

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Meljana BREGU
University of Tirana, Albania

ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN ALBANIA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EU INTEGRATION

Abstract:	<p><i>Albania is an EU candidate country that, in the framework of the integration process, is trying to align its policies within the EU's framework of the Green Agenda part of the European Green Deal. Albania has been part of the European Green Agenda for the Western Balkans since 2020, which enhances the goals of the European Green Deal. This Agenda promotes sustainability, green economy initiatives, and decarbonization in line with the EU's environmental and climate goals. Addressing climate change issues by strengthening green transition policies constitutes a fundamental priority for economic integration within the region and with the European Union.</i></p> <p><i>In this context, Albania has adopted the national climate change strategy, which is compatible with the goals of the European Union's climate and energy package, specifically the National Strategy for Climate Change and Action Plan (NSCCAC) 2020-2030. This policy prioritizes climate change mitigation, adaptation, a clean environment, and clean energy, following EU goals.</i></p> <p><i>While the country is progressing toward alignment with EU climate goals and policies, has adopted numerous strategies and plans, and has a sound legislative framework, it still lacks the implementation of the legal framework due to national and regional challenges.</i></p> <p><i>The paper analyzes the challenges and obstacles of implementing the national and European legal framework and EU directives.</i></p> <p><i>Methodologically, we will analyze and compare progress reports, public speeches, declarations, and national integration strategies.</i></p>
Keywords:	Green Agenda; EU-Integration; environment; climate change
Contact details of the authors:	E-mail: meljana.bregu@unitir.edu.al
Institutional affiliation of the authors:	Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana, Albania
Institutions address:	Rr. Elbasanit, Tiranë, Tel.: +3554 22369987 E -mail: fhf@fhf.edu.al Website: fhf.edu.al

Introduction

Since the demise of the communist regime, Albania's principal foreign policy priority has been EU integration. Political forces and the public, who are pro-European Union, support this goal. The integration process has been the primary driving force behind Albania's political, social, and economic reforms. In 2020, Albania advanced its integration process by joining the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, a regional strategy that aligns with the European Green Deal. This Agenda connects the region to the EU's goal of making Europe carbon neutral by 2050, and it has garnered significant support and encouragement throughout the Balkan region. The Sofia Summit embraced the Agenda in 2020, while the Brdo Summit endorsed the Action Plan in 2021. The aims are divided into five major areas: more clean energy sources to avert climate change, a circular economy, depolluted water, air, and soil, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity and ecosystem protection¹.

¹ Regional Cooperation Council, *Green Agenda*, 2020, <https://www.rcc.int/greenagenda> (08.11.2024)

The Green Agenda brings challenges and benefits to the region, but successful implementation requires better cooperation among countries of the region to overcome problems that can't be resolved on a national level¹. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has played an active role in implementing the Green Agenda and has tried to focus the government, media, and non-governmental organizations on the green transition. The RCC facilitates coordination and communication between Western Balkan countries, backing them in aligning their environmental policies, enhancing expertise, sharing best practices, and working collectively toward sustainable goals. Through initiatives like the Green Agenda, the RCC helps establish a unified approach to addressing environmental issues, setting shared goals, and securing regional stability and prosperity in line with EU standards².

Due to the main findings of the Balkan Barometer in 2024, the citizens in the region are mainly concerned about air pollution (57%), water and soil pollution (43%, 38%), extreme weather effects such as floods and earthquakes (32%), poor waste management (37%), and heavy traffic (32%)³. The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans can relieve these concerns and contribute to the reduction of pollution of air, water, and soil through the reduction of carbon emissions and can also increase the production of energy from renewable sources that decrease the emissions in the air. The Green Agenda aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, an ambitious goal for all European countries. It poses challenges but also offers opportunities to the region⁴. It can foster cooperation, enhance sustainable development, promote the integration process, promote renewable energy, and improve the quality of life of the region's citizens⁵. The proposed strategy encourages a cooperative approach to climate change, acknowledging the transboundary nature of many challenges and their need for coordinated efforts to achieve practical solutions⁶. These solutions can ensure a friendly environment and address specific problems, such as growing energy costs, which concern 45% of the people in the area⁷. Also, the implementation of the Green Agenda can ensure economic growth, ecological sustainability and social justice like in other region that had benefited from the green transition⁸.

The countries are advancing to a green transition through positive actions and are also increasing their renewable energy sectors, like hydropower, solar and wind energy. The countries have used different strategies to ensure more clean energy sources. Serbia is more focused on solar farms to reduce its coal dependence, and Albania and North Macedonia are more involved in wind energy⁹.

Despite these efforts, progress has been slow due to the difficulties of increasing energy production from renewable sources in a region that relies entirely on carbon for energy production, except Albania, which uses hydropower plants¹⁰. This fact has impacted the goal of cleaner energy and is a risk to environmental security since coal contributes significantly to pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases. Abandoning coal as a principal source of energy production may result in social and economic difficulties for many region countries,

¹ Sanja Filipovic, Lior Noam, Mirjana Radonavic, *The Green Deal – just transition and sustainable development goals Nexus*, “Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews”, Vol. 168, No. 13, 2022, p. 2 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2022.112759> (08.11.2024)

² Regional Cooperation Council, <https://www.rcc.int/greenagenda> (08.11.2024)

³ Regional Cooperation Council, *Balkan Public Barometer 2024*, <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public> (08.11.2024)

⁴ Miljana Durcevic Cucic, *European Union Practices Turn in “Green” Policies in the Western Balkans Accession Negotiations*, “Science, International Journal”, Vol. 3, No. 4. 2024, pp. 181-186

⁵ Mirjana Radovic Markovic, D. Jovancevic, Z. Nikitovic, *Toward green economy: opportunities and obstacles for Western Balkan countries*, Xlibris Publishing, Bloomington, 2016, p. 75

⁶ Jelena Šogorov-Vučković, Dušan Piksiades, Ivan Trifunović, *Governmental investment in the environmental economy in the Western Balkan*, “The European Journal of Applied Economics”, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2022, pp. 121-136, DOI: 10.5937/ejae19-33686 (08.11.2024)

⁷ Regional Cooperation Council, *Balkan Public Barometer 2024*, <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public> (08.11.2024)

⁸ David Gibbs, Kirstie O’ Neill, *Future Green Economies and Regional Development: a research Agenda*, “Regional Studies”, Taylor and Francis, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017, p. 161

⁹ Aspen Institute, *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Green-Agenda-for-the-Western-Balkans_2023.pdf (09.11.2024)

¹⁰ Jelena Zvezdanović Lobanova, *The Green Transition and Energy Security in the Western Balkans Countries*, 2024, pp. 544-569, doi:10.18485/iiepsirescu.2024.ch24 (08.11.2024)

such as increased unemployment due to a drop in the coal sector workforce¹. For this reason, governing political forces are not inclined toward a rapid green transition. Due to these challenges, and even though the region has a great potential to increase the production of renewable energy, the green transition remains still slow, and the region faces a series of challenges in achieving the target and the goals for renewable energy². Albania and Montenegro were the only countries in the region that accomplished good progress in 2020 due to the increase in energy production from renewable sources, which was 44.5% and 39.5%, respectively³. However, these countries' high percentages of renewable energy are also related to biofuels and wood used for cooking and heating, especially in the coldest areas but this renewable source of energy is a cause of environmental pollution⁴. The fact that Albania does not rely on carbon for electricity production does not make it less vulnerable; instead, it leads to massive energy imports during periods of low rainfall and, above all, results in an intense exploitation of water resources.

To sustain the region and to facilitate the implementation of the Green Agenda, the EU plays a fundamental role. The European Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans promotes the Green Agenda by increasing investments in sustainable transportation and clean energy. It has allocated a substantial financial package of up to €9 billion in EU funds, potentially mobilizing up to €20 billion of investments through the Western Balkan Guarantee Facility⁵. EU support is necessary in a region that still suffers economic constraints and where governments cannot finance costly projects or sustain the use of renewable energy through incentives in the private sector. The political, national, financial, and regional constraints can impact the green transition in the region, so the EU pressure and sustainment need to be present and comprehensive. The paper will focus on Albania's obstacles in developing sustainable energy sources and implementing a climate change strategy.

Albanian initiatives regarding climate change

The integration in Albania process is endorsed not only by the political forces but also by the public opinion; due to the Balkan Barometer, 77% of the Albanians sustain that the integration would be a positive step for the country⁶. In 2009 the country has signed the Stabilization-Association Agreement, in 2014 Albania was granted the candidate status and in 2020 the Council opened accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia giving a positive signal for the region integration into the EU⁷. Albania aims to become a full EU member by 2030 fulfilling the requested negotiations conditions.

Albania is trying to pursue the achievement of sustainable development goals and environmental protection conditions according to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Also, in the framework of the integration process has committed to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and to meet EU directives and to integrate the EU objectives into the legal framework. The government has adopted specific strategies and laws that enhance the regulatory framework on climate change and the environment, driven by the efforts to approximate the EU environmental acquis. Albania has adopted the National Energy Strategy (2018-2030), National Climate Change Strategy (2019), Law on Climate Change, National Action Plan for renewable energy resources in Albania (2019-2021) and is amending the National Climate Strategy and the National Energy Strategy to align with the Green Agenda objectives⁸. The legal framework is in line with the EU priorities, but the problem is the lack of implementation of the legal framework.

¹ Jelena Ignjatović, Sanja Filipović, Mirjana Radovanović, *Challenges of the green transition for the recovery of the Western Balkans*, "Energy. Sustainability and Society", 2024, Vol. 14, pp. 1-13, doi: 10.1186/s13705-023-00421-4 (08.11.2024)

² Agora Energiewende, *Powering the future of the Western Balkans with Renewables*, https://www.agora-energiewende.org/fileadmin/user_upload/2021-01_EU_Balkan_Green_Deal.pdf (13.11.2024)

³ Stefan Dunjic, Simon Pezzutto, Alyona Zubaryeva, *Renewable Energy development trends in the Western Balkans*, "Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews", Vol. 65, 2016, pp. 1026-1032 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1364032116301630?via%3Dihub> (13.11.2024)

⁴ Aspen Institute, *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Green-Agenda-for-the-Western-Balkans_2023.pdf (09.11.2024)

⁵ <https://www.wbif.eu/> (11.11.2024)

⁶ https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/key_findings_2024/2/public (11.11.2024)

⁷ <https://integrimi-ne-be.punetegashtme.gov.al/anetaresimi-ne-be/historiku/> (14.11.2024)

⁸ OECD, *Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans: From Analysis to Action*, OECD Development Pathways, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8824c5db-en> (11.11.2024)

The integration process closely links with the transition to a green economy, and the “negotiating framework” includes the Green Agenda. The “negotiating framework” for Albania was presented by the European Council in 2022 and includes guidelines and principles for the accession negotiations regarding Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Action), which is included in Cluster 4: Green Agenda and Sustainable connectivity which also incorporates transport policy, energy, and trans-European networks¹.

Chapter 27 is considered one of the most expensive in terms of costs, human resources and actors involved; it includes vertical and horizontal legislation and contains provisions addressing climate change². Since 2020, the EU and other donors has pledged to financially endorse and support Albania's implementation of the Green Agenda by providing technical and financial assistance in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and environmental management³. The EU with other donors like the Sweden is providing technical assistance to Albania specifically for the implementation of chapter 27 through the “Supporting Albanian Negotiations in Environment, Chapter 27” and is focused on the creation and enhancement of the administrative capacity to successfully negotiate the Chapter⁴.

Regarding the focus of the paper, Albania's energy sector differs from that of other countries in the region in that it is almost entirely based on hydroelectric electricity. Albania depends on the Drini River Basin for more than 90% of its domestic hydroelectric production⁵. This is a positive factor because Albania does not have the same problem as other countries in the region regarding dependency on coal. Yet, the country doesn't have diversified sources of energy production and depends on climate change that can decrease the river's flow and impact substantially energy supplies and energy sector. In 2007 because of low precipitations there were significant energy shortages.

As a result of the use of hydropower, the country's emissions of carbon dioxide are lower compared to other countries in the Balkans, but the country's energy production depends on natural factors such as rainfall and on energy imports during summer or dry winters. In this context, Albania needs to enhance the production of energy from other clean energy sources like the sun and wind and especially to implement the legal framework. Some obstacles to Albania's green transition include the country's financial incapacity to enhance the use of clean energy sources in the private sector, as well as the lack of energy efficiency in buildings due to legal, social, and economic issues. Indeed, the use of solar energy in the public and private buildings in Albania will bring an economic advantage and impact the economic development of the country⁶.

Over the years, the EU Commission has evidenced the unsatisfactory progress related to climate change. From 2021 to 2024, the Commission has indicated a moderated level of preparation and some progress in the energy sector and has marked the attempt to switch from exclusive use of hydropower to photovoltaic and wind renewable energy sources⁷. The mentioned progress reports of the last four years have highlighted the reliance on hydropower, the exposure to climate change that these circumstances create and the reliability of the import of energy during climate change. Climate challenges were evident last summer due to wildfires that destroyed thousands of acres of forests, while the lack of rain affected the water levels. Therefore, the utilization of alternative energy sources not only contributes to addressing climate change and achieving the objectives of the Green Agenda, but also ensures a reliance on energy production and a reduction in energy imports. Albania has tried to respond to this problem, trying to enhance the photovoltaic and renewable energy from wind but also to create other sources of energy. The 2024 Progress Report recognized the establishment and operation of the Photovoltaic Park in Karavasta, as well as the nation's efforts to diversify its energy

¹ <https://integrimi-ne-be.punetejashtme.gov.al/en/negociatat/rreth-negociatave/> (11.11.2024)

² Arteni Duraku, Irida Agolli, *EU Integration of Chapter 27 Environment and Climate change in Albania*, “Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Legal Sciences”, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2023, pp. 54-61

³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/75bf7bef-0ecc-40ba-893a-4d45d4ea6ddb_en?filename=factsheet_wb_green_agenda_en.pdf (12.11.2024)

⁴ <https://sane27.com/about-us/> (12.11.2024)

⁵ Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *Monitoring of The Strategy for Climate Change and Action Plan, 2020-2030*, <https://www.agora-parl.org/> (11.10.2024)

⁶ Mariola Kapidani, Eni Numani, *Investing in Green Energy: Profitability Analysis of Solar Energy for Household Consumption in Albania*, “WSEAS Transaction on Business and Economics”, Vol. 1, 2024, p. 345

⁷ European Commission, *Progress Report Albania 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024*, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2021_en (11.10.2024)

production sources¹. Also to ulteriorly diverge the fonts of energy production an auction on wind farms was launched in 2021 but is not sufficient to guarantee the independence of energy production from hydropower². The most ambitious initiative to diversify the energy font production was the participation and implementation of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline project that is a strategic opportunity for Albania to adopt cleaner solutions for the environment³. However, the Pipeline remains non-operational in the country, resulting in the unavailability of gas as a source of energy production in Albania. This is due to the absence of a gas network, which necessitates significant investments in infrastructure and distribution systems within both urban and rural areas⁴. Also, the size of the market is another factor that determines the absence of the gas system. Albania has a relatively small population and lower industrial demand for gas compared to other European countries.

The progress reports also highlight the absence of secondary legislation pertaining to the Energy Performance of Building EU directive. On a positive note, the Commission appreciated the adoption of the National Energy and Climate Plan (2020-2030).

The last progress report highlights a serious concern regarding the limited alignment with the EU acquis, the country's capacity to incorporate climate change into sectorial strategies and plans, and the lack of expertise in this area⁵. The Strategy for Climate Change evidence the necessity to enhance the institutional capacities, which are fundamental for the implementation of the objectives on climate change. Increasing capacity building is one of the top priorities in response to climate change. Building institutional capacities is crucial when addressing climate change, particularly by enhancing the structure of institutions and agencies with sufficient climate-specific capacity. Climate change actions, as a relatively new approach, are not supported by adequate local, institutional, and human capacity, as evidenced by the recent progress report and monitoring reports in the country. Also, the country needs to better use the natural resources of renewable energy, especially the photovoltaic energy to assure independence from the hydropower and to diminish the import of energy during summer, considering that Albania has all the possibility to use the solar energy due to its geographic position⁶. Also, the use of solar energy offers interesting possibilities, the low cost of PV systems if incentivized in the proper way by the government but also by the local institutions is a viable option that can help reducing green gas emissions⁷.

Currently, many public institutions in Albania lack the specialized knowledge, infrastructure, and resources required to develop and execute climate strategies. This gap in capacity makes it difficult to monitor emissions effectively, enforce environmental regulations, and integrate climate considerations into broader policy areas. Additionally, there is often insufficient inter-agency coordination, which hinders a unified approach to tackling climate issues across sectors. Albania's climate strategies have identified building these capacities as a national priority, emphasizing the need for training, resource allocation, and international cooperation to strengthen institutional responses to climate change⁸. This lack of capacity can risk the development and implementation of climate strategies and policies.

Indeed, the government's limited budget and staff's lack of expertise have significantly impacted the capacity of public administration. A serious corruption case involving the Tirana incinerator project surfaced in 2023, prompting the Specialized Anti-Corruption Structure to continue its investigation and several municipal directors and a former minister were arrested⁹. This fact didn't impact directly the alignment and the implementation of the EU acquis on the protection of the environment but gave space to a huge debate in the country on how the financial and human resources are being managed by the government to confront climate

¹ European Commission, *Progress Report Albania 2024*, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/> (11.10.2024)

² European Commission, *Progress Report Albania 2023*, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/> (11.10.2024)

³ Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Albania and the Geopolitics of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline: Regional and Domestic Dimensions*, 2018 <https://idmalbania.org/sq/news-cpt/4925/>

⁴ *Idem*

⁵ *Idem*

⁶ Aurela Qamili, Silva Kapia, *Evaluation and integration of photovoltaic (PV) systems in Albanian energy landscape*, "Solar Compass", Vol. 10, 2024, p. 3

⁷ Luiza Lluri, Blerta Germenji, Eli Vyshka, Adnand Mysketa, *The Use of Photovoltaic Technology in Albania: A Good Opportunity to face the Energy Crisis*, "Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development", Vol. 10, No. 2, 2023, p. 25

⁸ World Bank, *Albania – Climate change knowledge portal*, <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/> (11.10.2024)

⁹ European Commission, *Progress Report Albania 2024*, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/> (11.10.2024)

change. Another important focus point is the lack of inter-institutional coordination. There is a need for improved coordination among various governmental institutions involved in climate action. The current inter-institutional framework is not strong enough to facilitate effective collaboration leading to fragmenting efforts in implementing climate policies¹.

Another component of the Chapter 27 and of the Sofia Declaration is the involvement of the citizens and the information of the public on the objectives, plans, and activities that the government undertakes to ensure the green transformation and the fulfillment of the Green Agenda objectives². Additionally, raising awareness about climate change issues is crucial to encourage citizens to actively participate, engage, and contribute to environmental protection, as well as to provide appropriate responses to these issues. Citizens have a crucial part in decreasing emissions through alternative energy sources, house insulation, energy management, and efficiency enhancements. This has led to only a small portion of the population taking individual actions to protect the environment and impact climate change. According to the Balkan Barometer, only 25% walk to work, 23% use public transportation, and 21% use energy efficient household appliances³. Additionally, the percentage of people who install solar panels is even smaller according to the same source only 8% use an electric car and 11% install solar panels for household consumption. Despite the importance of citizens' involvement in responding to climate change and the increase in their awareness, Albania still lacks a clear strategy on this issue.

The global climate crisis, particularly the recent meteorological disasters such as the floods in Valencia and Barcelona, has brought the impact of climate changes to the forefront of public discourse, yet the debate is still limited. Although the actions are being recognized as necessary by experts and the public, the debate on the climate challenges remains a principal domain of scientific circles and experts. Unfortunately, the severity of the climate changes hasn't yet received enough attention in governance, media, and education, impeding general awareness and understanding⁴. In 2023, the European Delegation in Albania, aiming to increase attention on climate change and its consequences, launched a new campaign addressing Albanian citizens, policymakers, civil society, businesses, and other stakeholders around environmental issues affecting the country⁵. Albania does not earmark financial resources for environmental protection. There is no established national environmental fund or state budget line for environment-related purposes. Furthermore, there are no established conditions for expanding public and private environmental costs. In this context, EU initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing public knowledge.

Also, the EU financial support is vital for the increase of renewable energy sources. In 2023, the EU allocated 72 million EUR through the Energy Support Package under Ipa Annual Action plan aimed at new investments in energy sources and to mitigate the impact of the energy crisis⁶. The EU actions aim to implement the Albania's National Energy and Climate Plan's to fulfill the ambitious goal of 54.4% renewable energy into the final energy consumption by 2030 and integration aspirations⁷.

We can safely assume that the EU role on the climate change initiatives in Albania and on the fulfillment of the Sofia Declaration is indispensable not only for the financial support but also for the increase of expertise and capacity in the public administration and for the increase of awareness of the public. Also, the government

¹ Jelena Šogorov-Vučković, Dusan Piksiades, Ivan Trifunović, *Governmental investment in the environmental economy in the Western Balkan*, "The European Journal of Applied Economics", Vol. 19, No. 1, 2022, pp. 121-136

² Regional Cooperation Council, *For the implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans 2021-2030*, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/596/action-plan-for-the-implementation-of-the-sofia-declaration-on-the-green-agenda-for-the-western-balkans-2021-2030> (11.11.2024)

³ Regional Cooperation Council, *Balkan Barometer 2024*, <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public> (13.11.2024)

⁴ The Resource Environmental Center Albania, *Annual Report 2023, 2024*, <https://ww2.recshqiperi.org/2024/11/04/annual-report-2023/> (14.11.2024)

⁵ <https://webalkans.eu/en/news/eu-in-albania-launches-new-awareness-campaign-on-eus-support-to-tackle-the-countrys-environmental-challenges/> (14.11.2024)

⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/eu-transfers-eur-72-million-albania-part-energy-support-package_en?s=214 (14.11.2024)

⁷ Chiara Mihalcatinova, *Is Albania a New Regional Champion in the Energy Transition?* <https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/is-albania-a-new-regional-champion-in-the-energy-transition/> (14.11.2024)

should invest in grid capacity needs to enhance other infrastructure upgrade and appoint into private investments particularly into solar and wind energy¹.

Conclusions

The integration process has significantly impacted Albania, especially after the candidate status was granted in 2014. It has impacted structural reforms, the economic sector, environmental protection, and climate change. The region is struggling to cope with the consequences of natural phenomena like the flood in Bosnia Hercegovina this year or the fires in Albania the previous summer seasons. In this context, the green transition has become a priority and constitutes one of the principal integration conditions. To fulfil the membership conditions, the region became part of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, aiming to meet the ambitious goal of a region carbon-free until 2050. This process combats climate change by phasing out coal and converting it into renewable electricity production energy. Also, the process can boost economic growth, transform the energy sector, and attract foreign investors.

However, despite the opportunities, the green transition is affected by a series of challenges in the region that involve national and regional factors like the financial capacity and the countries' dependence on a single source of energy production. Indeed, the region depends mostly on coal, except Albania, which relies on hydropower. The use of coal increases air pollution in countries like Serbia or Bosnia Hercegovina; in Albania, the reliance on hydropower doesn't impact air pollution but leaves the country vulnerable to natural phenomena like rain and the import of energy to fulfil energy needs. So, it is of utmost relevance to the phasing out of coal and transition to renewable energy sources like wind and solar. Also, the countries need to enhance regional cooperation and collaborate with the Regional Cooperation Council to impact the green transition.

Albania has taken essential actions regarding implementing Cluster 4 – Green Agenda and Sustainable Activity - of the negotiation's accessions framework and progressing toward adopting the legal framework. Albania has adopted the National Energy Strategy (2018-2030), National Climate Change Strategy (2019), Law on Climate Change, and National Action Plan for renewable energy resources in Albania (2019-2021). It amends the National Climate and Energy Strategy to align with EU priorities. The problem that affects the country is the lack of the implementation of the legal framework due to financial factors and lack of human resources. Albania must enhance its administrative capacity by adopting a legal framework and strengthening institutional collaboration. The Commission Progress Reports define Albania as moderately prepared for climate change and some progress on the energy sector's transformation.

However, in the last year, the panorama has begun to change due to significant efforts to increase renewable energy sources that are still insufficient to cover the country's need for electricity but are a good starting point. Due to its geographical position with sunny days and mild winds, Albania has considerable potential for developing solar and wind energy. Albania has also invested in photovoltaic parks and increased the financial support to the private sector to use more solar panels. Another opportunity is the discovery of the largest hydrogen gas flow this year in Bulqize. The EU's financial support is significant in enhancing and sustaining new initiatives.

Another essential factor influencing the sector is the lack of public awareness of climate change and its consequences. Despite the topic's sensibility, the government lacks a clear strategy to involve the public in the discussion, so energy and climate problems remain a domain of academic and political circles. Raising public awareness of the importance of actions and reactions to reduce climate impact through daily life is indispensable. Also, there are no sufficient initiatives and financial capacity to support using renewable energy sources like the solar panel for domestic purposes. The EU and other donors like the Swedish government are developing continuous campaigns to enhance public awareness and engage citizens on environmental protection. In this context, Albania has taken important steps and has progressed to the green transition overall, but it needs to increase the implementation of the legal framework and elaborate clear strategies to raise public awareness.

¹ Dimitar Bechev, *The Green Transition and the Western Balkans*, "Carnegie Europe", 2024 <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/10/the-green-transition-and-the-western-balkans?lang=en¢er=europe> (13.11.2024)

Bibliography

Books

1. Radovic, Markovic, M.; Jovancevic, D.; Nikitovic, Z., *Toward green economy: opportunities and obstacles for Western Balkan countries*, Xlibris Publishing, Bloomington, 2016

Studies and Articles

1. Duraku, Artenida; Agolli, Irida, *EU Integration of Chapter 27 Environment and Climate change in Albania*, "Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Legal Sciences", Vol. 9, No. 3, 2023
2. Ignjatović, Jelena; Filipović, Sanja; Radovanović, Mirjana, *Challenges of the Green Transition for the Recovery of the Western Balkans*, "Energy Sustainability and Society", Vol. 14, No. 2, 2024 doi: 10.1186/s13705-023-00421-4
3. Gibbs, David; O' Neill, Kirstie, *Future Green Economies and Regional Development: a research Agenda*, "Regional Studies", Vol. 15, No. 1, 2017
4. Kapidani, Mariola; Numani, Eni, *Investing in Green Energy: Profitability Analysis of Solar Energy for Household Consumption in Albania*, "WSEASTransaction on Business and Economics", Vol. 1, 2024
5. Dunjic, Stefan; Pezzutto, Simon; Zubaryeva, Alyona, *Renewable Energy development trends in the Western Balkans*, "Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews", Vol. 65, 2016 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1364032116301630?via%3Dihub>
6. Filipovic, Sanja; Noam, Lior; Radonavic, Mirjana, *The Green Deal – just transition and sustainable development goals Nexus*, "Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews", Vol. 168, 2022 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S136403212200644X?via%3Dihub>
7. Lluri, Luiza; Germenji, Blerta; Vyshka, Eli; Mysketa, Adnand, *The use of Photovoltaic Technology in Albania: A Good Opportunity to Face the Energy Crisis*, "Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development", Vol. 10, No. 2, 2023
8. Qamili, Aurela; Kapia, Silvia, *Evaluation and integration of photovoltaic (PV) systems in Albanian energy landscape*, "Solar Compass", Vol. 10, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.solcom.2024.100070>
9. Durcevic Miljana, *European Union's practice turn in "Green" Policies in the Western Balkans Accession Negotiations*, "Science International Journal", Vol. 3, No. 4, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.35120/sciencej0304181d>
10. Šogorov-Vučković, Jelena; Piksiades, Dusan; Trifunović, Ivan, *Governmental investment in the environmental economy in the Western Balkan*, "The European Journal of Applied Economics", Vol. 19, No. 1, 2022

Documents

1. Aspen Institute, *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, 2023, https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Green-Agenda-for-the-Western-Balkans_2023.pdf
2. Carnegie Europe, *The Green Transition and the Western Balkans*, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/10/the-green-transition-and-the-western-balkans?lang=en>
3. European Commission, *Progress Report Albania*, 2021, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2021_en
4. European Commission, *Progress Report Albania*, 2022, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en
5. European Commission, *Progress Report Albania*, 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf
6. European Commission, *Progress Report Albania*, 2024, <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/>
7. Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Albania and the Geopolitics of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline: Regional and Domestic Dimensions*, 2018
8. IGN Agora Energiewende, *Powering the future of the Western Balkans with Renewables*, 2021 https://www.agora-energiewende.org/fileadmin/user_upload/2021-01_EU_Balkan_Green_Deal.pdf
9. Regional Cooperation Council, *Green Agenda*, 2020, <https://www.rcc.int/greenagenda>
10. Regional Cooperation Council, *Balkan Public Barometer*, 2024 <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/home>

11. REC Albania, *Annual Report*, 2023, <https://ww2.recshqiperi.org/2024/11/04/annual-report-2023/>
12. OECD Development Pathways, *Multi-dimensional Review of the Western Balkans: From Analysis to Action*, 2022, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/multi-dimensional-review-of-the-western-balkans_8824c5db-en.html
13. Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *Monitoring of The Strategy for Climate Change and Action Plan, 2020-2030*, 2024, <https://www.agora-parl.org/>
14. Zvezdanović, Lobanova, Jelena, *The Green Transition and Energy Security in the Western Balkans Countries*, 2024 https://doi.fil.bg.ac.rs/pdf/eb_book/2024/iipe_gsirescu/iipe_gsirescu-2024-ch24.pdf

Websites

1. <https://integrimi-ne-be.punetejashtme.gov.al/>
2. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/>
3. <https://sane27.com/about-us/>
4. <https://webalkans.eu/en/news/>
5. <https://www.rcc.int/>
6. <https://www.strategicanalysis.sk/>
7. <https://www.wbif.eu/>