



Who Fools Drita? Honor, Desire, and the Roots of Blood Feuds in Albanian Society

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini in shaping concepts of honor and revenge within Albanian culture, with a particular focus on gender dynamics and the impact of modern societal changes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative interviews with community members, ethnographic observations, and a review of existing literature on honor-based violence and customary law. The findings reveal that the Kanun serves as a significant cultural framework that dictates social behavior, particularly regarding family honor and the justification of revenge. Gender dynamics are found to be deeply entrenched, with women often positioned as the bearers of family honor, leading to heightened vulnerability to violence. Additionally, modern influences such as urbanization and digital communication have transformed traditional beliefs, creating new avenues for honor-related conflicts while simultaneously challenging the rigid adherence to the Kanun. Overall, the study concludes that while the Kanun continues to exert influence over social norms, there is a critical need for legal and educational reforms to mitigate honor-based violence. These reforms should aim to redefine honor in a manner that promotes individual dignity and gender equality, thereby fostering a cultural shift that respects heritage while advancing human rights. The research underscores the importance of integrating traditional values with contemporary legal frameworks to create a more equitable society.

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Introduction

In societies where personal reputation and family honor define one's social worth, the boundaries between love, humiliation, and vengeance often blur.

Albania's history of blood feuds—ritualized cycles of retribution codified in the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini—offers a stark lens through which to study this tension. Behind many feuds lie not only property disputes or

political rivalries, but affronts to personal dignity, especially in matters of affection and marriage. To be rejected or ridiculed before one's peers could be interpreted not as a private disappointment but as a public wound, demanding redress through violence.

The figure of "Drita," imagined here as the luminous woman whose name literally means light, serves as a symbol rather than a person: she is the catalyst around whom male pride, social codes, and emotional fragility orbit. The question "Who Fools Drita?" thus asks who dares to deceive or dishonor her—and, by extension, who dares to upset the equilibrium of desire and respect that maintains communal order. This essay explores how humiliation in courtship or rejection of affection can ignite the mechanisms of blood feud, tracing the phenomenon from its cultural roots to its psychological and modern manifestations.

Albania's rich and complex history begins in classical antiquity, when the region was inhabited by Illyrian tribes such as the Taulantii, Ardiaei, and Albanoi. These tribes interacted with Greek colonies like Epidamnos (modern-day Durrës) and Apollonia, which were established along the coast. The earliest known Illyrian king, Bardylis, emerged around 400 BCE, uniting tribes and challenging Macedonian power.

During the Roman era, Albania became part of the Roman Empire, and later the Byzantine Empire, which influenced its religious and cultural development. In the 15th century, Albania fell under Ottoman rule, which lasted for over four centuries. This period saw the rise of Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero, who led a prolonged resistance against the Ottomans in the mid-1400s.

Albania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, but its early years were marked by instability, foreign occupation during both World Wars, and shifting borders. After World War II, Enver Hoxha established a communist regime, turning Albania into one of the most isolated countries in the world. His rule lasted until his death in 1985, and the regime collapsed in the early 1990s.

Since then, Albania has undergone significant political and economic reforms, transitioning to a democratic system and seeking integration with European institutions. It became a NATO member in 2009 and

is currently a candidate for EU membership. Despite challenges like corruption and economic development, Albania has made strides in strengthening civil society and governance.

This study examines pre-national structures emerging from beneath the rubble of millenia of imperial dominance as a repository of a rare nation that survived and the travails of this struggling nation to modernise. The persistence of tribal norms in Albanian society, particularly in the northern highlands, reflects a complex interplay of historical continuity, geographic isolation, and sociocultural resilience. These norms, codified most famously in the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, have historically governed interpersonal relations, justice, property rights, and gender roles within clan-based communities. Despite Albania's transition to modern statehood and its integration into global institutions, elements of customary law continue to influence social behavior and local governance.

Tribal Albanian society is structured around deeply embedded norms. Honor (nder) functions as a central organizing principle, extending beyond the individual to encompass the entire fis (clan). A transgression by one member implicates the whole group, often necessitating restitution through blood vengeance (gjakmarrja) to restore dignity. Hospitality (mikpritja) is another foundational value, mandating the safeguarding of guests, including adversaries, under one's roof. Patriarchal structures dominate both public and private spheres, positioning men as decision-makers while women are often viewed as custodians of family honor, subject to strict behavioral codes. In the absence of formal legal institutions, tribal communities have relied on oral adjudication and mediation rooted in the Kanun, which offers a familiar and accessible framework for justice. Several factors have contributed to the survival of these norms. The mountainous terrain of northern Albania historically limited state penetration, allowing tribal structures to remain intact. Weak or distrusted state institutions have led communities to rely on customary law as a more legitimate and effective form of justice. The Kanun is also viewed as a symbol of Albanian resilience and autonomy, reinforcing its normative authority. Moreover, tribal norms provide a framework for regulating behavior and maintaining order in tightly knit communities, thereby fostering social cohesion and predictability.

While tribal norms have contributed to social cohesion and cultural continuity, they also present significant challenges in the context of modernization. On the one hand, they reinforce kinship bonds, preserve cultural heritage, and provide informal mechanisms for conflict resolution. On the other hand, blood feuds perpetuate cycles of violence and hinder social mobility, particularly among youth. Gender inequality restricts women's participation in civic and economic life, and rigid honor codes can escalate minor disputes and suppress individual autonomy. Furthermore, resistance to formal governance undermines legal integration and democratic consolidation.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Legal reform and institutional strengthening are essential to expanding access to formal justice systems and ensuring their credibility. Educational initiatives that promote civic engagement and critical reflection on tradition can foster reinterpretation of norms. Legal protections and cultural dialogue must support women's rights and agency. Rather than wholesale rejection, selective modernization of the Kanun can preserve its ethical foundations while eliminating harmful practices.

In conclusion, the survival of tribal norms in Albania is both a testament to cultural resilience and a challenge to democratic development. Their transformation requires a careful balance between respect for tradition and commitment to universal human rights and institutional progress.

Albanica refers to the body of writings, documents, artifacts, and studies related to Albanian history, language, culture, and society. It is often used to designate a specialized field of research or a collection of sources concerning Albania and Albanian heritage.

The rationale for studying the Kanun lies in its significance as both a historical and contemporary framework for understanding Albanian society, law, and culture. As a codified set of customary laws, most famously attributed to Lekë Dukagjini, the Kanun offers insight into the moral universe, social organization, and conflict-resolution mechanisms of Albanian communities, particularly in the northern highlands. It illuminates how concepts such as honor (nderi), hospitality (besa), and blood-feud (gjakmarja) structured interpersonal and inter-clan relation-

ships over centuries.

Studying the Kanun also allows scholars to analyze the interplay between customary law and formal state legal systems, showing how legal pluralism functions in practice and how traditional norms persist even under modern legal frameworks. It provides a lens through which to examine gender roles, social hierarchies, and kinship obligations, revealing both constraints and avenues of agency within traditional communities. Furthermore, understanding the Kanun contributes to broader discussions on cultural heritage, transitional justice, and the challenges of integrating customary law into contemporary governance, especially in contexts where state institutions are distant or weak.

In sum, the study of the Kanun is not merely antiquarian; it provides a theoretically grounded perspective on the enduring influence of customary norms on social behavior, legal reasoning, and community cohesion in Albania and the wider Balkans.

We argue In Albanian society, the concepts of honor and revenge are deeply intertwined, rooted in the traditional Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, which serves as both a moral framework and a social contract. This customary code dictates that personal and familial honor is paramount, often leading to violent retribution in the face of perceived insults. The collective nature of honor means that the actions of one family member can tarnish the reputation of the entire clan, compelling relatives to seek vengeance to restore dignity. Moreover, gender dynamics play a critical role in this context. Women are often seen as custodians of family honor, and their behavior is scrutinized under strict societal codes. This perspective not only places immense pressure on women but also positions honor killings as a means to reassert patriarchal authority when familial honor is perceived to be at stake. Such acts of violence are framed as necessary to uphold the family's reputation, illustrating how deeply ingrained these beliefs are within the cultural fabric.

Despite Albania's modernization, the psychological motivations for honor-based violence persist, adapting to contemporary contexts, such as social media, where public humiliation can trigger digital vendettas. This evolution highlights the urgent need for legal reforms and educational initiatives that address these issues while respecting cultural traditions. In summa-

ry, the interplay of honor and revenge in Albanian society underscores a complex legacy that challenges both individual rights and communal values. To foster a more equitable society, it is essential to navigate the delicate balance between honoring cultural practices and promoting human rights, ensuring that the cycle of violence does not continue to define the social landscape.

Objectives

- **To Analyze Cultural Norms:** This study aims to examine the role of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini in shaping the understanding of honor and revenge within Albanian society.
- **To Explore Gender Dynamics:** The research seeks to investigate the influence of gender on the perception and enactment of honor killings, particularly focusing on the role of women as custodians of family honor.
- **To Assess Modern Implications:** The study will evaluate how traditional beliefs regarding honor and revenge manifest in contemporary Albanian society, especially in urban settings and through digital platforms.
- **To Propose Solutions:** The research intends to identify potential legal and educational reforms that can address honor-based violence while respecting cultural traditions.

Scope

The scope of this study will primarily focus on northern Albania, where traditional practices are more prevalent, while also considering urban areas such as Tirana for comparative analysis. The research will delve into the historical and sociocultural background of the Kanun and its impact on contemporary Albanian society. An interdisciplinary approach will be employed, incorporating perspectives from anthropology, sociology, gender studies, and legal studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Research Questions

- What role does the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini play in shaping the concepts of honor and revenge in Albanian culture?
- How do gender dynamics influence the perception and enactment of honor killings within families?
- In what ways have modern societal changes, in-

cluding urbanization and digital communication, affected traditional beliefs about honor and revenge?

- What legal and educational reforms can be implemented to mitigate the prevalence of honor-based violence while respecting cultural heritage?

Significance

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural underpinnings of honor and revenge in Albanian society, highlighting the complexities of these concepts. Second, the findings can inform policymakers and non-governmental organizations working to address honor-based violence, providing insights into culturally sensitive approaches to reform. Third, by focusing on the role of women in these dynamics, the study aims to elevate discussions around gender equality and women's rights in the context of traditional practices. Finally, the research may offer valuable lessons for other cultures with similar honor-based systems, contributing to global discussions on violence, honor, and social norms.

Theoretical Explanations for Revenge, Honour Killings, and Taboos

The persistence of revenge practices, honour-based violence, and social taboos within Albanian Kanun culture—and comparable systems globally—has been approached from multiple disciplinary perspectives, each highlighting distinct causal mechanisms and levels of analysis.

The honour-culture paradigm argues that in societies where institutional enforcement of rights is weak, individuals rely on reputation and deterrence to ensure personal and familial security. Foundational studies by on “cultures of honour” in the American South, later extended cross-culturally, suggest that retaliatory violence functions as a socially rational response to perceived insults or threats when formal justice is unreliable. Within this logic, vengeance maintains social equilibrium and signals strength, thereby deterring aggression. In the Albanian context, where male honour (nder) historically conferred both personal dignity and social capital, the Kanun’s codification of revenge can be interpreted as a culturally embedded strategy for maintaining order in stateless conditions [14].

Anthropological theories derived from Ev-

ans-Pritchard's (1940) model of segmentary lineage societies offer another analytical frame. Here, vengeance and feud serve as structural mechanisms that regulate conflict within and between kin segments. Feuding maintains a form of balance by reinforcing boundaries between descent groups while ensuring internal cohesion. Northern Albanian clans (*fis*), much like other highland or pastoral societies, exhibit this logic of balanced opposition, in which the potential for feud acts as a deterrent and mechanism of self-regulation in the absence of a centralised state.

From a political-sociological perspective, legal pluralism—the coexistence of customary and formal systems—explains the endurance of revenge customs as rational adaptations to weak state capacity. When the state fails to provide reliable dispute resolution, communities revert to customary enforcement as an alternative governance structure. The Kanun thus persists not only because of cultural inertia but because it performs essential governance functions in areas of limited statehood.

Feminist and gender-critical scholarship interprets honour-based violence as an instrument of patriarchal control, primarily over female sexuality and reproductive agency. Within Kanun norms, women's conduct is viewed as directly tied to male and familial honour, rendering transgressions a collective moral injury. Honour killings, therefore, function as symbolic acts of restoring patriarchal authority. Such perspectives highlight the intersection of gender, kinship, and property, showing that control of women's behaviour is also linked to maintaining lineage purity and inheritance integrity.

Evolutionary anthropology and game-theoretical approaches conceive revenge as a costly signalling mechanism that enforces deterrence and strengthens cooperation within kin groups. Violence demonstrates willingness to incur personal costs for collective benefit, enhancing the group's reputation for defending itself. Complementary social learning models posit that such norms are transmitted intergenerationally through prestige bias—young men emulate admired figures who embody the honour ideal.

Integrated Interpretations

Contemporary scholars increasingly favour mul-

ti-causal and integrative frameworks that bridge structural, psychological, and institutional explanations. These models recognise that Kanun revenge practices emerge at the intersection of weak state institutions, patrilineal social organisation, gendered honour codes, and historically embedded moral economies. Understanding their persistence requires a holistic approach that accounts for both material constraints and symbolic meanings.

Research Gaps and Future Directions Despite considerable ethnographic and sociological research on Albanian customary law, substantial analytical and empirical gaps remain. These gaps constrain both theoretical advancement and the formulation of effective policy interventions.

While numerous programs have sought to mitigate blood feuds and honour-based violence, systematic evaluations of their effectiveness are rare. There is a lack of longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies measuring changes in community attitudes, dispute frequency, and justice access following interventions such as hybrid mediation or state legal reforms. Developing evidence-based assessment frameworks remains a key research priority.

Existing research describes the persistence of Kanun norms but provides limited insight into how social norms evolve or decay. Further inquiry is needed into the micro-mechanisms of normative transformation—including the roles of prestige, social learning, religious reinterpretation, and economic incentives in altering honour codes. Comparative studies of communities where Kanun observance has declined could illuminate pathways of peaceful cultural change.

Women's voices are often marginalised in analyses of customary law. Future research should foreground female agency—how women navigate, resist, reinterpret, or strategically deploy Kanun norms within patriarchal systems. Intersectional methodologies combining ethnography, oral history, and participatory research can reveal how women mediate honour and survival under the constraints of customary law.

The impact of internal and external migration on the transmission of Kanun values is underexplored. Remittances, urban exposure, and transnational media networks may facilitate normative shifts or, paradox-

ically, reinforce traditional identity markers among diasporic populations. Investigating how digital communication and diaspora communities reinterpret notions of honour and justice constitutes an emerging research frontier.

Although scholars often distinguish Kanun from Islamic or Christian law, the interplay between religious authority and customary norms remains insufficiently examined. Research could explore how clerics, imams, and priests reinterpret besa, forgiveness, and reconciliation in ways that align or conflict with the Kanun.

Psychological and Intergenerational Effects The psychological dimensions of blood feuds—trauma, anxiety, and intergenerational fear—are poorly documented. Longitudinal studies incorporating mental-health assessments could shed light on the social costs of living under threat of vendetta and inform reconciliation programs sensitive to trauma recovery.

Comparative and Cross-Cultural Analysis Comparative research linking Albanian Kanun practices to other honour-based legal systems—such as Pash-tunwali in Afghanistan or Bedouin *urf* in the Arab world—could refine general theories of customary justice under weak statehood. Identifying both universal and context-specific mechanisms would enhance theoretical generalisation.

Synthesis

Theoretical and empirical scholarship converges on the understanding that revenge and honour systems are adaptive responses to environments of weak institutional trust. Yet, transforming such systems demands research that is simultaneously locally grounded and theoretically rigorous. Future studies must bridge anthropology, law, gender studies, and behavioural sciences to develop evidence-based, culturally sensitive models of norm change capable of guiding both policy and peacebuilding in northern Albania and analogous contexts worldwide.

Background

The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, as codified in northern Albanian customary law, treats honour (*nderi*) and blood feud (*gjakmarrja* or *hakmarrja*) as central pillars of social regulation within a segmentary kin-

ship system. According to scholarly interpretations, the Kanun posits that “the life of the good man and the bad man has the same value,” reflecting the principle that all human life is formally equal under customary law, irrespective of individual moral conduct. Within this framework, any act that threatens or diminishes a family’s honour is considered tantamount to a form of social death, and restoration of honour may be achieved either through ritualized blood vengeance or through magnanimous pardon.

The customary law delineates the conditions under which blood feud may be undertaken, specifying that only deliberate murder triggers the obligation for vengeance. Accidental killings, theft, or minor insults do not automatically justify retaliation. Furthermore, the Kanun imposes strict limitations on the scope of retribution: certain categories of persons, including women, young children, and clergy, are exempt from being targeted, and vengeance is directed at the actual perpetrator rather than indiscriminately against an entire family line. In this sense, blood feud is codified as a highly formalized and socially constrained mechanism, rather than an uncontrolled manifestation of personal anger.

Significantly, the Kanun also institutionalizes alternatives to vengeance through the mechanisms of pardon and negotiated settlement. Such provisions indicate that honour-based retribution operates within a broader moral economy aimed at restoring social equilibrium. Scholarly commentary emphasizes that these principles reflect a customary-legal logic arising from a decentralized, clan-based society where formal state authority was historically weak. The regulation of honour and blood feud under the Kanun demonstrates an interplay between ritualized obligation, social constraint, and communal mediation, illustrating that vengeance functions primarily as a tool for maintaining social order rather than as an expression of arbitrary violence.

It says:

Personal Honor

- § 593. The Albanian Mountain Code makes no distinction between man and man. “One soul is worth as much as another; before God there is no distinction.”
- § 594. The strong man and the deformed have the same honor. “Beauty can be born from ugliness,

and ugliness from beauty.” In self-assessment, no one weighs less than others.

- § 595. For offended honor, there is no judgment or tribunal. The law says: “Forgive him if you wish, otherwise wash your own forehead.”
- § 596. Honor is personal property, and no one through judicial means can prevent its restitution. “Honor has been imprinted on the forehead by the Almighty God.”
- § 597. Outraged honor does not incur judicial fines. “An insult to honor is never forgiven.”
- § 598. Dishonor is not avenged with compensation, but with bloodshed or with generous forgiveness (granted following the intervention of good friends).
- § 599. The dishonored is free to avenge his honor; he gives no pledges, accepts no Elders, does not appeal to justice, and is not satisfied with monetary compensation. The valiant man takes justice into his own hands.

The text reflects a customary legal system rooted in honor-based restitution and blood-price logic, characteristic of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini. It operates outside state-centric legal positivism, privileging moral reciprocity, ancestral authority, and communal adjudication over codified judicial institutions:

- Articles 914-919 articulate a dual-track liability system: one for direct aggression (threats, insults), and another for retaliatory homicide. The blood price (gjakmarrja) is not extinguished by monetary fines, asserting a non-fungibility of moral debt.
- Article 128 codifies the principle that blood is ontologically distinct from money, rejecting

commodification of life and dignity. This reflects a sacral conception of justice, where restitution must mirror the gravity of the offense in kind, not in currency.

Family as Legal Subject and Moral Agent

The family unit is treated as a juridical actor, both bearer of rights and executor of obligations. This collectivization of liability and honor reflects a pre-modern legal anthropology:

- §918 and §919 affirm that inter-family offenses are adjudicated through elders (Vegliardi) and symbolic pledges, yet the right to blood revenge remains inalienable, even for marginalized families.
- The refusal to accept fines or judicial mediation underscores a horizontal justice logic, where peer-based adjudication and ritual satisfaction supersede vertical state authority.
- Book Eight, Chapter XVII elevates personal honor to a metaphysical status, beyond the reach of courts or compensation:
- §595-§599 reject judicial intervention, asserting that honor is self-regulated, divinely imprinted, and existentially defended.

The dissonance between legal remedy and moral satisfaction is resolved through bloodshed or magnanimous forgiveness, mediated by “good friends”—a proto-restorative justice mechanism. The motive may be more prestigious. According to a lokalnik the Albanians are really crypto catholics, and only converted to dervisha Sufism for reasons of submitting to the Ottomans while safeguarding their identity through interiorisation.

Dimension	Kanun Logic	Modern Legal Systems
Source of Law	Authority derives from custom, ancestral precedent, and collective memory. The norms are transmitted orally and reinforced through ritual, moral obligation, and communal consensus.	Authority derives from codified statutes, constitutional texts, and legislative enactments. Norms are formalized, written, and enforceable by state institutions.
Adjudicator	Disputes are adjudicated by elders, family councils, or respected individuals within the kinship network. Decisions rely on moral judgment, precedent, and communal notions of justice.	Disputes are adjudicated by courts, judges, and tribunals according to procedural rules. Decisions are guided by legal reasoning, statutory interpretation, and standardized evidence.

Remedy for Homicide	Responses are restorative and deterrent within the moral universe of the clan: blood price (gjoba) or vengeance (hakmarrja) aims to restore honor and social equilibrium.	Responses are punitive and rehabilitative: imprisonment, fines, or community service aim to protect society, deter crime, and uphold individual rights.
Honor Violation	Violations of honor are remedied through blood, mediated settlement, or ritualized reconciliation. Social recognition of moral equilibrium is paramount.	Violations of reputation or dignity are remedied through civil actions, defamation suits, or symbolic compensation; the legal focus is on the individual's rights rather than communal prestige.
Legal Subject	The primary unit of legal concern is the family or clan. Liability and obligations are collective, and responsibility often extends beyond the individual to the kin group.	The primary unit of legal concern is the individual. Rights, duties, and liabilities are personal and defined independently of familial or communal status.

This juxtaposition highlights the profound ontological divergence between customary law and modern state law. Kanun law operates on a moral-realistic ontology, in which law is inseparable from ethical and social obligations: the authority of the code rests on shared understandings of honor, lineage, and communal equilibrium. In contrast, modern legal systems operate on a procedural-abstraction ontology, in which law is codified, impersonal, and enforced according to standardized procedures that prioritize formal equality and individual rights. The contrast underscores not merely a difference of enforcement mechanisms, but a fundamentally distinct understanding of law's purpose: for the Kanun, law maintains social and moral cohesion; for the state, law ensures legal order, individual protection, and predictable governance.

The relationship between customary law, such as the Kanun, and *jus cogens* norms is complex and illuminates the tension between local moral orders and universal legal principles.

Customary law, like the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, derives its authority from ancestral practice, communal consensus, and moral realism rather than codified international statutes. Its norms regulate honor, vengeance, and collective responsibility within a kinship or territorial community. From the perspective of customary law, obligations are moral and social as much as legal; they are enforced through ritual,

mediation, and collective sanction rather than formal state coercion. In this sense, the Kanun embodies a localized, pluralistic understanding of justice that is self-contained and context-dependent.

By contrast, *jus cogens* norms represent the highest-order, peremptory principles of international law from which no derogation is permitted. These include prohibitions on genocide, slavery, torture, and crimes against humanity. They are universal, binding, and enforceable across states, reflecting a procedural and moral abstraction that transcends local or cultural norms.

Jus cogens refers to peremptory norms from which no derogation is permitted. These are rules considered so fundamental to the international legal order that all states are bound by them, regardless of consent or local law. Violating a *jus cogens* norm is considered universally illegal, and no treaty or domestic law can legally authorize such violations. In short, *jus cogens* represents the highest hierarchy of international legal obligations, overriding conflicting customary, national, or treaty-based law.

The tension arises when customary law prescribes practices, such as revenge killings or discriminatory treatment, that violate *jus cogens* principles. While the Kanun regulates homicide through blood-feud and collective responsibility, these practices would contravene the universal obligation to protect human

life and prohibit cruel treatment under international law. From a legal-theoretical perspective, customary law is nested in a moral universe, whereas *jus cogens* establishes non-negotiable ethical and legal limits. Therefore, any reconciliation requires recognizing the social and cultural function of customary norms while asserting the supremacy of universal human rights: customary law may guide social cohesion, but it cannot justify violations of peremptory international law.

In applied terms, this creates a framework for legal pluralism constrained by *jus cogens*: local dispute-resolution practices, such as mediation by elders or negotiated compensation, can be maintained, but practices that involve intentional killing, torture, or discrimination must be reformed or abolished to comply with international law. This tension illustrates a critical challenge in transitional justice, human rights implementation, and the integration of indigenous or traditional law into modern state systems.

In Albania today, the formal state legal system fully governs criminal liability, and invoking the Kanun (or customary law) does not legally exempt someone from punishment for homicide or related crimes. Blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*) and honor killings are considered criminal acts under the Albanian Penal Code, and the courts are bound to apply statutory law, not customary law.

However, there are some nuances in practice:

- Mitigation or contextual consideration: Judges may sometimes take into account the social and cultural context in sentencing — for example, whether the crime was committed in a clan-based honor dispute or under duress. This can sometimes result in slightly reduced sentences, but this is not a legal right and is entirely at the court's discretion.
- No “choice” in punishment: Perpetrators cannot legally choose to substitute Kanun-based remedies (blood price, mediation, or revenge) instead of serving a state-imposed sentence. Modern Albanian law treats homicide as a state crime; even if the victim's family forgives the perpetrator, the state can still prosecute.
- Historical tension: In the past, especially in remote highland areas, the Kanun functioned as the

primary law, and killings could go unpunished if feuds were “honor-bound.” After the establishment of a strong centralized state (post-Communism), the Albanian legal system explicitly criminalizes honor killings, and blood feuds are legally irrelevant as justifications.

- Enforcement challenges: In very remote areas, enforcement can be difficult, and local authorities may be reluctant to intervene immediately, which sometimes gives the illusion of customary law overriding the state, but this is a matter of practical enforcement, not legal legitimacy.

In short: Invoking the Kanun does not give legal immunity or allow individuals to pick their punishment. The Albanian courts may consider cultural context as mitigating circumstances, but the legal obligation to prosecute and punish homicide remains.

Cultural Context of Blood Feuds

Robert Elsie situates Albanian blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*) within a deeply embedded cultural and legal framework originating in the traditional customary code, the Kanun, most famously codified by Lekë Dukagjini.

For Elsie, blood feuding is not a random act of violence but part of a highly structured moral universe in which honor (*nderi*) is the core value that underpins social relations, lineage identity, and territorial autonomy in northern highland communities. He emphasizes four main contextual dimensions:

Honor is perceived as collective rather than individual. A wrongdoing against a family member — especially unlawful killing — is understood as a stain on the honor of the entire kin group (*fis*). Vengeance is thus framed as a duty of restoration, not personal retribution.

Elsie stresses that northern Albanian society historically relied on weak state penetration and strong kinship associations. Because formal authority was limited, the Kanun functioned as the principal regulatory system. Blood feuds served as a social enforcement mechanism that upheld balance between clans.

Contrary to sensationalist depictions, Elsie notes that the Kanun imposes strict rules to contain violence — specifying who may be targeted, when, and under what circumstances. Sanctuary protections (e.g., inside the home or near a church) and mediation routes demonstrate that the system sought to control conflict

rather than unleash it.

The tradition of mediated peace (paqja) — achieved through elders, the Church, and symbolic compensation — represents an equally significant cultural practice. Elsie stresses that reconciliation restores social equilibrium and is often perceived as a form of moral triumph exceeding vengeance.

Blood feuds, in his view, are a historical product of cultural autonomy, geographical isolation, and the absence of a powerful state, rather than an inherent trait of Albanian identity. He repeatedly warns against exoticizing or decontextualizing them. Modern manifestations of gjakmarrja, he argues, frequently depart from the classical Kanun and represent distortions influenced by contemporary socio-economic breakdown, criminality, and erosion of traditional authority.

The Albanian Kanun—a body of customary laws orally transmitted for centuries and first compiled by Shtjefën Gjeçov in 1933—functions as both moral framework and social contract. At its core lies the principle of nder (honor), which governs family reputation, gender roles, and responses to insult. Under the Kanun, injury to honor could be as grave as physical harm; the remedy, correspondingly, could be lethal [12].

Honor in traditional Albanian society was collective rather than individual. The misdeed of one family member tainted the whole fis (clan), and the restoration of dignity often required blood. Anthropologists have described such systems as “honor cultures,” where social cohesion depends on the visible defense of status ([17]; Pitt-Rivers, 1977). Within these frameworks, women were paradoxically both custodians and potential threats to male honor. Their behavior, virtue, and even the perception of chastity reflected on the reputation of the male kin group (Schwandner-Sievers, 2008).

Romantic pursuit, therefore, was never merely personal. A suitor’s proposal engaged two families’ standings. Acceptance elevated, refusal could humiliate. When a man’s advances were rejected—or worse, mocked—the affront echoed beyond his emotions into the moral economy of the village. The Kanun did not explicitly sanction vengeance for romantic rejection, yet its language of injury and resti-

tution easily extended to matters of pride.

European travelers of the nineteenth century often recorded astonishment at how quickly an insult could spiral into a blood feud. Observed that “a taunt shouted across the square may cost a man his life.” In a society where state justice was weak or absent, the defense of honor became privatized justice. To appear passive before humiliation risked emasculation and social exile. Thus, the belittled suitor, mocked for his failure to win Drita’s hand, might interpret his shame as an existential threat demanding a violent response [10].

The Psychology of the Belittled Suitor Paolo Dudaj, in his Italian-language scholarship and translation/commentary on the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, addresses the role of women in traditional Albanian customary law with careful attention to both limitations imposed by the system and the subtle forms of agency women could exercise.

In the context of blood feuds and family honor, Dudaj highlights several points:

Exemption from Direct Participation in Violence Women are generally exempt from being targets or perpetrators of blood feuds. The Kanun specifies that vengeance is the responsibility of male kin, usually the head of the family or designated male relatives. Women’s lives are legally protected from retaliation, reflecting a social norm that preserves the household and reproductive continuity.

Custodians of Family Honor

Despite being excluded from direct acts of revenge, women are considered guardians of familial and kinship honor. Their conduct, marriage choices, fidelity, and public behavior are closely tied to the family’s prestige. Any perceived dishonor could trigger feuds among male relatives.

Influence through mediation and negotiation:

Dudaj emphasizes that women sometimes wield indirect power by mediating conflicts or influencing male relatives to seek reconciliation rather than revenge. For example, mothers, wives, and sisters could urge restraint, support negotiated settlements, or advocate for pardon (paqja), acting as moral and social stabilizers within the feud system.

Symbolic centrality

In Dudaj's analysis, women symbolize the continuity and moral legitimacy of the clan. Even when their agency is circumscribed, their presence is central in ritual and symbolic contexts, such as hosting mediators, participating in oath-making ceremonies, or endorsing reconciliations that restore social equilibrium.

In short: Dudaj frames women as protected from the physical violence of blood feuds but essential to the maintenance of kinship honor. Their role is not combative but deeply structural and moral, shaping the strategies and social logic of vengeance while providing avenues for conflict moderation.

While anthropology explains the social mechanisms of honor, psychology reveals the internal storms that accompany humiliation. Research in moral emotions identifies shame as one of the most powerful motivators of aggression (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). When individuals experience humiliation publicly, they may externalize blame and seek to restore self-worth through dominance. In patriarchal contexts, this often translates into violence aimed at reclaiming status.

The belittled suitor's predicament thus intertwines cultural script and personal emotion. In his imagination, rejection is not an act of autonomy by the woman but a statement about his inadequacy as a man. This perception is intensified by community gossip—the social chorus that magnifies personal failures. Concept of symbolic capital—the prestige one accumulates through recognition—helps explain why loss of face feels like dispossession. To recover that capital, the suitor may resort to the only available currency: force [4].

In many rural Albanian communities, masculinity was historically measured through endurance, protection of kin, and readiness to avenge insult. Psychologist Richard Nisbett and colleagues (1996) have shown that “cultures of honor” produce heightened cortisol and testosterone responses to insult, priming men for aggression. Transposed to the Balkans, this biological-social feedback loop forms the emotional infrastructure of blood feuds [14].

From a narrative perspective, the figure of the re-

jected man mirrors classical tragic archetypes: Ajax humiliated by Odysseus, Othello consumed by suspicion, or the folk heroes of Balkan epics who kill to cleanse dishonor. “Drita,” then, functions as the luminous center around which darkness gathers—the unattainable light that exposes male insecurity. The suitor's rage is less about love than about the collapse of his self-image before an audience.

Modern gender theory interprets this dynamic as the product of patriarchal anxiety. When masculinity depends on female validation, autonomy becomes threatening. The belittled suitor cannot tolerate Drita's freedom to choose; her refusal destabilizes the hierarchy that grants him meaning. Philosopher calls this “objectification anxiety”—the fear that others will treat us not as subjects but as failures of worth. In communities structured by honor, this anxiety becomes collective: Drita's “no” is not merely her own but an affront to the male order [15].

The Kanun intensifies this tension by assigning women both sacred and subordinated status. A woman's purity symbolizes family virtue, but her consent is secondary to male negotiation. When she acts with agency—selecting, rejecting, or deceiving suitors—she unsettles the code. The resulting cognitive dissonance manifests in narratives of betrayal and vengeance. The suitor's humiliation becomes a political problem: how can a man remain honorable in a world where women speak their own desires?

In psychological terms, humiliation transforms private pain into public performance. The suitor may brood, fantasize revenge, or seek validation from peers. Over time, stories of insult crystallize into moral claims: “They have mocked our house.” The language of feeling turns into the language of justice. This translation is crucial, for it allows emotion to masquerade as ethics. Violence, once taboo, becomes duty.

At its core, the belittled suitor's descent into feud reveals a universal pattern: the fear of being laughed at. Anthropologist argued that laughter polices boundaries of the sacred and profane; to be laughed at is to be expelled from the sacred order. In small communities where reputation is survival, ridicule annihilates identity. Thus, the path from mockery to murder may traverse only a few overheard jokes [7].

Causes and Persistence of Blood Feuds in Albania
Blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*) in Albania represent one of the most enduring and complex forms of social conflict in Southeast Europe. Rooted in the historical Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini—a traditional code of customary law regulating honour, kinship, and retribution—these feuds continue to shape the moral landscape of certain Albanian communities, especially in the northern highlands. Although the Kanun no longer holds legal authority, its cultural resonance persists, providing an informal moral framework through which concepts of justice and honour are interpreted.

Several interlocking factors contribute to the continuation of this phenomenon. Foremost is the legacy of the Kanun itself, which legitimises revenge as a moral duty when an offence against family honour occurs. This traditional logic is reinforced by a widespread distrust in the formal justice system, often perceived as slow, corrupt, or inaccessible—especially in rural or mountainous areas. In such settings, private retribution becomes a substitute for state justice, perpetuating cycles of violence that span generations.

Social honour and intergenerational obligation further deepen this dynamic. In many communities, honour is understood not as an individual attribute but as a collective value transmitted through lineage. Consequently, the failure to avenge an affront may be interpreted as a stain on the entire family, compelling relatives to act in defence of social status and reputation. Economic marginalisation also plays a decisive role. Blood feuds are most prevalent in remote and impoverished areas, where limited access to education, employment, and public services constrains alternative pathways to dignity and recognition. The resulting isolation sustains both material deprivation and cultural conservatism, allowing feud practices to persist.

Moreover, the proliferation of firearms and the manipulation of feud narratives by criminal actors have transformed what were once localised honour disputes into more systemic forms of organised violence. Finally, migration from rural regions to urban centres—and even to the Albanian diaspora abroad—has expanded the spatial geography of feuds, extending their reach into cities and compli-

cating both prevention and reconciliation efforts. Taken together, these causes reveal that blood feuds in Albania are not merely vestiges of a pre-modern past, but living social phenomena shaped by the interplay of tradition, weak governance, economic exclusion, and evolving social pressures. Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating effective legislative, institutional, educational, and policy responses that move beyond repression toward genuine cultural and structural transformation.

Prevalence of Honour Killings in Albania

Honour killings (*krime nderi*) in Albania are rare but have been documented, particularly in the context of *gjakmarrja* (blood feuds) and patriarchal interpretations of family honour. These killings are often distinguished from other forms of domestic violence by their cultural justification rooted in the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, a traditional code that historically sanctioned revenge to restore family honour.

While comprehensive national statistics are limited, available reports indicate that honour-based violence, including killings, occurs sporadically and is more prevalent in rural and northern regions of Albania. For instance, an Amnesty International report notes that such crimes are rare and typically arise in the context of family honour disputes. The killing of Grosha Martincanaj by her father is cited as a paradigmatic example of an honour crime, highlighting the extreme measures taken to remove perceived dishonour from the family.

In urban areas like Tirana, honour killings are even less common, though the migration of families from the north has brought these practices into cities, complicating the social landscape. The Albanian Helsinki Committee has emphasized that the persistence of blood feuds and related honour crimes is partly due to the malfunctioning of the country's judiciary, which leads some individuals to resort to traditional justice systems instead of formal legal processes.

Despite their rarity, honour killings remain a significant concern due to their severe impact on victims and the broader community. Efforts to address this issue involve legal reforms, educational initiatives, and support for victims, aiming to reduce the occurrence of such crimes and promote gender equality and human rights.

Cross-Tabulation: Causes of Blood Feuds and Counter-Strategies in Albania

Causes	Legislative Strategies	Institutional Strategies	Educational Strategies	Policy Strategies
Enact and enforce laws explicitly criminalising blood feuds and collective responsibility, ensuring the Kanun has no legal standing in modern courts.	Enact and enforce laws explicitly criminalising blood feuds and collective responsibility, ensuring the Kanun has no legal standing in modern courts.	Strengthen local courts and mediation institutions to offer legitimate alternatives to customary justice, integrating trained mediators familiar with local traditions.	Promote civic education programs that reframe honour and conflict resolution within democratic and human rights norms.	Support community-based reconciliation programs that address cultural memory and provide alternative rituals of reconciliation.
Implement judicial reform laws increasing transparency, accountability, and speed of adjudication.	Implement judicial reform laws increasing transparency, accountability, and speed of adjudication.	Create mobile or regional courts in remote areas; establish ombudsman offices to handle grievance procedures.	Introduce legal literacy campaigns in affected areas to build public trust in the justice system.	Expand legal aid and witness protection for feud-related cases to ensure victims and witnesses cooperate with authorities.
Codify protections against social discrimination for families who refuse vengeance, framing honour as individual dignity rather than collective retaliation.	Codify protections against social discrimination for families who refuse vengeance, framing honour as individual dignity rather than collective retaliation.	Train social workers and religious leaders to mediate intra-family disputes before escalation.	Develop school curricula addressing gender roles, dignity, and non-violence through ethics and citizenship education.	Support youth dialogue initiatives and mentorship programs to interrupt the transmission of revenge norms across generations.
Allocate funds through social inclusion legislation and targeted rural development schemes.	Allocate funds through social inclusion legislation and targeted rural development schemes.	Strengthen local governance and service delivery (healthcare, education, policing) in northern regions.	Promote vocational and adult education programs that create alternative economic pathways.	Implement regional development policies that integrate infrastructure, employment, and community centres in high-risk districts.
Tighten firearm regulation and improve law enforcement capacity to track illegal weapons.	Tighten firearm regulation and improve law enforcement capacity to track illegal weapons.	Coordinate police, prosecutors, and intelligence services to dismantle criminal groups exploiting feud narratives.	Educate youth and local leaders on the dangers of weapon culture and criminal manipulation.	Develop national disarmament and reintegration policies with incentives for voluntary weapon surrender.

Update criminal law to include protection measures for displaced or threatened families.	Update criminal law to include protection measures for displaced or threatened families.	Establish urban integration offices to mediate between rural-origin families and local authorities.	Launch awareness campaigns in schools and community centres about peaceful coexistence and inter-regional tolerance.	Create national coordination bodies that link rural-origin communities with diaspora networks for peace-building and mediation.
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Implications for Legislation, Institutions, and Policy in Albania

The persistence of gjakmarrja reveals that Albania’s modernization remains incomplete at the intersection of law, culture, and governance. Legislation must do more than criminalize vengeance; it must embed justice reform within a culturally resonant framework that redefines honour as personal integrity rather than collective retaliation. Institutionally, Albania needs to decentralize its justice system, empowering local mediation and ensuring that state presence replaces customary authority rather than confronts it. Educationally, the introduction of civic and ethical curricula could delegitimize the Kanun’s violent codes across generations. Finally, public policy should align socio-economic development with reconciliation initiatives, ensuring that poverty, exclusion, and weak governance no longer sustain the conditions under which feuds persist.

From Personal Grievance to Family War

Once a man’s humiliation is reframed as an assault on honor, the private becomes public. In the idiom of the Kanun, a wrong done to one member stains the entire fis; vengeance, therefore, is not mere retribution but a ritual purification. A rejected proposal, an insult delivered in the marketplace, or a rumor about Drita’s affections can, through gossip, metastasize into a clan matter. The emotional wound of one man becomes the moral wound of many.

When this occurs, the language of grievance transforms into the grammar of kinship. Blood must answer blood, but the logic of retaliation rarely stops with symmetry. As legal anthropologist observed in his fieldwork in Montenegro, each act of vengeance redefines the boundary of justice and thus demands yet another act to restore balance. The feud sustains itself by promising closure it can never deliver [3].

In Albanian oral traditions, ballads often sanctify the avenger. He becomes the vessel through which the family’s nder is restored. Yet the same stories also carry an undertone of melancholy: every killing widens the circle of grief. In the cycle of “Gjaku për gjak” (“Blood for blood”), Drita’s light becomes the flame that consumes her world. She may have chosen freely, or been accused falsely, but the consequences are collective.

The sociological structure of such escalation mirrors what Randall Collins (2008) calls “interactional ritual chains.” Each act of vengeance reaffirms solidarity within the avenger’s group and hostility toward the rival clan.

Emotional energy circulates like currency; to abstain from revenge risks depleting the group’s moral capital. In this sense, the belittled suitor’s feelings—his wounded pride—are merely the spark that ignites a socially sanctioned conflagration.

It is crucial to note that these feuds are not lawless. They follow an alternative law. The Kanun prescribes the conditions of permissible killing, the sanctity of the home, and the duration of truce periods (besa). The result is what Galtung (1969) would term “structural violence”: harm perpetuated by the very rules that claim to preserve order. Within this moral architecture, forgiveness appears as weakness; patience, as shame.

Anthropologists such as Hasluck (1954) and Young (2000) observed that the mechanism of blood feud operated most intensely in regions where state authority was weakest. Where the law cannot guarantee justice, honor fills the vacuum. Thus, the suitor’s transformation from rejected lover to armed avenger is less an individual aberration than a symptom of legal absence.

Modern Echoes

Although Albania has undergone profound political, economic, and cultural change since the collapse of communism in 1991, vestiges of the honor system endure, particularly in northern rural areas. Studies in the 2000s estimated hundreds of families still confined to their homes under threat of revenge. Yet the psychology of humiliation and retaliation has adapted to modern life in subtler ways.

In urban centers like Tirana or Shkodër, the Kanun no longer dictates behavior, but social media has become the new arena of honor display. Public rejection, ridicule, or exposure online can trigger digital vendettas that mirror the emotional structure of the traditional feud. The belittled suitor now wields not a rifle but a smartphone, spreading rumors or seeking symbolic revenge through shaming posts. The terrain changes, but the emotions—pride, humiliation, rage—remain consistent.

Gender relations have also shifted. Post-communist Albania has seen a resurgence of patriarchal norms amid economic uncertainty. Sociologists link this to what Connell (2005) calls “compensatory masculinity”—the attempt to reassert male authority when traditional markers of success erode. In this context, Drita’s autonomy again becomes a flashpoint. A woman’s refusal or public independence can be framed as emasculating, provoking hostility that recalls older codes of honor.

Literature and film continue to explore these contradictions. Ismail Kadare’s *Broken April* (1980) remains the definitive modern meditation on the Albanian blood feud, depicting the tension between fatalistic duty and individual conscience. Drita’s metaphorical presence haunts such works—the woman as mirror of men’s honor, the silent witness to violence committed in her name. Contemporary Albanian writers such as Elvira Dones and Ornela Vorpsi, however, have inverted this trope, giving voice to Drita herself: the woman who refuses to be fooled by the mythology of male pride.

From a psychological viewpoint, the persistence of honor-based reactions can be understood through social learning theory. Behaviors that once ensured respect are transmitted across generations, even when their material context disappears. We emphasized the

power of modeled behavior: sons observing fathers defending honor through aggression internalize that as normative. Breaking the cycle requires alternative models of prestige—education, restraint, empathy—that must themselves be publicly valorized.

In recent years, Albanian NGOs and legal reforms have sought to replace Kanun-based justice with mediation and state arbitration. Yet, as researchers like Schwandner-Sievers (2013) note, reconciliation ceremonies often retain symbolic echoes of the traditional besa. The language of honor cannot simply be erased; it must be re-interpreted. Where once besa meant temporary truce, today it can signify permanent peace.

More broadly, the story of Drita and her suitors illuminates a universal problem: how societies handle humiliation. In cultures of dignity—common in the modern West—self-worth is internal, and insults are ideally ignored or pursued through legal means. In cultures of honor, self-worth is external, dependent on others’ recognition. The shift from one model to the other is neither linear nor complete. Albania, straddling East and West, rural and urban, embodies this tension vividly.

The Interaction of Blood Feuds, Honour Culture, and Organized Crime in Albania

Blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*) in Albania are historically rooted in the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, a customary code that regulates honour, kinship, and reciprocal retribution. While these feuds are traditionally confined to intra- or inter-family disputes, contemporary evidence indicates a complex interaction between honour-based violence and organized criminal activity. This intersection is particularly pronounced in northern Albania, where feuds and illicit networks coexist within socially and economically marginalised communities.

Organized crime actors have been documented exploiting the social legitimacy of blood feuds to further strategic or economic objectives. Feud narratives can provide a culturally sanctioned pretext for violent acts, thereby complicating law enforcement and judicial intervention. Violence framed as revenge for perceived breaches of honour may obscure criminal intent, allowing illicit actors to intimidate witnesses, consolidate territorial control, or settle disputes under the veneer of customary justice. In this way, tradition-

al norms of honour may be instrumentalised to mask or legitimise activities that are primarily criminal in nature.

The proliferation of firearms associated with feuds further amplifies the potential for organized criminal exploitation. Weapons circulated through familial or community networks may enter broader illegal markets, enabling both the escalation of inter-family conflicts and the expansion of criminal enterprises. The convergence of cultural sanction and material capability thereby creates a permissive environment in which feuds and criminal agendas reinforce each other.

The blurring of traditional and criminal forms of violence has significant implications for governance and policy. Judicial authorities face the dual challenge of addressing culturally ingrained practices while prosecuting acts that have been co-opted by organized crime. Community mediation programs, while essential for conflict resolution, require oversight mechanisms to prevent exploitation by criminal actors. Moreover, integrated strategies—combining disarmament, legal reform, and socio-economic development—are necessary to mitigate both the cultural and criminal dimensions of feud-related violence.

Sifting out bandits or exploitative actors from the positive aspects of kinship and solidarity structures in Albania requires a careful combination of legal, social, and institutional strategies. First, the government should establish clear legal definitions and consequences for criminal activity, ensuring that all forms of exploitation, extortion, or organized crime are explicitly penalized. Second, law enforcement must be professionalized and insulated from clan pressures, so that investigations target illegal behavior rather than disrupting legitimate social networks. Third, community-based monitoring mechanisms can be developed, enabling local leaders and civil society to report criminal activity while protecting constructive kinship ties. Fourth, public education campaigns should differentiate between lawful solidarity and unlawful coercion, promoting awareness of rights and obligations under the state and EU legal frameworks. Fifth, economic development programs can provide alternative livelihoods that reduce reliance on informal or criminally exploita-

tive networks. Sixth, dispute-resolution mechanisms rooted in both the formal judicial system and culturally informed mediation can address conflicts without empowering bandits or violent actors. Seventh, transparency in public administration and social programs ensures that resources intended to support community solidarity are not captured by illicit actors. Eighth, collaboration with diaspora networks can reinforce accountability by linking local initiatives to external scrutiny and investment, rewarding legitimate kinship activity. Ninth, data collection and research should track the social impact of clans and networks, distinguishing between those that provide social cohesion and those involved in criminality. Finally, a continuous feedback loop between the state, EU advisors, and local communities ensures that policies evolve, fostering positive kinship and solidarity structures while marginalizing bandits and other destructive actors.

In summary, while blood feuds in Albania are primarily motivated by social norms of honour and family reputation, their intersection with organized crime represents a critical vector for escalation and societal harm. Effective interventions demand a nuanced approach that simultaneously respects cultural realities, strengthens the rule of law, and addresses the structural conditions—poverty, marginalisation, and weak governance—that facilitate the exploitation of honour-based violence by criminal networks.

Kinship Structures in the North, Middle, and South of Albania

Albania exhibits significant regional variation in kinship structures, reflecting historical, ecological, and sociopolitical distinctions between the Gheg (northern) and Tosk (southern) cultural zones, with central Albania representing a transitional intermediary.

In northern Albania, kinship is organised around agnatic descent through the *fis*, a patrilineal clan whose members claim descent from a common male ancestor. The *fis* operates as a political, economic, and moral community that regulates marriage, property rights, and mechanisms of social control. Within the *fis*, lineages segment into sub-branches and households, forming a segmentary lineage system akin to those documented in other highland and pastoral societies. The social order is fundamentally patrilocal and patriarchal, with authority vested in male household heads and intergenerational solidarity enforced

through shared honour codes. This kinship model historically enabled self-governance in the mountainous north, where geographic isolation hindered state penetration.

In central Albania, the kinship system is more hybrid and transitional. Patrilineal descent remains significant, but households increasingly exhibit bilateral recognition of kin ties. Urbanisation, market integration, and Ottoman-era administrative presence encouraged smaller household units and more fluid forms of alliance formation. Kin-based solidarity remains salient but is often complemented by state, religious, and commercial networks.

In contrast, southern Albania (the Tosk region) is characterised by smaller, nuclear, and bilateral family structures, reflecting a longer history of sedentarism, agriculture, and state integration. Here, the large-scale *fis* system was historically weaker or transformed into symbolic kinship identities rather than active corporate groups. Authority tends to be more institutional and less reliant on clan arbitration, while kinship obligations are mediated through broader patron-client relationships and community structures.

The predominance of the Kanun in the Albanian north is the product of a confluence of structural, ecological, and historical factors that made customary law a durable and functional mode of governance. The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, codified in oral tradition and later in writing during the nineteenth century, offered a comprehensive normative framework for regulating social life in stateless or semi-stateless environments.

First, the fit between social structure and legal form is crucial. The Kanun institutionalised norms that directly reflected the segmentary lineage system of the northern *fis*, establishing mechanisms for conflict resolution, compensation (*gjakmarrja*), and the preservation of family honour (*nder*). Second, geographic isolation—the mountainous terrain and relative inaccessibility of the northern highlands—limited the efficacy of Ottoman and later Albanian state institutions, thereby preserving autonomous customary regulation. Third, the pastoral and transhumant economy favoured mobile and flexible governance structures, making centralised administration im-

practical.

Moreover, the weakness of formal governance throughout much of Albania's modern history reinforced the legitimacy of Kanun-based justice. In the absence of credible policing or impartial courts, customary law served as an alternative system of social order and deterrence. Finally, cultural continuity and legitimacy narratives sustained the Kanun's moral authority: it was conceived as ancestral law—both sacred and immutable—embodying collective memory and identity. These features rendered it resilient even under twentieth-century state centralisation and post-communist transition.

Empirical observation and ethnographic research indicate that areas exhibiting a higher prevalence of Kanun enforcement face a distinct cluster of social, legal, and developmental challenges.

Foremost among these is the persistence of blood feuds (*gjakmarrje*), which perpetuate cycles of retaliatory violence that can last generations. Such feuds undermine social stability, restrict mobility, and create a pervasive climate of insecurity. The prevalence of legal pluralism, in which customary and state judicial systems coexist uneasily, erodes the authority of formal law and hampers state-building efforts.

Other correlates include pronounced gender inequality and the continuation of honour-based violence, particularly restrictions on women's autonomy and participation in public life. Communities governed by Kanun norms often exhibit lower trust in state institutions, limited access to justice, and reduced socioeconomic mobility, as vendetta-related insecurity discourages education, employment, and investment.

At a broader level, the persistence of Kanun enforcement correlates with structural marginalisation: poor infrastructure, limited market access, and weak institutional presence reinforce dependence on kin-based systems. Consequently, the Kanun can be understood both as a symptom and a cause of underdevelopment and weak statehood in northern Albania.

Albanica Abroad

Albanian society has historically been structured around clans, known as “*fis*” in Albanian, and extended kinship networks, a system that remains influential

both within Albania and in diaspora communities abroad.

Historically, Albanian clans emerged in the mountainous regions of northern Albania, Kosovo, and northern Montenegro as a social organization for survival, defense, and social cohesion. The Kanun, a customary code attributed to Lekë Dukagjini, codified clan laws, including rules on honor, blood feuds, property, and dispute resolution. Each clan consists of extended families descended from a common ancestor, and loyalty to the clan often superseded loyalty to the state.

The structure of clans centers on the fis, which is the core social unit comprising several related extended families. The bajraktar, or flag-bearer, traditionally serves as the clan head responsible for collective decisions and leadership in conflicts. Extended families, consisting of multiple generations, emphasize strong kinship ties and collective responsibility. Clans are traditionally patrilineal, with inheritance and family names passing through male lines, though women play key roles in maintaining alliances and managing households.

Albanian emigration has led to significant diaspora communities across Italy, Greece, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada, where clan and kinship networks continue to play an important role. These networks help new migrants find housing, employment, and social support, while also transmitting language, customs, and religious prac-

tices to younger generations. Kinship ties facilitate remittances, business partnerships, and investment in Albania, and some diaspora clans maintain influence in local politics back home, often mobilizing support during elections.

Gheg clans from Northern Albania and Kosovo often maintain tight-knit associations abroad, especially in Germany and Switzerland, while Tosk clans from Southern Albania tend to be more dispersed but maintain extended family connections across Italy and the United States. In cities such as New York, Detroit, and Melbourne, Albanian kinship networks link multiple clans, facilitating cultural associations and community centers.

Modern Albanian clans abroad balance traditional obligations with integration into host societies. While younger generations may be less bound by the strict rules of the Kanun, clan affiliation remains important for cultural identity, social networking, and economic cooperation.

Gheg Albania (Northern Albania)

Overview

- Social structure: Highly tribal and clan-based (fis system).
- Kinship: Patrilineal; descent and identity defined through the male line.
- Law: Governed by the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini.
- Organization: Village → Brotherhood (vëllazni) → Clan (fis) → Tribe (bashkësi).

Major Clans and Regions

Region	Major Clans / Tribes (Fis)	Notes
Malësia e Madhe (Hot, Grudë, Kastrat, Kelmend, Shkrel)	Hoti, Gruda, Kastrati, Kelmendi, Shkreli	Fierce independence; part of the five great northern tribes.
Dukagjin / Tropoja	Krasniqi, Gashi, Bytyçi, Nikaj, Merturi, Shala, Shoshi	Krasniqi and Gashi are among the largest and most influential fis.
Puka / Mirdita	Oroshi, Kushnени, Spaçi (the “Three Bairaks” of Mirdita)	Catholic stronghold; central authority of the “Prince of Mirdita.”
Has / Kukës	Hasi, Topojani	Smaller fis-based communities; linked to Kosovo clans.

Lezha / Zadrima	Kallmeti, Dajçi, Blinishti	Transitional between tribal and feudal structures.
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Middle Albania (Central Albania)

Overview

- Social structure: Transitional; less rigid clan system, but strong extended family (farefisni).
- Kinship: Patrilineal but increasingly influenced by feudal ties and Ottoman administration.
- Law: Mixed — Kanun of Skanderbeg (Lezhë), Kanun of Dibra, and Ottoman law.

Regions and Kinship Patterns

Region	Notable Families / Kin Networks	Notes
Mat	Families descended from Fishta, Reçi, Bazdari	Some clan remnants; also birthplace of Ahmet Zogu.
Dibër	Dibran fis such as Reçaj, Cereni, Strazimiri, Lleshi	Still retains Gheg kin organization.
Krujë - Tirana - Elbasan	Prominent bejlerë families: Toptani, Kruja, Bargjini, Kadiu	More feudal-patrician; less tribal.
Shpat & Gramsh	Smaller kin groups; some clan remnants but integrated socially.	

Note: In Middle Albania, family solidarity (farefisni) and local patronage networks replaced the fis as the main social structure.

Tosk Albania (Southern Albania)

Overview

- Social structure: No fis system; society organized by family (shtëpi), village, and regional identity.
- Kinship: Patrilineal but oriented toward household solidarity and alliances.
- Law: Customary Kanuns of Labëria and Himara, plus Ottoman and Greek influences.
- Major Kinship & Regional Identities

Region	Notable Kinship / Families	Notes
Labëria (Kurvelesh, Tepelenë, Himarë)	Strong family alliances (e.g., Zenelaj, Meçollari, Gjonbaba, Vloraj)	Kanun of Labëria; honor-based society similar to Gheg north but non-tribal.
Myzeqe / Berat	Prominent landowning families: Vrioni, Dosti, Frashëri	More feudal and Ottoman-influenced.
Kolonjë / Përmet	Kinship groups with strong Orthodox background	Ties through marriage and village councils.
Korçë / Opar	Less kin-based, more civic/urban identity	Early centers of Albanian education and nationalism.
Region	Notable Kinship	Families

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Kolonjë / Përmet	Kinship groups with strong Orthodox background	Ties through marriage and village councils.
Korçë / Opar	Less kin-based, more civic/urban identity	Early centers of Albanian education and nationalism.

Key Differences Between Regions

Feature	Gheg	Middle	Tosk
Basis of identity	Clan (fis)	Family & region	Family & village
Descent system	Patrilineal	Patrilineal	Patrilineal
Customary law	Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini	Kanun of Skanderbeg,	Kanun of Labëria
Feuds & Honor	Very strong (gjakmarrja)	Moderate	Present but limited
Political organization	Tribal councils	Local nobles / beys	Feudal families, village elders

Implications

The persistence of Albanian clans and kinship networks has several important implications for the Albanian government and for the European Union, particularly in the context of EU enlargement:

The Albanian government must navigate a social landscape where informal kinship networks often influence political, economic, and social behavior. Clans can serve as sources of social capital, facilitating local governance, community cohesion, and grassroots mobilization. However, they can also pose challenges, such as perpetuating nepotism, localism, or informal justice practices that may conflict with national laws and anti-corruption frameworks. Effective governance requires engaging with these networks without being captured by them, promoting transparency and rule of law while leveraging the organizational capacity of extended families for public initiatives.

For the European Union, the existence of strong clan and kinship structures affects Albania's EU acces-

sion trajectory. EU enlargement criteria emphasize the rule of law, judicial independence, and transparent public administration. Deeply rooted kinship ties may complicate anti-corruption reforms, public procurement, and equitable economic development if local networks override institutional procedures. On the other hand, these networks can support EU integration by providing channels for civic engagement, diaspora remittances, and cultural continuity that enhance societal stability. EU institutions may need to consider these social dynamics when designing capacity-building programs, governance reforms, or monitoring mechanisms in Albania.

Moreover, kinship networks abroad can act as a bridge between Albania and EU member states. Diaspora communities often facilitate economic investment, knowledge transfer, and political advocacy, which can reinforce Albania's European integration. Yet the government and EU must balance engagement with diaspora networks against potential risks of informal influence in domestic politics or business sectors.

Montenegro and North Macedonia are often seen as obvious candidates for EU accession around 2028 due to their relatively advanced political and institutional reforms compared with other Western Balkan states. Both countries have made measurable progress in aligning their legal systems with EU standards, including judicial reform and anti-corruption measures, which are critical for managing the influence of traditional kinship networks on governance. Their societies, while retaining elements of clan and extended family influence, are more urbanized and integrated into state institutions, reducing the risk of informal networks undermining public administration. Diaspora networks from these countries in EU states provide additional channels for economic development, investment, and political advocacy, which can reinforce European integration. Montenegro's small population and high level of administrative cohesion make it easier to monitor and manage clan influence, ensuring that rule-of-law reforms are more effectively implemented. North Macedonia has successfully navigated ethnic and regional cleavages, demonstrating that traditional loyalties and kinship ties can coexist with national governance structures aligned with EU expectations. Both states have strategic incentives to maintain stability and curb nepotism or informal power structures, knowing that EU accession is contingent on credible institutional performance. In sum, their combination of reform progress, manageable clan influence, and diaspora support positions Montenegro and North Macedonia as leading candidates for 2028 EU accession.

Albanian clans and kinship networks represent both a governance challenge and a strategic asset. For the Albanian government, these networks require careful management to align traditional social structures with modern state institutions. This alignment involves recognizing the influence of extended families and clan-based loyalty systems while ensuring that formal governance mechanisms—such as judicial processes, public administration, and anti-corruption frameworks—operate independently and transparently. Policies could focus on integrating clan structures into civic engagement initiatives, local development projects, and diaspora collaboration, channeling their organizational capacity toward constructive state-building rather than informal power consolidation.

For the European Union, a nuanced understanding of these dynamics is essential to designing enlargement strategies that are socially informed and practically implementable. EU institutions must consider how kinship networks influence political behavior, economic activity, and social cohesion when assessing Albania's readiness for accession. Capacity-building programs, rule-of-law reforms, and monitoring mechanisms should be tailored to account for both formal state structures and informal social networks, leveraging the latter as a resource for compliance, civic participation, and cultural continuity. In this way, Albania's traditional kinship systems can be transformed from potential obstacles into complementary structures that reinforce governance, enhance societal stability, and support sustainable European integration:

First, map and engage key clan networks both domestically and in the diaspora, gaining a clear understanding of their social, economic, and political influence, and involve them as stakeholders in governance and development initiatives.

Second, strengthen legal and institutional frameworks to ensure that traditional kinship structures operate within formal state mechanisms, reducing nepotism and informal power overrides while promoting transparent decision-making.

Next, create channels for civic participation that channel the organizational capacity of clans toward constructive community projects, local development, and initiatives that reinforce state objectives and social cohesion.

Additionally, leverage diaspora networks to attract investment, knowledge transfer, and political advocacy, generating positive economic and governance feedback loops that support Albania's European integration.

Finally, establish adaptive monitoring mechanisms to track interactions between clans, state institutions, and EU-aligned reforms, allowing policies to be adjusted to maintain compliance, stability, and alignment with enlargement criteria.



Pastoralism in Albania

Pastoralism in Albania represents a deeply rooted socio-economic and cultural system that continues to shape mountain and rural life. It is both a livelihood and a way of understanding the relationship between humans, animals, and nature. Although its importance is widely acknowledged, the pastoral economy in Albania faces significant structural challenges that affect its sustainability. Understanding its needs, values, and conflicts provides a foundation for developing partnerships that can ease the burden of living for pastoral communities and sustain this heritage in the modern era.

The pastoral economy in Albania is anchored in transhumance — the seasonal movement of livestock, primarily sheep and goats, between lowland winter pastures and highland summer grazing areas. This system sustains not only rural livelihoods but also embodies a distinctive form of cultural and ecological heritage. Pastoral communities maintain traditional knowledge of pasture management, animal breeding, and land stewardship, which contributes to biodiversity and the preservation of high-nature-value landscapes. In many mountainous regions, such as the Albanian Alps, Kelmend, and Has, pastoralism also forms the backbone of the local food economy through the production of milk, cheese, meat, and wool. Socially, pastoral life supports dense networks of kinship, community rituals, and collective practices that reinforce cohesion and identity. Thus, what matters most in the Albanian pastoral economy is not only its material contribution to rural livelihoods but also its cultural continuity, its ecological role in landscape management, and its potential to foster sustainable rural development when linked with emerging opportunities such as agritourism and niche product markets.

However, this system faces multiple and interlinked needs that hinder its sustainability. One of the most

urgent requirements is improved access to markets and better integration into value chains. Many herders struggle to sell their products profitably because of the absence of organized markets, limited processing infrastructure, and weak marketing channels. Equally important is the need for accessible livestock health services, including veterinary care and disease prevention programs, which remain insufficient in remote areas. Pastoralists also face institutional and legal challenges regarding pasture rights and land tenure; unclear property regimes and the fragmentation of communal grazing areas undermine both mobility and management practices. Infrastructure deficits — such as poor road access, storage, and transportation — further isolate these communities. Moreover, the lack of access to credit and new technologies keeps production methods traditional but economically inefficient. Another pressing need lies in generational renewal: youth migration and the aging of rural populations threaten the transmission of knowledge and the continuity of herding traditions. Integrating pastoralism into broader strategies for sustainable rural development, recognizing women's roles within these systems, and adapting education and training to pastoral contexts are all critical to ensuring their long-term viability.



These needs are intensified by several structural conflicts and pressures that define the pastoral landscape in Albania. Land and resource access conflicts have become more pronounced as grazing territories are encroached upon by competing land uses such as construction, mining, and infrastructure projects. This has fragmented traditional transhumance routes and eroded customary rights. Economic pressures also create a conflict between maintaining traditional pastoral livelihoods and achieving market viability. Many herders

operate at scales below the economic sustainability threshold and are unable to compete with industrial livestock systems or imported products. Bureaucratic and regulatory frameworks often fail to reflect the realities of pastoral life, imposing administrative burdens that discourage participation in formal support programs or subsidy schemes. In addition, climatic variability and environmental degradation contribute to the vulnerability of pastoral households, as changing weather patterns affect pasture quality and water availability. Socially, pastoralists frequently feel marginalised and undervalued, their way of life perceived as outdated by urban society, which further weakens community motivation and resilience. These combined pressures result in an erosion of both the economic and cultural sustainability of pastoralism in Albania.

To address these challenges and ease the burden of living for pastoral households, partnerships at multiple — local, national, and international — are essential. Collaboration between herders, cooperatives, local governments, NGOs, and private actors can facilitate the creation of more resilient value chains. Organizing producers into cooperatives or associations can enhance their bargaining power, enable collective marketing, and allow investment in processing facilities for high-quality products such as mountain cheeses or traditional meats. Certification schemes and geographical indications can further add value and connect pastoral products to regional identities and tourism. Strengthening infrastructure and services — such as roads, mobile veterinary units, and access to storage and refrigeration — can help reduce isolation and economic vulnerability. Partnerships with universities and research institutions can support training, data collection, and policy advocacy, ensuring that decision-making reflects the actual conditions of pastoral life.

Equally important are initiatives that link pastoralism with tourism and cultural heritage promotion. Integrating herding routes into eco-tourism trails, creating festivals around transhumance, and developing rural guesthouses run by pastoral families can generate additional income while preserving tradition. Social inclusion programs should prioritize youth and women's empowerment, encouraging innovation within the pastoral economy and ensuring generational continuity. At the policy level, govern-

ments can ease bureaucratic constraints and recognize the ecological services pastoralists provide, integrating them into environmental protection and rural development programs. Finally, diversifying income sources — by combining herding with agritourism, craft production, or direct marketing — can reduce vulnerability to market and climate shocks.

In sum, the pastoral economy in Albania stands at a crossroads where traditional knowledge, ecological stewardship, and modern economic pressures intersect. Its needs revolve around access, recognition, and adaptation; its values lie in its cultural and environmental significance; and its conflicts stem from marginalization, economic fragility, and land-use competition. Sustainable partnerships that respect and revitalize this heritage can transform pastoralism from a burdened survival system into a resilient model of rural sustainability — one that preserves Albania's landscapes, supports its people, and strengthens its cultural identity.

A land and property register in the Albanian highlands provides the territorial clarity that pastoral communities have historically lacked, transforming uncertain customary boundaries into predictable rights that reduce conflict and enable long term investment. Secure tenure encourages households to improve pastures, build stables, and plant orchards, knowing their efforts cannot be arbitrarily contested. It also opens access to credit, since registered land becomes a usable form of collateral in an economy where liquidity is scarce. For pastoralism specifically, clarified grazing rights stabilise seasonal mobility and prevent the destructive overlap of herds on fragile upland terrain. A functioning communal water administration complements this by governing the single most limiting resource in mountain economies: water. When allocation is transparent and collectively managed, irrigation becomes reliable, fodder yields increase, and herds become less vulnerable to drought. Such administration also reduces the water related disputes that frequently escalate in areas where springs, canals, and streams are shared but unmanaged. Regular maintenance of communal infrastructure—canals, intakes, reservoirs—becomes possible only when responsibility is institutionalised rather than left to ad hoc arrangements. Together, these systems introduce a light but stabilising form of state presence that does not threaten local autonomy but strengthens it by giving customary norms legal

and operational backing. They also create the conditions for ecological stewardship, enabling rotational grazing, watershed protection, and sustainable use of highland ecosystems. By reducing informality, they make the region more legible to markets, cooperatives, and development actors. Donors and investors gain the certainty required to support agro tourism, processing facilities, and rural infrastructure. Climate resilience improves as water is managed collectively and land use becomes more predictable. Ultimately, these two governance instruments act as institutional force multipliers, anchoring the pastoral economy in stability, legality, and long term ecological viability.

This is important for High Albania because only through secure land tenure and coordinated water governance can its pastoral economy, fragile ecosystems, and customary social order be stabilised and carried into a viable future.

Strengthening Governace in Albania

Strengthening governance and institutional trust in Albania requires a comprehensive approach that addresses legal, administrative, social, and cultural dimensions. First, the government must continue aligning national laws and regulations with EU standards, particularly in the areas of rule of law, anti-corruption, and public accountability. Second, judicial independence must be reinforced through merit-based appointments, secure tenure for judges, and transparent oversight mechanisms that prevent political or clan interference. Third, law enforcement agencies should be professionalized, depoliticized, and equipped with modern investigative tools to ensure impartial enforcement of laws. Fourth, public administration should adopt meritocratic recruitment and promotion systems, alongside clear codes of conduct that are actively enforced. Fifth, transparency in government operations must be expanded, including open data platforms, public reporting of budgets, and accessible procurement procedures. Sixth, anti-corruption bodies must be empowered with resources, authority, and protection to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing at all levels of government. Seventh, civic education programs should inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities, fostering engagement and accountability. Eighth, local governments must be strengthened to provide effective public services and ensure citizens feel their needs are addressed fairly. Ninth, channels for citizen feedback, complaints,

and participatory decision-making should be institutionalized to increase responsiveness and trust. Tenth, collaboration with civil society organizations can help monitor government performance and advocate for reform, creating an additional layer of accountability. Eleventh, political parties should be incentivized to adopt internal democracy and transparency, reducing clientelism and patronage networks. Twelfth, independent media and investigative journalism must be supported to expose corruption and highlight institutional successes. Thirteenth, digital governance initiatives should be strategically expanded to streamline public services, reduce bureaucratic friction, and limit opportunities for informal influence, including integrating e-governance platforms for licensing, taxation, and public procurement, while ensuring cybersecurity and accessibility for all citizens. Fourteenth, targeted programs to integrate clan and kinship networks into constructive civic roles can reduce informal pressures on state institutions. Fifteenth, diaspora engagement can be harnessed to support transparency, investment, and expertise transfer. Sixteenth, anti-crime and anti-extortion measures should protect communities without alienating legitimate social networks. Seventeenth, performance metrics and audits should be established across ministries and agencies, linked to tangible incentives for compliance and improvement. Eighteenth, partnerships with EU institutions, including advisory and monitoring missions, can provide external validation and technical support. Nineteenth, public campaigns should highlight successes and reforms to reinforce confidence in government capabilities. Finally, sustained political commitment at the highest levels is essential, ensuring that reforms are continuous, coherent, and insulated from short-term political pressures, ultimately fostering durable institutional trust among citizens.

Governance roadmap

A governance roadmap is a structured plan or framework that outlines how an organization, institution, or political entity will manage, coordinate, and implement policies, processes, and responsibilities over a defined period. It serves as a strategic guide to ensure transparency, accountability, efficiency, and alignment of decision-making with overarching goals.

Key elements typically included in a governance roadmap are the objectives, roles and responsibilities, decision-making structures, mechanisms for monitor-

ing and evaluation, and phases of implementation. It may also define stakeholder engagement strategies, communication protocols, and the legal or regulatory frameworks guiding governance.

The purpose of a governance roadmap is to translate high-level policy ambitions into operational structures, clarify accountability lines, anticipate risks, and create a coherent sequence of actions that align institutional capabilities with strategic priorities.

In essence, a governance roadmap functions as both a strategic blueprint and a management tool, helping organizations or governments to coordinate complex initiatives, adapt to challenges, and track progress toward defined governance outcomes.

In the area of law and justice, the government must continue aligning national legislation with European Union standards, particularly regarding the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, and overall accountability. Judicial independence should be reinforced through merit-based appointments, secure tenure for judges, and transparent oversight mechanisms that prevent undue political or clan influence. Law enforcement agencies need to be professionalized, insulated from political pressures, and equipped with modern investigative tools to ensure impartial application of the law. At the same time, anti-corruption institutions must be empowered with sufficient resources, authority, and legal protection to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing effectively, while anti-crime strategies should protect communities without alienating legitimate social networks or disrupting constructive kinship structures.



On the administrative side, public institutions should adopt meritocratic recruitment and promotion systems alongside enforceable codes of conduct to ensure competence and integrity. Transparency must be expanded through open access to government data, regular public reporting of budgets, and procurement processes that are both fair and easily monitored. Strengthening local governments is essential to ensure that public services are delivered efficiently and equitably, fostering citizen confidence that their needs are addressed fairly. Performance metrics, audits, and accountability mechanisms should be implemented across ministries and agencies, with tangible incentives for compliance and improvement, while sustained political commitment at the highest levels is critical to maintaining continuous and coherent reforms that are insulated from short-term pressures.

Civic engagement and civil society play a vital role in reinforcing institutional trust. Comprehensive civic education programs can inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities, encouraging informed participation in governance. Institutionalized channels for citizen feedback, complaints, and participatory decision-making provide concrete mechanisms for the public to hold authorities accountable, while partnerships with civil society organizations enhance oversight, monitor government performance, and advocate for reforms. Political parties should be encouraged to adopt transparent and democratic internal practices, reducing patronage networks and clientelism. Independent media and investigative journalism must be supported as key instruments for exposing corruption, highlighting reform successes, and increasing societal confidence in public institutions. Additionally, traditional kinship and clan networks can be harnessed for constructive civic purposes, such as local development initiatives and community mobilization, while diaspora networks provide valuable expertise, investment, and external oversight that reinforce good governance.

Technological innovation represents another crucial pillar. Expanding digital governance initiatives can streamline public service delivery, reduce bureaucratic friction, and limit opportunities for informal influence or corruption. Integrating e-governance platforms for licensing, taxation, and public procurement enhances efficiency, accessibility, and transparency, while robust cybersecurity measures protect the integrity of

these systems. Technology also enables better monitoring, reporting, and accountability across government functions, creating a data-driven feedback loop that supports continuous improvement.

In combination, these reforms create mutually reinforcing pillars—law, administration, civic engagement, and technology—that strengthen governance, improve institutional performance, and foster durable trust among Albanian citizens. By implementing this comprehensive approach, Albania can improve domestic governance while accelerating its European integration, ensuring that state institutions operate transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with societal expectations and EU enlargement criteria. Ultimately, by transforming both formal institutions and social structures into complementary forces for stability, transparency, and citizen engagement, Albania can establish a governance model that balances traditional kinship networks with modern democratic norms, securing long-term political, social, and economic resilience.

In short, align tradition with transparency by harnessing kinship networks to strengthen the state. Build modern institutions, accountable governance, and active citizen engagement as the pillars of trust. Leverage digital innovation to transform public services while limiting corruption and informal influence. Pursue sustainable reforms that balance local customs with EU standards, creating resilient and inclusive governance for the long term.

Elderly Advisory Models to Albania: Comparative Perspectives on Danish Systems and Local Governance Traditions

Bringing councils of tribal elders into Albania's territorial development can be effective if they are framed as a cultural governance complement rather than a replacement for democratic institutions. These councils hold unique legitimacy in mountainous and peripheral regions, grounded in mediation practices, stewardship of land, and deeply rooted communal solidarity. Their involvement can strengthen the social legitimacy of local development by ensuring that infrastructure, tourism initiatives, and environmental policies align with community identity, heritage, and unwritten norms, thereby reducing resistance and fostering local ownership of reforms. Customary authority can also support the mediation of land-use

and communal property conflicts, especially in areas where formal property rights remain contested or complex, facilitating agreements over forests, grazing zones, water access, and migration corridors.

Moreover, elders serve as custodians of cultural landscapes, including oral histories, sacred sites, seasonal mobility routes, and traditional architectural knowledge, all of which represent significant assets for sustainable and authentic rural tourism. Their role in mobilizing community cooperation becomes critical in places where formal institutions are weak, allowing coordination of voluntary work and collective resource management that supports disaster response and the maintenance of protective infrastructure, such as riverbeds. Informal justice mechanisms grounded in tradition can relieve pressure on the formal court system, accelerating reconciliation and decreasing costly litigation while discouraging the resurgence of vendetta practices.

In addition, the transmission of intergenerational knowledge is vital, as traditional agricultural techniques, biodiversity insights, and ecological ethics can enrich environmental policymaking and climate adaptation strategies at the local level. Engaging elders as mediators between citizens and authorities helps rebuild trust in regions where the state may appear distant, offering a culturally anchored feedback mechanism that enhances municipal legitimacy.

To ensure effective integration, this approach should not represent a restorative romanticism but a modernized model based on advisory rather than executive functions, respect for human rights, and gender-inclusive reinterpretation of customary roles. It would ideally be embedded within formal institutional structures through municipality-community compacts. Such a system aligns with broader European trends in cultural democracy, participatory rural development, and heritage-based place-making, potentially transforming Albania's tribal legacies from perceived developmental constraints into strategic assets.

Pilot implementation could be considered in regions such as Malësi e Madhe (Kelmendi), Mirdita, and the highlands of Labëria, creating linkages between cultural councils, tourism clusters, diaspora co-investment frameworks, and environmental preservation initiatives.

The question of whether Denmark should export its elderly council (ældreråd) model to Albania raises broader issues about the transferability of institutional designs across differing cultural and political contexts. In Albania, traditional forms of elder consultation, such as pleqe and kuvend, historically facilitate decision-making at the community level (cf. Leka, 2015) [5]. This paper explores the advantages and limitations of three potential approaches: (i) direct importation of the Danish elderly council system, (ii) establishment of locally rooted consultative bodies for groups such as Gheg, Tosk, and Mugle, and (iii) a hybrid model combining formal Danish structures with Albanian local practices. This analysis draws on comparative politics literature on institutional transplantation and local governance theory [16,19].

Direct Transfer of the Danish Elderly Council Model
 The Danish ældreråd is characterized by formal structures, regular meetings, and legally mandated advisory functions. The potential advantages of transplanting this system to Albania include:

- Systematic representation: Older citizens would have an institutionalized channel to influence decision-making [1].
- Democratic consolidation: Transparency and accountability in policymaking are strengthened through formal procedures [6].
- Transferable principles: Established meeting schedules, reporting mechanisms, and statutory obligations could be directly adapted.
- However, significant challenges exist. Albanian society is marked by informal social structures, and a direct import of Danish systems may appear rigid or culturally alien. Moreover, such formalization risks clashing with traditional practices, where family and regional networks play central roles in governance [5,13].

Local Consultative Councils: Pleqe and Kuvend

Albanian traditional councils, such as pleqe and kuvend, provide flexible forums in which elders contribute to local decision-making. Establishing consultative councils for the Gheg, Tosk, and Mugle populations could:

- Enhance cultural legitimacy: These institutions are deeply embedded in local norms and customs.
- Ensure regional representation: Councils reflect the diverse social and geographic composition of Albania.
- Maintain flexibility: Decision-making processes can be adapted to local needs and temporal considerations.
- Yet, the limitations of such a model include the lack of formal legal authority and institutional weight, potentially reducing the influence of council recommendations on official policies [16].

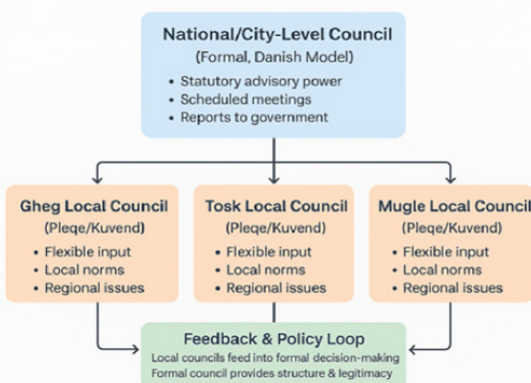
Hybrid Model: Integrating Danish and Albanian Elements

A hybrid approach offers a promising alternative, combining Danish institutional rigor with Albanian traditional flexibility. Such a model could include:

- A formal overarching council with scheduled meetings, reporting requirements, and statutory advisory functions.
- Local advisory bodies, operating in the pleqe/kuvend tradition, providing input to the formal council and representing Gheg, Tosk, and Mugle communities.
- Gradual integration of local practices into formal structures to ensure cultural acceptance and policy effectiveness.

The hybrid model offers a balance between structural consistency and cultural responsiveness, enhancing both legitimacy and efficacy. Challenges include coordinating formal and informal bodies and mitigating potential overlaps or conflicts in decision-making authority [18,19].

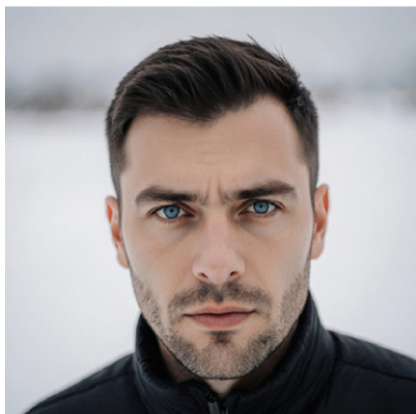
The direct transfer of Denmark’s elderly council to Albania is constrained by cultural and institutional differences. Conversely, a purely local consultative system aligns with tradition but may lack formal influence. A hybrid model, combining Danish principles of systematic representation with Albanian consultative traditions, appears most promising. This approach aligns with comparative governance research, suggest-



ing that institutional transplantation is most effective when adapted to local contexts, thus enhancing both legitimacy and practical impact [6,16].

Fun Fact: The presence of individuals with blue eyes in Albania can be understood as a consequence of genetic inheritance and the region's complex demographic history. Eye color is primarily determined by variations in the OCA2 and HERC2 genes, which regulate melanin production in the iris; lower melanin levels result in lighter eye colors such as blue. The occurrence of blue eyes among Albanians reflects several interrelated factors.

Firstly, the population's Indo-European ancestry, including Illyrian and Thracian predecessors, may have contributed alleles associated with lighter pigmentation. Secondly, historical migrations and population movements—including Celtic, Roman, Slavic, Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman influences—introduced additional genetic diversity into the region. Thirdly, Genetic Drift and Founder Effects in isolated or small communities may have facilitated the persistence and occasional increase in frequency of alleles for lighter eye colors.



Finally, intermarriage and trade-related contacts along the Adriatic and Ionian coasts could have introduced northern Mediterranean and European genetic variants associated with blue eyes.

In sum, the distribution of blue-eyed phenotypes in Albania represents a complex interplay of ancestral inheritance, historical gene flow, and population-specific genetic dynamics.

Albania's territorial development

Albania's territorial-administrative reform, imple-

mented in 2014–2015, represents one of the most consequential state reorganization efforts in the Western Balkans since the post-socialist transition. The reform reduced the number of local government units from 373 communes and municipalities to 61 municipalities, while retaining 12 counties (qarku) as the intermediate administrative level. Its primary objectives were to enhance administrative capacity, improve service delivery, strengthen fiscal sustainability, and align local governance with European standards of decentralization.

The reform was driven by structural inefficiencies associated with extreme territorial fragmentation. Small and fiscally weak communes lacked professional staff, investment capacity, and economies of scale, resulting in uneven public service provision and dependence on central transfers. Consolidation was therefore framed as a functional necessity rather than a purely territorial exercise, emphasizing governance performance over local identity preservation.

From an institutional perspective, the reform marked a shift from formal decentralization without capacity toward consolidated decentralization with enhanced competencies. Municipalities were granted expanded responsibilities in spatial planning, local infrastructure, social services, and environmental management, accompanied—though imperfectly—by fiscal decentralization measures, including shared taxes and increased local revenue authority.

However, the reform has generated persistent political and social contestation. Critics argue that the process was excessively top-down, insufficiently consultative, and politically polarized, particularly given opposition boycotts during its adoption. Concerns have also been raised regarding democratic representation, as larger municipalities may dilute local participation in peripheral and rural areas.

Empirically, post-reform assessments indicate improvements in administrative professionalism and investment absorption capacity, especially in urban municipalities, while disparities between urban cores and rural peripheries remain pronounced. The Albanian case thus illustrates both the potential and the limits of territorial consolidation as a tool for state modernization in small, unitary, and post-transition states.

In comparative perspective, Albania's reform aligns with broader European trends favoring municipal amalgamation, yet its long-term success depends on complementary reforms in intergovernmental finance, regional development policy, and sub-municipal governance mechanisms.

Albania's territorial and surface development cannot be adequately understood without recognizing the overwhelming influence of its mountainous terrain, which constitutes a dominant feature of the national landscape. The highlands, concentrated in the north and east and covering approximately seventy percent of the territory, profoundly shape settlement patterns, transportation routes, and economic activity. Intervention in these areas matters because limited accessibility hinders economic integration, infrastructure costs are higher per capita, and vulnerability to landslides, erosion, and flash floods threatens human and economic capital. At the same time, the mountains offer opportunities for tourism, renewable energy, and niche agricultural products, which, if harnessed effectively, can generate high-value development outcomes.

Valleys along rivers such as the Drin, Vjosa, and Shkumbin occupy significant portions of the territory and serve as natural corridors for settlements, agriculture, and local trade. These river basins provide strategic routes for transport and communication and concentrate population and agricultural productivity, making them ideal for targeted infrastructure investment. Preserving ecological balance along these basins is essential for water security and environmental resilience, which underpins broader territorial development.

Coastal areas along the Adriatic and Ionian seas host major cities, ports, and tourism hubs. The economic dynamism of these zones depends directly on the accessibility and functionality of the hinterland. Integrated transport and energy infrastructure linking coast and mountains is critical, particularly in coastal-mountain interface regions where balancing economic development with environmental conservation is essential for sustainable growth.

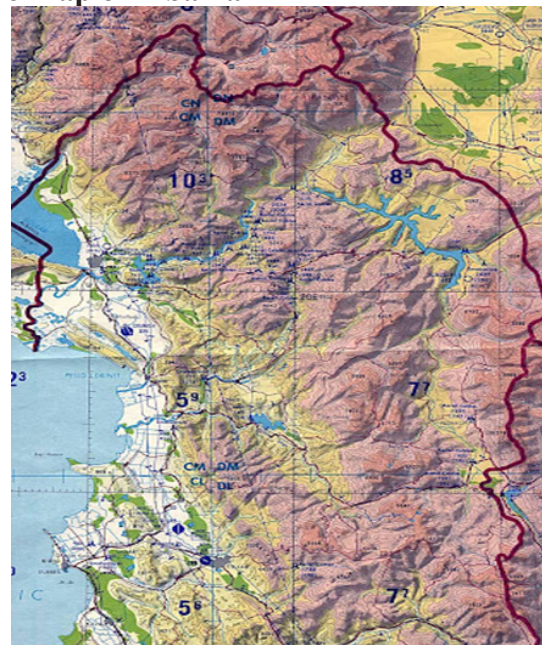
Approximately sixty percent of Albanians live in urban and peri-urban areas along the coast, while the remaining forty percent are dispersed across inland

towns and mountainous villages. These inland communities often face limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Equitable development requires focused interventions in these areas to reduce migration pressures toward urban centers and enhance social cohesion.

Infrastructure gaps are significant in mountainous regions. Less than half of mountain villages have reliable paved road access, digital connectivity in highlands remains below forty percent for high-speed internet, and energy supply is inconsistent in remote areas. Addressing these gaps is critical because infrastructure underpins economic inclusion, access to social services, and disaster resilience.

Economic activity is heavily skewed toward coastal and lowland regions, which dominate industrial, service, and trade sectors. In contrast, mountainous areas largely depend on subsistence agriculture, small-scale livestock, forestry, and emerging niche products such as medicinal herbs, cheese, and honey. Supporting value chains in these highland regions can diversify incomes, reduce migration, and leverage the unique natural and cultural assets of Albania's hinterland.

Figure Map of Albania



Environmental and disaster risks are pronounced, with mountain areas highly susceptible to landslides, erosion, flash floods, and deforestation. Rivers and coastal zones also face flooding risks, which are exacerbated by climate change. Integrating resilience and

environmental management into infrastructure and settlement planning is essential to protect both populations and long-term development investments.

Tourism potential is significant in highland and hinterland regions, where over half of Albania's natural heritage sites, including national parks, cultural landscapes, and mountain trails, are located. Sustainable tourism development in these areas can create employment, preserve cultural heritage, and incentivize environmental protection, making it a key pillar of people-centered transformation.

Governance and local capacity remain limited in many mountainous municipalities, which often struggle with staffing, budgeting, and technical expertise. Strengthening local governance is vital to ensure effective implementation of development projects, risk management, and participatory planning, allowing communities to play an active role in shaping their own futures.

Achieving people-centered transformation therefore requires interventions that prioritize connectivity linking mountains, valleys, and coasts, tailor economic programs to terrain-specific opportunities such as eco-tourism, renewable energy, and niche agriculture, integrate environmental risk management with infrastructure planning, and build local governance capacity. Ensuring that inland regions are fully engaged alongside coastal areas is essential to prevent socio-economic disparities and to realize the full potential of Albania's diverse territorial landscape.

Here's a structured academic-style overview addressing your questions about best practices in EU states with terrain similar to Albania, and guidance from EU cohesion policy and OECD recommendations on territorial development.

EU Member States with Comparable Topography and Lessons for Albania

Albania is characterized by a largely mountainous interior, a rugged coastline, and a mix of inland valleys. In the EU, states with analogous topographies include Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, and Romania. Best practices from these countries can be summarized as follows:

Regional Integration and Connectivity:

- Slovenia has invested heavily in transport corridors linking mountainous regions to urban and

coastal centers, combining road and rail infrastructure with digital connectivity. Mountainous regions were prioritized using EU Structural Funds to prevent depopulation and economic marginalization.

- Croatia has leveraged its EU cohesion funding to upgrade Adriatic hinterlands and integrate remote inland areas with major ports and tourism hubs. This includes multimodal transport solutions and support for small-scale rural enterprises.
- Greece has focused on territorial cohesion through integrated spatial planning that links islands and mountainous regions to economic centers via subsidized transport, broadband expansion, and tourism development.
- Economic Diversification in Challenging Terrain:
- These countries emphasize sectoral clustering in agriculture, eco-tourism, and renewable energy. Mountainous regions often benefit from specialized production (e.g., Slovenia's alpine dairy, Greece's olive oil cooperatives).
- Development strategies combine rural entrepreneurship, local value chains, and cultural heritage preservation to retain populations and stimulate local economies.

Institutional Coordination:

- Successful territorial development often depends on strong intergovernmental coordination. Slovenia, for example, integrates regional authorities in planning processes and ensures that EU-funded programs are managed at both national and regional levels.

EU Cohesion Policy Guidance

EU cohesion policy provides a framework and funding mechanisms for regional development, particularly for countries with mountainous and peripheral areas. Key points relevant to Albania include:

Territorial Cohesion Principle: The EU emphasizes reducing disparities between regions, ensuring that peripheral and mountainous regions can participate in national and European growth. Cohesion policy explicitly promotes connectivity, accessibility, and territorial integration.

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI): EU member states with complex topographies often adopt ITI frameworks that combine infrastructure, economic development, and social policy interventions in a single, coordinated program.

Smart Specialization Strategies (S3): Mountainous or peripheral regions are encouraged to identify competitive advantages, such as niche agriculture, sustainable tourism, or renewable energy, and align EU structural funds accordingly.

Cross-Border and Macro-Regional Cooperation: For areas like the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region, EU cohesion policy encourages cross-border projects that integrate infrastructure, environmental management, and economic development across regions with similar topographical challenges.

Use of ESIF Funds: European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) prioritize transport, digital infrastructure, human capital, and local enterprise development for regions with low accessibility.

OECD Recommendations for Mountainous and Peripheral Regions

The OECD emphasizes that territorial development in complex terrain requires tailored approaches, combining infrastructure, governance, and economic diversification:

Targeted Infrastructure Investment: High-quality transport links, energy access, and digital networks are essential to overcome natural barriers and connect remote populations to markets.

Governance and Capacity Building: Strengthening regional institutions, improving planning capabilities, and fostering local participation are key. OECD case studies highlight the importance of decentralized planning paired with EU-style accountability.

Integrated Economic Development: Mountainous areas require diversified economic strategies, including tourism, high-value agriculture, and SMEs that leverage local natural and cultural assets.

Sustainability and Environmental Risk Management: OECD stresses integrating environmental protection and climate adaptation in territorial development, particularly in areas prone to erosion, landslides, or extreme weather.

Leveraging EU and Multilateral Funding: OECD encourages using EU cohesion and regional development funds in combination with national resources to implement multi-sectoral development strategies.

Implications for Albania

Albania can draw lessons from EU and OECD experiences to address its territorial challenges:

- Integrated planning is essential. Combining infrastructure, human capital, and economic diver-

sification programs increases resilience and cohesion.

- Smart specialization should identify local competitive advantages (e.g., mountain agriculture, ecotourism, renewable energy).
- Strengthening institutional capacity at regional and municipal levels will be critical to absorb EU funds effectively and implement projects sustainably.
- Cross-border and macro-regional cooperation with neighboring states (Montenegro, North Macedonia, Greece) can increase the effectiveness of infrastructure, environmental, and economic initiatives.
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks consistent with EU cohesion standards can ensure that investments reduce regional disparities rather than concentrating in urban or coastal areas.

Albania's territorial development can draw lessons from EU member states with comparable topographies, such as Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, and Romania. Slovenia, which is predominantly mountainous with alpine valleys, has invested heavily in transport corridors connecting mountainous regions to urban centers, combined with digital infrastructure expansion and targeted rural development programs. For Albania, these experiences suggest the importance of improving connectivity between the mountainous hinterland and coastal areas, while also ensuring digital inclusion. EU cohesion policy in Slovenia emphasizes accessibility and rural development through European Structural Funds and integrated regional planning, offering a model for Albania's use of similar EU instruments.

Croatia's terrain consists of coastal hinterlands with a mountainous interior, and the country has focused on developing the Adriatic hinterlands through transport and logistics investments, supporting rural small and medium enterprises, promoting eco-tourism, and establishing multimodal connectivity. For Albania, this highlights the value of multimodal transport solutions and support for small-scale enterprises in remote regions. EU cohesion programs support Croatia's peripheral areas through cross-border cooperation and macro-regional initiatives, such as the Adriatic-Ionian strategy, which could provide frameworks for Albania's regional projects.

Greece, with its mountainous mainland and islands,

has implemented integrated spatial planning linking islands and mountains to economic centers, subsidized transport, broadband expansion, and eco-tourism development. Albania can apply similar strategies in the northern and inland mountainous regions by integrating tourism, transport, and local economies. EU cohesion policy instruments, including Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) for complex territories and Smart Specialization Strategies, provide a mechanism to implement such coordinated approaches.

Romania, characterized by the Carpathian Mountains and extensive rural highlands, has developed sectoral clustering in agriculture, forestry, and eco-tourism, combined with targeted infrastructure investment and strengthened regional governance. Albania can adopt similar approaches to balance development between highland and lowland areas, while supporting niche economies. EU cohesion funding in Romania supports regional convergence, smart specialization, and effective utilization of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), offering insights for Albania's engagement with EU resources.

From these examples, several key implications emerge for Albania. Integrated connectivity is essential, including transport and digital infrastructure linking mountains, inland, and coastal regions, following Slovenia and Croatia as models. Economic diversification in remote and mountainous areas, through high-value agriculture, ecotourism, and renewable energy, can draw on Greece and Romania's experiences. Institutional strengthening is critical, as regional governance must be capable of managing EU funds and coordinating multi-sector development projects. Aligning with EU cohesion policy by using ESIF, ITI, and macro-regional initiatives enables integrated territorial development and helps reduce disparities. Finally, environmental sustainability should be embedded in planning, incorporating climate adaptation and natural hazard management, in line with OECD recommendations for mountainous regions.

Implications of EU Cooperation for Albania's Territorial Development and Development Potential

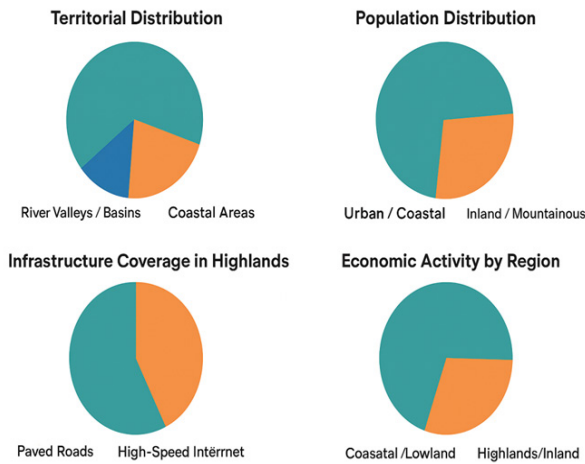
Albania's territorial development has been shaped by historical centralization, post-socialist restructuring, and ongoing efforts to align with European Union

(EU) standards. The country's regional development framework has undergone significant reform in recent years. The 2022 regional policy law established a formal institutional architecture for territorial planning, including a National Committee for Regional Development and Cohesion under the Prime Minister's Office. Albania has been divided into four development regions, each encompassing several counties, with the Albanian Development Fund (ADF) responsible for drafting and implementing both national and regional development strategies (Balcanicaucaso.org, 2023). These institutional reforms aim to strengthen administrative capacity and coordination between central and local authorities, thereby enhancing the country's ability to manage EU-linked regional and cohesion funds.

The theoretical and practical implications of EU cooperation for Albania's territorial development are multifaceted. In the context of the EU accession process and under the framework of Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi's Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies, Albania has access to funding mechanisms and technical assistance that can catalyze infrastructural and socio-economic modernization. The EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans (2024–2027) provides targeted support for infrastructure, governance reforms, and economic convergence, which can facilitate more balanced territorial development (Euronews.al, 2024). Concrete examples of EU-backed initiatives include the Vlorë bypass, co-financed by the EU, the European Investment Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This project enhances regional connectivity between inland and coastal areas, reduces travel time, and improves accessibility, thereby fostering spatial integration and potential economic growth (EIB.org, 2024).

However, the realization of these development potentials is conditioned by significant structural challenges. Administrative and absorptive capacities at regional and local levels remain limited, and the newly created institutions often lack experience in EU-style fund management and regional planning (Balcanicaucaso.org, 2023). Governance deficits, including weaknesses in public procurement, anti-corruption mechanisms, and the rule of law, continue to constrain effective implementation of territorial development strategies (Ijor.co.uk, 2024). Additionally, regional disparities and demographic pressures, such as emi-

gration and low fertility, may undermine the equitable distribution of development benefits and limit long-term sustainability (EEAS.europa.eu, 2024).



The strategic opportunity presented by EU cooperation lies in leveraging funding and conditionality to promote integrated regional development. Coordinated investment in infrastructure, human capital, digital services, and environmental sustainability can foster inclusive growth across Albania’s regions. Aligning rural development initiatives with EU agri-food standards can enhance economic diversification, reduce rural poverty, and integrate peripheral areas into broader European value chains (Tiranadiplomat.com, 2025). Moreover, integrating mobility, housing, and commercial development planning can mitigate uncoordinated urban sprawl while supporting sustainable regional urbanization.

In conclusion, EU cooperation offers significant potential to advance Albania’s territorial development. The effectiveness of these interventions, however,

will depend on the country’s capacity to institutionalize governance reforms, build administrative competencies, and ensure equitable regional investment. Without parallel reforms and strategic planning, EU-backed initiatives risk reinforcing existing inequalities and underperforming relative to their potential.

Scenario Analysis: Albania’s Territorial Development Trajectories under EU Cooperation (2025–2035)

Albania’s territorial development under EU cooperation can be conceptualized through three alternative trajectories, depending on the effectiveness of governance reforms, administrative capacity, infrastructure investment, and demographic trends. In an optimistic scenario, Albania successfully implements comprehensive administrative and governance reforms, strengthening institutional capacity at national, regional, and local levels. EU funding, including the 2024–2027 Growth Plan and future cohesion funds, is efficiently absorbed, supporting strategic infrastructure projects and connectivity improvements. Rural and peripheral regions benefit from targeted economic development initiatives, such as agribusiness and green infrastructure programs. Under these conditions, regional disparities are significantly reduced, with inland and coastal regions integrated into national and European markets. Human capital is enhanced through education, vocational training, and digital skills programs, while sustainable urbanization is achieved through coordinated housing, transport, and commercial development, mitigating informal settlement growth. Strengthened institutions ensure alignment with EU standards, fostering long-term socio-economic stability and territorial cohesion.

Scenario	Regional Integration	Infrastructure Development	Human Capital	EU Fund Absorption & Governance
Optimistic	High (fully integrated, inland & coastal regions connected)	Complete, high-quality networks and digital infrastructure	Strong, balanced workforce & education distribution	High efficiency, transparent use of EU funds
Baseline	Moderate (uneven, mostly urban/coastal)	Partial, uneven coverage	Moderate, concentrated in urban centers	Moderate, inconsistent absorption & governance
Pessimistic	Low (fragmented, weak integration)	Limited, delayed projects	Weak, declining skills & workforce	Low, poor absorption and weak institutions

In a baseline scenario, Albania experiences moderate progress characterized by uneven development. Governance and administrative reforms are partially implemented, leading to gradual improvements in absorptive capacity that remain uneven across regions. EU investments are partially utilized, with delays and inefficiencies affecting certain areas, and infrastructure development tends to be concentrated in urban and coastal centers while peripheral regions receive limited attention. Demographic trends, including emigration and low fertility, continue to constrain human capital availability. As a result, economic growth is moderate and largely concentrated in areas with existing infrastructure and administrative capacity. Regional disparities persist, with inland and mountainous regions lagging behind coastal urban centers. Institutional capacity improves incrementally, but gaps in public procurement, transparency, and the rule of law remain. Rural and peripheral areas are only partially integrated into EU-driven economic and transport networks, limiting the potential for balanced territorial development.

In a pessimistic scenario, limited reform and missed opportunities constrain territorial development. Governance reforms are either weakly implemented or inconsistently applied, while administrative capacity

Best practices

Country / Region	Topographical Context	Best Practices in Territorial Development	Relevance for Albania	EU Cohesion / Policy Links
Slovenia	Predominantly mountainous with alpine valleys; urban centers concentrated in lowlands	Investment in transport corridors linking mountains to urban centers; integration of digital infrastructure; targeted rural development	Can inform Albania’s connectivity strategy between mountainous hinterland and coastal regions; highlight role of digital inclusion	Use of European Structural Funds for accessibility and rural development; integrated regional planning
Croatia	Coastal hinterlands with mountainous interior (Dinaric Alps); dispersed population	Development of Adriatic hinterlands via transport and logistics; support for rural SMEs and eco-tourism; multi-modal connectivity	Albania can adopt multimodal transport solutions and support small-scale enterprises in remote areas	Cohesion policy support for peripheral regions; cross-border and macro-regional initiatives (Adriatic-Ionian)

remains insufficient to manage EU funds effectively. EU investments are underutilized due to bureaucratic inefficiency or corruption, and infrastructure projects face repeated delays or cancellations, resulting in minimal connectivity improvements. Demographic decline continues, with high emigration reducing the labor force and human capital. Consequently, economic growth stagnates and remains concentrated in a few urban and coastal enclaves, while regional inequalities widen, leaving mountainous and rural areas increasingly marginalized. Limited institutional reform undermines EU integration prospects and diminishes future funding potential. Social cohesion is weakened, increasing migration pressures and eroding public trust in state institutions.

Overall, these trajectories indicate that Albania’s territorial development is highly sensitive to the interplay between governance reforms, institutional capacity, and the effective utilization of EU support. The optimistic scenario demonstrates the transformative potential of coordinated investments in infrastructure, human capital, governance, and rural development, whereas the baseline and pessimistic scenarios highlight the risks of partial or ineffective reform implementation, including persistent regional disparities and underdevelopment.

Greece	Mountainous mainland and islands; fragmented accessibility	Integrated spatial planning linking islands and mountains to economic centers; subsidized transport and broadband; eco-tourism development	Lessons for Albania’s mountainous north and inland regions; integrating tourism, transport, and local economies	EU cohesion emphasis on territorial cohesion; ITI for complex territories; smart specialization strategies
Romania	Carpathian mountains and extensive rural highlands; uneven regional development	Sectoral clustering (agriculture, forestry, eco-tourism); targeted infrastructure investment; regional governance strengthening	Can guide Albania in balancing development between highlands and plains; developing niche economies	EU cohesion funds for regional convergence; smart specialization; ESIF fund utilization

Summary

Albania’s territorial development requires a multi-faceted and strategically coordinated approach to harness both domestic potential and EU support effectively. First, integrated connectivity emerges as a foundational priority. Investments must focus on linking the country’s mountainous hinterlands, inland valleys, and coastal regions through a combination of high-quality transport networks, multimodal infrastructure, and digital connectivity. Lessons from Slovenia and Croatia demonstrate that such integration not only reduces regional isolation but also enhances economic accessibility, population retention, and market participation across peripheral areas.

Second, economic diversification is critical to ensuring that remote and less accessible regions contribute meaningfully to national development. Albania should cultivate niche economic sectors that leverage local natural and cultural assets, including high-value agriculture, eco-tourism, and renewable energy. Experiences from Greece and Romania indicate that strategically targeted investment in these sectors can stimulate local entrepreneurship, create employment opportunities, and foster sustainable rural economies while simultaneously reducing migration pressures from depopulated areas.

Third, institutional strengthening is indispensable for translating policy ambitions into tangible outcomes. Regional and municipal governance structures must possess the capacity to plan, coordinate, and implement multi-sector development projects, manage

EU funds effectively, and ensure transparency and accountability. This aligns with broader EU cohesion policy principles that emphasize the absorptive capacity of local institutions as a determinant of successful territorial development.

Fourth, Albania must align its regional strategies with EU cohesion frameworks, including the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), and macro-regional cooperation initiatives. By doing so, the country can leverage both technical expertise and financial support to implement integrated territorial development plans, address regional disparities, and ensure that infrastructural and economic interventions are mutually reinforcing and spatially coherent.

Finally, environmental sustainability must be embedded at the core of territorial planning. This entails incorporating climate adaptation strategies, natural hazard management, and environmental protection measures, particularly in mountainous regions prone to landslides, erosion, and extreme weather events. OECD guidance underscores that integrating ecological resilience into infrastructure, agricultural practices, and urban planning is essential for long-term development that is both inclusive and sustainable.

In combination, these five pillars—integrated connectivity, economic diversification, institutional strengthening, EU cohesion policy alignment, and environmental sustainability—provide a comprehensive framework for Albania to harness its territorial devel-

opment potential, reduce regional disparities, and pursue a resilient and equitable growth trajectory in line with European best practices.

Gender and Clan-Based Claims in Albania: Policy Recommendations within the EU Accession Framework

Despite significant legislative advances in Albania – a gender equality law was adopted in 2025; implementation of gender equality policies remains uneven across the country. Institutional mechanisms responsible for monitoring, enforcement, and accountability are often weak, particularly in rural areas and within sectors of the informal economy, where regulatory oversight is limited and reporting structures are underdeveloped. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has repeatedly highlighted that while formal frameworks exist, gaps in capacity at local government and municipal levels hinder effective translation of laws into practice, leaving women in marginalized communities vulnerable to systemic inequities.

Traditional gender norms and conservative pushbacks further complicate progress. The gender equality agenda in Albania faces resistance from organized “anti-gender” movements, as well as religious and conservative actors who challenge both the legitimacy and necessity of reforms. A 2025 report from the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Tirana notes, for example, that proposed amendments to the Civil Registry Law seek to define gender strictly in biological or sex-assigned terms, signaling an attempt to legally constrain the recognition of gender diversity and limit the scope of anti-discrimination protections.

Structural inequalities in the labor market exacerbate these challenges. Female labor-market participation remains comparatively low, reflecting persistent barriers such as the gender wage gap, overrepresentation of women in informal or unpaid care work, and limited access to entrepreneurship opportunities. These systemic constraints reduce women’s economic independence and limit the broader social and economic benefits of gender-inclusive growth, as documented by the World Bank in its assessments of Albania’s labor market dynamics.

To address these issues, a range of actionable strategies is necessary. Strengthening monitoring and

evaluation frameworks is critical, particularly through building capacity at the municipal level to track gender-responsive budgeting outcomes, labor-market indicators, and service delivery for survivors of violence. Engaging traditional and religious actors in inclusive dialogues can mitigate resistance to gender equality policies by framing reforms in culturally resonant terms rather than as externally imposed or adversarial initiatives. Legislative expansion is also required to reinforce protections for gender identity, sexual orientation, and intersectional forms of discrimination, in alignment with both EU *acquis* standards and international human rights obligations. Moreover, gender mainstreaming should be institutionalized across all sectors—including infrastructure, agriculture, and digitalization—rather than being confined to specialized “women’s affairs” units, ensuring that gender perspectives inform policy design, budgeting, and program implementation systematically. Finally, Albania can benefit from leveraging regional initiatives to share best practices across the Western Balkans, facilitating cross-border learning, harmonizing standards, and reinforcing a cooperative approach to gender equality reform.

Albania’s accession to the European Union necessitates full alignment with the *acquis communautaire*, particularly in the domains of human rights, rule of law, and gender equality. Traditional clan-based structures and the persistence of blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*) pose significant challenges to both legal compliance and the protection of vulnerable groups, notably women and minors. It is imperative that national legislation unequivocally prohibits extrajudicial practices associated with blood feuds while ensuring equal protection under the law irrespective of clan affiliation.

Policy interventions should prioritize the development of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that replace customary vengeance with legally sanctioned arbitration, integrating gender-sensitive approaches that recognize the disproportionate impact of clan conflicts on women. Capacity-building initiatives targeting local authorities, judicial actors, and law enforcement are essential to improve the handling of clan-related claims in a manner consistent with EU standards.

Furthermore, enhanced access to justice must be guaranteed for victims of clan violence, supported by safe shelters, protection programs, and community medi-

ation initiatives that promote reconciliation without perpetuating gender inequities. Educational and public awareness campaigns should challenge the legitimacy of blood feuds and disseminate knowledge of EU human rights norms, particularly in rural and high-risk areas. Monitoring and data collection on blood-feud incidents and their gendered consequences will provide an empirical basis for policy evaluation and refinement.

Finally, the integration of gender perspectives into all national programs addressing traditional conflict resolution, coupled with targeted use of EU pre-accession assistance, will reinforce Albania's compliance with the *acquis* and contribute to sustainable social cohesion. Regular evaluation through EU monitoring mechanisms will ensure that measures are effective. As pertains gender in the context of clans the following could be considered for your use and consideration.

Gender and Clan-Based Claims in Albania: Action Plan within the EU Accession Framework

Albania's accession to the European Union requires the full alignment of national laws and institutions with the EU *acquis*, particularly in the areas of human rights, gender equality, and the rule of law. Traditional clan structures and the persistence of blood feuds present challenges that necessitate a multi-dimensional strategy. Legislative reforms should explicitly prohibit extrajudicial practices associated with blood feuds while harmonizing criminal and civil codes with EU standards on gender equality and violence prevention.

Institutional strengthening is essential to ensure effective enforcement. This includes establishing specialized units within courts, prosecutor offices, and law enforcement agencies to handle clan-related disputes and providing comprehensive training on gender-sensitive, EU-compliant case management. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms should be promoted, integrating gender perspectives and allowing safe participation for women and minors.

Victim protection mechanisms should include safe shelters, legal aid programs, and simplified procedures to access justice. Public awareness campaigns must target rural communities, emphasizing the illegality of blood feuds and the principles of human

rights and gender equality enshrined in EU law. Education initiatives should integrate curricula on non-violence and gender equality at both school and adult learning levels.

Data collection and monitoring systems should be established to track blood-feud incidents and assess gendered impacts, providing a reliable evidence base for policy evaluation. EU pre-accession funds can support capacity-building, awareness campaigns, and victim protection programs, with active involvement of civil society organizations. Annual reviews and evaluations, informed by monitoring data and EU progress reports, will ensure the continuous refinement and effectiveness of these policies.

A matrix serves primarily as a planning and communication tool. It clarifies objectives and actions, visualizes relationships between goals, tasks, responsible actors, and timelines, and supports prioritization of critical areas. It enhances accountability by assigning responsibilities and allows for structured tracking of progress. The matrix also improves communication by condensing complex strategies into a concise, easily understandable format for stakeholders.

However, a matrix cannot ensure implementation, capture dynamic social or political complexities, or substitute for qualitative judgment and adaptability. It does not directly measure outcomes, nor can it overcome resistance, institutional inertia, or deeply rooted traditional practices. Its effectiveness depends on integration with real-time monitoring, adaptive management, and active stakeholder engagement.

Action Plan Matrix

Objective	Action	Timeline	Responsible Institutions	EU Legal Basis
Legislative Alignment	Amend national laws to prohibit blood feuds and harmonize with EU standards	2025–2026	Ministry of Justice, Parliament	Council Directive 2006/54/EC; Istanbul Convention
Institutional Strengthening	Create specialized units in courts and law enforcement; train personnel	2025–2027	Ministry of Justice, Judicial Council, Police	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU
Alternative Dispute Resolution	Develop community mediation programs with gender perspectives	2025–2028	Ministry of Justice, Civil Society	FRA, 2020; Council Directive 2000/43/EC
Victim Protection	Provide shelters, legal aid, and simplified claim procedures	2025–2028	Ministry of Health and Social Protection, NGOs	Istanbul Convention; EU Charter
Public Awareness & Education	Launch campaigns and integrate curricula on gender equality and non-violence	2025–2029	Ministry of Education, NGOs	Council Directive 2006/54/EC; FRA, 2020
Data Collection & Monitoring	Track incidents and assess gendered impacts	2025–ongoing	Ministry of Justice, National Statistics Institute	FRA, 2020
EU Pre-Accession Support	Utilize EU funds for programs and civil society engagement	2025–2029	Ministry of European Integration, NGOs	EU Pre-Accession Assistance Regulations
Policy Evaluation	Conduct annual reviews and refine policies	2025–ongoing	Ministry of Justice, EU Delegation	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU

Implications and Actionable Insights

The matrix provides a structured framework for addressing gender and clan-based claims in Albania and serves as a strategic tool for aligning national policies with the EU acquis. Legislative alignment emphasizes the necessity of formal legal compliance to demonstrate commitment to the rule of law and human rights. Institutional strengthening highlights that capacity-building and specialized training are essential for the effective enforcement of laws, while alternative dispute resolution initiatives underline the importance of replacing informal, extrajudicial mechanisms with legally sanctioned and gender-sensitive approaches. Victim protection measures enhance social cohesion, gender equality, and human security by ensuring safe access to justice. Public awareness and education initiatives contribute to normative change within high-risk communities, while data collection and monitoring create evidence-based feedback loops to refine policy. Leveraging EU pre-accession funds ensures that these programs are financially and technically feasible, and regular evaluations promote accountability, transparency, and alignment with EU expectations.

Actionable insights include prioritizing legal reforms that explicitly criminalize blood feuds, ensuring inter-institutional coordination between justice institutions and civil society, developing gender-sensitive training programs for mediators, police, and judicial personnel, using monitoring data to refine interventions in high-risk areas, strategically deploying EU pre-accession resources, and incorporating feedback from victims and communities to improve alternative dispute resolution initiatives.



The Albanian flag features a black double-headed eagle on a red background, symbolizing sovereignty, vigilance, and unity. Although the double-headed eagle originated in Byzantine imperial symbolism, Albania's use of it is not a direct claim of Byzantine

heritage. The emblem is most strongly associated with Skanderbeg, who used it during his resistance against Ottoman rule. Through this association, the eagle became a symbol of independence and defiance rather than empire. The red field represents blood, sacrifice, and centuries of struggle for freedom. Unlike Serbia, Albania's flag contains no religious symbols or claims of Orthodox continuity. Serbia uses similar imagery to emphasize medieval statehood and imperial succession, while Albania rejects imperial narratives. Overall, the Albanian flag represents national resistance and self-rule, not merely a Byzantine legacy.

In Albania the Dogs Bark at Their Own Shadow

Albania has emerged over the past two decades as a structurally significant node within transnational organized crime (TOC), particularly in relation to narcotics trafficking, contraband logistics, and the laundering of illicit proceeds. This evolution should not be understood as the sudden rise of a "narco-state" in a simplistic sense, but rather as the outcome of long-term transformations in global criminal markets, post-socialist institutional fragility, strategic geography, and the adaptive capabilities of Albanian-speaking organized crime groups. These groups increasingly function as connective tissue between Latin American cocaine producers, European wholesale and retail drug markets, and long-established criminal organizations such as the Italian mafias.

At the core of this ecosystem are Albanian organized crime groups (OCGs), which have shifted from peripheral roles in trafficking chains during the 1990s to positions of strategic coordination and brokerage in the contemporary period. Initially involved primarily in cannabis cultivation and regional smuggling, Albanian groups progressively moved upstream and downstream within the cocaine economy. Today, they are widely documented as engaging directly with Latin American suppliers in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, negotiating purchase terms at source and organizing maritime containerized shipments to European ports. This transition reflects a broader trend in organized crime whereby intermediary groups seek to reduce dependency on traditional gatekeepers by acquiring logistical expertise, financial capacity, and transnational trust networks.

Italy has long been a critical interface in this process. The Adriatic corridor, linking Albania to southern

Italy, provides both geographic proximity and historical familiarity. Cooperation between Albanian groups and Italian mafias—particularly the 'Ndrangheta—has evolved from ad hoc smuggling arrangements into more stable, symbiotic partnerships. Italian organizations retain control over territorial governance, retail distribution, and political corruption within Italy, while Albanian groups increasingly dominate wholesale logistics, maritime transport, and cross-border coordination. Law enforcement in-

vestigations in Italy have repeatedly highlighted the degree to which Albanian traffickers are no longer subordinate actors but are instead treated as reliable strategic partners, sometimes entrusted with large volumes of cocaine and significant autonomy in operational decision-making.

The factors accounting for the phenomenon of organized crimes are often conceptualized within different theoretical framework:

Table

Theory	Core Idea	Relevance to Albanian OC	Application to Clan-Based Balkan OC
Strain / Anomie Theory	Blocked legitimate opportunities lead to crime	Post-communist transition, unemployment, migration pressures	Clans provide alternative means to achieve status and wealth
Social Disorganization Theory	Weak institutions enable crime	Weak rule of law in the 1990s	Clans replace absent state authority
Power Vacuum Theory	Crime fills governance gaps	State collapse (1997 Albania)	Clan elders act as informal governors
Enterprise Theory	OC operates like a business	Drug trafficking, human smuggling networks	Family-based enterprises ensure loyalty and secrecy
Market Theory	Illegal markets respond to demand	Trafficking routes to EU markets	Clans control territory and routes
Differential Association Theory	Crime is learned	Criminal skills passed within families	Intergenerational transmission of criminal norms
Cultural Transmission Theory	Crime embedded in culture	Normalization of smuggling in some regions	Clan traditions legitimize illegal activities
Subculture Theory	Alternative value systems emerge	Honor, loyalty, silence (besa)	Clan code overrides state law
Protection Theory	OC provides security/services	Extortion framed as "protection"	Clan protection substitutes for police
Political Corruption Theory	OC thrives via state collusion	Links between criminals and officials	Clan loyalty facilitates political infiltration
Elite Theory	Powerful actors benefit from crime	Business-political-criminal nexus	Clan elites shield members from prosecution
Social Control Theory	Weak bonds to formal society	Low trust in state institutions	Strong clan bonds replace societal bonds
Institutional Anomie Theory	Economic goals dominate norms	Rapid capitalism post-1990	Wealth over legality justified within clans
State Failure Theory	Weak states enable OC	Fragile institutions during transition	Clan law (Kanun) fills legal vacuum

Albanian and wider Balkan organized crime is most convincingly explained through an integrated framework combining power vacuum, enterprise, cultural transmission, and protection theories. Periods of state weakness—most notably during post-communist transition and the 1997 institutional collapse in Albania—created governance vacuums in which criminal groups assumed functions traditionally monopolized by the state. Within this context, organized crime operates as a rational economic enterprise, managing illicit markets such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, and money laundering through highly structured, profit-oriented networks. These activities are sustained by cultural transmission mechanisms, whereby criminal norms, skills, and expectations are passed intergenerationally within kinship groups, normalizing illicit activity as a legitimate livelihood. Central to this process are clan-based social structures, which provide high levels of trust, internal discipline, and dispute resolution through customary norms such as *besa* and the *Kanun*. These mechanisms allow criminal organizations to enforce contracts, ensure loyalty, and maintain operational continuity without reliance on formal legal institutions. Consequently, clan structures function as parallel systems of governance and protection, enabling organized crime to persist, adapt, and expand transnationally in environments where the authority and legitimacy of the state remain limited.

Latin American criminal organizations, for their part, do not appear to be using Albania as a classical territorial “beachhead” akin to a cartel-controlled enclave. Rather, Albanian groups function as European-facing brokers and logisticians, allowing Latin American producers to externalize risk while maintaining access to lucrative EU markets. These relationships are transactional and mutually reinforcing rather than hierarchical. Albanian traffickers provide linguistic, cultural, and logistical insulation from European law enforcement, while Latin American suppliers offer stable access to high-quality cocaine at scale. The result is a modular transnational network that is resilient, flexible, and difficult to dismantle through traditional state-centric enforcement strategies.

The Albanian diaspora plays a decisive enabling role in this architecture. Diaspora communities across the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany provide not only manpower

but also social infrastructure that supports criminal operations. Kinship ties, shared regional origins, and strong norms of loyalty facilitate trust-based cooperation in environments where formal contracts are impossible. Diaspora-based cells frequently control safe houses, storage facilities, transportation companies, and cash-intensive businesses that serve as fronts for money laundering. Crucially, these communities also allow Albanian OCGs to embed themselves within local criminal ecosystems, forming alliances with indigenous gangs and accessing distribution networks without attracting the visibility that might accompany overt territorial control.

From a political economy perspective, Albania’s domestic environment further reinforces its attractiveness as a logistical and financial hub. Weak regulatory oversight, persistent corruption vulnerabilities, and the prominence of cash-based sectors such as construction, tourism, and real estate create favorable conditions for laundering illicit proceeds. Investments in luxury housing, coastal resorts, and urban redevelopment projects provide both profit opportunities and mechanisms for integrating criminal capital into the formal economy. While international pressure—particularly from the European Union—has led to episodic crackdowns and judicial reforms, enforcement remains uneven and often reactive rather than systemic.

Claims that Albanian organized crime contributes 3% of national GDP are not just misleading—they are analytically wrong. Organized crime does not “contribute” to GDP in any meaningful sense; it extracts, distorts, and drains economic value. Criminal revenues are untaxed, largely laundered abroad, and reinvested in corruption, real estate inflation, and political capture rather than productive growth. Any short-term cash flow is overwhelmed by long-term damage: weakened institutions, deterred foreign investment, market monopolization, and entrenched inequality. Far from boosting the economy, Albanian organized crime suppresses legitimate GDP growth and locks the state into underdevelopment.

Importantly, Albania’s role should not be overstated in isolation. The country does not function as the sole or even primary command center for these networks. Instead, it operates as a nodal space within a wider transnational system that spans Latin America, South-

ern and Western Europe, and diaspora communities across multiple jurisdictions. Its significance lies in connectivity rather than dominance. Albanian OCGs excel at bridging structural gaps between producers, transport corridors, and consumer markets, leveraging diaspora embeddedness and strategic geography to maintain resilience under enforcement pressure.

In sum, Albania is not merely being “used” by external criminal syndicates, nor is it simply hosting foreign cartels. Rather, Albanian organized crime groups have become central protagonists in contemporary illicit economies, collaborating with Italian mafias and Latin American suppliers on relatively equal footing. The Albanian diaspora functions as both an operational backbone and a force multiplier, enabling transnational reach while diffusing risk. Together, these dynamics suggest that Albania represents less a passive beachhead and more an active, adaptive hub within global organized crime—one whose influence is likely to persist unless addressed through sustained, multinational strategies targeting both financial flows and the social infrastructures that underpin criminal cooperation.

Albania’s organized crime landscape is shaped not by territorial domination but by the strategic integration of tribal networks, diaspora communities, and transnational brokerage. The country functions as a nodal hub, connecting Latin American producers to European markets through flexible, modular networks. In this context, the counter-organized-crime strategy must begin with a clear understanding of the social terrain.

Figure Albanian Anti-OC strategy



Tribal (fis) networks form the foundational layer, providing trust, cohesion, and resilience where formal contracts cannot exist. These networks facilitate the continuity of operations and succession planning, embedding criminal activity within extended kinship structures. Countermeasures must therefore avoid direct confrontation with kinship itself, instead severing the pathways through which tribal loyalty converts into criminal advantage. Policies that increase asset transparency across family holdings, provide alternative educational and professional pathways, and offer robust protection for defectors can gradually reduce the operational utility of these networks while maintaining social legitimacy.

The diaspora constitutes a parallel structural layer, acting as both operational and financial force multipliers. Diaspora-linked cells oversee safe housing, cash-intensive businesses, and transport infrastructure, enabling Albanian groups to embed themselves seamlessly within local criminal ecosystems across the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany. Effective disruption cannot be confined to Albania alone; it must adopt a synchronized, multinational approach that leverages intelligence-sharing, harmonized beneficial ownership registries, and community-oriented initiatives to weaken norms of silence and concealment. Engagement with diaspora populations through education, vocational opportunities, and legal entrepreneurship can reduce reliance on criminal networks, gradually converting what once served as a shield into a transparency surface.

At the network level, Albanian organized crime operates through modular, semi-autonomous cells that excel in brokerage rather than hierarchical command. Traditional kingpin-focused interventions are insufficient; sustained pressure must instead increase coordination costs, disrupt intercellular linkages, and target facilitation nodes in logistics, finance, and documentation. Financial flows, particularly those involving construction, tourism, and real estate, serve both as profit mechanisms and vehicles for social legitimacy, embedding illicit capital into family and community futures. Counter-strategies must treat laundering as a systemic governance challenge rather than a policing problem alone, deploying EU-led anti-money laundering supervision, lifestyle audits for politically exposed sectors, and cross-border asset recovery frameworks that account for familial benefit structures.

Institutional fragility amplifies the effectiveness of these networks, with selective enforcement, persistent corruption, and reactive reforms creating predictable gaps that criminal organizations exploit. Strengthening the judiciary, ensuring prosecutorial independence, implementing protective rotations for investigators, and embedding EU monitoring can make corruption costly, uncertain, and socially untenable, thereby raising the structural barriers to organized crime.

The integrative layer is both strategic and operational, reflecting the necessity of sustained, multinational coordination. No single national effort suffices; transnational operations must maintain a decade-long horizon, supported by joint intelligence, shared risk, and political ownership across European institutions. Only by simultaneously addressing tribal loyalty structures, diaspora embedding, financial integration, and institutional weaknesses can enforcement convert the Albanian organized crime environment from a low-risk, high-trust ecosystem into a high-risk, low-trust landscape. In doing so, Europe can neutralize the connective tissue that enables these criminal networks to persist, adapt, and expand.

Ignoring Albanian tribal and diaspora-linked organized crime networks poses severe strategic risks for the European Union. First, these networks serve as resilient conduits connecting Latin American producers with European consumer markets, meaning that inaction allows cocaine and other illicit commodities to flow unimpeded. Second, the diaspora and kinship structures provide operational depth and social insulation, making enforcement increasingly difficult and selective crackdowns largely ineffective. Third, modular, semi-autonomous cells reduce the impact of targeting individual leaders, allowing criminal operations to regenerate rapidly. Fourth, the integration of illicit profits into construction, real estate, tourism, and other cash-intensive sectors entrenches organized crime in the legitimate economy, undermining financial transparency. Fifth, institutional weaknesses in Albania and across EU member states create predictable gaps that traffickers exploit, allowing corruption, bribery, and regulatory arbitrage to flourish. Sixth, the networks' transnational character means that local enforcement cannot succeed in isolation, and fragmented approaches risk creat-

ing safe havens for criminal activity. Seventh, unaddressed, these networks increasingly act as bridges to other criminal organizations, including Italian mafias and European street gangs, amplifying their influence and reach. Eighth, failure to engage allows criminal capital to reinforce social and political legitimacy within communities, complicating future law enforcement and policy interventions. Ninth, ignoring these networks erodes EU credibility in upholding rule-of-law standards and undermines broader anti-trafficking objectives. Finally, without sustained, multi-layered, and coordinated action, these networks will continue to adapt, evolve, and expand, turning temporary gaps in enforcement into long-term structural vulnerabilities for the Union.

In summary, Albanian organized crime thrives because social trust, diaspora density, and institutional weakness align. A layered, sustained, and multinational strategy that disrupts these enablers concurrently represents the only credible path toward systemic disruption and long-term containment. The evolving context of the west Balkan integration into the EU provides a good opportunity to make a concerted push to cut the Çole, Gaxhai, Pusi i Mezinit, Rudaj, Hellbanianz, Osmani, Kompania Bello, Hamburg networks and the Kosovar diaspora. down to size and beat the thugs and clannish crime families into legitimate business activities or behind bars.

In summary, Albania is a post-socialist one-party state governed by an aging Rama-Berisha-Meta Triumvirate, tribal networks, hybrid State-OC structures, corrupt businesses and secret police entertaining methods of total control from a bygone era. The current Albanian Government's priorities is to strengthen governance in Kosovo, consolidate territorial development and to increase tax and customs revenues, whereas the people appreciates better education, infrastructure and a stronger health sector. A concerted push on OC could be in the making following progress in Kosovo in the context of rooting out agents involved in outsourced burial jobs by archaic structures amongst the Northerners.

Sustainability

Albania has demonstrated measurable progress in several areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The country is currently on track in achieving objectives related to poverty reduc-

tion (SDG 1), access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), the provision of affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), and the promotion of responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). These areas reflect Albania's capacity to implement targeted policy interventions and infrastructure improvements that directly impact living standards and environmental sustainability.

Progress is moderately improving in other domains, including good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation, and infrastructure development (SDG 9), as well as partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). While advancements are evident, these areas require sustained policy focus and investment to consolidate gains and accelerate momentum toward full achievement.

SDG Dashboards and Trends

Click on a goal to view more information.



Dashboards: ● SDG achieved ● Challenges remain ● Significant challenges remain ● Major challenges remain ● Information unavailable
Trends: ↑ On track or maintaining SDG achievement → Moderately improving → Stagnating ↓ Decreasing ↔ Trend information unavailable

Source: <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/profiles/albania/>

Conversely, Albania is experiencing stagnation in several critical dimensions. Limited progress is observed in zero hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), the protection of life on land (SDG 15), and the promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). These challenges highlight structural barriers, including persistent social and economic disparities, infrastructural deficits, and governance limitations, which impede the country's ability to advance these goals effectively.

Overall, Albania's SDG trajectory indicates a mixed performance, with clear successes in infrastructure and environmental management, moderate improvements in socio-economic domains, and persistent

stagnation in areas related to social equity, education, and governance. Targeted strategies that address systemic bottlenecks and leverage international partnerships will be essential to ensure comprehensive progress across all SDGs.

Comprehensive Plan to Address SDG Challenges in Albania: A Center-Periphery Approach

Albania's uneven territorial development and persistent disparities between urban centers, coastal hubs, and peripheral mountainous regions present significant challenges for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) uniformly across the country. To accelerate progress, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive, spatially differentiated strategy that explicitly addresses center-periphery dynamics while aligning with national policy frameworks and EU cohesion principles.

Integrated Spatial Governance

A core principle of the plan is the establishment of integrated spatial governance structures that coordinate national, regional, and local actors. This includes strengthening the National Committee for Regional Development and Cohesion, creating regional SDG task forces, and empowering municipal offices to design and implement context-specific interventions. Organizing governance in this way ensures that peripheral areas, which often face isolation and limited administrative capacity, are included in planning processes, reducing the risk of uneven policy implementation.

Targeted Infrastructure and Connectivity Investments

Bridging center-periphery gaps requires prioritizing investments in transport and digital infrastructure. Key measures include upgrading roads and public transport linking peripheral municipalities to urban and economic centers, expanding broadband and mobile network coverage in remote areas, and improving energy access and reliability. These interventions facilitate access to education, healthcare, markets, and employment, directly supporting SDGs related to poverty reduction, clean energy, sustainable cities, and economic growth. Investing in connectivity is critical because physical and digital isolation remains a structural constraint that perpetuates regional disparities.

Economic Diversification in Peripheral Regions

Peripheral regions should be supported through sectoral diversification initiatives that leverage local resources, cultural heritage, and ecological assets. Programs could include high-value agricultural production, eco-tourism, small-scale renewable energy projects, and local artisanal industries. Organizing support through regional development agencies and cooperative networks allows peripheral communities to integrate into national and European value chains, reducing migration pressures and fostering sustainable economic growth. This approach is essential to achieving SDGs related to decent work, responsible consumption, and innovation.

Social Services and Human Capital Development

Addressing stagnation in SDGs related to education, health, and gender equality requires targeted expansion of human capital programs in peripheral areas. This includes mobile health services, digital learning platforms, vocational training for young people, and programs promoting women's economic participation. Organizing these programs at a regional level ensures coverage in areas distant from urban centers, while partnerships with civil society and international organizations enhance resource efficiency and impact. Strengthening human capital is crucial because disparities in skills and services between central and peripheral areas reinforce long-term social and economic inequalities.

Institutional Capacity and EU Cohesion Integration

Successful implementation depends on building institutional capacity to absorb EU funds, monitor progress, and coordinate multi-sector initiatives. This includes training local and regional officials in project management, establishing transparent governance frameworks, and aligning interventions with EU cohesion mechanisms such as ESIF and ITI. Integrating EU cohesion principles ensures that funding is effectively targeted to reduce territorial disparities, promote inclusive development, and accelerate SDG achievement across both center and periphery.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

Peripheral regions are often environmentally sensitive and vulnerable to climate risks. The plan emphasizes integrating environmental sustainability

into all development interventions, including climate adaptation strategies, disaster risk management, and conservation programs. This approach directly addresses SDGs on life on land, sustainable cities, and clean energy, while ensuring that development in peripheries does not compromise ecological integrity.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management

Finally, organizing a national SDG monitoring framework with regional data collection, real-time reporting, and adaptive management is critical. This enables policymakers to track center-periphery progress, identify bottlenecks, and adjust strategies dynamically. Effective monitoring ensures accountability, guides resource allocation, and demonstrates impact to both domestic and international stakeholders.

Importance of this Organizational Approach

Organizing SDG interventions along center-periphery lines is pivotal because Albania's peripheral regions historically face structural disadvantages, including geographic isolation, lower institutional capacity, and limited access to economic opportunities. Without a spatially differentiated strategy, national averages may mask persistent local inequalities, undermining sustainable development. By coordinating governance, infrastructure, economic diversification, social services, and environmental protection across multiple scales, Albania can ensure that development is inclusive, equitable, and resilient, thereby accelerating progress toward all SDGs in a manner that leaves no region behind.

Accountability and Participatory Governance

To ensure accountability and participatory governance in Albania's SDG implementation, several interlinked measures should be considered. Establishing multi-level governance structures is essential, involving national, regional, and local authorities. National SDG coordination bodies can set targets, monitor progress, and provide guidance, while regional and municipal task forces adapt strategies to local contexts. This ensures decisions are grounded in local realities but aligned with national and international goals.

Engaging citizens, civil society organizations, local businesses, and community leaders in planning and monitoring processes is critical. Participatory governance mechanisms—such as public consultations, advisory councils, and local SDG forums—enhance

transparency, build trust, and ensure that interventions reflect community priorities, especially in peripheral areas.

Implementing real-time monitoring systems and publicly accessible dashboards to track SDG progress at national, regional, and local levels promotes transparency. Regular reporting and independent audits increase accountability, allow timely corrective actions, and communicate achievements and gaps to stakeholders.

Creating mechanisms for continuous feedback from local communities to decision-makers allows policies and programs to adapt dynamically to challenges and changing conditions. This fosters learning-oriented governance and avoids top-down imposition that may not suit peripheral regions.

Investing in training and institutional capacity for local authorities and civil society organizations strengthens knowledge in project management, data collection, SDG indicators, and financial management. This improves the quality of governance and ensures effective use of resources, including EU cohesion and development funds.

Developing incentives for participatory engagement and performance in achieving SDG targets, such as recognition programs for municipalities demonstrating exemplary progress or innovative approaches, encourages accountability and motivates sustained commitment to local SDG goals.

Leveraging digital platforms and e-governance tools facilitates participatory decision-making, tracks project implementation, and enables remote communities to contribute to monitoring and reporting, reducing disparities between center and periphery.

Collectively, these measures ensure that SDG implementation is inclusive, transparent, and adaptive, fostering accountability while empowering communities across Albania, from urban centers to remote mountainous regions.



Renvoi - Albania's Transformation: From Hoxha's Iron Fist to EU Integration

Historical Legacy: Political, Security, Economic, and Social Foundations

Enver Hoxha's regime (1944–1985) left a profound and enduring imprint on Albania's institutions, political culture, and society. Politically, the regime established an authoritarian, centralized system in which decisions flowed strictly from the top down. Loyalty to the Party and ideological conformity were prioritized above pluralism, accountability, or transparency. Surveillance and secret police networks institutionalized fear, suppressing dissent and enforcing conformity. These mechanisms were not merely administrative but penetrated daily life, creating deep-rooted patterns of mistrust toward formal institutions. Bureaucratic structures were designed to maintain control rather than efficiency, reinforcing a hierarchical political culture that remains partially visible in modern Albania.

In terms of security, Hoxha's policies were shaped by historical anxieties, post-war isolation, and Cold War dynamics. The regime pursued extreme suspicion of foreign powers, emphasizing national self-reliance, internal control, and militarization. Defensive infrastructures, including thousands of bunkers, compulsory military service, and pervasive civil surveillance, reflected a security paradigm focused inward rather than on alliances or international engagement. Security was understood as internal stability and territorial defense rather than collaborative engagement in regional or global structures.

Economically, Hoxha pursued state-led industrialization and collectivization, aiming for autarky and minimizing external dependencies. While certain infrastructure projects and industrial foundations were

established, inefficiency, low productivity, and technological stagnation characterized the economic system. Trade was severely restricted, and technological development lagged behind regional peers. Regional disparities were pronounced, and rural underdevelopment was entrenched. These policies left structural legacies that continue to shape Albania's economic landscape decades later, including gaps in infrastructure, uneven industrial development, and limited technological adoption.

Socially and culturally, Hoxha enforced secularization and suppressed religious, cultural, and traditional institutions. Religious practice was banned, and community structures were dismantled. While opportunities for upward social mobility increased for some, repression of dissent limited freedom and constrained societal expression. Education and literacy were emphasized, producing a highly literate population, which remains one of the enduring positive legacies of the period.

Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

Since the transition to a market-oriented democracy in 1991, Albania has made remarkable progress. Multiparty elections, constitutional governance, and formal democratic institutions have been established. Albania is now a member of NATO, participates in EU security initiatives, and actively seeks European Union accession. Despite these advances, the shadow of Hoxha's legacy persists. Bureaucratic inertia and hierarchical decision-making continue to affect public administration. Political polarization and informal patronage networks influence governance and access to resources. Public trust in institutions remains fragile, shaped by a long history of surveillance, repression, and limited civic engagement.

Albania's economic transformation has been uneven. While market reforms, privatization, and liberalization have stimulated growth, structural inefficiencies inherited from the Hoxha era remain. Industrial sectors remain underdeveloped, infrastructure gaps persist, and regional disparities are evident, particularly between urban centers and rural peripheries. Foreign investment, integration into EU and regional markets, and digital modernization are critical to overcoming these structural constraints. Socially, Albania enjoys religious tolerance and pluralism, yet the historical rupture with cultural and religious tra-

ditions affects identity, civic participation, and social cohesion. Education remains a strength, providing the foundation for a skilled workforce capable of driving modernization.

Generational dynamics also play a critical role in Albania's political evolution. Older generations, shaped by decades of authoritarian rule, may retain skepticism toward active political participation and democratic institutions, whereas younger generations tend to embrace reform, transparency, and EU-aligned values. Balancing these generational expectations while deepening civic engagement is essential for sustainable democratic consolidation.

Policy and Strategic Recommendations

Albania's path to modernization and EU integration requires a multidimensional strategy that addresses historical legacies while leveraging contemporary strengths.

Governance and Institutional Reform

Albania must continue strengthening the rule of law, judicial independence, and meritocratic civil service. Bureaucratic reform should focus on reducing hierarchical inertia, promoting transparency, and institutionalizing accountability mechanisms. Civic education programs can rebuild trust in institutions and cultivate participatory governance. Regional administrative modernization, particularly in rural areas, is essential to reduce disparities and strengthen social cohesion.

Security and Strategic Orientation

Albania should consolidate its role in NATO and EU security frameworks while adopting proactive strategic planning to engage with regional and global partners. Balancing national sovereignty with openness to foreign partnerships and investments requires a nuanced strategic culture, informed by historical lessons but oriented toward integration, resilience, and regional leadership in the Western Balkans.

Economic Modernization and Infrastructure

Targeted investments in digital infrastructure, transportation, energy, and industrial modernization are critical. Encouraging foreign direct investment, fostering innovation ecosystems, and aligning economic policy with EU standards will enhance competitiveness, reduce regional disparities, and accelerate Albania's integration into European and global markets.

Social and Cultural Reconciliation

Programs aimed at strengthening civil society, promoting religious and cultural pluralism, and enhancing social mobility are vital. Education and literacy provide a strong foundation, but addressing historical alienation from institutions and promoting civic participation is essential for long-term social cohesion.

EU Integration and Political Maturity

Aligning Albania's legal, administrative, and human rights frameworks with EU requirements remains a priority. Generational strategies that combine civic engagement with institutional reform can accelerate political maturity, strengthen democratic norms, and foster a culture of accountability. Mentorship, youth-led civic programs, and inclusive policymaking will help bridge the gap between historical skepticism and contemporary reformist energies.

Synthesis and Outlook

Hoxha's "iron fist" fundamentally shaped Albania's trajectory, producing both structural challenges and latent opportunities. Authoritarian legacies manifest in bureaucratic rigidity, mistrust in institutions, and cautious strategic postures, while educational foundations, social cohesion, and industrial infrastructure provide critical leverage points. The future of Albania hinges upon the successful translation of these legacies into actionable reform strategies. By fostering governance transparency, stimulating economic modernization, enhancing civic engagement, and strategically leveraging EU integration, Albania can transform historical constraints into catalysts for sustainable growth, regional leadership, and full European integration. In this process, the interplay between historical memory, generational perspectives, and forward-looking policy will define Albania's capacity to consolidate democracy, advance economically, and secure its position in the European and global strategic landscape.

Figure Apothosis of Enver from Grijokastër,?



Hoxha's "iron fist" shaped Albania's institutions, culture, and economic base in ways that both constrain and enable transformation. The coast was developed and the economy industrialised, and when the regime fell most people either migrated or were left to their own devices. Tribal structures and bonds of kinship comes as natural bond of solidarity in the absence of fundamental reform. To think Albania could complete accession negotiations by 2028 would be to fool yourself about the realities of the situation overthere.

While the authoritarian and isolationist legacies present challenges for EU integration, Albania's literacy, infrastructure, and social cohesion provide a solid foundation for reform. Success depends on overcoming historical centralization and mistrust, strengthening institutional transparency, and leveraging EU and regional integration to modernize both governance and the economy.

The Illyrian tribes tried mixing their traditions like a complicated recipe, but instead of a feast, they got a never-ending potluck of stagnation. You could say the Illyrians were great at "mutually inseminating" ideas—too bad none of them hatched into lasting progress!

The Illyrian tribes were like a group project where everyone contributed, but somehow the grade was always stuck on "perpetual stagnation." Their tribal fusion was impressive—if only they could have fused some innovation instead of just staying stuck in the same old groove.

The Illyrians had all the ingredients for success but forgot to hit "start" on the progress machine.

You could say their tribes were the original social network, but with no Wi-Fi, they just kept buffering forever. The Illyrians mastered the art of mixing tribes but forgot the crucial step: evolving beyond the prehistoric pause button. If the Illyrians had a motto, it might be: "Together forever—at a standstill."



Conclusions

“Who Fools Drita?” is not merely a question of deceit but of transformation: who deceives the luminous principle of humanity by turning love into vengeance, pride into violence? In tracing the path from the belittled suitor’s wounded ego to the outbreak of blood feud, we uncover a pattern both culturally specific and universally human. Honor, when tethered to public image rather than inner integrity, breeds fragility. Desire, when fused with possession, becomes a battlefield.

The Albanian Kanun provided coherence to communities once bereft of centralized law, but its moral logic, rooted in reciprocity and shame, also perpetuated suffering. In this framework, Drita’s refusal—or her perceived betrayal—becomes intolerable because it exposes male dependence on female judgment. To “fool Drita,” in the ironic sense, is to imagine that violence can restore dignity. In truth, each act of revenge only deepens the darkness her name seeks to dispel.

The infrequency of honour killings in Albania is partly due to the country's legal reforms and efforts to modernize the justice system. However, the persistence of traditional codes like the Kanun in certain regions, particularly in the north, continues to influence social norms and can occasionally lead to such extreme acts. Given the lack of systematic national data, it's challenging to provide an exact annual figure for honour killings in Albania since 2000

Modern Albania’s gradual move toward reconciliation and the rule of law reflects a broader human evolution: the redefinition of honor as self-control rather than retaliation. Yet this evolution is fragile. Whether expressed in village feuds or online shaming, the cycle of humiliation and revenge persists wherever pride outweighs empathy.

Ultimately, the antidote lies not in denying honor but in reimagining it. The new honor is forgiveness; the new courage, restraint. To protect Drita’s light, one must resist the seduction of vengeance. For as long as men measure their worth by others’ fear, the question “Who fools Drita?” will remain unanswered—because the real deception lies in mistaking dominance for dignity.

The Kanun is not merely a legal code but a moral

and cosmological order, intended to preserve social cohesion, honour, and equilibrium within a stateless society. Its normative foundation rests on several interlocking values.

Central among these is honour (nder), which serves as both a personal and collective moral currency. The preservation of honour through the regulation of conduct, hospitality, and revenge constitutes the primary organising principle of social life. Reciprocity and balance underpin the Kanun’s conception of justice: every offence demands proportional compensation or retaliation to restore equilibrium.

A second core value is collective responsibility, in which the individual’s actions implicate the entire *fis*, thereby reinforcing solidarity and mutual accountability. The Kanun also upholds *besa*—the sanctity of the word or oath—which functions as a contractual mechanism of trust and temporary immunity even among adversaries. Autonomy and self-regulation are likewise celebrated; the Kanun enables communities to govern themselves without reliance on external authorities.

In essence, the Kanun’s objectives are order, deterrence, and the preservation of communal honour within a context of weak formal governance. Its emphasis on predictable, codified norms gave it a high degree of internal legitimacy, even as its enforcement has often produced outcomes incompatible with modern human rights and rule-of-law principles.

Efforts to mitigate or eradicate Kanun-based justice must recognise that the Kanun persists not merely as a legal system but as a cultural schema that confers meaning and legitimacy within specific social ecologies. Sustainable change therefore requires multi-dimensional, culturally embedded, and temporally sequenced strategies that strengthen formal institutions while engaging with customary authorities.

The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini serves as a foundational legal and moral framework in Albanian culture, codifying norms related to honor and revenge. It establishes the principles that govern interpersonal relationships, particularly within clan-based communities. The Kanun emphasizes the importance of family honor, often linking it to the actions of individual family members. Consequently, any affront to honor can

lead to a demand for retribution, perpetuating cycles of violence as a means of restoring dignity and social standing.

Gender dynamics play a critical role in the perception and enactment of honor killings in Albanian society. Women are often viewed as the custodians of family honor, and their behavior is closely monitored by male relatives. Transgressions by women, such as perceived infidelity or failure to conform to societal expectations, can provoke violent responses from male family members seeking to restore honor. This patriarchal framework positions women in a vulnerable position, where their actions directly impact the family's reputation, thereby reinforcing the cycle of violence associated with honor.

Modern societal changes, such as urbanization and the rise of digital communication, have significantly influenced traditional beliefs about honor and revenge in Albania. In urban areas, the rigid adherence to the Kanun may diminish as individuals encounter diverse cultural norms and legal frameworks. However, social media has emerged as a new arena for honor display, where public humiliation can trigger digital vendettas that mirror traditional feuds. This duality reflects an adaptation of honor-based values to contemporary contexts, complicating the relationship between tradition and modernity.

To address the prevalence of honor-based violence, legal and educational reforms must be implemented that respect cultural heritage while promoting human rights. Legal reforms could include the establishment of clear penalties for honor-based violence and the promotion of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that align with local customs. Educational initiatives should focus on raising awareness about gender equality and the harmful effects of honor-based violence, fostering a cultural shift that redefines honor as personal integrity rather than collective retaliation. By integrating these reforms, it is possible to create a more equitable society that honors cultural traditions while safeguarding individual rights.

Strengthening the credibility and accessibility of the formal justice system is essential. This involves improving policing, ensuring impartial adjudication, and reducing judicial delays that incentivise ex-

tra-legal retaliation. Mobile courts and local legal-aid mechanisms can make state justice more visible and responsive.

Integrating hybrid mediation frameworks—whereby customary elders and mediators operate under state oversight—can facilitate transitional compliance. These arrangements should draw on local legitimacy while aligning outcomes with constitutional and human-rights standards.

Social transformation strategies must target the cultural foundations of honour-based violence. Educational initiatives, gender equality programs, and public campaigns led by respected community figures can gradually reframe notions of honour toward non-violent forms of prestige.

Economic development and infrastructural investment in historically marginalised areas can weaken reliance on kin-based security systems. As employment opportunities and social mobility expand, individuals are less dependent on extended kin networks for protection and arbitration.

Finally, transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives may help communities address historical vendettas through truth-telling, compensation, and restorative practices sanctioned by the state. These initiatives must be participatory, trauma-informed, and attentive to gender-specific harms.

Collectively, such measures aim not at abrupt eradication—which risks backlash—but at the gradual institutional substitution of the Kanun by a legitimate, inclusive, and rights-based rule of law.

In societies where formal legal systems are perceived as ineffective or corrupt, individuals may resort to traditional norms and practices, such as those codified in the Kanun, to resolve conflicts and restore honor.

To transform these entrenched systems, the statement highlights the necessity for research that is both locally grounded and theoretically rigorous. This dual approach ensures that any proposed changes are relevant to the specific cultural context while also being informed by broader theoretical frameworks.

Future studies are encouraged to bridge multiple disciplines—such as anthropology, law, gender studies,

and behavioral sciences—to create evidence-based and culturally sensitive models of norm change. This interdisciplinary approach is crucial for understanding the complexities of honor and revenge in Albanian society and for developing effective policy interventions.

By focusing on culturally sensitive models, researchers can guide policy and peacebuilding efforts in northern Albania and similar contexts worldwide. This means that any interventions should respect local customs and values while promoting human rights and social justice, ultimately leading to a more equitable society.

In summary, the extent to which you managed to address this topic involves recognizing the adaptive nature of honor and revenge systems, the need for interdisciplinary research, and the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in transforming these systems for positive societal change.

Whether myth or reality, the notion of mutually inseminated Illyrian tribes captures both the ancient imagination and the modern fascination with Balkan kinship, blending genealogy, conquest, and symbolic interconnection into a single, provocative legend.

How to earn Trust between Governor and Ruled

Trust in modern states is often owed to several key factors that contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance. These factors include:

Rule of Law: A strong legal framework that is applied consistently and fairly helps build trust. When citizens believe that laws are enforced impartially and that justice is accessible, they are more likely to trust state institutions.

Transparency: Openness in government operations, decision-making processes, and financial management fosters trust. When citizens can see how decisions are made and how public funds are used, they are more likely to have confidence in their government.

Accountability: Mechanisms that hold public officials accountable for their actions are crucial. When citizens know that officials can be held responsible for misconduct or corruption, it enhances trust in the state.

Public Participation: Engaging citizens in the political process and decision-making increases trust. When people feel that their voices are heard and that they have a stake in governance, they are more likely to trust the state.

Service Delivery: The ability of the state to provide essential services—such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure—effectively and efficiently builds trust. When citizens see tangible benefits from their government, their trust in state institutions grows.

Social Cohesion: A sense of community and shared identity can enhance trust in the state. When citizens feel connected to one another and to their government, they are more likely to trust state institutions.

Crisis Response: The effectiveness of a state in responding to crises—such as natural disasters, economic downturns, or public health emergencies—can significantly impact trust. A competent and compassionate response can strengthen citizens' faith in their government.

Historical Context: The historical relationship between the state and its citizens also plays a role. Past experiences with governance, including periods of oppression or effective leadership, shape current perceptions of trust.

In summary, trust in modern states is owed to a combination of legal, institutional, and social factors that together create an environment where citizens feel secure, valued, and engaged. Building and maintaining this trust is essential for the stability and effectiveness of governance.

Further Research

First, investigate how traditional clan and kinship structures influence local governance and decision-making processes in Albania. This research could explore the legitimacy of these structures and their interaction with formal legal systems.

Second, conduct a detailed study on the gendered aspects of honor-based violence in Albania, focusing on the experiences of victims and the effectiveness of current legal frameworks in providing protection and support.

Third, examine the role of cultural heritage in shaping

contemporary Albanian identity and its implications for social cohesion and modernization efforts. This could include a comparative analysis of how cultural preservation initiatives impact community engagement and economic development.

Scenarios

First, consider a scenario where the Albanian state implements comprehensive legal reforms that recognize the Kanun as a cultural heritage while simultaneously establishing clear legal frameworks to address honor killings. In this context, the state could engage with tribal leaders to create a hybrid legal system that respects traditional norms while promoting human rights. This approach may lead to a gradual reduction in honor-based violence as community members begin to see the benefits of legal recourse over traditional retaliation.

Second, envision a situation where increased urbanization and modernization challenge the traditional tribal networks. As younger generations migrate to urban areas for education and employment, they may adopt more progressive views on gender equality and individual rights. This shift could weaken the influence of the Kanun and reduce the prevalence of honor killings, as individuals prioritize personal integrity over familial honor. However, this evolution may also lead to tensions between traditionalists and modernists, potentially resulting in conflict.

Third, imagine a scenario where the Albanian government collaborates with international organizations to implement educational programs focused on gender equality and the harmful effects of honor-based violence. By targeting both urban and rural populations, these initiatives could foster a cultural shift that redefines honor as personal integrity rather than collective retaliation. Over time, this could lead to a significant decline in honor killings and a transformation in the perception of the Kanun within society.

Fourth, consider a situation where the state faces challenges in enforcing laws against honor killings due to the strong influence of tribal networks. In this scenario, the government may struggle to gain the trust of local communities, leading to selective enforcement of laws. To address this, the state could adopt community policing models that involve local

kinship networks, enhancing legitimacy and cooperation. This approach may help bridge the gap between formal legal systems and traditional practices, ultimately reducing honor-based violence.

Fifth, envision a scenario where the Albanian diaspora plays a crucial role in reshaping attitudes towards the Kanun and honor killings. As diaspora communities engage in advocacy and education, they may influence perceptions of honor and gender roles among their families back home. This transnational exchange of ideas could lead to a gradual transformation in cultural norms, reducing the acceptance of honor killings and promoting a more equitable understanding of honor.

These scenarios illustrate the complex interplay between tribal networks, the Kanun, and honor killings in the context of the evolving state. Each scenario highlights potential pathways for change, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and community engagement in addressing these deeply rooted issues. Fourth, explore the factors that influence youth engagement in political processes in Albania. This research could assess the effectiveness of mentorship and civic education programs in fostering democratic values and participation among younger generations.

Fifth, analyze the potential for cross-border programs that link Albanian clans with those in Kosovo and Macedonia to enhance cultural exchange and economic cooperation. This study could evaluate existing initiatives and propose new frameworks for collaboration.

Sixth, investigate the impact of EU integration strategies on Albania's governance and institutional reforms. This research could assess how alignment with EU standards influences local practices and public trust in institutions.

Seventh, study the role of digital platforms and e-governance tools in enhancing participatory decision-making in Albania. This research could focus on how technology can bridge gaps between urban and rural communities in governance processes.

Eighth, conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in societal attitudes towards honor-based violence and gender equality over time. This research could provide insights into the effectiveness of educational and

policy interventions.

Ninth, explore interdisciplinary approaches that combine anthropology, law, and behavioral sciences to develop culturally sensitive models for conflict resolution in Albanian society, particularly in relation to blood feuds.

Tenth, analyze the economic implications of organized crime on local communities in Albania, focusing on how criminal networks affect legitimate business activities and economic development.

These research proposals aim to deepen the understanding of the complex social, cultural, and economic dynamics in Albania, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders involved in governance and development initiatives.

Counterarguments Regarding Tribal Networks, Kanun, and Honor Killing

While the challenges posed by tribal networks and the Kanun in relation to honor killings are significant, it is essential to recognize the positive aspects of tribal societies, such as loyalty, family honor, and the cultural identity they provide.

First, tribal loyalty fosters a strong sense of community and belonging. In many rural areas of Albania, kinship ties serve as a vital support system, providing social capital that can enhance resilience in the face of economic hardships. This loyalty can lead to collective action, where families and clans come together to support one another during difficult times, thereby reinforcing social cohesion.

Second, the concept of family honor, deeply rooted in tribal culture, can serve as a motivating factor for individuals to uphold ethical standards and maintain social order within their communities. While this can sometimes lead to negative outcomes, such as honor killings, it can also encourage individuals to act responsibly and protect their family's reputation through positive contributions to society.

Third, the historical context of the mountainous regions of Albania, often characterized by economic deprivation and isolation, serves as a reminder to the government of the need for balanced development strategies. The harsh realities faced by these communities highlight the importance of integrating tradi-

tional values with modern governance. By acknowledging the role of tribal structures in providing social support, the government can develop policies that respect cultural heritage while promoting economic growth and social progress.

Fourth, regional cooperation can play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by Albania. Collaborative efforts with neighboring countries can facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge, and best practices in governance and development. By engaging in regional initiatives, Albania can leverage its tribal networks to foster cross-border partnerships that enhance economic opportunities and cultural exchange.

Fifth, a realistic development trajectory must consider the unique socio-cultural landscape of Albania. Policymakers should aim to create inclusive programs that empower local communities while respecting their traditions. This approach can help bridge the gap between modernity and tradition, ensuring that development initiatives are culturally sensitive and effective in addressing the needs of the population.

In summary, while the issues surrounding tribal networks and honor killings present significant challenges, it is crucial to recognize the positive aspects of loyalty, family honor, and the cultural identity that tribal societies provide. By balancing these values with realistic development trajectories and fostering regional cooperation, the Albanian government can work towards a more prosperous and equitable future for its citizens.

Policy recommendations

Governance and Institutional Reform:

Albania should strengthen rule of law, judicial independence, and meritocratic civil service. Reducing bureaucratic inertia and informal patronage is essential, alongside civic education programs to rebuild public trust.

Security and Strategic Orientation:

Albania should consolidate NATO and EU security engagements while cultivating proactive, outward-looking strategic planning. Balancing sovereignty with openness to regional and international partnerships is crucial.

Economic Modernization:

Investments in digital infrastructure, transport, energy, and industrial modernization are critical. Attracting foreign direct investment and integrating into EU markets will stimulate innovation, competitiveness, and regional equity.

Social and Cultural Reconciliation:

Promoting civic engagement, religious pluralism, and cultural revitalization can bridge historical alienation. Education and youth programs are central to fostering social cohesion.

EU Integration and Political Maturity

Aligning legal and administrative frameworks with EU standards requires transparency, accountability, and generational engagement. Mentorship, youth-led programs, and inclusive policymaking can accelerate political maturity and democratic norms.

Comparative Policy Note

Countries like Poland and Hungary faced post-communist democratic consolidation challenges but leveraged EU frameworks effectively. Albania can adapt these lessons, particularly in civic engagement and institutional reform, while addressing its unique isolationist past.

Perspective

The persistence of clan and kinship structures in Albania, particularly among Gheg communities in the north and in cross-border regions of Kosovo and Western Macedonia, presents both challenges and opportunities for governance, development, and social cohesion. Effective policy formulation must acknowledge the historical and social significance of the *fis* system while integrating modern legal and institutional frameworks. One critical area for intervention is governance. Traditional leadership structures, including village elders and tribal councils, possess substantial legitimacy in local communities. Incorporating these figures into municipal decision-making and consultative processes can strengthen local governance, enhance trust in public institutions, and facilitate conflict resolution. Programs that encourage inter-clan dialogue and mediation are essential, especially in regions where the practice of blood feuds, or *gjakmarrja*, persists. Establishing community mediation centers staffed with trained facilitators who understand both customary law and state

law can significantly reduce inter-clan tensions and promote long-term stability.

Economic development policies can also benefit from a nuanced understanding of kinship networks. Extended-family and clan-based structures often function as informal economic units, providing social capital, labor coordination, and trust-based networks. Microfinance initiatives and cooperative development programs that target these kinship groups can harness existing social cohesion to foster entrepreneurship and cross-clan economic collaboration. At the same time, infrastructure and public services should be prioritized in tribal regions, with considerations for the dispersed and often remote nature of these settlements. Mobile healthcare, education, and administrative services that are culturally attuned to local kinship dynamics can ensure equitable access and promote social integration.

Legal and security frameworks must balance respect for customary law with the enforcement of national legal standards. Recognizing elements of the *Kanun* in civil matters such as inheritance and property disputes, while discouraging violent practices through legal incentives and education, allows communities to maintain cultural continuity without undermining rule of law. Community policing models that engage local kinship networks can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness, as officers recruited from within the clans are more likely to gain trust and cooperation.

Cultural preservation is another important dimension of policy. Documenting clan histories, oral traditions, and regional customs through local cultural centers and museums not only safeguards heritage but also contributes to civic identity and intergenerational understanding. Cross-border programs linking Albanian clans in Kosovo, Macedonia, and northern Albania can strengthen cultural exchange and economic cooperation. Finally, youth engagement is critical for the long-term adaptation of traditional kinship structures to modern society. Education programs that integrate civic responsibility, negotiation, and mediation skills within the context of traditional kinship, combined with mentorship and collaborative community projects, can reduce intergenerational conflicts and prepare younger generations to navigate both local and national institutions effectively.

In conclusion, policies addressing Albanian clan and kinship structures must adopt a multidimensional approach that leverages traditional social cohesion while promoting legal conformity, economic development, cultural preservation, and youth engagement. By respecting the legitimacy of historical structures while introducing modern governance and development mechanisms, such policies can transform kinship networks from potential sources of conflict into active instruments of social stability and sustainable development [18-53].

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Appendix

I hereby denounce Vlora Hyseni (and possible Vasil Kalluci) for alleged actions and/ or complicity in a US led false flag operation under the apparent responsibility of Claire Bennet, an associate editor in Las Vegas for the Journal for Development & Global Market , in and around of Gjirokaster Friends Hotel involving divisive and identitarian tactics, An australian pigeon insinuating opportunistic behavior prejudicing my legal interests in cooperation with Ai manipulation under the editorial revisions process on a piece on Caucasus, in collusion with one or more intel services, and as a follow up by PET preparing the ground though indiscretions and strategic leakages of innuendo in an attempt to play me out against Salma BA, the second daughter of King Abdullah, with whom I chat on Zangi and is a confidante.

Subsequently attempts were made to cover the tracks in the pussies of unfucked villages heteres, manipulating images by Alhusein, a customer, and followed up with creative if transparent attempts to divert, appropriate and distort the truth with criminal intent and for the sake of putting the lokalniks trunk into the public coffers of the EU in cooperation with unsalubrious and sinister citizens form the Albanian underworld, son of whores and acting like dogs barking at their own shadow.

I request the arrest of the Danish and Albanian female blonde agents involved in strategic leakages of innuendo and stungrenade throwing street wise for the purpose of

covering up statecrime and systematic chicanery, taking note that participation and cooperation with foreign intelligence services illicit activities disabusing Albania as a site for laundry machine of the rodden state of Denmark dirty underwear may constitute a crime under both EU and Albanian law.

It is an aggravating circumstance that the manager of Friends Hostel, motivated by a quasi dysfunctional marriage and the situation in Grijokaster Satrap, indulges in opportunistic overcharging, while Claire Bennett allegedly is motivated by interest in a good launching path for the newbie journal as part and parcel of this incoherent combi crime in order to get the better of me2035-40.

AI as a Means of Access: If someone uses AI to find vulnerabilities, automate intrusion, or bypass security, that could be prosecuted under **Article 192/b** (unauthorized access).

AI to Alter or Fabricate Data: AI could be used to generate or alter data (e.g., fabricating messages, faking metadata) — this could fall under **Art. 293/b** (data interference) or **Art. 143/b** (fraud) if linked to deception or financial/ reputational harm.

AI for Disinformation Campaigns: If the AI is used to create false or manipulative content strategically, combining with “innocent” or “plausible” data to mislead, this could trigger fraud charges (Art. 143/b), especially if there's economic or reputational damage.

Provision of AI Tools: If someone creates or distributes software (or AI models) specifically designed to break into systems, spread false content, or manipulate data, **Art. 293/ç** might apply.

Attacks on Critical Systems: If manipulation via AI includes interference with critical infrastructure (e.g., public order systems, health systems, national-security-related data), **Art. 293/a-c** could be invoked with harsher penalties (because of the “public importance” aggravating factor).

Confer also with the Albanian penal code article 208-209, 217-218.

AI Manipulation and Innuendo: Analytical Paragraphs

AI-Assisted Manipulation Tactics

AI-enabled manipulation refers to the deliberate use

of algorithmic tools, machine-learning systems, or automated content-generation mechanisms to influence an individual's perceptions, emotional responses, or decision-making processes without their informed consent. Such manipulation can involve micro-targeted messaging, tailored suggestions, or subtle narrative reinforcement designed to steer a person toward a predetermined conclusion. In more sophisticated scenarios, AI systems may simulate patterns of human behaviour, imitate communication styles, or insert contextual cues that appear organic but are strategically calibrated to shape interpretation. When deployed in sensitive environments—political, personal, or security-related—these tactics can distort situational awareness, erode trust, and create false impressions of risk, conflict, or obligation.

Innuendo as a Psychological Instrument

Innuendo functions as an indirect method of influence, relying on suggestive or ambiguous statements that imply wrongdoing, threat, or hidden meaning without offering direct evidence. Used systematically, innuendo can implant doubt, provoke self-censorship, or generate artificial tension between individuals or groups. In intelligence or disinformation settings, innuendo may be employed to create false associations, to insinuate personal or political disloyalty, or to trigger emotional reactions that overshadow rational assessment. The combination of vague implications and strategic ambiguity often prevents the target from directly contesting the narrative, thereby increasing psychological pressure.

Convergence of AI Manipulation and Innuendo

When AI-based systems are coupled with innuendo-driven communication, the resulting dynamic can amplify the destabilizing effect far beyond traditional influence operations. Automated analysis can identify the target's vulnerabilities, emotional triggers, or interpersonal relationships, enabling tailored innuendo that appears coincidental or spontaneous. This fusion allows actors to simulate patterns of “organic” social feedback, construct manufactured interpretations of events, or suggest hidden motives through subtle linguistic nudges. The outcome is a sophisticated form of psychological shaping that blurs the line between external manipulation and the target's own inference-making process.

Impact on Perception, Autonomy, and Security

AI-supported innuendo can undermine an individual's autonomy by creating uncertainty about the intentions of others, the reliability of information sources, or the meaning

of ordinary events. In more severe cases, it may be used to engineer conflict between parties, redirect attention away from actual threats, or fabricate the appearance of illicit activity. Such tactics can impair judgement, provoke defensive behaviour, or isolate the target socially and politically. From a state security perspective, this form of manipulation—particularly when coordinated or transnational—can contribute to destabilization, sow mistrust in institutions, and interfere with legitimate communication channels.

Thresholds Relevant to Legal or Institutional Scrutiny

While AI manipulation and innuendo are not crimes by themselves, certain behaviours derived from them may trigger legal or institutional scrutiny when they intersect with prohibited acts such as unauthorized surveillance, intimidation, dissemination of false information with harmful intent, interference with official duties, or collaboration with foreign actors in ways that threaten sovereignty or personal rights. Establishing intent, identifying the mechanism of influence, and demonstrating the harmful effect on decision-making or security structures become key factors in determining whether further investigation or legal measures are justified.



Human trafficking involving abuse of power for pecuniary sake in the interest of cover up of crimes is a triple crime and can be persecuted under the law in conjunction.

Reprimand And Official Warning to Chief of Shish

I hereby issue a formal reprimand and official warning to Ismail Huseyn, Chief of SHISH, concerning serious errors of judgment and actions that constitute an abuse of authority bordering on treason of Albania at the behest of self-interested scoundrels in Denmark wishing to straw pebber in the tracks and engage in projections of their narcissistic mindset and enrolling SHISH in their holy fear for violent consequences of their state crimes, negligence of duty, abuse of power.

The matters at issue include:

- Authorization of operations based on misleading intelligence from external sources.
- Engagement in systematic practices that amount to abuse of power during the relevant period.
- Failure to recognize and respect the loyalty, skills, and networks of individuals whose interests were aligned with national priorities, including matters of territorial development and regional stability.

Such conduct is incompatible with the standards of governance expected under national law, European Union principles, and international human rights obligations. It undermines institutional credibility and risks damaging national interests.

You are hereby instructed to take immediate corrective measures, including:

- A comprehensive review of operational practices.
- Disclosure of external influences and accountability for decision making processes.
- Alignment of future actions with national interests and European standards of governance.

Failure to comply with these expectations will result in further disciplinary or legal consequences. This reprimand will remain on record until corrective action has been verified.

Under these circumstances I pledge to make my influence felt for the deferral of Albania's bid for EU membership in 2030, and ask for acquittal of Ismail Huseyn and the involved agents, pedarast with an Identity problem combined with a commission into the working and legal frameworks and gathering methods of SHISH.

I declare my non-confidence in the Minister of Interior for dereliction of duty in overseeing the work of SHISH, until an unreserved apology is forthcoming from the Albanian authorities.

I expect full cooperation of the new leadership with any upcoming trial against the rodden state of Denmark, and the teaching of tactics to counter traitors and right wing cliques inside the state apparatus.

And fear not: we are building a state upon Europe — a state rooted in unity, strengthened by justice, and guided by the shared destiny of its peoples.

HOPA – Human Trafficking is a grave crime and comes at a price

Legal Concerns

Alleged Acts (Neutral Categorization)

- Manipulation or non-investigation of violent incidents
- Facilitation of false flag operations
- Unauthorized tracking of phone and electronic communications (eavesdropping, email access)
- Deployment of surveillance without judicial authorization
- Attempted corruption or abuse of office
- Violation of privacy and personal data protection
- Conduct involving defamation or degrading portrayal (posing with false identity)
- Systematic cover-up of misconduct

Relevant Legal Frameworks**Albanian National Law**

- Penal Code Article 221: Prohibits surveillance without judicial authorization.
- Articles 248–260: Abuse of office and corruption.
- Articles on Privacy Violations: Illegal interception of communications, violation of correspondence.
- Defamation provisions: Criminal liability for degrading or false portrayal.

European Law

- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- Article 8: Right to respect for private and family life, home, and correspondence.
- Article 6: Right to a fair trial (compromised by unlawful surveillance).
- Article 10: Freedom of expression (potentially impacted by intimidation or manipulation).
- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Article 7: Respect for private life.
- Article 8: Protection of personal data.
- Article 11: Freedom of expression and information.

International Law

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- Article 17: Protection against arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence.
- Article 19: Freedom of expression.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- Article 12: Protection against attacks on honor and reputation.

Adjudication and Punishment (General in Albania)

- Illegal surveillance/eavesdropping: Criminal liability, fines, and imprisonment (depending on severity).
- Abuse of office/corruption: Criminal prosecution,

dismissal from office, imprisonment, and fines.

- Violation of privacy/data protection: Civil damages, administrative sanctions, and criminal penalties.
- Defamation/false portrayal: Civil liability (damages) and possible criminal sanctions.
- Cover-up or obstruction of justice: Criminal liability for obstruction, with imprisonment possible.

Policy Assessment

If substantiated, these acts would undermine Albania's obligations under EU accession criteria and international human rights law. They would compromise governance credibility and risk positioning institutions as obstacles in the European context. A comprehensive clean-up and transparent oversight mechanisms would be necessary to restore trust.

This memorandum examines alleged misconduct attributed to the Albanian intelligence services (SHISH) in relation to surveillance, privacy violations, and misuse of authority. The reported practices—ranging from unauthorized electronic monitoring to manipulation of investigative processes—raise serious concerns under both domestic and international law.

Under Albanian law, Article 221 of the Penal Code prohibits surveillance without judicial authorization, while broader provisions criminalize corruption and abuse of office. At the European level, the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 8) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Articles 7 and 8) enshrine the right to privacy and data protection. Internationally, the ICCPR (Article 17) similarly prohibits arbitrary interference with private life.

Taken together, these frameworks underscore the incompatibility of such practices with Albania's obligations as a European partner. Unless comprehensive reforms and accountability mechanisms are implemented, the credibility of SHISH within the European context remains compromised. This dossier therefore calls for a systematic review, disclosure of external influences, and corrective measures to restore trust in governance and align Albania with European standards.

Reports of surveillance, manipulation of investigations, and privacy violations attributed to Albanian intelligence services raise serious concerns about legality, accountability, and compliance with European standards. These practices, if substantiated, undermine both domestic rule of law and Albania's credibility in its European integration trajectory. Relevant Legal Frameworks Potentially Violated

International Law

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 17: protection against arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence.

ICCPR, Article 19: freedom of expression and access to information.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 12: protection against attacks on honor and reputation.

European Law

- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Article 8: right to respect for private and family life, home, and correspondence.
- ECHR, Article 6: right to a fair trial (potentially undermined by unlawful surveillance).
- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Articles 7 and 8: respect for private life and protection of personal data.
- U Charter, Article 11: freedom of expression and information.

National Law (Albania)

- Albanian Penal Code, Article 221: prohibition of surveillance without judicial authorization.
- Provisions on abuse of office and corruption (Articles 248–260).
- Provisions on violation of privacy and illegal interception of communications.

Assessment The alleged practices—unauthorized electronic monitoring, manipulation of investigations, and misuse of authority—are incompatible with Albania’s obligations under international and European law. They erode public trust, compromise democratic governance, and risk positioning national institutions as obstacles rather than partners in the European project.

Conclusion Until comprehensive reforms and accountability mechanisms are implemented, Albanian intelligence services risk being perceived as a “red herring” in the European context. A systematic clean up, disclosure of external influences, and transparent oversight are necessary to restore credibility and align Albania with European standards of governance and human rights.