

Policy paper

Why do Reform and Growth Facility Oversight and Transparency matter?

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Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	2
II. The methodology and limitations.....	3
III. Why Transparency and Oversight matter for the RGF	4
IV. Current institutional framework and how it works in practice.....	5
V. Parliamentary Oversight	7
VI. Stakeholder Insights	9
VII. Spotlight Case: Local Government	11
VIII. Spotlight Case: State Agency of Cadastre	12
IX. Key findings of the analysis	13
X. Conclusions.....	14

I. Executive Summary

The Reform and Growth Facility (RGF), part of the European Commission's 2023 New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, is the second EU financing instrument offered to aspirant Member states. For Albania, successful implementation is a prerequisite for demonstrating readiness to complete EU accession by 2030. Functioning as a monitoring mechanism and a political dialogue instrument, the RGF aims to reinforce accountability, transparency, and reform credibility¹.

The Albania's Reform Agenda, agreed between Albania and the European Commission under the RGF, sets out a very detailed roadmap, with 143 steps (commitments) scheduled across half-yearly intervals from 2024 to 2027². Each step must be completed on time, to secure the next tranche of EU payment, turning the agenda into more than just a checklist. It represents a complex new layer of political negotiation, administrative coordination, and technical and bureaucratic effort, demanding sustained capacity from institutions. In essence, the process is both highly structured and intensely demanding, designed to test Albania's ability to keep pace with the EU's conditionality framework.

Between October 2024 and June 2025, Albania achieved significant progress under the National Reform Agenda, implementing 21 of 41 reform measures (51%), as evaluated by the European Commission³. Albania has demonstrated sustained progress in advancing its reform agenda, supported by established⁴ institutional structures and reporting mechanisms. This good performance made Albania positioned as the leading performer in the WB region for this reporting cycle. An initial pre-financing of €64.5 million was provided as an automatic one by completing the pre-conditions, followed by the other amount release of €99.3 million for the progress on implementation of reforms from October 2024 to June 2025.

Despite progress, several challenges might affect the performance, as per data provided through this paper. Some challenges lie in the complexity and interdependence of reforms (i.e. in the area of the rule of law), together with the need for close inter-institutional coordination. Inadequate oversight, limited transparency, and weak stakeholder participation, together with poor access to information for citizens and insufficient consultation with affected groups such as the private sector, risk turning reforms into purely technocratic exercises rather than genuine governance transformation. Addressing these gaps requires stronger coordination, improved parliamentary oversight, more efficient fund absorption, systematic engagement with civil society, better communication of results, and robust monitoring mechanisms. These steps are essential to ensure that reforms remain credible, inclusive, capable of driving sustainable change, and enjoy long-term legitimacy.

¹ Law No. 19/2025, "On the ratification of the Facility Agreement between the Republic of Albania, represented by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, and the European Union, represented by the Commission, concerning specific arrangements for the implementation of European Union support for the Republic of Albania, within the framework of the Reform and Growth Facility.

² Council of Ministers Decision no. 621, dated 10.10.2024, On the approval of the policy document "National Reform Agenda 2024–2027," within the framework of the European Union instrument "Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans", <http://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2024/10/10/621>.

³ Commission Implementing Decision of 8.10.2025 on approving the second release of funds to Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, Publication date 16.10.2025, www.enlargement.ec.europa.eu/commission-implementing-decision-8102025-approving-second-release-funds-albania-montenegro-and-north_en

⁴ Council of Ministers Decision No. 252, dated 2 May 2025, "On the determination of functions, responsibilities, and relations between the authorities and structures responsible for coordination and reporting, pursuant to the provisions of the Facility Agreement ratified by Law No. 19/2025".

The key message is clear: Speed alone is insufficient. The achievements and progress require transparency coupled with inclusiveness, and oversight must extend beyond institutional boundaries to incorporate other stakeholders and citizen perspectives. Strengthening these dimensions will safeguard reform credibility, foster trust, and ensure that the RGF evolves into a transformative instrument for sustainable governance. Ultimately, deepening stakeholder ownership is not only vital for the success of the RGF but also for Albania's broader trajectory toward EU integration.

Key recommendations are; (a) prioritizing the completion of pending reforms; (b) enhancing transparency in financing and trust through transparency; (c) leveraging regional cooperation to maximize the impact of reforms; (d) strengthening parliamentary oversight; and (e) replicate successful digitalization reforms to modernize governance and accelerate EU accession.

An important stakeholder as local government, is not supported directly by the RA. Although municipalities are excluded, they should still be supported through clear information sharing, targeted capacity-building and voluntary adoption of best practices. Civil society and regional networks can help channel local perspectives, while monitoring local impacts ensures reforms remain credible and sustainable.

This policy paper provides a panorama of the current framework, highlights achievements and progress, identifies gaps and challenges that need to be addressed, and provides recommendations to strengthen inclusive governance and accountability during the implementation of the National Reform Agenda 2024–2027. This paper seeks to provide a forward-looking, insight-driven analysis of transparency and oversight within Albania's Reform and Growth Facility (RGF), aiming not only to deliver a technically robust assessment, but also to reflect the institutional dynamics, voices, and perspectives that underpin the success and inclusiveness of the reform's implementation process.

II. The methodology and limitations

The assessment's methodology is based on a review of Albania's laws, institutions and official reports from the European Commission, as well as documents provided by civil society actors. We also spoke directly with people involved in the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF) through interviews and written contributions. The interviews were conducted in a constructive and inclusive manner, to capture diverse perspectives on transparency, oversight, and reform priorities, and enabling stakeholders to articulate both achievements, difficulties and challenges. To illustrate these dynamics more concretely, two spotlight cases are presented, one as a positive example of reform progress, and the other revealing persisting gaps.

The objectives of the interviews were threefold: (1) to capture diverse perspectives on the functioning of RGF transparency and oversight; (2) to identify institutional results, strengths, weaknesses, priorities, and opportunities for reform; and (3) to build stakeholder ownership of the assessment by ensuring their active participation in the process. Qualitative evidence was integrated with quantitative indicators such as reform completion rates, financial allocations, and measurable outputs, as well as thematic analysis of interview data and institutional statements, to capture perceptions of reform effectiveness.

To achieve these objectives, interviews engaged a broad spectrum of stakeholder groups, conducted both in person and through information provided directly by stakeholders. At the central government level, discussions were held with the RGF National Coordinator (SASPAC), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, the Agency for Supporting Local

Self-Government (ASLG) and State Agency for Cadastre; at the parliamentary level, the interview was held with the Chair of the parliamentary Committee on Economy, Employment, and Finance. Civil society perspectives/private sector are incorporated through consultations with ICC Albania.

While this approach uses both data and interviews, some limits remain. Interviews may reflect personal or institutional opinions. Some groups, especially local communities and parts of the private sector, were less represented. Also, official data may not fully capture longer-term impacts, such as public trust or lasting change. These limitations mean that the findings should be interpreted as indicative, highlighting important trends but may not fully represent all perspectives or capture the broader sustainability of reforms.

III. Why Transparency and Oversight matter for the RGF

Albania aims to join the EU by 2030, and to achieve this, it needs to align its transparency and oversight practices with EU standards. Strong transparency and oversight help protect public funds, build trust in institutions, and ensure that EU investments bring real improvements to services, jobs, and the quality of life for all citizens. In this context of Albania's EU integration, these principles carry particular weight, as the European Union places strong emphasis on governance standards, the rule of law, and citizen participation. Open processes and effective monitoring allow citizens and stakeholders to follow progress, identify challenges, and hold institutions accountable.

The analysis shows that when processes are open and decisions are traceable, transparency fosters trust among citizens and stakeholders. Internal and external oversight, in turn, provides the tools to monitor performance, identify shortcomings, and enforce corrective measures. Together, transparency and oversight safeguard public resources, reinforce institutional credibility, and ensure that reforms are implemented fairly and effectively. Civil society organizations like the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), track reform implementation, highlighting achievements and challenges. As a positive example, the Reform Tracker⁵, developed by CDI, is the first public Western Balkan's platform that transparently monitors Albania's reform agenda under the EU Growth Facility, offering a clear view of progress and conditionality in practice.

While Albania has established a monitoring and reporting framework, gaps remain in practice, particularly in citizen engagement, better institutional coordination, and the accessibility of information. Oversight mechanisms (that include civil society actors) help bridge the gap between government and citizens, reinforcing democratic accountability and fostering inclusive growth. From the analysis, it is clear that there is a need for a broader participation of civil society and private sector in implementing the reform agenda.

Drawing on stakeholder perspectives, including government officials, parliamentary committee, civil society organizations/private sector, the paper identifies both strengths and weaknesses in the current system. Key findings reveal that while the RGF has contributed to reform momentum, its inclusiveness and credibility depend on stronger oversight, clearer communication channels, and more systematic involvement of civil society. Ultimately, without strong transparency and oversight, the RGF risks becoming a technical exercise rather than a transformative tool for sustainable reform and growth.

⁵ www.cdinstitute.eu/reform-tracker/

The paper concludes with targeted policy recommendations designed to enhance transparency, strengthen institutional accountability, and ensure that reforms are not only technically sound but also socially inclusive and sustainable.

IV. Current institutional framework and how it works in practice

The Reform and Growth Facility (RGF) in Albania is governed by a framework that combines legal provisions, institutional mandates, and reporting mechanisms designed to ensure accountability and alignment with national reform priorities. This framework establishes responsibilities for government agencies, oversight bodies, and implementing institutions. It also includes reporting requirements intended to track progress and provide transparency to both domestic stakeholders and international partners⁶.

Yet the true measure of success lies not in the framework itself, but in how it functions in practice. What matters is whether responsibilities are carried out effectively, reporting translates into meaningful oversight, and transparency builds trust among citizens and international partners. Evaluating the practical implications—how institutions coordinate, how information is shared, and how accountability is enforced—reveals whether the RGF is genuinely driving reforms or merely existing as a formal structure.

The State Agency for Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) leads strategic programming and aid coordination around this agenda, translating reforms into measurable results and national priorities. Where necessary, as reported by SASPAC, this institution provides support to state institutions by engaging international experts to facilitate the effective preparation and designation of projects under the Reform and Growth Facility. Early monitoring outlines the legal-administrative setup for RGF, funding request and release processes, and progress by reform steps, alongside emerging challenges in coordination, capacity, and execution within the first semester of 2025. Weak monitoring systems and difficulties in coordinating cross-sector reforms remain an issue in the activity of SASPAC. These shortcomings heighten the risk that reforms prioritize formal compliance over tangible results.

RGF Monitoring Committee

The RGF Monitoring Committee (RGF MC), is the key body that monitors how the Reform Agenda is implemented in Albania and serves as a key platform for assessing progress and impact and also ensuring efficient and strategic use of funds. The RGF National Coordinator provides guidance to the Albanian responsible structures and ensures that the RGF MC receives the information needed to perform its duties. Beyond guidance, it is also responsible for securing the implementation of the RGF Monitoring Committee's operational conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's work is supported by a technical secretariat within the RGF Coordinator Support Office⁷. The first RGF Monitoring Committee held on 24 September 2025, reviewed reforms in five priority areas of NRA. It also discussed how reforms can translate into real, visible improvements for people and businesses. During this first meeting were adopted

⁶ Cooperation and Development Institute, Elvis Zerva, October 2025, "Albanian Reform Agenda: Progress Report October 2024 - June 2025", <https://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Albanian-NRA-Progress-Report.pdf>

⁷ Findings based on the SASPAC interview and provided information. See also: Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 252, dated 2 May 2025.

its rules of procedure⁸, including provisions for preventing any conflict of interest and ensuring the application of the principle of transparency.

Civil society organizations, recognized as important players in Albania's EU integration, are not systematically included in IPA monitoring committee, and in the case of the RGF MC, some civil society actors were invited to participate, but not as a full member of the Committee, which limited the possibility to have the final version of the Rules of Procedure and to have access into the detailed information of the implementation of the RA. This means that civil society/private sector participation in the reforms implementation and monitoring remains limited. Current mechanisms have not fully institutionalized CSO engagement, leaving oversight and inclusiveness weaker than intended⁹. Nevertheless, during the interview, the National Coordinator office emphasized a strong commitment to deepening cooperation with all relevant actors and stakeholders.

REGFIS (Electronic Monitoring and Reporting System), is a platform under construction by NAIS (National Agency for Information Society) that will be managed in cooperation with SASPAC. It will serve as Albania's central electronic system for monitoring and reporting. Its primary function will be to ensure transparency in the use of public funds and to prevent the risk of double financing across projects and programs. By consolidating reporting mechanisms, REGFIS will strengthen the integrity of financial management and enhance trust in reform implementation. REGFIS will be designed not only as a technical tool but also as a governance instrument that enables inclusive oversight. Without a fully functional REGFIS, public fund management would be impaired, financial integrity safeguards weakened, and trust in reform implementation reduced, exposing reforms to greater inefficiency and credibility risks.

Other institutional mechanisms

Institutional mechanisms have been established to ensure alignment, implementation, accountability, and effective monitoring of reforms:

- **Designation of Officials for RGF Implementation and Reporting¹⁰:**
 - Each leading or participating institution has, through internal directives, designated the structures accountable for implementation.
 - At the ministry level, Deputy Ministers serve as the designated officials for RGF implementation and reporting, while simultaneously acting as negotiators for the relevant reform chapters. Supported by dedicated technical staff, they ensure effective execution and monitoring of reforms.
- **Communication and Reporting Coordinators¹¹:**
 - Ministries and public institutions have formed internal working groups, appointed Deputy Ministers or senior officials as contact points, and designated information coordinators for visibility and reporting.
- **Inter-Institutional Working Groups:**
 - Line ministries have established dedicated groups to monitor reform measures under the National Reform Agenda 2024–2027.

⁸ Findings based on the SASPAC interview and provided information.

⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ardita Seknaj, International Chamber of Commerce Albania. (ICC Albania).

¹⁰ In line with the provisions of the National Reform Agenda 2024–2027 and Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 621, dated 10 October 2024, defining responsible institutions of their obligations under the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF).

¹¹ In accordance with obligations arising from Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 252, dated 2 May 2025, the National Coordinator has instructed line ministries and public institutions listed in the National Reform Agenda to establish internal working groups for coordinating and implementing the defined measures.

- The National Coordinator has requested all relevant institutions to continue forming internal working groups to ensure effective coordination of reform implementation under the National Reform Agenda 2024–2027.
- **Internal Management and Control Procedures:**
 - The Ministry of Finance leads the drafting of national procedures for financial management, internal control, and auditing. The first reporting exercise was carried out in July 2025 based on Instruction No. 21, dated 14 July 2025, issued by the Minister of Finance. This instruction provided precise guidance on the internal control and audit processes to be implemented by responsible institutions.
- **Ministry of Finance** has a central role in managing EU funds, loan agreements, budget planning, disbursement, financial control, and safeguarding EU financial interests, working closely with the National Coordinator on payment requests and reporting.

Key gaps and difficulties in the institutional performance of RGF implementation in Albania

In practice, however, several challenges limit the effectiveness of this framework, such as:

- **Fragmented Oversight:** Responsibilities are spread across multiple institutions, leading sometimes to difficulties in coordination and monitoring¹².
- **Limited Accessibility of Information:** Reports and data are often technical, difficult to access, or not widely disseminated, reducing transparency for citizens, civil society/private sector.
- **Weak Citizen Engagement:** Mechanisms for involving civil society and the public remain underdeveloped, leaving citizen voices underrepresented in reform consultation and monitoring.
- **Missed Opportunities for Innovation:** Digital tools and open-data platforms are underutilized, despite their potential to enhance transparency and citizen oversight. The operationalization of REGFIS, which is not yet functional, would provide significant added value in this context.

These shortcomings highlight the gap between the formal framework and its implementation. While Albania has made progress in establishing structures for oversight, the lack of effective coordination, accessibility, and inclusiveness undermines the credibility and impact of the RGF. Addressing these blind spots is essential to ensure that reforms are not only technically sound but also trusted and embraced by citizens.

V. Parliamentary Oversight

Parliament plays a central role in ensuring that the Reform and Growth Facility in Albania operates with transparency, accountability, and alignment to national priorities. Through its constitutional functions of legislation, supervision, and monitoring, Parliament safeguards the integrity of reforms, scrutinizes executive actions, and acts as the guarantor of public trust. Law No. 15/2015, on the role of Parliament in the process of integration of the Republic of Albania into the European Union, formally assigns Parliament responsibility for monitoring policies, overseeing reform implementation, and supervising EU financial assistance. *Amendments adopted in 2025*¹³ further strengthened this mandate by requiring accelerated

¹² Findings based on the interview with Mr. Andi Memeti, Deputy Minister of Ministry of Economy and Innovation and interview with Mrs. Suela Jahaj, Director of the Directorate of Integration, International Agreements and Projects- Ministry of Interior.

¹³ Law No. 15/2015, “On the role of the Parliament in the process of the integration of the Republic of Albania into the European Union,” as amended.

review of draft laws aligned with the EU *acquis*, positioning Parliament as a central actor in advancing reforms under the National Reform Agenda 2024–2027.

Within this framework, the Committee on European Affairs and Foreign Policy plays a pivotal role by monitoring the government’s work, the Chief Negotiator, and institutions responsible for EU accession duties, including oversight of RGF fund use, compliance with disbursement conditions, and evaluation of the impact of financial assistance on reform outcomes.

MPs interviewed emphasizes the role of parliament in strengthening the legitimacy of the integration process, fostering public trust, and ensuring the sustainability of reforms. By institutionalizing reforms within parliamentary procedures, legislators mitigate the risk of policy reversal amid political transitions and thereby reinforce the long-term stability of the reform agenda.

Parliament’s monitoring role is particularly critical given that RGF disbursements are conditional and subject to European Commission assessments of reform progress before funds are released. Legislative scrutiny ensures that these assessments extend beyond executive-level reporting, preventing misuse of funds and reinforcing transparency. However, oversight remains fragmented, with RGF-related issues dispersed across multiple parliamentary committees¹⁴ and no dedicated parliamentary structure to coordinate monitoring.

As an integral component of the parliamentary structure, the National Council for European Integration is mandated to monitor Albania’s EU accession process, strengthen parliamentary oversight, and function as the principal forum for civil and social dialogue throughout negotiations, in accordance with its internal regulation¹⁵. By delivering specialized opinions and fostering broad consensus, the Council reinforces transparency, accountability, and the credibility of reform implementation.

Parliament’s involvement in RGF oversight is vital for democratic accountability, ensuring reforms are subject to legislative scrutiny rather than driven solely by the executive. It strengthens transparency by monitoring the use of EU funds and preventing misuse or inefficiency. It enhances legitimacy by building public trust in the integration process and ensures sustainability by embedding reforms within parliamentary processes, reducing the risk of reversal with political changes. While progress is evident, challenges such as weak institutional mechanisms, limited analytical capacity, and information asymmetry continue to hinder effective oversight¹⁶.

Beyond fragmented oversight, Parliament in Albania faces a few additional challenges in RGF implementation that constrain its effectiveness:

- a. **Information Asymmetry.** Parliament’s ability to oversee RGF implementation is weakened by the lack of systematic access to detailed information. Most reporting occurs directly between the government and the European Commission, leaving Parliament dependent on secondary or delayed updates. This creates an information asymmetry that prevents timely intervention and limits Parliament’s capacity to address specific issues before they become entrenched.
- b. **Analytical and Technical Capacities** even when information is available, Parliament struggles to fully analyze it. The technical nature of RGF reforms - ranging from performance indicators and financial conditions to result-based disbursement mechanisms - requires specialized expertise in

¹⁴ Interview with Mrs. Milva Ekonomi, Chair of the parliamentary committee on Economy, Employment, and Finance.

¹⁵ Article 103/2 of the Regulation of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania, <https://kuvendwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/RregullorjaeKuvenditeperditesuar.pdf>

¹⁶ Interview with Mrs. Milva Ekonomi, Chair of the parliamentary committee on *Economy, Employment, and Finance*

public finance, economic governance, and EU policy frameworks. These skills are not yet sufficiently consolidated within parliamentary structures, leaving members reliant on external inputs and reducing the depth of parliamentary scrutiny.

- c. Procedural and Time Constraints. Finally, parliamentary procedures and the legislative calendar are not aligned with the European Commission's reporting cycle. Deadlines set by the Commission often fall outside Parliament's rhythm of work, meaning that oversight tends to occur after the fact. This reactive posture denies Parliament the opportunity to influence reforms at the critical early stages, limiting its role to ex post evaluation rather than proactive guidance.

Strengthening Parliament's role through current monitoring structures, improved reporting systems, enhanced staff expertise, and greater transparency is essential for sustaining reforms and accelerating Albania's EU integration trajectory.

VI. Stakeholder Insights

So far, stakeholders interviewed within the established structures engaged in implementation and monitoring broadly concur that the RGF represents a valuable instrument for advancing Albania's EU integration and fostering economic growth. While its potential is widely acknowledged, they also recognize that the mechanism remains both promising and demanding in practice. Government officials emphasize the institutional progress achieved to date, underscoring the RGF's role in strengthening administrative capacity. Civil society/private sector actors place particular weight on issues of transparency and accountability, highlighting the importance of ensuring that reforms are implemented in an open and credible manner.

However, as evidenced, implementation speed poses challenges, while transparency and inclusiveness must be improved. A policy approach that balances conditionality with capacity-building and citizen engagement will maximize the facility's transformative potential.

Reform implementation outcomes and financial progress

By July 2025, Albania had completed 21 of the 41 reform steps under the RGF, demonstrating commitment and readiness from its institutions. Financial support, in total 163.8 Mln Euros released to the treasury¹⁷, was structured to balance immediate reforms with long-term investments channelled through the Western Balkans Investment Framework, to fund infrastructure projects¹⁸.

The first investment projects¹⁹ financed through RGF pre-financing and supported by KfW loans have been approved in the energy sector including transmission system digitalization, rehabilitation of the Fierza Hydropower Plant, and construction of key transmission lines. With a WBIF contribution of €30.9 million, these initiatives strategically strengthen competitiveness and energy security.

¹⁷ Reform Tracker, <https://cdinstitute.eu/reform-tracker/>

¹⁸ See: www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/albania/eu-disburses-€100-million-albania-under-eu-growth-plan_en?s=214; www.cdinstitute.eu/reform-tracker/

¹⁹ Findings based on the SASPAC interview and provided information.

Among the first initiatives receiving financial support were key energy projects, such as the digitalization of the transmission system, the rehabilitation of the Fierza Hydropower Plant, and the construction of important transmission lines, strengthening both energy security and competitiveness.

Gaps and challenges identified from stakeholders' interviews and provided information

Stakeholder insights reveal that while reforms have achieved progress, the implementation outcomes still show gaps and challenges that must be addressed. Tight implementation timelines have strained institutional capacity, while issues of transparency and inclusiveness remain a concern. Addressing these challenges will be essential to ensure reforms translate into sustainable improvements in governance and service delivery. In the following, we summarize the key gaps and challenges identified from stakeholder insights:

- **Gaps in implemented measures and outcomes**

At present, information gaps persist regarding reform measures being implemented and what concrete results have been achieved. This lack of transparency constrains the ability of stakeholders to fully assess progress and impact.

- **Complexity of reforms and Coordination**

In the context of implementing the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF), the main challenges faced by the governmental stakeholders are primarily related to the complexity and interdependence of reforms across specific areas of competence, as well as the need for close inter-institutional coordination.

- **Perceived Impact**

For citizens and civil society organizations, it remains too early to measure the tangible effects of the RGF. Improvements in the investment climate, business environment, and innovation are not yet clearly attributable to this reform framework.

- **Public Trust**

No reliable data is currently available to determine whether the RGF has influenced public confidence in institutions and reforms carried out. This underscores the need for stronger monitoring and communication mechanisms to capture ownership perceptions and build legitimacy.

- **Civil society/private sector involvement**

Civil society and the business community have had only limited formal involvement in the RGF agenda. Systematic engagement of private sector actors remains absent²⁰. Yet, the successful implementation of reforms ultimately depends on the active participation and contribution of these stakeholders.

- **Lack of consultation**

A substantial portion of the measures outlined in the National Reform Agenda (NRA) are centered on reforms that primarily involve legal and institutional changes. The accelerated pace of these reforms, combined with the rapid alignment of Albanian legislation with the EU acquis, carries the risk of producing a largely formalistic process if not accompanied by effective implementation and meaningful public consultation. The speed of the process may constrain opportunities for engagement with businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders, thereby diminishing the overall quality and legitimacy of the policies and measures adopted.

²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Ardita Seknaj, International Chamber of Commerce Albania. (ICC Albania).

Overall Assessment. Albania’s RGF experience illustrates both the promise and the demands of reform delivery in the EU integration process. The RGF has laid the groundwork for reform through accelerated implementation, financial mobilization, and institutional consolidation. However, its effectiveness is constrained by capacity pressures, transparency gaps, limited consultation, and weak stakeholder engagement. The tangible impact on citizens, businesses, and public trust remains unclear, underscoring the need for stronger monitoring, communication, and inclusive participation.

To ensure reforms translate into sustainable improvements, the process must shift from a formalistic, accelerated approach toward one that emphasizes implementation quality, transparency, and inclusiveness.

VII. Spotlight Case: Local Government

The desk review of the documents and the interview conducted with representative of the Agency for the Support of Local Governance (ASLG) reveal that local governments remain outside the RGF. This exclusion limits their ability to translate evidence into action, access resources, and address structural disparities. Albania has institutionalized mechanisms to measure municipal performance and align development planning with cohesion objectives, yet structural disparities remain. Smaller municipalities struggle with limited fiscal autonomy, narrow revenue bases, and weak administrative capacity²¹. Heavy reliance on central transfers and expenditure structures dominated by personnel costs further restricts their ability to invest in infrastructure and services. Tools such as the 2024 Municipal Performance Measurement System and the 2023 Census provide an evidence base for identifying disparities, underscoring the need for differentiated solutions rather than uniform approaches.

ASLG provided tailored assistance to 13 municipalities, helping them navigate complex procedural and financial requirements in 2025. Support included PRAG rule guidance, co-financing and VAT resolution, and project registration. 6 municipalities received technical support in drafting project proposals, resulting in 5 successful applications. This outcome illustrates that when municipalities are equipped with the right tools and guidance, they can overcome structural constraints and access external funding to drive local development.

These findings underscore a critical takeaway: The analysis makes clear that the local government is not involved in the RGF. Albania’s path toward balanced territorial development depends not only on legal frameworks and performance measurement systems, but also on sustained, practical support for municipalities. The RGF must evolve to ensure that convergence with the EU is accompanied by a reduction of internal disparities between municipalities: weaker municipalities should receive tailored capacity-building, fiscal reforms should expand local autonomy, and systematic assistance should facilitate access to EU resources.

Going forward, the any adaptations possibilities of the RA provide an opportunity for institutionalizing few good practices so that they are not isolated achievements but part of a consistent and sustained approach.

Strengthening local governance through performance monitoring and tailored support will be essential for Albania’s EU integration trajectory, and RGF can still be put in use to support this objective.

²¹ Interview with Mr. Stiljan Llavdaniti, Acting General Director of the Agency for Supporting Local Self-Government.

VIII. Spotlight Case: State Agency of Cadastre

The Reform and Growth Facility aim to highlight institutional practices that drive effective governance, modernization, and sustainable development. Within this framework, the State Agency of Cadastre (SAC) is brought through this paper as a spotlight case, showing how targeted reforms can strengthen capacity and improve service delivery.

SAC's reforms focus on digitalization, transparency, and integrity, aiming to secure property rights, improve the business climate, and prepare Albania for EU single market integration. Key milestones include the Digitalization Roadmap and the Integrity Plan and the Risk Management Action Plan (adopted in December 2025), established to reinforce accountability, stronger safeguards against corruption and clear standards for modernizing property data management.

By the end of 2025, digitalization of property records rose from 24% to 80%, with all technical and legal documentation scanned²². This progress reflects a focused institutional commitment and marks a decisive step toward modernizing cadastral services.

Monitoring mechanisms have also been embedded into the process. An ad-hoc group within SAC oversees the Risk Management Action Plan and reports regularly on progress, while transparency is ensured through published reports and ongoing consultations with stakeholders. The aim is to ensure accountability, while citizens and businesses benefit from faster, more reliable services and reduced costs. Through effective prioritization and coordination, SAC managed to meet the established timelines.

The implementation of these reforms has not been without challenges. Tight deadlines, relative to institutional capacity and resources, posed difficulties. Collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption has been particularly constructive, ensuring timely implementation of reform measures.

Looking ahead, SAC priorities for 2026–2027 include completing initial property registration in 96.5% of cadastral zones by 2026 and achieving full coverage by 2027. The agency also aims to finalize the digitalization of property records by June 2026, strengthen inter-institutional coordination, and expand automation of cadastral services. Currently, ten services are automated, and plans are underway to integrate artificial intelligence into service delivery, further enhancing efficiency and transparency.

The strategic impact is clear: a reliable property data system reduces corruption risks, fosters legal certainty, and strengthens Albania's investment climate²³. Most importantly, these reforms directly support Albania's readiness for EU single market integration by aligning with European standards of efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

SAC's experience demonstrates how institutional reforms can deliver measurable improvements in governance, economic growth, and public trust. This spotlight case underscores the importance of aligning institutional capacity with broader reform objectives, offering both practical lessons and strategic insights for future implementation efforts under the Reform and Growth Facility.

²² Findings based on the interview and provided information by the State Agency of Cadastre and Ministry of Justice.

²³ Findings based on the interview and provided information by Mrs. Eva Kokonozi, Head of the Statistics and Projects Sector, State Agency of Cadastre.

IX. Key findings of the analysis

- **RGF as a Strategic Driver of EU Accession.** The Reform and Growth Facility (RGF) has emerged as a considerable pre-accession financing instrument, positioning Albania as a regional frontrunner in reform delivery and financial mobilization. Its successful implementation is pivotal for demonstrating readiness to complete EU accession by 2027.
- **Structured but demanding Framework:** The Reform Agenda's 143 commitments across 2024–2027 create a highly structured, conditional process that tests Albania's institutional capacity and ability to align with EU acquis and Single Market standards.
- **From Speed to Sustainability: Strengthening Oversight and Engagement in Albania's RGF Implementation**

Albania has achieved rapid reform progress, implementing 51% of planned measures by mid-2025 and leading the region, but accelerated timelines strain institutional capacity, and long-term credibility will depend on strengthening transparency, citizen engagement, and civil society participation. Albania leads the region in RGF implementation, yet accelerated timelines strain institutional capacity. RGF budget support should be channelled to key line ministries tasked with complex inter-institutional reforms, providing the necessary support for staff to achieve objectives, comply with criteria, and respect implementation timelines.
- **Transparency and Oversight as foundations of credibility.** Robust monitoring and open communication are essential to safeguard public trust. Current gaps in accessibility, coordination, and citizen involvement risk reducing reforms to technocratic exercises rather than genuine governance transformation.
- **Institutional Framework/architecture established but better coordination is needed in practice.** Legal mandates, designated officials, and inter-institutional working groups provide structure, yet weak coordination and overlapping responsibilities may undermine efficiency and credibility. Oversight structures such as SASPAC, the RGF Monitoring Committee, and the emerging REGFIS system provide a framework for accountability. However, fragmented responsibilities, weak inter-institutional coordination, and underutilization of digital tools continue to undermine effectiveness.
- **Financial Mobilization.** Significant resources have been secured through national budgets and regional investment frameworks, reinforcing fiscal sustainability and strengthening Albania's integration trajectory.
- **Parliamentary Oversight requires consolidation.** Parliament's constitutional role in monitoring reforms and EU funds was reinforced by 2025 amendments. Yet oversight remains dispersed across multiple committees, highlighting the need for strengthening the actual monitoring structures, enhanced analytical capacity, and greater transparency to ensure democratic accountability.
- **Stakeholder Perspectives highlight both promise and demands.** Government actors emphasize institutional progress, Members of Parliament underline legitimacy, while civil society and private sector highlight transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability as areas needing reinforcement. Across stakeholders, there is broad consensus on the need for more participatory implementation. Stakeholders agree that speed of implementation strains capacity and inclusiveness standards.
- **Transparency and Trust Challenges.** Information gaps, weak communication of results, and limited citizen engagement hinder public confidence and make it difficult to assess the tangible impact of reforms.

- **The spotlight cases** illustrate both the risks of uneven institutional capacity and the transformative potential of well-designed reforms, reinforcing the need for tailored support and replication of successful practices across sectors.

X. Conclusions

For the Reform Agenda to succeed, the focus needs to shift from speed to sustainability — balancing fast progress with strong institutions, inclusiveness, and transparency. Better coordination among SASPAC, ministries, and working groups, supported by digital monitoring tools, will help reduce fragmentation and strengthen accountability. At the same time, deeper engagement with civil society and the private sector, along with strategic investments and stronger local governance, will ensure reforms deliver real benefits for citizens.

Transparency tools like REGFIS and open data platforms should be fully operational to improve efficiency and build trust, while parliamentary oversight must be strengthened through better analytical capacity. Stakeholder engagement should be formalized, and successful reforms — such as the Cadaster’s digitalization — should be replicated across institutions.

Ultimately, Albania’s EU accession depends on a reform process that is adaptive, transparent, and participatory. By consolidating progress and prioritizing sustainability, Albania can build a strong and resilient foundation for democratic consolidation and European integration.

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