laundering and property rights issues are critical to maximizing our economic partnership.

For us to succeed on any portion of our policy agenda, we must keep working to make our Mission as productive, healthy, and inclusive as we can be. To that end, Embassy Tirana has prioritized supporting our employees with a modern, efficient, and healthy workplace. Especially as we come out of the pandemic, it is important to make our operational objectives align with two, equally important goals – our policy objectives and the support for the Mission's people.

This year, we mark 100 years of U.S.-Albania relations, underscoring the deep and enduring nature of our partnership despite decades of separation. Albania has come a long way and we have a stronger, more capable, and more democratic partner as a result. There remains critical

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work left to do, and our assistance and engagement are critical to any step forward. Our priorities support Albania becoming a more capable, stable, and prosperous U.S. partner, and one which we can increasingly count on to assist on shared regional and global challenges.

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## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

**Mission Goal 1:** Albania strengthens democratic institutions and effectively implements key rule of law reforms to counter corruption and organized crime.

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** Strengthen rule of law, governance, law enforcement oversight, and security capabilities to support a credible, transparent, and fair justice sector.
- **Mission Objective 1.2:** Coordinate and prioritize U.S. resources and programs to create strong, representative, and independent NGOs and media.

**Mission Goal 2:** Albania becomes a more capable NATO ally and advances security and stability domestically and regionally.

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** Support efforts to increase the capacity of the Albanian military and national security services, including readiness for domestic contingencies.
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** Support Albania's efforts to contribute to U.S., NATO, U.N., and other multi-national security missions worldwide to increase regional stability.

**Mission Goal 3:** Albania deepens economic reforms and trade, investment, and energy cooperation.

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** Create conditions for broad based, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth.
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** Support efforts to increase Albania's energy security by promoting diversified energy supplies and green technologies.
- **Mission Objective 3.3:** Protect Albania from malign economic activity from strategic competitors by strengthening legal protections.

**Management Objective 1:** Adopt and apply new technologies to modernize diplomacy, enhance service delivery, and improve diverse workplace collaboration.

**Management Objective 2:** Align physical spaces with current and long-term needs of the Mission to allow for more effective, efficient, inclusive, and secure work practices.

**Management Objective 3:** Streamline management and operational for efficiency, policy alignment and to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

**Mission Goal 1** | Albania strengthens democratic institutions and effectively implements key rule of law reforms to counter corruption and organized crime.

**Description** | Although Albania is a member of NATO and an EU-candidate, five decades under harsh authoritarianism and isolation fostered an environment of intense politicization, systemic corruption, and endemic organized crime. These factors prevented the development of any real criminal justice system and left Albania's citizens with little trust in their justice sector institutions. Albania's ongoing justice reform, initiated in 2016 and underwritten by the USG and EU, is now starting to overcome a long-standing culture of impunity. Still, corruption remains a key challenge in all sectors of Albanian society and governance, especially in rule of law, and continues to inhibit Albania's progress toward EU membership and further transatlantic integration. Albania continues to rank among the lowest countries in Europe in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index and was ranked 110th of 180 countries in 2021. USG assistance will focus on completing ongoing justice reform, strengthening new institutions, and improving the capacity of government, justice, and law enforcement entities to prevent, detect, and punish corruption and organized crime. USG assistance will further strengthen media and civil society in their role as watchdogs and advocates for reform.

**Objective 1.1** | Strengthen rule of law, governance, law enforcement oversight, and security capabilities to support a credible, transparent, and fair justice sector.

- **Justification** | Albania has been working to improve its rule of law, strengthen its justice sector, and address corruption, which all help Albania's ability to integrate into the EU. The Mission will focus on implementing justice reform, while working to enhance law enforcement's capabilities at all levels. This will be achieved by supporting new institutions of justice reform, including anti-corruption prosecutors, investigators, the institutions including the prosecutorial and judicial councils and courts, and providing



support to the International Monitoring Operation, which oversees and observes the vetting of judges and prosecutors. In addition, corruption and vulnerability to corruption in the public and private sectors have undercut public trust in governing institutions and efforts to increase government accountability and transparency. On the law enforcement side, Mission Tirana developed EUR's first vetted police unit program, which has been a major success on its core mission and enhanced our abilities to partner on a broader range of law enforcement operations, while also helping professionalize Albanian law enforcement. Mission interventions will aim to strengthen democratic institutions and increase transparency, promote rule of law and human rights, increase Albania's ability to counter corruption and transnational crime, and strengthen U.S. borders and protect U.S. citizens in Albania.

- **Linkages** | Mission Objective 1.1 is aligned with the Interim NSS pertaining to strengthening democracies and combatting corruption, the National Security Study Memorandum on the Fight Against Corruption, the European Bureau [draft] Joint Regional Strategy objectives 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 4.3, and the INL Bureau Functional Strategic Framework 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, and 3.2.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve the mission objective would hinder Albania's further transatlantic integration, including progress toward European Union membership; would increase the threat posed to U.S. national security by Albanian organized crime networks and narcotics traffickers; and would increase Albania's vulnerability to malign foreign actors. The mission will mitigate risks to achieving the objective through strong advocacy for the continuation of justice reform with government and opposition leaders, robust public engagement in support of justice reform, and close cooperation with international partners such as the European Union, key member states, the United Kingdom, and international organizations such as the UN, OSCE, and Council of Europe.

**Objective 1.2** | Coordinate and prioritize U.S. resources and programs to create strong, representative, and independent NGOs and media.

- **Justification** | Strong and independent NGOs and media are critical for holding the government accountable, deterring corruption, fostering greater transparency, and pushing for essential reforms in Albania. A broad range of observers, including from Albanian civil society, have noted that, relative to counterparts in other Western Balkan countries, Albania's civil society is less developed and less capable. The Mission will develop initiatives to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and the media to serve as government watchdogs against corruption and crime. These initiatives will help transition Albania from an assistance recipient to an enduring diplomatic, economic, and security partner, and increase the effectiveness and sustainability of our diplomacy and development investments. We will promote civic participation by young people, including women, and other underrepresented groups. Leveraging our relationships with the media, businesses, other embassies, and international organizations is necessary to increase the effectiveness and public confidence of civil society organizations.
- **Linkages** | Mission Objective 1.2 is aligned with the Interim NSS pertaining to strengthening democracies and combatting corruption, including combating anti-democratic forces using misinformation and disinformation. The objective is also aligned with the European Bureau [draft] Joint Regional Strategy objectives 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 4.3.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve the mission objective would hinder Albania's democratic progress, including European Union membership. The absence of strong civil society organizations and an independent media would undermine democratic progress in Albania. It would create backsliding in justice reform and anti-corruption efforts which, in turn, would increase the threat posed to U.S. national security by Albanian organized crime networks and narcotics traffickers. The absence of NGOs and independent media playing a watchdog role would substantially increase Albania's vulnerability to malign foreign actors and increase opportunities for mis/disinformation. The mission will mitigate risks to achieving the objective through strong support of civil society development and independent media.

**Mission Goal 2** | Albania becomes a more capable NATO ally and advances security and stability domestically and regionally.

**Description** | Albanian willingness to collaborate with the U.S and NATO is unmatched. In 2022, Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) will establish a forward-based Special Operations Forces (SOF) headquarters in Albania and the Army's Security Forces Assistance Brigade (SFAB) will begin permanently operating in country. This marks the first time U.S. troops will be permanently stationed in Albania, a significant milestone. However, the Albanian Armed Forces face significant capability shortfalls and are not currently able to fulfill most NATO capability targets. Since 1999, the U.S. Department of Defense has invested ~\$275 million into security assistance projects for Albania. The majority of these projects have focused on the delivery of equipment to address critical shortfalls. Moving forward, the U.S. Department of Defense (via the U.S. Embassy) intends to increase training opportunities to ensure capabilities are developed and NATO capability targets are met. Another necessary component will be institutional level reform at the Ministry of Defense (executive) level. U.S. advisement, at the strategic level, will focus on planning, budgeting, procurement, and human resources practices. Improvement at the institutional level will allow for capability development at the tactical and operational level. Finally, U.S. led security assistance programs will build increasing coordination and interoperability with a key partner in southeastern Europe, including contingency or crisis planning beyond this region.

**Objective 2.1** | Support efforts to increase the capacity of the Albanian military and national security services, including readiness for domestic contingencies.

- **Justification** | Developing Albania's ability to provide self-defense and contribute to the collective defense of the NATO Alliance will enhance transatlantic security, strengthen regional stability, and support the U.S. European Command's mission to defend the United States. As a more capable security partner, Albania will be better prepared to secure its territory against state and non-state security threats, including criminal trafficking, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises. Developing deployable military capabilities will enable Albania to expand its participation in out-of-area Alliance and

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coalition operations, ensuring broad international participation and balancing resource demands on U.S. and other Allied forces. This objective directly supports Albania's efforts to contribute to stability in the region, to the preparedness of the armed forces, and to assist civil authorities in responding to domestic emergencies. This year, we have two new major steps forward in our military engagement and presence, supporting bilateral and regional partnerships with Albania. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) decided in 2022 to place a rotational, regional headquarters in Albania while U.S. Army Europe - Africa (USAREUR-AF) is deploying a rotational company team from the U.S. Army's Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB). Both U.S. military presences are at the invitation and with full support of the GOA and provide new ways to build on our engagement with Albania.

- **Linkages** | Mission Objective 2.1 is aligned with the Interim NSS guidance to reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world. Additionally, 2.1 is aligned with the National Defense Strategy (strengthen alliances); JSP Goals 1.1;1.2; 1.3 and 1.4, JRS Objectives 1.1; 1.2; and 1.4.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve these goals will hinder our ability to advance U.S. objectives in the Western Balkans and allow malign influence to increase. Inability to achieve NATO capability targets will squander previously administered U.S. security assistance efforts. It is in the best interests of the U.S. government to help build a more capable NATO ally, that is willing to join bilateral and multilateral military operations around the world. Capability improvement in the Albanian Armed Forces will stabilize the region and enable the advancement of U.S. interests.

**Objective 2.2** | Support Albania's efforts to contribute to U.S., NATO, U.N., and other multi-national security missions worldwide to increase regional stability.

- **Justification** | The Mission will work with the GoA, NATO Allies, and the EU to assist Albania to develop domestic institutions that function as role models for the region. Working with other like-minded donors and international organizations, the Mission will seek opportunities to tackle ongoing and emerging threats, including

combatting terrorism and violent extremism. For example, the Mission will support Albania's ability to function as a leader in natural areas of competence, such as by developing narratives in the Albanian language to discourage ethnic Albanians from becoming foreign fighters. The Mission will also encourage inter-ministerial cooperation, and GoA collaboration with NGOs on crosscutting issues, such as the development of educational tools and economic opportunities to discourage radicalization. Furthermore, we will assist in building Albania's capacity to handle transnational challenges, such as migration and illicit trade in contraband or sensitive items.

- **Linkages** | Mission Goal 2.2 is aligned with the Interim NSS guidance pertaining to reinvigorating and modernizing our alliances and partnerships around the world and with the European Bureau Draft Joint Regional Strategy Goal 1.
- **Risks** | Failure to achieve the mission objective would hinder Albania's ability to provide forces to Alliance and coalition operations as well as to contribute to regional stability. The mission will mitigate risks to achieving the objective through strong and sustained engagement with government and military leaders and robust public engagement in support of defense cooperation.

**Mission Goal 3** | Albania deepens economic reforms and trade, investment, and energy cooperation.

**Description** | A stronger, more prosperous Albania is a stronger, more effective partner of the United States. An Albanian economy that grows jointly with institutional reforms becomes a self-sustaining cycle that will in turn encourage more positive returns and even further trade and investment. As Albania's economy grows it is uniquely positioned to be a driver for the region especially in the energy sector. Its unique, low-emission, power generation mix and close alignment with the United States means that it can be a leader in green energy spurring forward a needed transformation in a region full of high-emission, high-pollution energy dependency.

**Objective 3.1** | Create conditions for broad based, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth

- **Justification** | Albania has made notable strides in transforming its economy over the past two decades. Yet more must be done to improve the business environment and remove barriers to investors and entrepreneurs, including better enforcement of contracts, creation of a more predictable tax and regulatory regime, and increased transparency in public procurement. The Mission will continue to encourage the GoA to implement necessary reforms, including, most critically, judicial reform, to create a level playing field for U.S. investors and a more favorable destination for U.S. exports.
- **Linkages** | Mission Goal 3.1 is aligned with the Interim NSS guidance pertaining to renewing our commitment to partnership with the private sector in our development investments and seek to create investment opportunities for American firms in developing countries. Mission Goal 3.1 is also aligned with European Bureau Draft Joint Regional Strategy Goal 3.
- **Risks** | Corruption remains a significant challenge in Albania and an unfair playing field that is created by such an environment poses risks for successful competition. Political corruption gets outside attention, but economic corruption is endemic through Albanians' daily lives and a major cause for lack of trust in Albanian institutions. If we do not promote fair economic practices as a Mission through our operations, and through promoting U.S. businesses, we will miss a major opportunity to keep Albania's development on track and trust in the U.S. high.

**Objective 3.2** | Support efforts to increase Albania's energy security by promoting diversified energy supplies and green technologies.

- **Justification** | Albania has the greenest domestic energy production in the region and has the possibility of bringing more electricity online for a region that is one of the most polluting in Europe. They have shown an eagerness to move forward with the U.S. private sector providing opportunities to the Albanian and U.S. economies.

- **Linkages** | Mission Objective 3.2 is aligned with the Interim NSS guidance pertaining to support the accelerated growth in renewable energy deployment, invest in climate friendly infrastructure, build resilience to climate change, modernize our energy grid, and provide the international leadership required to encourage countries around the world to do the same. Mission Objective 3.2 is also aligned with European Bureau Draft Joint Regional Strategy Goal 3.
- **Risks** | Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe and climate issues are seen as a luxury problem for many. Economic constraints will be a challenge for overcome for projects that are not seen as having the highest return on investment. U.S. economic and clean energy engagement will be critical to keep Albania on the path of cleaner energy internally and for export in a region that generally uses some of the least green and clean energy sources.

**Objective 3.3** | Protect Albania from malign economic activity from strategic competitors by strengthening legal protections.

- **Justification** | Strategic competitors continue to work to get a deeper foothold in Albania and exert destabilizing influence, including weakening democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration. U.S. assistance with strengthening rule of law and law enforcement in support of Albania's anti-corruption prevention and prosecution efforts, will continue to increase resiliency against malign foreign influence.
- **Linkages** | Mission Objective 3.3 is aligned with the Interim NSS in terms of China's leaders seeking unfair advantages, behaving aggressively and coercively, and undermining the rules and values at the heart of an open and stable international system. The objective is also in alignment with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) 5G Strategy. Mission Objective 3.3 is also aligned with European Bureau Draft Joint Regional Strategy Goal 4.
- **Risks** | Competitors' malign influence will seek to exploit and perceived shortcomings in USG assistance or U.S. private sector engagement. Commercial alternatives are more readily available in the market and a lack of awareness regularly results in procurements with unintended consequences.

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## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1** | Adopt and apply new technologies to modernize diplomacy, enhance service delivery, and improve diverse workplace collaboration.

- **Justification** | Technology advancements drive mission effectiveness and operational efficiencies. Today's diplomatic engagement and tomorrow's workforce demand more dynamic and digital communications channels. Employees need access to reliable data everywhere -- and the ability to easily share and retrieve data -- to securely engage, internally and externally. The Mission must continually adapt its processes to keep pace with private sector technology advancements. Many knowledge management tools are already available to employees, and by making cloud adoption the #1 ICS Management Objective, this Mission commits to use these tools to improve our business processes.
- **Linkages** | This objective is in line with the Deputy Secretary of State for Management & Resources Enterprise Data Strategy. The goals and objectives of the Enterprise Data Strategy call for: the development of a data culture in the Department; the promotion of training for increased data fluency; greater data access, in part through new technology; and better data governance to ensure data is used ethically and securely. Achieving these goals will allow us to make data-informed decisions about policy and management, thereby strengthening our foreign policy
- **Risks** | Not achieving this objective will make us ineffective in achieving foreign policy goals. Specifically, we will be unable to address EUR's JRS Strategic Framework Goal 4, Objective 3 Counter Russian, PRC, and Iranian Disinformation, Conventional and Hybrid Threats, and Emerging Disruptive Technologies that Threaten U.S. and European Security in Europe, the Arctic, and Beyond.

**Management Objective 2 |** Align physical spaces with current and long-term needs of the Mission to allow for more effective, efficient, inclusive, and secure work practices.

- **Justification |** The embassy is out of alignment regarding space. The embassy is the first purpose-built embassy in the history of the U.S. State Department and was built in the 1920's. It has limited controlled access spaces which limits Post's ability to have sensitive conversations and perform national security tasks in an effective manner. The Chief of Mission residence (CMR), the Embassy's only representational space, is a prefabricated building installed in the early 1990s when Albania had no suitable CMR options. Updates and repairs to the CMR are time-consuming and expensive as compared to upkeep on a normal (not prefabricated) structure. In a one-year period, the Ambassador hosts over 2,500 representational guests. Representational events at the CMR are the primary mechanism for engaging with embassy interlocuters to further diplomatic priorities.
- **Linkages |** This objective is linked to the Interim NSS in terms of the need to "make smart and disciplined choices regarding our national defense and the responsible use of our military, while elevating diplomacy as our tool of first resort" and the commitment to "ensure our national security workforce can continue to operate safely and effectively."
- **Risks |** Program offices are working in close cramped quarters. The Embassy will need more secure space to adequately and efficiently meet operational goals. The CMR, prefabricated construction, will only become harder to use and maintain with more age, and post risks having no representational space.

**Management Objective 3** | Streamline management and operational processes for efficiency, policy alignment, and to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- **Justification** | Executing national security strategy requires expertise and informed judgement. Ensuring our workforce represents the diversity of America will improve our ability to achieve mission goals.
- **Linkages** | This objective is linked to the Interim NSS regarding the commitment to invest in our national security workforce, institutions, and partnerships, inspire a new generation to public service, ensure our workforce represents the diversity of our country, and modernize our decision-making processes. It is also linked to the EUR JRS Strategic Framework Management Goal “Recruit, develop, and retain a cadre of EUR officers who represent the diversity of the United States and have the set of skills necessary to advance the Bureau’s goals.”
- **Risks** | The risk associated with not achieving this goal is not maximizing American diversity as a tool to promote greater cultural, democratic, and linguistic engagement.