Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM)
Progress Report 2014–15: Albania

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Open Government Partnership

Executive Summary: Albania

Albania has made progress in implementing commitments involving direct citizen participation in the fight against corruption. For the next action plan, successful models of citizen complaint can be strengthened and expanded to new areas of government activity. Judicial reform and political party financing are especially important.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry, to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Albania began participating in OGP in September, 2011. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out a biannual review of the activities of each OGP participating country.

The Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration (MSIPA) is the lead institution coordinating OGP in Albania. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IWG), lead by MSIPA, is responsible for the development and implementation of the action plan (AP). Its membership is limited to representatives of government agencies. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are not included.

OGP Process

Countries participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan and during implementation.

Compared to the previous action plan cycle, the process of Albania's second OGP Action Plan development has demonstrated significant improvement. The CSO Coalition for OGP Albania formed in December 2013, assuming the leading role in holding participatory consultations. The CSO Coalition organized a conference with the government on 28 March, 2014, which was used as a forum for consultations with CSOs. From April to June 2014, MSIPA also launched an online consultation and held several individual in-person meetings with various CSOs. However, the consultation meetings were held only in Tirana. Summaries of consultative events and the 25 recommendations presented by CSOs have been published online.

During the action plan implementation, MSIPA maintained an open channel of communication and exchange with interested CSOs. Government-to-government meetings remain closed; civil society organizations have not been invited to IWG's meetings, and no regular meetings with CSOs have taken place.

The government published the midterm self-assessment report on 13 October, 2015.

At a Glance:	
Member since:	2011
Number of commitments:	13
Level of Completion:	
Completed:	0% (0)
Substantial:	38% (5)
Limited:	54% (7)
Not started:	8% (1)
Timing:	
On schedule:	62% (8)
Ahead of schedule:	31% (4)
Behind schedule:	8% (1)
Commitment Emphasis:	
Access to information:	54% (7)
Civic participation:	8% (1)
Public accountability:	23% (3)
Tech & innovation for transparency & accountability:	46% (6)
Commitments that Are:	
Clearly relevant to an OGP value:	69%(9)
Of transformative potential impact:	8% (1)
Substantially or completely implemented:	38% (5)
All three (⊛):	0

Commitment Implementation

As part of OGP participation, countries make commitments in a two-year action plan. The Albania action plan contains thirteen commitments. The following tables summarize for each commitment the level of completion, potential impact, whether it falls within Albania's planned schedule and the key next steps for the commitment in future OGP action plans. Similar commitments have been grouped and re-ordered in order to make reading easier.

The IRM method includes starred commitments. These commitments are measurable, clearly relevant to OGP values as written, of transformative potential impact, and substantially or completely implemented. The Albania action plan contains no starred commitments. Note that the IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015 in order to raise the bar for model OGP commitments. The old criteria included commitments that have moderate potential impact. Under the old criteria, Albania would have received 4 starred commitments (Commitments 4.2, 1.1, 1.3, 3.3). See (bit.ly/1n6xNHB) for more information.

Table 1: Assessment of Progress by Commitment

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME ✪COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING
	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE	
1.2 Electronic registry of energy and industry permits	■	■	■		■	■			On Schedule
1.4 Promoting OGP values with local authorities	■				■				Behind Schedule
2.1 Database on economic assistance beneficiaries	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
3.2 National Geoportal	■	■	■		■	■			On Schedule
3.2.1 Data collection	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
3.2.2 ToRs for software and hardware	■	■			■	■			On Schedule
3.2.3 Data model preparation	■	■	■		■				On Schedule
3.3.4 Preliminary Geoportal website	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	On Schedule
3.3.5 New Geospatial information	■	■	■		■				On Schedule
4.2 Police Service Offices	■	■	■		■	■	■		Ahead of Schedule
4.2.1 Establish "Open Stop Shop"	■	■	■		■	■	■		Ahead of Schedule
4.2.2 Electronic registration of citizens' requests	■	■	■		■	■			On Schedule
Cluster 1: Denouncing Corruption									
1.1 Standardization of corrupton complaints	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
4.1 Whistleblower protection law	■	■	■	■	■	■			Behind Schedule

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING
✪ COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE	
Cluster 2: Open data & e-services									
1.3 Public expenses in open data	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
3.3 E-Albania	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
Cluster 3: Open access on natural resources data									
2.2 Electronic portal on water resources management	■	■	■		■	■			Behind Schedule
3.1 Electronic access to protected areas	■	■	■		■	■			Behind Schedule
Cluster 4: Simplified Customs services									
2.3 Single Window	■	■			■	■			On Schedule
3.4 E-document	■				■	■			On Schedule

Table 2: Summary of Progress by Commitment

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
1.2 Electronic registry of energy and industry permits • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	Creation of the electronic register for concessions is a major step forward, reflecting civil society calls to provide transparency on the companies operating in the extractive industry. The commitment is partly implemented. The inception phase of the project was completed, and the Ministry of Energy and Industry is currently working on the establishment of the Concession Monitoring and Information System. Additional bylaws regulating the electronic register are not adopted. Implementation could be aided by better coordination between the Ministry of Energy and Industry, Ministry of Economy, the Agency of Concessions and its private sector associations, and those CSOs with expertise in monitoring concession processes through similar websites. In addition, it would be useful if the register publishes more detailed data on the activities of companies operating in the extractive sector.
1.4 Promote OGP values with local authorities • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: None • Completion: Not started	This commitment aims to promote OGP values among local governments but falls short of outlining specific activities and targets. Interviewees agreed on the need for more accountability on a municipal level, but the local government units (LGUs) or associations were not involved in drafting this commitment. Neither the MSIPA nor CSOs have taken any steps. In the next action plan, the commitment could link better with the newly adopted Decentralization Strategy (which makes reference to the OGP) and the upcoming legislation in this area. In addition, the commitment could define specific best practices to be established and replicated among LGUs. For this purpose, the government needs to ensure active involvement of LGUs in the development of the next action plan.
2.1 Database on economic assistance beneficiaries • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	Establishment of the national database on recipients of economic aid is an important government reform. The register will contain datasets on the number of beneficiaries, financial resources, and geographic concentration. However, they are not to be made publicly available, which diminishes the relevance to OGP values. The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) and the State Social Services are currently monitoring implementation of the system in three pilot regions, are expanding the system's interlinks with other governmental databases, and are including additional modules, such as the electronic register for people with disabilities. The database is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2016. Stakeholders believe that opening many of these datasets would improve accountability in distribution of social welfare and better-informed policymaking.

3.2 National Geoportal • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	This commitment aims to provide public access to geospatial information through the upgraded national geoportal, which is already developed and managed by the State Authority for Geospatial Information (SAGI). In 2015, SAGI has populated the existing portal with new data, including information from education institutions, roads, protected areas, and topographic maps. A new version is being developed to satisfy the standards of the European Commission directive (INSPIRE) on establishing the infrastructure for spatial information. It will include the "download" option and contemporary standards for uploaded metadata. Adequate coordination with other state institutions as well as a relevant strategic planning and monitoring framework will be necessary for effective completion. CSOs further note the need to inform the public about information and services available on the Geoportal.
4.2 Police Service Offices • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	Police Service Offices are designed to serve as a one-stop point of citizen access to unified police services. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Albanian State Police (ASP) established one-stop shops in most of the police regional directorates and police commissariats in the country. These offices are required to inform citizens on police services, accept citizens' applications, and process complaints. The application for electronic registration of citizens' complaints has been developed and tested for some of the services, but additional investments are needed for full installation in all offices. MoI and ASP have also launched the "Digital Commissariat" mobile application, allowing citizens to proactively report corruption and other illegal activities, recording an average of nearly 5,500 citizens' reports per month.
1.1 Standardization of corrupton complaints • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	This commitment seeks to create an effective and easy-to-use mechanism for citizens making corruption complaints. The anti-corruption portal (stopkorrrupsionit.al) launched in February 2015, allows citizens to submit corruption complaints online and upload supporting evidence (i.e., photos, videos and other documents). Citizens can choose to disclose their identity or submit claims anonymously. A submitted complaint is automatically channeled to the operational office and is handled through an issue tracking system. Since February, more than 7,000 reports have been submitted to the portal, the largest number of them related to education, healthcare, police, and the judiciary. The portal should be further promoted to the public. It should include a means of providing user feedback, and publishing the outcomes of complaints.

4.1. Whistleblower protection law • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Transformative • Completion: Limited	The draft law sets out the rules to protect whistleblowers in the public and private sectors. The deadline for adopting the draft has been postponed twice and it is now expected to conclude by the end of 2016. Two large-scale consultation meetings were organized with civil society, private sector, state agencies, and foreign experts. According to CSOs, the consultation for drafting this law has been inclusive. At the time of writing of this report, the draft law is being finalized by the Ministry of Justice. Stakeholders interviewed recommend that the draft law be adopted as soon as possible to allow timely preparations for its implementation.
1.3. Public expenses in open data • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	The public expenses module encourages transparency of governmental spending through displaying public expenditures in an open data format. The module for open budgetary data was launched in late 2014 on the Council of Ministers website. It offers information on government spending from 1 January, 2015. However, the module does not meet the Five-Star Open Data Standard, as visitors can only access the visualized information for the government or a specific ministry according to a total of 11 categories of expenditures. Interviewed stakeholders did not find the module helpful and noted that they use other websites that provide the opportunity to reuse published data. The module should be redesigned to meet open data standards.
3.3 E-Albania • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	E-Albania is a portal where citizens both can access information and can receive e-services offered by state institutions. Over the past year, the e-Albania portal has increased the number of offered services. However, the majority of them only provide information and guidance on various public services. E-Matura, an online tool used by high school students to apply to public universities, is likely the most used module of the portal. With more investment in public awareness and stronger public accountability elements (i.e., complaint mechanisms) the portal could have a major impact. Interviewed stakeholders raised concerns on the quality of services currently offered and recommend carrying out an audit of most- and least-used services so that the portal can better respond to citizens' needs.
2.2. Electronic Portal on Water Resources management • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	The creation of the Water Resources Administration and Management portal is mandated by law. At the time the action plan was adopted, the Ministry of Environment (MoE) hosted an online national register of authorizations issued for the use of water resources. This commitment envisions the national strategy of integrated water management, development of the water cadastre and the portal. During the first year of implementing the action plan, authority for development of the portal was transferred from the Ministry of Environment to the Ministry of Agriculture, and implementation so far has been limited. The development of the strategy and the cadastrer is still underway. The electronic portal is at an early preparatory stage, as its progress depends on the development of the water cadastrer.
3.1 Electronic access to protected areas • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	A database of the protected areas network has been available online at the MoE's website since July 2014. The development of this portal is entrusted to the National Agency of Protected Areas and Regional Administrations of Protected Areas which was established in February 2015. The portal is at an early developmental stage. The portal will provide detailed information on every protected area including plans, activity, flora and fauna.

	Both commitments are highly relevant to OGP values and are in line with civil society recommendations to improve transparency and open access on natural resources data. Considering the timeline of the donor-funded projects supporting these initiatives, the implementation is likely to take longer, stretching beyond the current action plan cycle.
2.3 Single Window • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	The Single Window and E-document intend to improve customer services for operators in Albania's trade exchange system by facilitating efficient procedures for customs administration. The Single Window initiative was launched in March 2014 and was meant to provide an interconnected system (telematics network) that enables state institutions to exchange communications and files. The General Directorate of Customs has set up a working group to elaborate the project. The Single Window requires additional investments in other state institutions' ICT systems in order to enable interoperability, which could lead to further delays.
3.4. E-document • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: None • Completion: Limited	E-document is part of the Single Window and allows the real-time authenticated exchange and verification of documents. Representatives of the General Directorate of Customs report that the terms of reference for the e-Document tender have been elaborated. The National Agency of Information Society (NAIS) is tasked to open the tender procedure. Business associations express high optimism on the benefits of the initiatives and think they will significantly improve the pace of custom procedures. However, the system is set up to interconnect only with economic operators and state institutions, and there are no plans to allow wider public access. While this is an important initiative, its relevance to OGP values is unclear, as it does not make government more open.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Albania has made progress in setting more concrete commitments that increase opportunities for citizen participation in the anti-corruption initiatives. However, more could be done by mainstreaming public accountability and civic participation commitments throughout government. In particular, there is a need for commitments that promote open government approaches in developing key sectorial reforms and initiatives, including judicial reform, political party financing, and the ongoing debate on integrity of elected, high-level public officials. Based on the challenges and findings identified in this report, this section presents the principal recommendations.

Top Five SMART Recommendations
1. **Establish an ongoing multi-stakeholder forum,** and develop a comprehensive management (at least quarterly monitoring) and reporting framework for the Action Plan Implementation.
2. **Undertake more ambitious and OGP-relevant commitments that place citizens and interest groups in an interactive role** in the areas of anticorruption, fighting impunity, enhancing transparency, and accountability. The government could provide more opportunities to direct citizen input and monitoring, building on the models of corruption denouncing portal and digital commissariats.
3. **Promote open government approaches in developing key sectorial reforms and initiatives**, including judicial reform, political party financing, and the ongoing debate on the integrity of elected and high-level public officials.
4. **Civil society must take stock of the OGP process** and better streamline OGP content in its agenda.
5. **Dedicate a specific budget and human resources to the National Coordinator** who deals with the OGP Action Plan development, implementation and monitoring, as well as national promotion of Albania's OGP Agenda with the public, interested stakeholders, public administration and the community of donors.

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) assesses development and implementation of national action plans to foster dialogue among

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I. National Participation in OGP

History of OGP participation

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP provides an international forum for dialogue and sharing among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government.

Albania began its formal participation in August 2011, when the Minister for Innovation and Information and Communications Technology, Genc Pollo, declared his country's intention to participate in the initiative (Link to Letter: http://bit.ly/1PbFgMh).

In order to participate in OGP, governments must exhibit a demonstrated commitment to open government by meeting a set of minimum performance criteria on key dimensions of open government that are particularly consequential for increasing government responsiveness, strengthening citizen engagement, and fighting corruption. Objective, third-party indicators are used to determine the extent of country progress on each of the dimensions. See Section IX: Eligibility Requirements for more details.

All OGP-participating governments develop action plans that elaborate concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Action plans should set out governments' OGP commitments, which move government practice beyond its current baseline. These commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

Albania developed its second National Action Plan from January to June 2014. The effective period of implementation for the action plan submitted in June was officially July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2016. This mid-term progress report covers the first year of implementation of this period, from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015. The self-assessment report of the government was published on October 13, 2015, allowing for a two-week public comment period.

In order to meet OGP requirements, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) of OGP has partnered with Gjergji Vurmo of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), who carried out this evaluation of the development and implementation of Albania's second action plan. It is the aim of the IRM to inform ongoing dialogue around development and implementation of future commitments in each OGP participating country. Methods and sources are dealt with in a methodological annex in this report.

Basic institutional context

While the institutional context for OGP in Albania has improved, basic issues of capacity, stability, and mandate to consult with civil society have limited the influence of OGP and the involvement of civil society organizations.

The Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration (MSIPA) is the leading office responsible for implementing Albania's OGP commitments 2014–16. Under the new government formed after June 2013 general elections, MSIPA replaced the Ministry for Innovation, Information, and Communications Technology of the previous cabinet (Council of Ministers) and assumed the role of the National Coordinator for OGP Albania. As a Minister of State, who is the National OGP Coordinator has limited human resources while its funding is planned under the Prime Minister's (PM's) budget which is not the case with a "typical" ministry. As a result, OGP coordinator has limited funds and small staff.

The Interministerial Working Group, the Technical Working Group, and the Technical Secretariat established by the previous government were replaced in February 2014.[1]

Based on the PM's Order no. 37 (5 February, 2015), MSIPA established a Technical Working Group (TWG) with representatives (i.e., experts, specialists, directors) proposed by each participating institution. A Technical Secretariat, composed of MSIPA and NAIS representatives, has provided technical support to the Interinstitutional Working Group on OGP and has acted as a focal point for coordinating and reporting on progress..

The first meeting of IWG was held on 7 March, 2014. According to the PM's order, the IWG comprises all government ministries and a few government agencies, such as the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS), Customs, the State Inspectorate and the Public Procurement Commission. This has limited the extent and depth of OGP-related exchange among all state institutions not only at the executive level but also among other branches of power.

Although the PM's order stipulates that representatives from civil society and other state agencies may participate in IWG's meetings, civil society has not been invited. CSOs have not attended TWG's meetings and no regular meetings with CSOs have taken place during the action plan implementation. MSIPA representatives maintained an open channel of communication and exchange with interested CSOs.

Lack of sufficient financial and human resources at MSIPA have affected the OGP process in Albania. In additional to OGP, MSIPA's mandate covers innovation and public administration, the latter being one of the most challenging reforms in the country.

The Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS) has supported participation and consultation in the country. A PASOS-led regional project, Advocacy for Open Government, funded by the European Union specifically assisted the consultation process with civil society.[2]

Despite the improvement of the OGP consultation process for drafting the Action Plan as compared to the first year (2012–13), MSIPA's limitations, including those stemming from its place under the Minister of State, have not allowed for a full-fledged institutional system of OGP implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

Methodological note

The IRM partners with experienced, independent national researchers to author and disseminate reports for each OGP-participating government. In Albania, the IRM partnered with Gjergji Vurmo, who reviewed the government's self-assessment report, gathered the views of civil society, and interviewed appropriate government officials and other stakeholders. OGP staff and a panel of experts reviewed the report.

This report covers the first year of implementation of Albania's second action plan, from 1 July, 2014 to 30 June, 2015. This report follows an earlier review of OGP performance, "Albania Progress Report 2012–13," which covered the development of the first action plan as well as implementation from 1 July, 2012 to 30 June, 2013.

To gather the voices of multiple stakeholders, the IRM Researcher organized a stakeholder forum in Tirana, which was conducted according to a focus group model. The IRM Researcher for Albania also reviewed two key documents prepared by the government: a report on Albania's second action plan[3] and the self-assessment published by the government in October 2015.[4] Numerous references are made to these documents throughout this report.

Summaries of these forums and more detailed explanations are given in the Annex.

1 Prime Minister's Order no. 37, 5 February, 2015 on the Establishment of the Inter-institutional working group on the development and implementation of the Action Plan Open Government Partnership 2014–16.

2 Advocacy for Open Government: Civil Society agenda-setting and monitoring of country action plans, accessible at bit.ly/1RvZZPp

3 Government of Albania, Second National OGP Action Plan 2014 –16, accessible at bit.ly/1ZQte2a.

4 Albania Mid-term Self-Assessment, 13 October, 2015,accessible at bit.ly/1RmcXB5

II. Process: Action Plan Development

The process of developing Albania's second OGP Action Plan (2014–16) was more inclusive than the first Action Plan (2012–13). Cooperation between civil society groups and the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration (MSIPA) has improved. However, consultations and informing actions remained centered in the capital. The involvement of state institutions was limited to central government and a few agencies within the Executive. Some recommendations of civil society were taken into account by MSIPA.

Countries participating in OGP follow a set process for consultation during the development of their OGP action plan. According to the OGP Articles of Governance, countries must:

- Make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (online at minimum) prior to the consultation
- Consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector; seek out a diverse range of views and; make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions available online
- Undertake OGP awareness raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation
- Consult the population with sufficient forewarning and through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.

A fifth requirement, during consultation, is set out in the OGP Articles of Governance. This requirement is dealt with in the section "III: Consultation during implementation":

- Countries are to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one.

This is dealt with in the next section, but evidence for consultation both before and during implementation is included here and in Table 1 for ease of reference.

Table 1: Action Plan Consultation Process

Phase of Action Plan	OGP Process Requirement (Articles of Governance Section)	Did the government meet this requirement?
During Development	Were timeline and process available prior to consultation?	No
	Was the timeline available online?	Yes
	Was the timeline available through other channels?	No
	Provide any links to the timeline.	bit.ly/1TESrtu
	Was there advance notice of the consultation?	Yes
	How many days of advance notice were provided?	17
	Was this notice adequate?	No (see narrative)

	Did the government carry out awareness-raising activities?	No
	Were consultations held online?	Yes
	Provide any links to online consultations.	bit.ly/1CJic7z bit.ly/1gDxSiJ
	Were in-person consultations held?	Yes
	Was a summary of comments provided?	Yes
	Provide any links to summary of comments.	bit.ly/1O6IW1L
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	Open
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.[1]	Consult
During Implementation	Was there a regular forum for consultation during implementation?	No
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	N/A
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.	N/A

Advance notice and awareness-raising

The Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration (MSIPA) published an invitation for public consultations on its website on 11 April, 2014. Interested parties could submit their comments by 28 April, 2014 (with 17 days' advance notice). However, the consultations had already started a month earlier, in March , with the initiative of the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). The latter had circulated an invitation to Albanian CSOs to participate in consultations at a national conference on 28 March, which was coordinated with MSIPA and other players such as PASOS, the CSOs Coalition for OGP Albania, an EU delegation, the US embassy in Tirana, and United Nations Development Programme Albania.

MSIPA has made full use of promotional activities conducted by the CSO Coalition for OGP Albania.[2] The Coalition was launched on 5 December, 2013, at a conference organized jointly with MSIPA, gathering civil society, government, donor and other stakeholders committed to improve the OGP Albania process.[3] The conference was held in connection with "Advocacy for Open Government: Civil society agenda-setting and monitoring of country action plan," an EU-funded PASOS project to encourage governments in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia to become more transparent. The CSO coalition established by this project has encouraged and supported Albania's OGP National Coordinator (MSIPA) to broaden the consultations on the AP. Under the same project, the 28 March, 2014 national conference was co-organized with MSIPA, introducing Albanian stakeholders to the OGP experience of Western Balkan countries.[4] Civil Society and governmental representatives discussed possible commitments for OGP Albania. Albanian CSOs presented a list of 25 proposals was presented to MSIPA.[5] In addition to the recommendations of the March Conference, MSIPA had been receiving comments on the new action plan until early June 2014.

No awareness raising campaign was organized by MSIPA or CSOs.

Depth and breadth of consultation

Compared to the previous action plan cycle, the process of developing Albania's second OGP Action Plan demonstrated significant improvement. Civil Society assumed the leading role in holding participatory consultations for the action plan.

The OGP National Coordinator, MSIPA, was highly cooperative with civic stakeholders and the CSO coalition for OGP Albania. MSIPA responded to the Coalition's invitation to co-organize 28 March, 2014 conference, as a forum for consultations with CSOs and for gaining experience from the region. Representatives from governmental agencies were active participants at the event. In addition, MSIPA launched an online consultation and organized another consultation event on April 28, 2014 with Albanian CSOs. From April to June 2014, several individual, in-person meetings were held at MSIPA premises with CSOs and representatives of the CSO Coalition. MSIPA has published summary of consultative events and the 25 recommendations presented by CSOs. [6] However, summary of individual submissions or in-person consultations are not published online.

The process had some shortcomings. Consultation events were held only in the capital, Tirana. MSIPA's information sessions included only central government agencies. The only information and training event outside of Tirana was organized by the CSO coalition for OGP Albania with civil society representatives, and it was held after the Action Plan had been finalized.[7] In Tirana, the coalition organized two advocacy events with CSOs and governmental representatives on 16 May (on OGP at the local level) and an OGP round table titled, "Increasing the Communication between Police and Community" on 19 May, 2014.[8] Participation of private sector representatives in these consultative events remained low.

The OGP Process in Albania could have benefited from more awareness-raising activities with central and local government institutions. Despite active participation from and adequate representation of civil society in the consultation process, CSOs claim that the adopted OGP Action Plan has included no more than one commitment on local governments proposed by the CSOs and a limited number of recommendations regarding the process, such as publication of consultations timeline. There is disagreement on the degree to which CSO recommendations have been followed. The National OGP Coordinator's Office claims that there are more commitments, which respond to CSOs' recommendations. The CSO coalition for OGP Albania issued a statement calling on the government to increase civil society input in the process.[9] Similar calls were issued via e-mail by other CSOs working on OGP issues.

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[1] "IAP2 Spectrum of Political Participation", *International Association for Public Participation*, bit.ly/1kMmlYC

[2] MSIPA's website accessible at http://bit.ly/1TESrtu. OGP Resource of the CSOs Coalition accessible at http://bit.ly/1UAihyo. IDM (Institute for Democracy and Mediation) is PASOS Project's local partner in charge of coordinating project activities in Albania. Accessed in October 2015.

[3] "Albanian OGP coalition announced at IDM Conference," PASOS website, accessible at bit.ly/1RwbJkO

[4] "PASOS project delivers Open Government recommendations to Albanian government (+video)", PASOS website, accessible at bit.ly/1OSccsA

[5] "All IDM projects," IDM website, accessible at bit.ly/1kQhCfY

[6] "Public Consultation," MPIA website, accessible at bit.ly/1CJic7z

[7] "Training on Open Government Partnership and Civil Society: Monitoring of National Action Plan 2014-2016," downloadable document accessible at bit.ly/1kQhJrG

[8] "Advocacy for Open Government: Civil Society Agenda-Setting and Monitoring of Country Action Plans," IDM website, accessible at bit.ly/1IToIfd

[9] "IDM calls on Albanian government to increase civil society input on Open Government," PASOS website, accessible at bit.ly/1OdTfBn

III. Action Plan Implementation

There is no regular multi-stakeholder forum to develop consultation on OGP implementation in Albania yet. Civil society was not involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the AP's implementation.

As part of their participation in OGP, governments commit to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one. This section summarizes that information.

Regular multi-stakeholder consultation

Despite CSOs' calls to establish a multi-stakeholder consultation forum on the OGP action plan implementation, such a mechanism has not been created. Civil society representatives interviewed by the IRM researcher argue that the lack of such forum has kept CSOs and other non-state stakeholders outside of the AP's implementation and monitoring.

MSIPA has been highly responsive to contacts and exchange with the CSO coalition for OGP Albania during the past year. However, the multi-stakeholder forum and other missing measures, such as awareness campaigns, informing and consulting potential stakeholders from other sectors, transparent review, and reporting process would have led to a meaningfully proactive and inclusive approach to the AP's implementation. MSIPA's representatives recognize the need for a multi-stakeholder forum and for a broader awareness-raising campaign, but they have also pointed out the limited resources within the OGP National Coordinator's office. The monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan has involved only state institutions.

The IRM researcher could trace evidence of only one meeting of the TWG (April 2015) and various electronic exchanges (February to June 2015) where state institutions have reported on implementing commitments. The proceedings of these meetings, including conclusions and next steps, have not been published. Some of the institutions responsible for OGP commitments reported more frequent exchanges with MSIPA on progress monitoring, including a review meeting in February 2015, for which no evidence was presented to the IRM researcher. The low frequency of periodic reporting and the irregular monitoring of commitments' implementation represent a serious concern.

In view of such limitations and shortcomings, this IRM researcher suggests the use of an existing multi-stakeholder forum to ensure more open and inclusive overview of the AP's implementation. In this context, a National Council for Cooperation with Civil Society (a consultative body to the government), which is expected to be established by the end of 2015, might be an option. Another option is to have OGP-dedicated, periodic meetings under the recently established National European Integration Council (NEIC). While the first option may be more feasible due to the content (OGP as part of government-civil society dialogue), the second alternative offers a better representation of potential stakeholders, as NEIC involves representatives of executive, legislative and judiciary branches, civil society, media, academia, and private sector.

Progress on AP implementation, periodic review, reporting, and monitoring must be more comprehensive, and their outcomes must be publicly available. In addition, awareness campaigns and OGP informing should not rely only on civil society. The involvement of the PM's office is highly recommendable in this regard.

IV. Analysis of Action Plan Contents

All OGP-participating governments develop OGP country action plans that elaborate concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Governments begin their OGP country action plans by sharing existing efforts related to open government, including specific strategies and ongoing programs. Action plans then set out governments' OGP commitments, which stretch practice beyond its current baseline. These commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

Commitments should be appropriate to each country's unique circumstances and policy interests. OGP commitments should also be relevant to OGP values laid out in the OGP Articles of Governance and Open Government Declaration signed by all OGP participating countries. The IRM uses the following guidance to evaluate relevance to core open government values:

Access to information

Commitments around access to information:

- Pertain to government-held information, as opposed to only information on government activities. As an example, releasing government-held information on pollution would be clearly relevant, although the information is not about "government activity" per se;
- Are not restricted to data but pertain to all information (e.g., releasing individual construction contracts and releasing data on a large set of construction contracts;
- May include information disclosures in open data and the systems that underpin the public disclosure of data;
- May cover both proactive and/or reactive releases of information;
- May cover both making data more available and/or improving the technological readability of information;
- May pertain to mechanisms to strengthen the right to information (such as ombudsman's offices or information tribunals);
- Must provide open access to information (it should not be privileged or internal only to government);
- Should promote transparency of government decision making and carrying out of basic functions;
- May seek to lower cost of obtaining information;
- Should strive to meet the 5 Star for Open Data design (bit.ly/1ZUVBxi).

Civic participation

Commitments around civic participation may pertain to formal public participation or to broader civic participation. They should generally seek to "consult," "involve," "collaborate," or "empower," as explained by the International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum (bit.ly/1kMmlYC).

Commitments addressing public participation:

- Must open up decision making to all interested members of the public; such forums are usually "top-down" in that they are created by government (or actors empowered by government) to inform decision making throughout the policy cycle;
- Can include elements of access to information to ensure meaningful input of interested members of the public into decisions;
- Often include the right to have your voice heard, but do not necessarily include the right to be a formal part of a decision making process.

Alternately, commitments may address the broader operating environment that enables participation in civic space. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Reforms increasing freedoms of assembly, expression, petition, press, or association;
- Reforms on association including trade union laws or NGO laws;
- Reforms improving the transparency and process of formal democratic processes such as citizen proposals, elections, or petitions.

The following commitments are examples of commitments that would **not** be marked as clearly relevant to the broader term, civic participation:

- Commitments that assume participation will increase due to publication of information without specifying the mechanism for such participation (although this commitment would be marked as "access to information");
- Commitments on decentralization that do not specify the mechanisms for enhanced public participation;
- Commitments that define participation as interagency cooperation without a mechanism for public participation.

Commitments that may be marked of "unclear relevance" also include those mechanisms where participation is limited to government-selected organizations.

Public accountability

Commitments improving accountability can include:

- Rules, regulations, and mechanisms that call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.

Consistent with the core goal of "Open Government," to be counted as "clearly relevant," such commitments must include a public-facing element, meaning that they are not purely internal systems of accountability. While such commitments may be laudable and may meet an OGP grand challenge, they do not, as articulated, meet the test of "clear relevance" due to their lack of openness. Where such internal-facing mechanisms are a key part of government strategy, it is recommended that governments include a public facing element such as:

- Disclosure of non-sensitive metadata on institutional activities (following maximum disclosure principles);
- Citizen audits of performance;
- Citizen-initiated appeals processes in cases of non-performance or abuse.

Strong commitments around accountability ascribe rights, duties, or consequences for actions of officials or institutions. Formal accountability commitments include means of formally expressing grievances or reporting wrongdoing and achieving redress. Examples of strong commitments include:

- Improving or establishing appeals processes for denial of access to information;
- Improving access to justice by making justice mechanisms cheaper, faster, or easier to use;
- Improving public scrutiny of justice mechanisms;
- Creating public tracking systems for public complaints processes (such as case tracking software for police or anti-corruption hotlines).

A commitment that claims to improve accountability, but assumes that merely providing information or data without explaining what mechanism or intervention will translate that information into consequences or change, would **not** qualify as an accountability commitment. See bit.ly/1oWPXdl for further information.

Technology and innovation for openness and accountability

OGP aims to enhance the use of technology and innovation to enable public involvement in government. Specifically, commitments that use technology and innovation should enhance openness and accountability by:

- Promoting new technologies that offer opportunities for information sharing, public participation, and collaboration.
- Making more information public in ways that enable people to both understand what their governments do and to influence decisions.
- Working to reduce costs of using these technologies.

Additionally, commitments that will be marked as technology and innovation:

- May commit to a process of engaging civil society and the business community to identify effective practices and innovative approaches for leveraging new technologies to empower people and promote transparency in government;
- May commit to supporting the ability of governments and citizens to use technology for openness and accountability;
- May support the use of technology by government employees and citizens alike.

Not all eGovernment reforms improve openness of government. When an eGovernment commitment is made, it needs to articulate how it enhances at least one of the following: access to information, public participation, or public accountability.

Key variables

Recognizing that achieving open government commitments often involves a multiyear process, governments should attach timeframes and benchmarks to their commitments that indicate what is to be accomplished each year, whenever possible. This report details each of the commitments the country included in its action plan, and analyzes them for their first year of implementation.

All of the indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual, available at (bit.ly/1rki45i). One measure deserves further explanation, due to its particular interest for readers and usefulness for encouraging a race to the top between OGP-participating countries: the "starred commitment." Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. In order to receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:

1. It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have "medium" or "high" specificity.

2. The commitment's language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability.

3. The commitment would have a "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented.[1]

4. Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving a ranking of "substantial" or "complete" implementation.

Finally, the tables in this section present an excerpt of the wealth of data the IRM collects during its progress reporting process.

General overview of the commitments

The government of Albania made 13 commitments under the OGP Action Plan 2014–16. The majority of the commitments (9 out of 13) rely on the use of information and communication technology to improve public services, transparency, and accountability.

The development of the Action Plan by the Government in early 2014 was guided by OGP values while its structure follows the logic of OGP grand challenges. The same approach was employed also by the CSO coalition for OGP Albania, which invited Albanian civil society to contribute to the design of the country's second Action Plan. Specifically, at the 28 March, 2014 Conference, parallel panel discussions were held to elaborate draft commitments to be presented to the Government according to the five OGP grand challenges:

- Improving Public Services
- Increasing Public Integrity
- More Effectively Managing Public Resources
- Creating Safer Communities
- Increasing Corporate Accountability

Civil society presented 25 proposals including not only specific commitments but also recommendations to improve the OGP consultations and the Action Plan's overall implementation. CSO consultations were limited after April 2014, and they were carried out in the capital, Tirana. Broader awareness raising and information activities did not take place.

The Action Plan adopted by the government and submitted to OGP in July 2014 tackles four (out of five) OGP grand challenges as follows:

- Four commitments under "Increasing Public Integrity" grand challenge
- Three commitments under "More Effectively Managing Public Resources"
- Four commitments under "Improving Public Services"
- Two commitments under "Creating Safer Communities" grand challenge

The majority of Albania's Action Plan commitments reflect at least one of the OGP principles: transparency, citizen participation, accountability, or technology and innovation. However, the end user or final beneficiary of commitments' impact is not always the general public. This IRM report finds that a few commitments focus on limited audiences, or their relevance to OGP values remains questionable.

The ambition of most commitments is to produce results and deliver change at a national level. One commitment aims to promote OGP values among local government authorities while its implementation was elaborated as a shared responsibility of the CSO coalition for OGP Albania, the Minister of State for Local Issues, and the National OGP Coordinator, the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration.

Clustering

This IRM Report has reorganized eight of the Action Plan's commitments and clustered them into four groups in order to allow for better understanding of progress. The clustering was done for commitments targeting one specific priority (e.g., fight against corruption) or those falling within one sector (e.g., customs, environment).

Therefore the structure of this report is slightly different from that of the Action Plan, and it elaborates on five commitments individually and another eight commitments grouped into four clusters, as follows:

- Denouncing Corruption
- Open data & e-services
- Open access on natural resources data
- Simplified Customs services

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[1] The International Experts Panel changed this criterion in 2015. For more information, visit bit.ly/1IUMUho

1.2. Electronic Registry of energy and industry permits

Commitment Text:

Electronic Registry of authorizations, permits and agreements issued by the Ministry of Energy and Industry

The Ministry of Energy and Industry, in the framework of increasing transparency and accountability, has undertaken the Electronic Registry initiative, aiming to establish and publish in its web page an Electronic Registry of authorizations, permits and agreements given in the relevant fields and their updated status.

Currently there is a lack of information not only on the procedures for obtaining an authorization or permit, but also citizens, interested groups, civil society have no information on the number of permits and authorization given in the energy and industry sector. In order to address this problem and acquire full transparency on the status of the actors operating in these field, the Ministry has initiated a process of identifying the current status, which will also allow an easier monitoring process.

This registry system will help improving MEI transparency and accountability, but will also allow citizens to access information through the Electronic Registry.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Energy and Industry

Supporting institution(s): N/A

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
		✓			✓			✓			✓			✓		

What happened?

The commitment aims to establish an electronic register for issuing authorizations, permits and agreements in the energy and industry sector, enabling public access to information on operators in these sectors.

The creation of the electronic register of concessions in the energy and industry sectors represents a followup of Albania's e-concession commitment under the first OGP Action Plan 2012–13.[1] While the commitment in the first action plan was about the establishment of an electronic concession procedure with no public access element, the second action plan commitment focuses on the transparency and public access to authorizations, permits, and agreements issued by the Ministry of Energy and Industry (MEI). The new commitment is partly in line with recommendation no. 8 that civil society proposed during the AP consultations (March 2014) to provide transparency on companies operating in the extractive industry in Albania.

As part of the first action plan, the electronic registry initiative was launched in April 2014 by the MEI in the framework of the Albania EITI event.[2] At the time of adopting OGP's

second action plan (June 2014), the Ministry was gathering information on operators, awarded authorizations, permits and signed agreements in the respective areas.

The lack of specificity of commitment language in terms of deliverables,, timeframes, and which institution is responsible makes it hard to clearly track the progress of the commitment. The Law on Concessions and Public-Private Partnerships (2013) stipulates that the register will be established and managed by the unit on concessions and public-private partnerships at the Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship (MEDTTE).[3] However, it is unclear whether the mandate for the implementation of this commitment has been transferred from the MEI to the MEDTTE.[6][4] The self-assessment report states that the Department of Concessions at the Ministry of Energy and Industry is responsible for the implementation of this commitment and sets the project's deadline for 30 December, 2015. The current website of the Agency of Concessions, an MEDTTE-subordinate agency, does not contain any information on the Concessions Register.[5] The MEI did not provide information despite three official requests for information submitted via e-mail by the IRM researcher between August and September 2015.

The government's self-assessment report suggests this commitment is partly implemented. According to the self-assessment report, the inception phase of this project was completed, and the Ministry is currently working on establishing the concession Monitoring and Information System. The amendments to the Law on concessions and public-private partnerships (July 2015) require additional bylaws regulating the electronic register, which are yet to be adopted.

Meanwhile, civil society has created useful tools to make information on contractors public. The Albanian Institute of Science (AIS), a civil society organization in Tirana, has developed an electronic database of concessions in Albania, listing a total of 61 private companies and the respective concessions awarded by the government in the energy and extractive industries.[6]

Did it matter?
Creation of an electronic register of concessions in the energy and extractive industries is a major step forward in enhancing transparency of these important sectors. Energy, especially hydropower generation, and exploration of mineral ores constitute a significant and growing activity in the Albanian economy. As Albania's 2012 Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) report shows, the extractives share of the country's GDP has risen from 2.4% in 2008 to 5.6% in 2012. Today, hundreds of companies operate in the previously state-owned extractive sector, and the number of permits increases year after year.

The potential impact of the register largely depends on the types of information and datasets it provides for public access. The language of the commitment does not specify the type of information making it hard to assess the potential impact beyond moderate. Civil society stakeholders are cautious in evaluating potential results of this commitment not only due to the lack of progress in its implementation so far but also due to its vague description in the action plan and ambiguity as regards the responsible institution.[7]

Moving forward
The IRM researcher recommends the following steps to bring more clarity in the implementation of the commitment:

- Redesign the commitment with more detailed milestones and with a timeframe for the Electronic Register, in line with the recent legal amendments. Include specific modules in the Electronic Register to publish more detailed data on the activity of economic operators.
- Coordinate with the MEDTTE, Agency of Concessions, private sector associations, companies operating in the energy sector, and civil society organizations during the implementation and monitoring. Address CSOs' recommendations to follow up on

Albania's 2012 commitment on EITI, and develop cooperation with experienced CSOs to share expertise.

[1] IRM Albania Progress Report 2011–13, p. 51, accessible at bit.ly/1ZgGdO1

[2] Media report accessible at bit.ly/1n8KD8q and bit.ly/1SEOwxP

[3] Law no 77/2015, date 16 July 2015, Official Gazzette 132/2015 (Page 6,763), accessible at bit.ly/1POrhi6

[4] "End abuse and monopoly concessions. Registry was established new procedures only 145 days," Albanian government website, accessible at bit.ly/1SEPLgv

[5] Agency's link for concessions register accessible at bit.ly/22Vl1w9, last accessed 28 September, 2015

[6] AIS Portal on concessions accessible at bit.ly/1OXdWXP. Interview with AIS Director, Aranita Brahaj (September 2015).

[7] Interviews with environmental CSOs and stakeholder focus group (September 2015).

1.4. Promoting OGP values among local authorities

Commitment Text:

The Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration in cooperation with the Minister for Local Affairs and the open government partnership coalition of civil society organization will undertake together the commitment to promote and engage local authorities in the OGP values.

This commitment was proposed by civil society organizations with the aim to introduce and promote the core value of OGP also in the governance of local authorities. The aim is to reinforce the participatory mechanism and built open governance also in the local level. Some of the actions that will be undertaken are promoting activities, legal modifications to promote transparency and other OGP values.

Responsible institution: Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration and the Minister of State for Local Affairs

Supporting institution(s): CSOs Coalition for OGP Albania

Start date: 2014

End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
	✓				Unclear				✓				✓			

What happened?

As described in the Action Plan, this commitment aims to promote OGP values among local governments. As written, the commitment only describes activity "to promote and engage local authorities in the OGP values," and it does not include information on specific deliverables or impact. It may be assumed that this commitment would result in developing specific actions, but during the reporting period, neither the institution responsible nor the CSOs have taken any steps. The government's self-assessment notes that the implementation of this commitment has not started, despite attempts by the CSO Coalition to fundraise.

The IRM researcher notes that Minister of State for Local Issues (MSLI), MSIPA, and the CSO Coalition are still unclear about their respective roles in the implementation of this commitment. Representatives of both institutions express full support for concrete initiatives that may be elaborated on further on by the CSO Coalition. However, they think that the Coalition should be the driving force for this commitment rather than the Minister's Office.

On the other hand, representatives of the CSO Coalition suggest that they have been prevented from acting on this commitment because of the lack of funding and the new administrative and territorial division that entered into force with June 2015 local elections.[1] By the time of drafting the IRM report, two members of the Coalition (MJAFT! Movement and IDM) confirmed that they will start implementation of concrete projects targeting this

commitment by Autumn 2015. Both projects are being financed by the US Embassy in Tirana. The IDM project will develop along two lines: first, the establishment of the multi-stakeholder forum in cooperation with MSIPA, and second, implementation of OGP measures in two local governments. MJAFT! Movement's project will monitor and assist local governments in improving access to information tools.

Did it matter?
In absence of the concrete framework of measures to carry out this commitment, its OGP relevance and potential impact is unclear.

The commitment's design did not include representatives of local authorities' associations nor local government units (LGUs) to pilot specific measures. The MSLI, as part of the central government, cannot undertake action on behalf of the local government units. However, the minister can consult,inform, or encourage local government stakeholders (LGUs or their affilates) to undertake commitments; the minister could also facilitate discussions with CSOs to formulate proposals for relevant commitments on a local level.

There is a general agreement about the need for better transparency, participation, and accountability at the municipal level in Albania. For example, the International County and Municipalities Association (ICMA) has established priorities in Albania, ranging from soft tools like ethics guidance, to transparency indexes.[2] The most recent European Union Report referred to local government as "particularly vulnerable to corruption." For that reason, further action on opening local government is laudable.

Civil society leaders involved in OGP echoed the need for a subnational commitment. The idea of an OGP commitment that involves local government authorities in the OGP process was proposed by civil society organizations.[3] Specifically, CSOs' recommendation was "the involvement of local institutions in the drafting and implementation of action plan. Local institutions should undertake commitments to promote transparent and all inclusive governance."[4] MSIPA, the National OGP Coordinator for Albania, agreed with the recommendation, which was later elaborated by the CSO Coalition for OGP Albania. However, despite agreement, the commitment language was never very specific. The Coalition suggested measures such as

- publication of decisions(legislative acts taken by local government units);
- citizen participation in planning and implementating budgets, programs, and local government plans;
- budget transparency and access to information; and
- strengthening the mechanisms for accountability and public integrity.[5]

In the absence of concrete measures suggested by CSO Coalition, this commitment is limited to awareness raising and informing of local governments on OGP.

Moving forward
Further work on opening local government is clearly needed in the next OGP action plan and can be elaborated further, even during the remainder of this action plan.
The upcoming project interventions of two members of the CSO Coalition in OGP Albania (IDM and MJAFT! Movement) are welcome steps that may potentially lead to more local governments endorsing and working to deliver on OGP ambitions; even so, the implementation of this commitment will require the following:
- greater involvement by the Coalition and local governments.
  - These efforts may also include specific LGUs as coresponsible institutions.
- better defined expectations, deliverables and impact.
  - In doing so, key stakeholders must link also with the newly adopted Decentralization Strategy which makes reference to the OGP and the upcoming legislation in this area.[6][6]
- a clearer target, be it legal, institutional, or other regulatory instruments for all LGUs.

o This might include a concrete set of activities targeting a specific best practice to be established and further replicated among LGUs. In both cases, the commitment's ambition must clearly link to one or more OGP values.

[1] Interviews with members of the CSOs Coalition for OGP Albania, Erisa Lame (IDM) and Aldo Merkoci (MJAFT! Movement) in September 2015.

[2] "Transparency and Anti-Corruption," ICMA International website, accessible at bit.ly/1W08iDG

[3] "PASOS project delivers Open Government recommendations to Albanian government," PASOS website, accessible at bit.ly/1OSccsA

[4] See recommendation no 15. at http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Civil-Society-Recommendations.pdf

[5] See conclusions of Round Table "Open Local Government" (16 May 2014) at http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/OGP-Round-Table-Open-Local-Government.doc

[6] Council of Ministers Decision no. 691, 29 July, 2015. Official gazette 147/2015.

2.1. Database on Economic Assistance Beneficiaries

Commitment Text:

Establishing the database of government data for economic assistance

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, in close collaboration with the State Social Service, in the framework of the reform for poverty alleviation, increase of transparency, service quality and effective use of budgetary funds and exclusion of abusive cases in the economic assistance scheme, has undertaken the initiative to establish the National Electronic Registry of beneficiaries of Economic Assistance.

The administration of benefits is hindered by inadequate capacity, lack of information system, supervision and controls. Albania currently has no national electronic registry of economic assistance seekers and the administration of receiving welfare benefits takes place locally with paper documentation. This consequently leads to (a) inefficiency in the application and granting of benefits (higher transaction costs), (b) weaknesses in supervision and control of fraud and error, and (c) monitoring and evaluation of ineffective social policy.

The implementation of the new system will help improving the effectiveness of State Social Service by identifying families in need, will improve the evaluation of beneficiaries from applicant families and will exclude abusive cases in the Economic Assistance Scheme.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth

Supporting institution(s): State Social Service

Start date: 2014

End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
			✓		Unclear						✓				✓	

What happened?

The commitment aims to improve effectiveness of the social assistance scheme in Albania by establishing the National Electronic Registry of Beneficiaries of Economic Assistance.

The National Electronic Registry of Beneficiaries of Economic Assistance is part of theSocial Assistance Modernization Project for Albania, a joint initiative of the World Bank Albania and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. In 2013 they started preparations piloting the National Electronic Registry of Beneficiaries of Economic Assistance in three regions in Albania: Tirana, Durres and Elbasan.[1] The registry started operating in three regions in June 2014.[2] Upon succesful completion of the pilot phase by the end of 2016, the registry will be applied nationally. The system allows helps the assessment of applications, control and verification, and the decision-making and approval of electronic payment of economic assistance. The Register is interlinked with other governmental databases in order to evaluate the applications, such as the civil registration database, social security, state employment service, immovable property register, national center of registration of

businesses, and so forth. The digitalization of the economic assistance system throughout the electronic registry has served to mitigate abuses.[3]

According to the latest project report (July 2015) of the World Bank, at least 80% of the registry applicants case files in three pilot regions are complete and consistent with the application and intake processes.[4] The World Bank project is a major reform that includes a review of the parameters of economic assistance programs. To implement this reform, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of local, regional, and central authorities in areas including management, monitoring, and evaluation of the system of granting economic aid. These complementary activities are covered by an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)project.[5]

The Government's self-assessment reports that this commitment is fully implemented. However, the database can be implemented at a national level only by the end of 2016. The MSWY and the State Social Services are currently monitoring implementation of the system in the pilot regions, are expanding its interlinks with other governmental databases, and are including additional modules, such as the electronic register for people with disabilities. Based on the analysis of its implementation and key issues of concern, the database will be fully operational at national level after 2016.

Did it matter?
The database for economic assistance is an important initiative of the government that can ensure increased efficiency of financial aid, reduce administrative burden, and shorten application process for beneficiaries. However, the system is for internal use of the state institutions, and despite its function to generate data (i.e., number of beneficiaries, financial resources, geographical concentration), no such datasets are made publicly available. Therefore, its relevance to OGP values remains unclear. Although the project relies on the use of technologies, the electronic register does not include elements that would link it with transparency or public accountability. According to MSWY's representative, economic assistance data are essential for designing effective social policies. However, civil society organizations suggest that in absence of a transparency element for public accountability or a "participation and monitoring mechanism," this commitment's OGP relevance is highly questionable.

The impact of this project extends also in other areas such as elections, given the fact that the economic assistance has been often misused for electoral purposes.[6] However, the media has reported several cases of unfair exclusion from economic assistance over the past year.[7] There have been questions raised over the legal criteria for granting assistance, including in the three regions where the pilot project is being implemented. Various associations and civil society groups have urged the Ministry to ensure proper evaluation of applications, review award criteria, and train public officials who are implementing the process.[8] The Ombudsman's Annual Report 2014 presented a total of 184 individual or group complaints about economic assistance while it has also issued a recommendation for MSWY.[9]

Moving forward
The IRM researcher notes the importance of the project's objective. However, the commitment's description in the OGP Action Plan and the projected implementation have to better align to OGP values, and more specifically to "Technology and innovation for transparency and accountability." Making publicly available the datasets generated by the electronic register will allow for greater accountability in the process, and this availability will also enable interest groups' involvement in informed policymaking debates on social welfare. Since some data on the economic assistance are available on the GIS portal of the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)[10], it is highly recommended that MSWY and State Social Services coordinate with INSTAT in this context. This coordination would be in line with the CSO's recommendation no. 11 proposed during the Action Plan consultation on 28 March, 2014.

[1] "Ndihma ekonomike," accessible at bit.ly/1K9G0ja

[2] Interview with Ms. Jonida Cerekja, MSWY former commitment contact point for this commitment (September 2015).

[3] "Buxheti 2015 i MMSR-së: "Kemi rritur pagesat për shtresat në nevojë", Albanian government website, accessible at bit.ly/1mQUAHd

[4] "Social Assistance Modernization Project," World Bank website, accessible at bit.ly/1W0CbDV

[5] " Project Fiche Nr 11 – IPA National programmes / Component I," EU website, accessible at bit.ly/1TQcwwt

[6] "SHSSH padit Xhelal Mziun për abuzim me ndihmën ekonomike," *Dita Gazeta*, 28 January, 2014, accessible at bit.ly/1OXJD3n. "Memaliaj, qyteti ku abuzohet me ndihmën ekonomike," *SHGD*, 26 September, 2013, accessible at bit.ly/1ndMb0T.

[7] "Totozani në Elbasan: 400 familje janë përjashtuar pa të drejtë nga skema ekonomike," Top Channel, 7 October, 2015, accessible at bit.ly/1Rizq1s. "Ndihma ekonomike, Avokati i Popullit: Të rishikohet formula. Ka padrejtësi," ORA News, 26 December, 2014, accessible at bit.ly/1ZnZzAB. "Cërrik, protesta për ndihmën ekonomike," Top Channel, 3 September, 2015, accessible at bit.ly/1SKp2Pu

[8] Interviews with Dritan Ziu (Roma Active Albania) and other CSOs' representatives (September 2015).

[9] "RAPORTVJETOR Për veprimtarinë e Avokatittë Popullit," *People's Advocate*, Annual Report 2014, pp. 81–83, accessible at bit.ly/1RxPOLW

[10] Some data on the economic assistance are available at INSTAT (Institute of Statistics) publications and its interactive webpage http://instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1

3.2. National Geoportal

Commitment Text:

The Ministry for Innovation and Public Administration, in collaboration of the Albanian Authority for geospatial information will undertake the creation of a National Electronic Geoportal, which, for the first time, will provide citizens and institutions, transparent and accurate geospatial information. Through the National Geoportal mapping citizens and interested parties can access to topographic maps, orthophotos, boundary maps, indicative maps of immobile property, and maps of the property value.

Some of the steps that will measure the implementation of this commitment are, the interagency coordination in order to enable existing data collection, preparation of the terms of reference for software and hardware infrastructure needed for the realization of this commitment, preparation of the data model for the existing geospatial information, preliminary geo-portal website will make available the existing information, preparation of new geospatial information.

Information on land property and value, positioning and boundary maps and data are information that currently is very difficult for citizens to collect. Also the level of corruption in this field has been very high for long time. Through the implementation of this commitment will contribute in facilitating the access to geospatial maps and data in a unique portal.

Editorial Note: The commitment describes "some steps" for its implementation as follows:

- *Interagency coordination in order to enable existing data collection;*
- *Preparation of the terms of reference for software and hardware infrastructure needed for the realization of this commitment;*
- *Preparation of the data model for the existing geospatial information;*
- *Preliminary geo-portal website will make available the existing information;*
- *Preparation of new geospatial information*

Responsible institution: Ministry for Innovation and Public Administration;

State Authority for Geospatial Information (SAGI)

Supporting institution(s): NA

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
OVERALL				✓	✓			✓			✓			✓		
3.2.1 Data collection				✓	✓						✓				✓	
3.2.2 ToRs for software & hardware				✓						✓				✓		
3.2.3 Data model preparation				✓	✓			✓			✓		✓			

3.2.4 Preliminary geoportal website				✓	✓			✓				✓						✓
3.2.5 New geospatial information			✓	✓			✓				✓		✓					

What happened?

The commitment aims to provide transparent and accurate geospatial information and related services. The portal is developed and managed by the State Authority for Geospatial Information (SAGI), established in 2013.[1] The creation of the national geoportal is a legal obligation deriving from the law no. 72/2012, dated 28 June, 2012).

At the time of Albania's OGP Action Plan's adoption (June 2014), the Geoportal was already developed in beta version, although the population of the portal with data was still underway.[2] The National Geoportal's development started in 2013 through a grant from the Norwegian Government (EUR 1.2 million) and with the technical support of the Norwegian Mapping Authority.[3] In the framework of the National Spatial Data Infrastructure project, the assistance, which will have been 2013–16, will enable:

- the Albanian Geospatial Infrastructure Authority as the institution responsible for the implementation of the INSPIRE directive;
- the Geodetic Albanian Reference Framework as a reference of European standards for National GIS; and
- the National Geoportal, through which geospatial data and related services will be accessed.

This initiative also seeks to include necessary maps for all sectors of the economy. This ambition is similar to the work being carried out by the Albania's Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) over the past year on establishing the INSTAT GIS.[4]

SAGI's representatives interviewed by the IRM Researcher reported that their activities on the National Geoportal during 2015 have consisted of populating the portal with new data such as CENSUS 2011[5], information on education institutions, roads, geology, protected areas, property value, territorial division, cadastrers, topographic maps, orthophotos, and so forth. By September 2015, nearly 40 services were being offered free of charge at the Geoportal for institutions and the public at large. The number of services offered by the portal before adopting the OGP Action plan in June 2014 was around 8 to 10.

The government's self-assessment concludes that the commitment is implemented. However, it still elaborates on specific milestones that are yet to be carried out. In October 2015, SAGI will finalize the Terms of Reference for software and hardware development, in line with the European Commission's (EC) INSPIRE directive. This directive aims to create a European Union spatial data infrastructure that will enable the sharing of environmental spatial information among public sector organizations and better facilitate public access to spatial information across Europe.[6]

While the current beta version of the Geoportal has been operational since 2014, the new version of the Geoportal that satisfies INSPIRE standards is still at an early phase of development. The data model preparation and new geospatial information (to be included in the final Terms of Reference) will have to comply with the new standards. The novelties to be introduced with the new version of the portal will include, among others, the "download" option and contemporary standards for uploaded metadata.

Did it matter?

Despite some overlap between this portal and INSTAT GIS Portal (e.g., on the territorial division, CENSUS 2011) the information and services offered through the Geoportal

represent an important milestone for open data and transparent governance reforms. Additionally, the portal may help in informing policy-making stakeholders when they want to develop an evidence-based approach to decision-making. The Geoportal is already supporting the implementation of other OGP commitments such as the "Electronic Access to Protected Areas" and other similar tools such as the INSTAT GIS Portal.

SAGI has not developed a monitoring framework of Portal's usage and awareness of it has been limited. The IRM researcher was offered information only for July 2015 analytics, according to which the portal had about 1,000 unique visitors. The only stakeholders informed on the National Geoportal and its services (e.g., INSTAT) were a few environmental civil society organizations and some state institutions interviewed by the IRM researcher were.

Civil society representatives at the stakeholders' focus group that convened for this report raised concerns over lack of coordination among different state institutions in relation to the above initiatives. According to SAGI representatives, there is no ground for such concerns, because this institution has complete overview and is actively supporting the development of similar tools by state institutions.[7]

Moving forward
This commitment is highly relevant for the OGP values, and its advanced stages may deliver transformative impact if it is accompanied with an adequate coordination with other state institutions, and if has a relevant strategic planning and monitoring framework. This report echoes some of the concerns raised by civil society representatives, especially on the need to inform public about information and services that are accessible through the Geoportal.

While the milestones for the implementation of this commitment are, to a certain extent, clearly elaborated, it is essential to bring more clarity on the timeline for their implementation under the new version of the portal.

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[1] Law no. 72/2012, "On the organization and functioning of the national infrastructure of geospatial information in the Republic of Albania" available at http://www.inovacioni.gov.al/files/pages_files/183907828-LIGJ-Nr-72-2012-PER-ORGANIZIMIN-DHE-FUNKSIONIMIN-E-INFRASTRUKTURES-KOMBETARE-TE-INFORMACIONIT-GJEOHAPESINOR-NE-REPUBLIKEN-E-SHQIPERISE.pdf.

[2] Geoportal, SAGI website, accessed/monitored during 2014–15, accessible at bit.ly/1K9WeZQ

[3] Website of the Norwegian Mapping Authority, accessible at bit.ly/1OLStz9

[4] Website of the INSTAT GIS Portal, accessible at bit.ly/1IZpibx

[5] "INSTAT Paraqet Sipas Ndarjes së re Territoriale Për Herë Të Parë të dhënat e Gjeoreferuara të Censusit 2011," INSTAT website, accessible at bit.ly/1PotNsK

[6] "About INSPIRE," INSPIRE directive website, accessible bit.ly/1Zh7QRA

[7] Stakeholders focus group and additional interviews with ASIG representatives (Klaudio Collaku, Erin Mlloja and Renaldo Agolli). September 2015.

4.2. Police Service Offices

Commitment Text:

The Albanian Government in the aim to ensure and facilitate the access to Police Service, will establish "one stop shop" point in each police district with the purpose to: create a unified reception desk for all services delivered, simplify the procedures and limit the number of documents to be submitted.

The one stop shop will also improve and make more efficient the cooperation Police-Community thus helping in the creation of a safer community and raise public participation.

Currently the police district stations are closed areas where the citizens have very little access or not access at all. This commitment aims to open up police services to citizens by offering them not only access but also a transparent service, on time, avoiding bureaucracy and corruption.

Service delivery to citizens through these offices will increase the citizen's trust to the police, and will affect in the prevention of the corruption phenomena among the police organization.

Restoring the communication with the public, through the provision of the administrative and procedural services, aims to be achieved through the electronic registration of their needs and their requests, and forwarding them, together with relevant documentation to the office of reviewing and resolving the problem within the time, as scheduled.

The Police Service Offices will be set up and operate in all of police structures, from the General Directorate of Police to the police directorates and commissariats in the districts, which will have open premises for the public and will operate non-stop 24 hours, reception-shapedshaped, for Administrative and Procedural Service.

The number of police service offices that will be open, the number of services that will be available for citizens, the number of citizens served will used as indicators to verify the implementation of this commitment.

Editorial Note: The commitment's description elaborates on a number of specific actions that may be categorized into two core milestones, as follows:

1. *Establishing the "one stop shop" point (24/7 reception-shaped) in each police district*

    a. *a unique reception desk for all services delivered operating with simplified procedures; and*

2. *Electronic registration of citizens' needs and requests and forwarding them to the respective office*

Responsible institution: General Directorate of State Police

Supporting institution(s): NA

Start date: 2014

End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
OVERALL				✓	✓		✓	✓			✓				✓	

4.2.1 Establish "One-stop shop" points				✓	✓		✓				✓			✓	
4.2.2 Electronic registration of citizens' requests				✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓		

What happened?

This commitment aims at improving police services to citizens through increased efficiency, reduced administrative barriers, and unified police services. The Police Service Offices are designed to serve as a one-stop-shop point of citizens' access.

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Albanian State Police (ASP) have achieved substantial progress towards the implementation of this commitment during the first year (2014–15) and will likely complete its implementation before the deadline, the end of 2016. Moreover, this commitment has produced additional actions by the police, beyond the obligations under the OGP Action Plan, to take innovative steps towards encouraging proactive citizens through introducing the Digital Commissariat application ("Komisariati dixhital").

Preparations for the implementation of this commitment started in 2014,[1] with the support of SIDA-funded project Swedish Albanian Community Policing (SACP).[2]

The first milestone has been substantially completed. By September 2015, the Police Service Offices (one-stop shops) have been established in most of the police regional directorates in the country—nine out of twelve. Their duties include informing citizens on police services; accepting citizens' applications, complaints, requests, or other communications; processing applications; updating applicants on progress; and so forth. Information on police services are available also online on ASP's website.[3] According to the Minister of Interior's Order in March 2015, citizens are served by civilian officers in Police Service Offices.

The second milestone of this commitment has limited completion. During 2015, the application for electronic registration of citizens' requests was developed and tested in a few of the established offices for some services, such as lost-document statements, authorizations for hunting weapons, and so forth. Based on this testing, there were further upgrades to the application. The application allows for citizens' requests to be processed electronically and channeled to the relevant police departments as an electronic file. Citizens are provided an electronic receipt stating the type of service applied for, documents submitted, and deadline for ASP to respond. Currently, the application is ready for use, but it had not yet been fully installed in all Police Service Offices in September 2015. This limited completion is due to additional investments that are needed to improve IT server capacity and internet connection quality in some police commissariats. Few related staff trainings in Police Service Offices have been organized over the past year. Additional IT and communications training is expected to take place by the end of 2015. Although the self-assessment states that this commitment is implemented, it elaborates on the above as "actions pending adoption or implementation."

In addition to the measures for implementing this commitment, MoI and ASP have launched as of May 2015 the "Digital Commissariat" mobile application, which was developed in cooperation with Vodafone Albania.[4] This tool is designed to encourage greater interaction between police and the public, by allowing citizens to proactively report corruption and other illegal activities.[5] With an average of nearly 5,500 citizen reports per month, this application totaled nearly 22,000 cumulative reports submitted by citizens in early September 2015. The majority of reports concern cases of irregular parking, but other reports include also police misbehavior, illegal construction works, and so forth. Citizens who have installed the application can submit reports fairly easy from their mobile devices.

Did it matter?

This commitment represents an important step towards enhancing public trust and police-citizen relations by making police services more open, efficient, and transparent. Civil society representatives interviewed by the IRM researcher highlight this commitment's potential to improve efficiency and openness of police services as well as earn public trust. Despite the improvements and reforms over the past years, corruption in the Albanian Police is still a serious concern.[6] A 2014 IDM Study on police integrity and corruption in Albania underlines that "police corruption is endemic and linked with the features and the organizational culture of the police services."[7]

The commitment targets directly three OGP values, namely "Access to Information," "Public Accountability," and "Technology and Innovation for Transparency and Accountability.". However, independent experts argue that the commitment should be accompanied with more comprehensive monitoring and accountability measures.[8] Some of the concrete measures proposed in this regard include immediate citizen evaluation of services at police service offices; publicly available analysis including datasets of performance indicators (i.e., number of complaints/requests received and processed at police service offices, average time of processing, types of services most applied for); and so forth. These measures will also help ASP to improve its performance and planning of resources. Representatives of the institutions responsible for this commitment argued that the application developed for the electronic management of citizens' requests at these offices provides for such opportunities. At the same time, continued investment in server capacity and connectivity will benefit police institutions.

Responsible institutions interviewed by IRM did not present data and other information on the performance of the Police Service Offices by the time of writing of this report (end of September 2015). Also, no performance analysis of the offices was conducted during 2015. The MoI representative suggested that such analysis is scheduled to take place by the end of 2015.

Moving forward

Despite the evident progress in implementing this commitment, more concerted efforts are needed to fully implement its second milestone on introduction of electronic registration of citizens' requests. Investment is needed to improve IT server capacities and internet connection for police commissariats throughout the country by the end of 2016.

Some of the recommendations for this commitment's implementation include the following:

- Complete the opening of Police Service Offices in the remaining police commissariats and ensure qualitative training for the staff
- Explore the possibility of partnering with civil society or community organizations to monitor performance of Police Service Offices
  - This is in line also with the first recommendation from civil society representatives, which was elaborated during the AP's consultation (28 March, 2014).
- Introduce anonymous evaluation tools for citizens accessing police service offices
- Install the application for electronic registration of citizens' requests in all operational Police Service Offices and publish datasets indicating the performance of the offices as per this application.
- Coordinate with the www.stopkorrupsionit.al portal and make sure to avoid overlapping with the Digital Commissariat application.

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[1] Accessible at bit.ly/1N5aliX. See also presentation (date 23.07.2014) at the website of the Ministry of Interior, accessible at bit.ly/1l3eEF2
[2] Accessible at bit.ly/22XEOen
[3] Accessible at bit.ly/1mSSmqC
[4] Accessible at bit.ly/1Q2GDle
[5] Android application accessible at bit.ly/1QLCxMm, and iOS application accessible at apple.co/1ONuIql.

[6] See EC 2014 Progress report for Albania p.2, accessible at bit.ly/1BQGIgC
[7] Police Integrity and Corruption in Albania, IDM 2014, accessible at bit.ly/1mSU9Mo
[8] Interviews with civil society experts and Focus group discussion, September 2015

Cluster 1: Denouncing Corruption

This cluster is composed of two commitments as follows:

1.1 Standardization of corruption complaints
Commitment Text:

The Minister of State for Local Issues, in the role of the National Coordinator for Anti-Corruption, will undertake the standardization of the process related to complaints addressing corruption. Currently, although many ministries have been given green lines or forms to denounce corruption, there is no standardized procedure, which ensures transparency in the review of the complaint and concrete deadlines to ensure a good service. Some of the indicators and milestones set for this commitment are the drafting of relevant guidelines for addressing corruption complaints, integrating them in each ministry transparency plan rules, publish them online.

Given the specifics and difficulty of the fight and investigation of corruption, this system, through the standardization of processes, can increase confidence in the administration and increase the number of informants. Ministries will have to officially publish relevant standards and inform the public on the progress of specific issues, thus raising the level of accountability of the public administration. This commitment will help improve the transparency regarding the complaint procedures in fact until now there is no clear information on how a citizen can actually address a complaint in corruption cases. The publication of this "standards" will not only create uniformity in the way the complaint will be address but will also serve in raising the efficiency of the public administration while handling corruption complaints.

4.1 Law on whistleblowers protection
Commitment Text:

Currently, the trust of the public towards the public administration is low, while the risk that an informant will have when denouncing cases of corruption is very high. In Albania, there is no clear framework which ensures cooperation with informants and protects whistleblowers. This law, together with the awareness campaign that will follow, will ensure that informants that will entrust the enforcement agencies with information regarding corruption in sectors where they work or are involved, will be protected. This law will not only enhance transparency and reporting of cases of corruption, but also the credibility of the administration.

A draft law currently exists and is under consultation. The law is in line with the National Strategy on the Fight Against Corruption 2014-2017 which provides for both preventative and awareness-raising objectives. Furthermore, the adoption of the law is also part of the Roadmap Priority Nr. 3 commitment for the fight against corruption in the context of Albania‚Äôs integration in the EU.

There will be a broad consultation with government agencies and donors, while there are also planned consultation meetings for the civil society and business sector. Following these consultations, the draft will be edited to reflect comments, and after further internal and external consultations, the law is expected to be finalized in fall and adopted before the end of the year.

Editorial Note: This cluster (C.1) assembles two individual commitments aiming to deliver legislation and bylaws in the fight against corruption. They are both undertaken by the Minister of State for local Issues - National coordinator on anticorruption in Albania.

Responsible institution: Minister of State for Local Issues (MSLI)

Supporting institution(s): Ministries, Parliament

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
1.1 Standardization of corruption complaints			✓				✓				✓				✓	
4.1. Law on whistleblower protection				✓			✓					✓		✓		

What happened?

The law on whistleblowers protection and the standardization of corruption complaints procedure have been raised as issues of concern by various civil society organizations in the past few years. Both commitments are currently part of Albania's Anticorruption Strategy 2015–20 and its 2015–17 Action Plan. In November 2013, in the capacity of National Coordinator for Anticorruption, the Minister of State for Local Issues started the consultation process with governmental and civil society actors on a new anticorruption strategy and its Action Plan. The Strategy employs a threefold approach— prevention, punishment and awareness raising—and it was initially expected to cover the 2014–17 period. However, the comprehensive reviews within the governmental agencies and the series of consultations with civil society produced feedback that required further improvements of the draft document. Consequently, the Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption 2015–20 and its Action Plan for the period 2015–17 were adopted by Council of Ministers Decision no. 247, dated 20 March, 2015.

The standardization of a corruption complaints procedure and the law on whistleblowers are part of the prevention approach of the Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption (Objective A 4: Improving the handling of denunciations against corruption). The Government's OGP Action Plan 2014–16 puts the law on whistleblowers under a clear timeframe (end of 2014), while, for the standardization of corruption complaints procedures, it is assumed that the deadline for implementation is 2016. The 2015–17 Action Plan of the Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption 2015–20 postpones the deadline for the law on whistleblowers for June 2015, while the implementation of related measures, such as drafting and adoption of bylaws, and establishing and strengthening state structures for its implementation, is for the end of 2016.

1.1 Standardization of corruption complaints

The first commitment aims at standardization of corruption complaints procedure and the disclosure of transparency rules within each ministry. The OGP Action Plan 2014–16 elaborates milestones for the standardization of corruption complaints procedures. However, the Inter-sectoral Strategy Against Corruption provides a better overview of the milestones and measures for this commitment. According to the strategy, the standardization of corruption complaints' procedure will be achieved through

> (1) establishing a single approach to handle cases of corruption reported from the general public;

> (2) increasing trust in the public administration through transparency in handling denunciations and the publication of related data; and

(3) electronic delivery of complaints and ensuring tracking throughout the administrative examination process following citizens' complaints.

This commitment is substantially completed. On 5 March, 2015, the Prime Minister issued the order adopting the regulation on the procedures for registering, handling, and storing corrupt practices that are denounced at the anticorruption portal www.stopkorrupsionit.al. The PM's order sets out the rules for the functioning of the portal; procedures for cooperation and communication of responsible (central) institutions; and rules for the functioning of the Operational Office affiliated with the National Anti-corruption Coordinator. The anticorruption portal, which was launched in early February 2015, allows citizens to submit corruption complaints online through a fairly practical process by uploading evidence (i.e., photos, videos, documents). Citizens may choose to disclose their identity or submit claims anonymously. The submitted report is automatically channeled via e-mail to the Operational Office, the PM's Unit of Internal Control and Anticorruption, and responsible persons at the PM office and at the relevant ministry.

Citizens may choose a specific area such as judiciary, education, healthcare, police, customs, tax authorities, and relevant state institutions to which their report is related. If they have not done so, the Operational Office channels the report via e-mail to the relevant institution. The handling of these reports is carried out through an issue tracking system, which provides an overview of the status of the report (e.g., submitted, under consideration, solved, or closed) that is assigned a unique registration number. Complainants can trace progress of their report submitted at the portal, provided they are not anonymous. Authorized state institutions should review the reports and other complaints submitted through the portal within 30 days of their registration.

While the portal has responded to the need for standardization of procedures in handling complains and reports on corruption, many ministries have not published their transparency programs, register of requests, and responses. This latter measure derives as an obligation from the Law on the Right to Information (2014), which stipulates (in Articles 4 to 10) that each state institution will publish online information on the transparency program, register of requests and responses, and the right to information coordinator. Although a number of government ministries and agencies have published this information, according to a template developed by the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data,[1] many others have not done so. Furthermore, even among ministries that have published this information, there are often inconsistencies with some of them publishing only the transparency program template or contacts of the coordinator in the respective institution. The IRM researcher has found that Transparency sections of the ministries' websites do not contain unified standards in handling corruption complaints (September 2015). The Government's self-assessment refers to this commitment as being implemented. However, it does not elaborate on the number of central institutions that have integrated transparency rules and standards by the end of reporting period (30 June, 2015).

4.1. Whistleblower Protection Law

The Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption considers the law on whistleblowers as a means to protect the high integrity of officials and monitor state activity. For this purpose, Albania will (1) adopt the law and its accompanying bylaws, and (2) establish and strengthen responsible structures within and without the institutions to handle corruption cases.

The IRM researcher noted only limited progress on implementation of this commitment during the reporting period. Although according to the Action Plan, the draft law was expected to be adopted by the end of 2014, this deadline was postponed for mid 2015 by the 2015–17 Action Plan of the Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption 2015–20. According to this document, the implementation of other measures related to this law (i.e., adoption of bylaws, establishing and strengthening state structures for its implementation) is expected to conclude by the end of 2016. However, the implementation of this commitment

is behind schedule, even according to this revised timeframe. A draft text of the law was already under review prior to the second OGP Action Plan (as described in the commitment), which was further improved by the Minister of State for Local Issues, with foreign technical assistance and expertise from the University of Utrecht, which was financially supported by the Government of the Netherlands.

On 12 September, 2014, MSLI and the Ministry of Justice organized a consultation with civil society groups, experts and other state agencies.[2] Another open consultation process took place on 26 February, 2015 with civil society, private sector, state agencies, representatives, and experts from foreign assistance missions and international organizations.[3] According to many civil society organizations, the consultative process for drafting of this law has been very open and inclusive. Some feedback and recommendations from nonstate representatives is reported by the government during this year. At the time of writing of this report, the draft law is being finalized by the Ministry of Justice experts. MSLI's representatives have reported to IRM that its adoption by the Parliament will take place by the end of 2015. The Dutch Government will continue to support the implementation of this law through technical support and expertise for the preparation of related bylaws, setting up of institutional structures, and training.[4]

Did it matter?
Both commitments lay important foundations in the fight against corruption and efforts to consolidate transparency and accountability of public administration in Albania. MSLI's approach towards the implementation of these commitments has been effective and highly inclusive.

The need for standardizing processes on complaints related to corruption was underlined in the first IRM report for Albania (2013), which recommended integration of online portals, enabling citizens to report corruption and other wrongdoings in the judiciary.[5] On the other hand, the law on whistleblowers has also been subject to the recent advocacy of civil society and efforts to improve the fight against corruption.[6] According to MSLI, delays in relation to the adoption of this law have followed due to the broad consultations with state and civil society experts, which have significantly improved the draft.[7]

1.1 Standardization of corruption complaints

The portal for denouncing corruption represents a major step in creating effective complaint mechanisms for citizens. This initiative has proven to be a success. According to MSLI representatives, many of the denounced corruption practices or other wrongdoings at different institutions have been followed up with administrative or judiciary proceedings. According to the governmental representatives, over 1,000 reports were submitted to the portal within the first few days of its operation. The number of reports reached close to 7,000 entries by the end of June 2015[8] At the time of writing of this report, a total of 4,310 corruption reports were already solved or closed, while another 2,318 have been refused. According to the regulation, the status "refused" is assigned to complaints that are not denouncing a specific practice or other issue; it is assigned in cases when citizens submitting the report fail to provide additional information within three days when requested by the relevant office. The majority of submitted reports are "complaints," while a smaller amount contain concrete denouncing of corruption practices. The portal has also recorded more than 1,000 double entries (same complaint submitted more than once by the same complainant). The largest number of reports (as of August 2015) are related to the education system, healthcare, police, judiciary, and cases of illegal building/construction works.

However, CSOs' representatives participating at the focus group conducted by the IRM researcher have raised concerns regarding the outcome of "solved" cases. They pointed out that "it is not the number of submitted reports but rather the outcome of denounced cases of corruption that should be used for evaluating the effectiveness of these tools." When

asked, MSLI's representatives responded that they have no information on the status of complaints that they have referred to prosecution.

CSOs suggested that in absence of information related to "what happened after the report was made and what concrete measures followed," the public may lose interest and even become skeptical of these tools.

4.1 Law on Whistleblowers' Protection

The draft law on whistleblower protection sets out the rules for whistleblowers' protection in the public and private sector, their rights, and obligations of the public authorities and private subjects. The objective of this initiative is to prevent and fight against corruption in the public and private sector, to protect whistleblowers, and to encourage the denouncing of corrupt practices. The adoption and implementation of this draft law may provide a new impetus to anti-corruption efforts in Albania, particularly in fighting impunity. The consultations carried out by MSLI and the Ministry of Justice with state institutions, private sector, and civil society experts have brought significant improvements of the preliminary 2014 drafts (2014). Additionally, the foreign expertise provided through Netherlands Embassy's assistance have incorporated European best practices in the draft law.

The draft law is expected to enter parliamentary procedure and to be adopted by the end of 2015.[9] By the time of drafting this IRM report (end of September 2015), the government has not yet submitted the draft law to the parliament.

Moving forward

The implementation of these commitments needs to be finalized and further reinforced. In order to complete the "Standardization of processes on complaints related to corruption," the IRM researcher recommends that the government take measures to ensure that unified standards for handling corruption complaints are published under the Transparency sections of the ministries' websites. The IRM researcher strongly suggests the portal's continual usage and further public promotion, especially through public access to evidence in its results. As United Nations Development Programme Albania has launched a satisfaction survey on the Portal (October 2015), it is essential to improve its further implementation based on users' experience and advice.

Stakeholders interviewed for this report recommend that the draft law on whistleblowers' protection be adopted as soon as possible, in order to allow for adequate preparations for its implementation. The MSLI's planned activities in this regard are realistic, while the continuous support with technical assistance and foreign expertise will enhance the process and contribute to timely delivery of the full framework of implementation for the law.

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[1] Accessible at bit.ly/1mV5V9I

[2] Accessible at bit.ly/1Rkj7Bo

[3] Accessible at bit.ly/1ONMTfH

[4] Interview with Juliana Hoxha- Director of Partners Albania, a CSO contracted by the Dutch Embassy in Tirana.

[5] "Online Citizens' Claims in the Judiciary System", IRM Albania Progress Report 2011–13, p 63, accessible at bit.ly/1Q38Wjm

[6] "Whistleblowers Protection In Albania: An Assessment Of The Legislation And Practice," Rule of Law Program South East Europe, Conference sponsored by Konrad Adenauer Foundation, November 2013, accessible at bit.ly/1RkkiRb

[7] Interviews with MSLI and representatives of the Netherlands Embassy in Tirana

[8] April–August 2015 reports, accessible at bit.ly/1PUWjVK

[9] Parliamentary calendar, accessible at bit.ly/1ZqGduV

Cluster 2: Open data & e-services
This cluster is composed of two commitments, as follows:

1.3. Implementation of public expenses module in "open data" format
Commitment Text:

The National Agency for Information Society in the context of the global initiative "Partnership for Open Governance", will undertake as commitment the implementation of a module that will allow in an open data format, online access to information on budgetary data of the Ministries.

This module will be accessed from the government portal e-Albania and the official websites of the respective institutions. This module will provide information in real time of budgetary expenses of the Council of Ministers and Line Ministries in order to guarantee complete and transparent information of the expenses. The indicators such as the functionality of the module, the number of visitors of the web pages or downloaded information will be used to verify the implementation of this commitment.

3.3. E-Albania
Commitment Text:

E-Albania portal serves as a single contact point for government services, helping to improve the overall accessibility of information to the public. Interoperability Platform on which this portal is based can be extended for other essential governmental services. Until now, information for 170 services offered by the public administration has been published. Services as access to personal data, business data, and online declaration of personal income will soon be added as e-services offered by the portal. E- Albania will be in enriched with various other public e-services.

The aim of this commitment is to pass from first level services (informative services) to level 3 and 4, which means public services that are offered entirely online. It is expected that during 2015, 10 new services with be offered entirely online and other 10 will be added in 2016.

Editorial Note: Both commitments will be implemented by MSIPA and the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS). In addition, the public will have access to their deliverables through the e-Albania portal - first commitment delivering a "public expenses module" with open data and the second commitment, expanding the number of e-services accessed through e-Albania.

Responsible institution: MSIPA and NAIS

Supporting institution(s): Ministries

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
1.3 Public expenses in open data			✓		✓			✓			✓				✓	
3.3 e-Albania			✓		✓			✓			✓				✓	

What happened?

These commitments aim to improve transparency, accountability and access to information and governmental services through the use of information technology. Specifically, the public expenses module enables transparency of governmental spending and accountability. On the other hand, the e-Albania initiative is designed as a portal through which citizens both can access information and can receive e-services offered by state institutions.

The objectives of both commitments have been referred to at the first 2012–13 OGP Action Plan of Albania, such as the expansion of e-services to be provided through e-Albania, and also the daily payments made by government agencies.[1]

1.3. Public expenses module in "open data" format

This commitment has been substantially implemented. In February 2015, the Council of Ministers adopted the policy document on the implementation of public open data and the creation of an open data portal.[2] The document paves the way for publishing governmental data in open data format, assigning the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS) the responsibility to develop and administer the opendata.gov.al portal.

The module displaying budget information of Council of Ministers and ministries in an open data format was launched in late 2014 at the Council of Ministers' website. A link to this module at Government's website is also available on the websites of some line ministries.[3] Currently, the module offers information on government's spending data from 1 January, 2015. However, the information on the government and ministries' spending is displayed as a percentage of their respective budget, and it does not provide the actual figures of the budgets. Visitors can only access the visualized (not open data) information for the government or a specific ministry, according to a total of 11 categories of expenditures. Therefore, the module does not meet the criteria for a five-star open data standard as envisaged in the Action Plan.[4]

3.3 e-Albania Portal

This commitment has been substantially completed. Over the past year, the e-Albania portal has increased the number of offered services from 177, in 2013, to a total of 700, by September 2015. However, the majority of these services are "information and guidance" (first-level services) to citizens and on various state institutions' services that citizens or businesses may use. Services with interoperability functions, which would allow exchange and use of information, are limited. The ambition of this commitment is to move toward services that are offered entirely online, such as fully integrated services. The government's self-assessment (October 2015) reports that by the end of 2015, the portal will include 75 new e-services (levels 3–4) that will be offered online.

The 2013 IRM Albania Progress Report suggested extending interoperability functionality of e-Albania in other public services, and populating the portal with more information and services, which would improve visibility and encourage greater usage of the portal.[5]

User registration with the portal is still a requirement for accessing services provided by e-Albania. NAIS representatives interviewed by IRM researcher reported that registration is necessary in order for citizens and businesses to interact with state institutions. The same applies for e-services that are used by the public administration via the e-Albania portal. Nevertheless, IRM researcher has identified a few services of e-Albania (subject to user registration) that are offered on other governmental agencies' websites without registration requirement such as the online check of traffic police penalties.[6] Further, while most of the information services (first level) hosted on e-Albania do not require registration, the IRM researcher has identified a few cases when such services require user registration with the portal (e.g., information on local tariffs and taxes[7]).

Did it matter?
1.3. Public expenses module in "open data" format

Some stakeholders suggest that the implementation of this commitment during 2014–15 represents a modest step to enhance transparency in government spending. The majority of stakeholders raise concerns over the quality and usability of the information offered.

Most of civil society representatives and journalists interviewed by the IRM researcher reported either that they had no information on this module or that they did not find it helpful. They consider the data on payments made available by the Treasury General Directorate at the Ministry of Finance to be a more useful tool.[8] This tool meets the 2-star standards of open data, as it provides access to downloadable data in excel format on the daily payments made by the Treasury General Directorate for the years of 2014 and 2015. The same data is available in a more open format on e-Albania Portal.[9] Specifically, this e-Albania service meets a 3-star open data standard, as it provides free access (no registration is needed) to printable and downloadable data in XLS and CSV format. However, while the link at the Treasury website offers access to 2014 and 2015 data, the e-Albania service covers only 2015 daily payments made by the Treasury General Directorate.

The first IRM progress report has suggested that "the disclosure of payments made by the Treasury General Directorate may in the future be part of the Open Data Portal, complying with technical standards for publishing data and interlinked to other functionalities of the portal". Limited progress has been made to address this recommendation.

In addition to various government agencies (e.g., Institute of Statistics), some civil society organizations are already re-using and publishing "open data" with significant success.[10]The AIS open spending portal in 2015 marked an average of 4,000 unique users per month and nearly 16,000 views per month according to reports submitted to the portal's donors between May and July 2015.[11]

3.3 e-Albania Portal

The potential impact of this commitment is moderate. The portal provides information useful for the everyday life of citizens, such as documents required for getting identification documents, driver's license, registration of vehicles, and so forth. With more investment in the public services and their interoperability function, combined with public awareness on the portal's use, it could have a major impact. However, so far, the usage of the portal has been modest. Government's self assessment has reported a total of "257 uses during September 2015 of this service at e-Albania portal."

Stakeholders' focus group suggested that e-Matura is likely the most used module of e-Albania because this is the only tool for nearly 45,000 (in 2015) high school students to apply online at public universities. Additionally, a few concerns were raised on the quality of services and their outreach, for which stakeholders strongly advise the implementation of an *audit* of most- and least-used services of the Portal in order to prioritize e-services and better respond to citizens' needs.[12][10]

Moving forward
The IRM researcher suggests:

- The module should be redesigned to meet open data standards. An alternative could be to withdraw this commitment and instead focus on the opendata.gov.al portal and also on "the disclosure of payments made by the Treasury General Directorate" in an open data format. Cooperation and partnership with civil society and interest groups is highly recommended in this regard.
- MSIPA and NAIS, as well as other governmental agencies at the central and local levels linking their services with e-Albania, must do more to promote the portal with the public and thus increase the number of users.
- An audit of the performance of e-Albania will help responsible institutions to improve its impact and outreach, including tailor-made measures related to the range or access to services.

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[1] IRM Albania Progress Report 2011–13; "e-Albania", p. 72; "Disclose Payments Made Daily by the Government Units" p. 78, both accessible at bit.ly/1ZgGdO1.

[2] Council of Minister Decision no. 147, date 18 February, 2015; Official Gazette no 27/2015, p. 1280, accessible at bit.ly/1Q3jnUc

[3] Accessible at bit.ly/1ONUE5h

[4] Acessible at bit.ly/1ZUVBxi

[5] IRM Albania Progress Report 2011-2013, p. 73, accessible at bit.ly/1ZgGdO1

[6] ASP website accessible at bit.ly/1TTldpG

[7] Accessible at bit.ly/1JIN0Zs

[8] Aceessible at bit.ly/1ngpFVf

[9] e-Albania accessible at at bit.ly/1N5QT5K

[10] AIS open data accessible at bit.ly/1TTlKba; AIS open spending project accessible bit.ly/1Zj3f1q

[11] Interview with AIS Director Aranita Brahaj, September 2015.

[12] Stakeholders focus group discussion 30 September, 2015

Cluster 3: Open access on natural resources data

This cluster is composed of two commitments, as follows:

2.2. Electronic Portal on water resources administration and management

Commitment Text:

The interested parties applying for a license or authorization for the use of water resources face a complicated and long procedure of application. The lack of a national inventory of permits for the use of water resources is also a disadvantage that causes conflicts between the institutional stakeholders and the interested parties. The Ministry of Environment, through the Directorate of Policies for Water Resources, will undertake the creation of an integrated water management system that will improve the cooperation of public and private actors through the use of new technologies for license applications and control.

This system will help increase the transparency on the use of water resources in Albania. This commitment seeks to improve governance of natural resources for a better water management by reducing the cases of corruption, strengthening the public awareness on water management. The creation of an online register of water resources users will positively affect transparence and public access to information.

3.1. Electronic Access to Protected Areas

Commitment Text:

Electronic access to a registry of protected areas increases the participation and the inclusiveness of the public opinion and interested stakeholders for activities related to protected areas, hunting areas and national legislative initiatives in the field of nature conservation and biodiversity. The access to the portal will allow consultation of legal documents related to environment protection, a database of new Protected Areas (PA) or extension of existing PA, information on Hunting Areas and associated GIS digital maps. The creation of this portal will strongly contribute in the increase of transparency and public participation; in fact the portal will allow interactive exchange of opinions on draft laws, regulations, and strategies in the field of protected areas.

Editorial Note: Both commitments focus on (access to) data regarding natural resources and their implementation is assumed by the Ministry of environment.

Responsible institution: Ministry of environment

Supporting institution(s): NA

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
2.2 Electronic Portal on water resources management			✓		✓						✓			✓		
3.1 Electronic access to protected areas		✓			✓	✓		✓			✓			✓		

What happened?

These commitments aim to improve transparency in administration and management of natural resources, such as water and protected areas of Albania. These commitments, proposed by civil society, aim to publish information on concessions to private companies to use natural resources (e.g., rivers), and they aim to create a public database on polluted areas, including information campaigns to inform citizens on consequences of pollution in their communities.

At the time of the Action Plan's consultation and adoption (June 2014) the Ministry of Environment was in charge of the sectors targeted by these commitments, namely water resources and protected areas. A Council of Ministers decision in February 2015 transferred the authority on water resources from the Ministry of Environment to the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, and Water Administration.[1] An OGP contact point at the Ministry, now responsible for the commitment "Electronic Portal on water resources administration and management", was not made known to the IRM researcher.

2.2. Electronic portal on water resources management

The Law on the Integrated Management of Water Resources (2012) mandates the creation of an integrated portal of electronic data ("National Register of permits, authorizations and concessions").[2] At the time of the Action Plan adoption, a database (National Register) of issued authorizations on the use of water resources has been available online in Excel format, on the website of the Ministry of Environment.[3] The portal on water resources administration and management represents a much more comprehensive undertaking. This undertaking is part of a complex assistance project implemented in Albania by the World Bank since May 2013 in cooperation with respective ministries and the Technical Secretariat of the National Council of Water.[4] The project provides assistance to the Government of Albania to design the national strategy of integrated water management, develop the water cadastre and also the electronic portal on water resources administration and management. The project underwent minor changes due to the transfer of authority on water management from the Ministry of Environment to Ministry of Agriculture.[5]

The development of the strategy and the cadastre of waters is still underway. The electronic portal on water resources administration and management is at an early preparatory stage,

and its progress depends on the development of water cadastres.[6] The self-assessment of the government reports this commitment as not implemented.

3.1. Electronic access to protected areas

Similar to the previous commitment, progress on telectronic access to protected areas has been limited. At the time of OGP Action Plan's publication (July 2014), a database of protected areas (PA) network in Albania was online at the Ministry of Environment's website[7] along with a map of PA network.[8] The development of this portal is entrusted to the National Agency of Protected Areas and regional administrations of protected areas, which were established in February 2015.[9] According to the Action Plan of the intersectoral strategy "Albania's Digital Agenda 2015–20,"[10] and according to IRM interviews with Ministry of Environment representatives, the portal will be developed with the assistance of the UNDP Albania project.[11]

Preparations for the development of the portal are at an early stage. A GIS map of protected areas is already available at the National Geoportal.[12] The portal Electronic Access to Protected Areas will provide more detailed information on every protected area, including plans, activity, flora, fauna, and so forth.[13] The Government's self-assessment suggests this commitment was partially implemented but does not report on specific implemented activities, except for the "development of the template database for electronic access to protected areas." As the commitment's description suggests, the portal will serve also as a channel for public consultation of legal documents related to environment protection.

Did it matter?
Both commitments are highly relevant to OGP values and are in line with civil society recommendations to improve transparency and to open access to natural resources data. Although civil society representatives consider both commitments very useful, the focus group pointed out that the impact of these commitments will depend on other actions. The electronic portal on water resources depends upon the development of a water cadastre, which is not yet finalized. Further development of the portal for protected areas depends on the assistance of the UNDP Albania project, which aims to improve the coverage and management effectiveness of Albania's network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPA project).

Moving forward
Considering the timeline of the projects supporting the implementation of these commitments (World Bank and UNDP), the IRM researcher suggests a review of the timeframe for the implementation of these commitments under the OGP Action Plan. While the electronic portal on water resources administration and management will follow after the development and adoption of the national strategy for water management, the establishment of electronic access to protected areas will require more time for full development, due to the wealth of information it is planned to incorporate.

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[1] CDM no. 91, 4 February, 2015 (Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, and Water Administration); CDM no. 92, 4 February, 2015 (Ministry of Environment), Official Gazette no 16/2015, accessible at bit.ly/1P0X9Dk

[2] Article 4, point 44 of Law no. 111/2012, 15 December, 2012

[3] Downloadable at bit.ly/1W7xVCN

[4] CDM no. 230, Technical Secretariat of the National Council on Waters

[5] "Project restructuring," World Bank, 23 April, 2014, accessible at bit.ly/1P0XHJc

[6] Interviews with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, and Water Administration and with Eduart Cani, Regional Environment Center, REC Tirana; September 2015

[7] Accessible at bit.ly/200oR4K

[8] Accessible at bit.ly/1UORbn6

[9] CMD no 102, 4 February, 2015, Official Gazette no. 18/2015, accessible at bit.ly/1TUU45Q

[10] Action Plan accessible at bit.ly/1ZtROcy

[11] "Protecting Albania's Marine and Coastal Biodiversity," UNDP Albania website, accessible at bit.ly/1kQE2fX

[12] Accessible at bit.ly/1mYDaJ8

Cluster 4: Simplified Customs services

This cluster is composed of two commitments, as follows:

2.3. Single Window
Commitment Text:

In order to facilitate and accelerate the procedures for trade in the custom system, the General Directorate of Customs will centralize the administration of requests and procedures through a single window. The utilization of a single window will reduce the time of administrative practices, will reduce the cost and inevitably increase the transparency level. The interface between private sector and the General Directorate of Customs it will be a web portal interface.

The institutional cooperation and coordination of actions will be in real time. The single window will raise the transparency level of transactions between the administration and the private sector.

3.4. E-document
Commitment Text:

Forms and documents to be completed for different procedures in the customs system are not only complicated but also numerous. In the aim to facilitate the access to the customs system we shall introduce the e-document. Not only will we facilitate the use of different forms and documents, but we will also contribute in the establishment of a paperless environment.

The provision of public services in electronic way through e-documents and e-forms will facilitate the procedures for citizens and business, by reducing the costs and time employed for this services, it will also improve the degree of access to information for citizens thus making the procedures more transparent. E-documents will:

1. *Improve public access by making selected documents, transparency and valid information for citizens available online.*

2. *Streamline citizen services by allowing licensees to submit electronic documents with their online applications.*

3. *Increase efficiency by eliminating filing, retrieving and re-filing of paper documents, and reducing time spent searching for misplaced paperwork.*

4. *Reduce the cost and clutter associated with manual, paper-based processes, and the printing and archiving of paper records.*

5. *Allow the public to submit electronic documents with online complaint forms.*

Editorial Note: Both commitments aim at facilitating access to Customs services and system. the General Directorate of Customs is in charge of implementation of these commitments.

Responsible institution: General Directorate of Customs

Supporting institution(s): NA

Start date: 2014
End date: 2016

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete

2.3 Single Window			✔		Unclear		✔			✔	
3.4 E-document			✔		Unclear	✔				✔	

What happened?

The Single Window and e-Document in the customs system aim at improving custom services for operators in Albania's trade exchange system, by reducing costs and facilitating procedures both for economic operators and for the customs administration. Both measures have been included in the Action Plan, following internal consultations with central government agencies only. The Single Window initiative, including the e-Document were launched in March 2014 at a joint press conference with the Prime Minister of Albania, the Minister of Finance, and the Director of Customs.[1]

According to a public report of the Director General of Customs, these projects were planned to start in 2015.[2] Under current customs procedures, Albanian economic operators who are engaged in trade with other countries have to gather and present numerous documents (i.e., licenses, authorizations, certificates) from various institutions in Albania for the goods they are importing or exporting. This procedure is highly costly and time-consuming not only for private operators but also for the customs administration processing the applications. The Single Window will provide an interconnected system (telematic network) that enables state institutions to exchange communications and files (e-Document). The system would allow for realtime and authenticated exchange and verification of documents and procedures.

During the past year, very limited progress was made to implement these commitments, which are to be financed by the State budget.[3] Regarding the Single Window, the General Directorate of Customs has set up a working group to elaborate the project which is still at early phase. Possible delays may take place, becauseSingle Window requires additional investments in other state institutions ICT's systems in order to enable interoperability.

Representatives of the General Directorate of Customs interviewed by the IRM researcher have reported that the terms of reference for the e-Document tender have been elaborated. The National Agency for Information Society is tasked to open the tender procedure which, by the time of drafting the IRM report was not published.

Did it matter?

Business associations interviewed by the IRM researcher have expressed high optimism on the benefits of the Single Window and e-Document. "These measures will replace our [economic operators] role as a 'postman,' running from one institution to another to get documents and submit them to Customs."[4]

The OGP relevance of these commitment is unclear. The description of the Action Plan on the Single Window makes reference to transparency and public accountability elements:"Improve public access by making selected documents, transparency and valid information for citizens available online."And, "Allow the public to submit electronic documents with online complaint forms." However, IRM interviews with responsible institutions pointed out that the system has only two *interlocutors*—economic operators and state institutions—and that there are no plans for allowing public access to this information. Business sector's representatives are highly skeptical as to whether citizens' access to the Single Window or other public transparency measures is possible.

Moving forward

Although there are clear and important benefits for both, economic operators engaged in trade with foreign countries and also for the state administration, lack of OGP relevance is evident. Consequently, this IRM report suggests abandoning these important projects for the

country as an OGP commitment. One of the recommendations of civil society during the AP's consultation in March 2014 suggested that the General Directorate of Customs should elaborate and publish a monthly report on the work of customs administration by differentiating businesses and citizens. However, it remains unclear how such measure can embody OGP values.

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[1] Accessible at bit.ly/1Zuc5Pj

[2] 2014 Report on the work of General Directorate of Customs, accessible at bit.ly/1Q5yjkG

[3] Interview with contact officer at General Directorate of Customs, September 2015.

[4] Interview with Tirana Chamber of Commerce representative, September 2015.

V. Process: Self-Assessment

The Government of Albania did not publish its self-assessment on time.

Self-assessment checklist

Was the annual progress report published?	Y
Was it done according to schedule?	N
Is the report available in the administrative language(s)?	N
Is the report available in English?	Y
Did the government provide a two-week public comment period on draft self-assessment reports?	Y
Were any public comments received?	Y
Is the report deposited in the OGP portal?	N
Did the self-assessment report include review of consultation efforts during action plan development?	Y
Did the self-assessment report include review of consultation efforts during action plan implementation?	N
Did the self-assessment report include a description of the public comment period during the development of the self-assessment?	N
Did the report cover all of the commitments?	Y
Did it assess completion of each commitment according to the timeline and milestones in the action plan?	Y

Summary of Additional Information

The Government's self-assessment was published on 13 October, 2015 at Ministry of State for Innovation and Public Administration's (MSIPA) website, inovacioni.gov.al. The report is available in English only and it has been shared with limited number of CSOs through the Coalition for OGP Albania. This approach raises concern over its reach not only in terms of numbers but also in depth of comments. There was also a two-week public commenting period on the self-assessment. By the end of October 2015, the National OGP Coordinator had received written comments on the self-assessment by two CSOs only. A joint meeting between MSIPA's officials and representatives of the CSO Coalition was held on 20 October, 2015, where comments and different aspects of the self-assessment were discussed. The National OGP Coordinator has not published online these comments or minutes of the meeting with the CSO Coalition.

Quality of the self-assessment report

The twenty-three-page self-assessment report offers a realistic evaluation of the OGP process (consultation, implementation, and monitoring of AP) and lessons learned from it. The self-assessment emphasizes that the government will work with civil society to improve the process and to seek efficient mechanisms for broader and continuous involvement of CSOs.

This document emphasizes that Albanian institutions will continue working on the implementation of all commitments within the timeframe of the Action Plan. According to the self-assessment, the majority of the Action Plan commitments were fully implemented (6 out of 13) or partially implemented (3 out of 13). For another three commitments, work is underway ("in process"), and one commitment was not implemented.

The self-assessment reports on activities that have been carried out to implement the commitment. The overall timeframe of implementing commitments and the level of detailing of milestones for each commitment are also vague. The self-assessment does not include a description of the evaluation scale, so it remains particularly unclear what it implies with "in process" and "partially implemented."

These weaknesses of the self-assessment derive from the design and structure of the Action Plan, which does not elaborate on stages of implementation for the commitments, their timeline, or on impact indicators.

In a few cases, the self-assessment provides some information on the results that some commitments have produced: for example, the number of users for the "Publication of daily payments" service (September 2015). However, there is no information for the impact that has come from delivered results. This is particularly important to ensure OGP relevance of government's efforts and change (impact) that responds to public's expectations.

Follow-up on previous IRM recommendations

Self-assessments are meant to address past IRM recommendations. This section reprints key recommendations and includes notes on whether they were fully addressed, partly addressed, or not addressed.

Out of 17 concrete recommendations from the IRM Report 2013 on the OGP process and Action Plan, Albania has fully addressed four of them during 2014–15. Another 9 recommendations have been partly addressed and 4 recommendations have not been addressed at all.

2013 Recommendations

Inclusive process and communication

The process had a low profile among key societal stakeholders and state actors beyond the capital, and there was a lack of visibility throughout the past two years. Given the evident shortcomings and deficiencies during late 2011 and early 2012, the following measures will help address past concerns with the aim to build a context-specific, broadly accepted OGP agenda:

- Identify the range of civic, public, and private stakeholders of OGP in Albania, and launch immediately target-specific information activities to raise awareness and build networks of supporters for the process. **(Partially addressed)**
- Launch an ongoing public information campaign through media and other tools (including e-participation mechanisms) to communicate the OGP Albania platform and to encourage citizens' active and continuous involvement. **(Partially addressed)**
- Launch an informative internal campaign on the OGP and OGP in Albania among state administration at all levels—including central government institutions, agencies, local authorities, and oversight bodies— to ensure informed and cooperative state actors.
- Approach OGP consultations on the upcoming action plan through a midterm vision designed to anchor nonstate actors in all stages of the process—preparation of the action plan, consultation, implementation, evaluation and review. The government should also set a clear timeline that gives civil society actors sufficient notice to prepare and participate in the deliberations. **(Partially addressed)**

- Establish joint OGP standing structures (multistakeholder forums) with civil society, private sector, media, academia, local authorities, and other relevant stakeholders as part of the governmental institutional setup that actively coordinates, monitors, and assesses action plan implementation. **(Not addressed)**
- Communicate to and coordinate with the donor community involved in assisting Albanian reform processes to better streamline medium-term development assistance and bilateral and multilateral assistance agreements in line with national strategic documents. **(Partially addressed)**
- Explore alternatives and mechanisms to generate continuous public input into the national OGP Agenda. **(Partially addressed)**
- In addition to the first three OGP grand challenges, assume responsibilities and take specific commitments in relation to the remaining two grand challenges (creating safer communities, and increasing corporate accountability) thus responding to current public safety concerns and civil society calls for sustained mechanisms in support of community engagement. **(Fully addressed)**
- Embark on a results-oriented action plan accompanied with an adequate framework of measurable indicators with clear and realistic implementation timeframe**. (Not addressed)**

Implementation partnerships, ownership and learning process

The first year of OGP Albania implementation was largely dominated by central government actors with very few connections to the range of possible stakeholders in the country. Simple communication about the Open Government Partnership as an international multistakeholder initiative may risk proving another case of an externally "imposed" and donor-dependent endeavor, should the government fail to share ownership and develop sustained partnerships nationally. In this regard, it is essential to consider the following recommendations:

- Support efforts invested by civil society actors, academia, and local authorities in the framework of OGP principles, buy into best practices (to be) established, promote results and assist sustainability development efforts. **(Fully addressed)**
- Share responsibility with and entrust nonstate actors with implementation of specific stages of the OGP process (based on the Irish experience) including cooperation and synergies in the context of a specific commitment's implementation. **(Fully addressed)**
- Take actions to improve active involvement of state actors at regional and local level, engaged in or assisting implementation of concrete commitments in partnership with local stakeholders from civic and private sector.
- Encourage the donor community to embark on shared ownership and partnership-oriented support to OGP-relevant reforms and development objectives in Albania. **(Partially addressed)**
- Champion the creation of a (Western) Balkan OGP regional forum with separate and joint (state and nonstate actors) experience-sharing subforums for mutual assistance and exchange. Explore opportunities for cross-regional commitments on issues or areas of shared interest. **(Fully addressed)**
- Make greater use of the OGP mechanism for peer-to-peer learning at the government level, by encouraging civil society exchange and experience sharing at national, regional, and global levels. **(Partially addressed)**
- Approach national evaluation via a participatory approach,with an adequate timeline that allows both state and nonstate actors to provide feedback. **(Not addressed)**
- Harmonize ambitions with the needs and priorities of the local context in the design of future action plans that rely on increased feedback from societal actors. **(Partially addressed)**

VI. Country Context

Albania was granted European Union candidate country status in June 2014, and it is currently implementing major reforms to open EU accession negotiations.

Characterized as a "transitional government" or "hybrid regime," the country has improved its overall democracy score in 2015 (4.14)[1] and has started a number of reforms in the areas of government accountability, transparency and judiciary, mainly driven by the EU accession process. In 2015, only one pillar (national democratic governance) out of seven pillars of Freedom House's index improved in 2015 while no changes in country's rating are observed for electoral processes, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption.

Widespread corruption remains one of the most challenging concerns. Albania is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in Europe, scoring 33 out of 100 on Transparency International's (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI)[2], making it lag behind all other EU candidate countries. Citizens are often confronted by bribery when accessing public services. The services perceived to be most susceptible to bribes are judiciary (81%), health (80%), education (70%), police (58%) and civil services (52%).[3]

The government led by the Socialist Party, which came to power in 2013, took measures intended to tackle corruption and organized crime. These measures included passage of the new law on civil service, adoption of the national anti-corruption strategy, and strengthening rules on asset disclosure and conflicts of interest for public officials. The government also made efforts to crack down on corruption in higher education by revoking licenses of 18 universities accused of selling diplomas.[4]

Political corruption has been pervasive, and little has been done so far to address its core problems. Areas of particular concern include party financing, de facto impunity for high-level officials, undue influence of private business interests in political decision-making, and the prejudiced application of the rule of law by an ineffective judiciary. Scandals, such as the use of public funds to finance pro-government media, have justified this suspicion and revealed the links between politicians and powerful businesses, which have been able to set the political agenda.

The EU accession process has been a major driver of development and democratization reforms, particularly in the area of the fight against corruption. In order to open EU accession talks, Albania must address five key priorities: anticorruption, fight against organized crime, public administration reform, judicial reform, and human rights. The European Commission's 2015 progress report for Albania acknowledges "good progress" in relation to public administration reform but notes the need for further measures in other four areas.[5] Key findings and issues for further actions according to the EC's 2015 report on the five priorities include

1. reforming judiciary to ensure independence;

2. enforcing of decisions;

3. faster administration of justice;

4. establishing a solid track record of corruption investigations at all levels and of convictions in organized crime and in money laundering; and

5. ensuring effective implementation of legal framework for the protection of human rights.

In addition to the above five key priorities, the public policy discourse over the past year has been increasingly focused on accountability of institutions, electoral integrity, political party financing, decriminalization, and the enabling environment for civil society.

Civil society in Albania still has a limited influence in the public sphere. Two important pieces of legislation, the Law on the Right to Information and the Law on Notice and Consultation were drafted with input from CSOs and adopted in 2014, likely to provide a positive push for increasing civic participation.

Other important achievements closely associated with open governance include the following: the adoption of a new Anticorruption Strategy and its plan' for implementation; the Decentralization Strategy, including the new territorial and administrative division; the Charter of Civil Society; and the establishment of the National European Integration Council as a multi-stakeholder forum.

The so-called decriminalization debate, which evolved in 2015 following the exposure of members of Parliament with past criminal records, is expected to produce more strict legislation to prevent such persons from being elected or appointed to public office. However, these measures will likely fail to produce results if the country does not deliver on other challenges related to impunity, political party financing, and judicial reform.

While OGP is not yet well known in Albania, it can accelerate and catalyze additional action on critical issues of governance. The reforms outlined above are closely associated with all four OGP values—access to information, participation, accountability, and technology for openness and accountability—and echo the need for more open and inclusive public decision-making.

Albania is committed to deliver by the end of 2015 on a judiciary reform, adoption of a law on protecting whistleblowers, and establishment of a national council for cooperation with civil society. In the meantime, Albania continues to consolidate public services through strengthening public administration, broader use of information, and communication technologies.

Practical implementation of adopted legislation remains a concern in Albania, and civil society organizations are focusing on monitoring of newly introduced instruments and rules, such as the access to information and public consultation laws. The fight against corruption and impunity, one of the five key priorities for opening of accession negotiations with EU, remains a central priority for civil society, donors, and international partners of Albania. Monitoring and impact evaluation of the government's measures to fight corruption and reinforce public integrity are essential to achieve results. Electoral reform and transparency of political party financing require greater focus and involvement, as preparations for the next general elections in 2017 are approaching. Despite several initiatives to promote transparency on the work of the government agencies in a number of sectors, open data in Albania still remains underdeveloped.

These developments may give an impetus to the OGP agenda in the country to capitalize on and contribute to policy discourse and generate relevant actions.

Stakeholder priorities
Current Action Plan and OGP Process in Albania

Participants expressed high interest in the Action Plan's content while they provided an overall positive opinion on the objectives and ambition of most of commitments. Relevance of the e-Document and Single Window commitments of the General Directorate of Customs was questioned at the focus group discussion. Lack of performance assessment and monitoring indicators according to stakeholders make it difficult to trace progress and impact of results.

The focus groups suggested that quality of impact (rather than quantity of outputs) and results of OGP commitments should be key criteria for measuring AP's success. Drawing attention on few of the corruption-denouncing tools in Albania (e.g., stopkorrupsionit.al portal or the Digital Commissariat application), some stakeholders pointed out the need for more comprehensive information on its achievements. "It is not the number of submitted

reports but rather the outcome of denounced cases of corruption that should drive these tools. In absence of information related to 'what happened after the report was made and what concrete measures followed?,' the public may lose interest and even become skeptical of these tools." Some of the key conclusions and recommendations on the OGP process and Action Plan during 2014–15 in Albania according to stakeholders in the focus group include the following:

- A significantly improved AP consultation process, as compared to the first Action Plan (2012), was still unable to reach broader audiences outside the capital, including a low level of informing the public administration

- There was no civil society involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the AP's implementation. The OGP coordinator must ensure transparency of this process

- The AP's description of commitments did not include clear indicators to assess progress and impact

- Civil society failed to use to its full extent the OGP agenda and leverage its recognized role in this process

Most relevant commitments that have already delivered or have high potential to do so by the end of the AP's duration (2016) include the following:

- Standardization of corruption complaints and the stopkorrupsionit.al portal

- Law on whistleblower protection

- Police Service Offices and the Digital Commissariat application

- National Geoportal

- The database of government data for economic assistance

- Establishment of electronic registers in different sectors (environment, industry)

The next OGP Albania action plan

Focus group participants suggested that the government should carry out an audit of its commitments' impact to help design the next steps. For example, in relation to the e-Albania Portal, an audit of most- and least-used services will help responsible institutions to improve the portal and provide tailored services for users.

Greater focus is strongly advised on commitments targeting citizen participation and public accountability. Interviewed CSOs suggested that, for example, Digital Albania or the use of other ICT tools to improve governance, transparency, accountability and public services will not deliver without "active citizens" and participatory mechanisms.

Some participants suggest greater focus on reforms and initiatives that target broader groups and vulnerable categories of citizens, including the Roma community, women, and unemployed youth. In this context, the government database for economic assistance should remain part of the Action Plan, even though it is a pre-existing commitment implementation supported by multiyear donor assistance, and even though there are some concerns over its OGP relevance.

Better coordination among central government agencies is required in developing ICT projects or applications to interact with the public, in order to avoid "inflation of ICT tools" that fail to bring about *active citizens*.

The establishment of a multi-stakeholder body to oversee OGP implementation and assessment will also improve the mechanisms for periodic reporting and risk management, and it will stimulate responsiveness and accountability among responsible institutions. This and other unaddressed recommendations from IRM's 2013 Progress Report for Albania

should take deserved attention, including specific commitments (e.g., political party financing), which resonate with the actual political developments in Albania.

Scope of action plan in relation to national context

Albania's accession to the European Union is considered a national priority, which is essentially framing the reforms and development processes in the political, economic and broader societal spheres. The latest EC Report (November 2015) concluded that "Albania made steady progress as regards the political criteria," while it underlines that in the opening of accession negotiations, the country will need to finalize "the comprehensive reform of the judicial system." The EC report also concluded that Albania will need to deliver "tangible results in the area of rule of law, including progress with a view to establishing a solid track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and final convictions at all levels in the fight against corruption and organized crime." Constructive, cross-party political dialogue as well as civil society active involvement remain essential for further progress in relation to other EC priorities (i.e., human rights, public administration) and for the EU accession process.

The fight against corruption, improving public services, fostering citizen participation, and using information technologies for greater transparency, accountability, and good governance have been at the center of both OGP Action Plans in Albania (2012 and 2014). However, as most of these efforts have centered on establishing the legal, institutional, or infrastructural framework, civil society stakeholders echo EU's recommendations and lay emphasis on the "track record of achievements and tangible results."

Interviewed stakeholders have underlined key priorities for developing Albania's next Action Plan as follows: anticorruption, fighting impunity, reforming and monitoring the judiciary, using ICT and open data for greater transparency, accountability and better policy planning, and enabling an environment for civil society and public participation. However, attention must shift towards more ambitious, specific, and measurable OGP-relevant commitments in order to strengthen public trust in these reforms.

Last but not least important, while the majority of focus group participants recognize the broad range of potential commitments that respond to OGP values such as access to information, citizen participation or public accountability, they encourage the government to undertake commitments that target also rural communities and disadvantaged groups as well.

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[1] Nations in Transit 2015, Freedom House, accessible at bit.ly/1JL7HnB

[2] CPI 2014 Report, accessible at bit.ly/1JL7NeZ

[3] Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer (2013). Source http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013/country//?country=albania.

[4] "Albania closes 18 universities for issuing fake diplomas," ANSA website, accessible at bit.ly/1Rmahmy

[5] EC Albania 2015 Report, accessible at bit.ly/1GUJ5rn

VII. General Recommendations

Crosscutting recommendations

- **Track impacts on the ground:** Albania needs to move toward more ambitious measures and commitments that directly affect the lives of the citizens and reinforce their trust in reforms and government accountability. In this context, emphasis could be placed on tracking impacts and creating a track record of tangible results and accomplishments that embody core principles of transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and technology and innovation.

- **Clarity in commitments:** The design of the subsequent action plan needs to take into account concerns raised over its specificity and measurability by setting realistic impact–level indicators and a clear sequence of milestones.

- **Expand participation:** To reach larger audiences, the next Action Plan could expand and involve the wider spectrum of state institutions from all three branches of power— executive, legislative and the judiciary—in addition to the involvement of civil society, academia, private sector stakeholders, and other players. A significant number of recommendations of IRM Report in 2013 (page 88-89[1]) still remain relevant, **particularly** in relation to improving the implementation, ownership, communication of and learning from the process.

TOP FIVE 'SMART' RECOMMENDATIONS
1**. Establish an ongoing, multi-stakeholder forum** and develop a comprehensive management, at least quarterly monitoring, and reporting framework for the Action Plan Implementation.
2. **Undertake more ambitious and OGP-relevant commitments that place citizens and interest groups in an (inter)active role** in the areas of anticorruption, fighting impunity, enhancing transparency, and accountability. More opportunities should be provided to direct citizen input and monitoring, building on the models of corruption denouncing portal and digital commissariats.
3. **Promote open government approaches in developing key sectorial reforms and initiatives** including judicial reform, political party financing and the ongoing debate on integrity of elected and high level public officials.
4. **Civil Society must take stock of OGP and assume greater role in Albania's OGP process** by better streamlining OGP-content embodied in its agenda.
5. **Dedicate a specific budget and human resources to the National Coordinator** dealing with the OGP Action Plan development, implementation and monitoring, as well as promotion of Albania's OGP Agenda nationally with the public, interested stakeholders, public administration and the community of donors.

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[1] IRM Albania Progress Report 2011-2013, available at
http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Albania%20OGP%20IRM%20Public%20Comment%20%28Eng%29_0.pdf

VIII. Methodology and Sources

As a complement to the government self-assessment, an independent IRM assessment report is written by well-respected governance researchers, preferably from each OGP participating country.

These experts use a common OGP independent report questionnaire and guidelines,[1] based on a combination of interviews with local OGP stakeholders as well as desk-based analysis. This report is shared with a small International Expert Panel (appointed by the OGP Steering Committee) for peer review to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, and feedback from nongovernmental stakeholder meetings. The IRM report builds on the findings of the government's own self-assessment report and any other assessments of progress put out by civil society, the private sector, or international organisations.

Each local researcher carries out stakeholder meetings to ensure an accurate portrayal of events. Given budgetary and calendar constraints, the IRM cannot consult all interested or affected parties. Consequently, the IRM strives for methodological transparency, and therefore where possible, makes public the process of stakeholder engagement in research (detailed later in this section.) In those national contexts where anonymity of informants—governmental or nongovernmental—is required, the IRM reserves the ability to protect the anonymity of informants. Additionally, because of the necessary limitations of the method, the IRM strongly encourages commentary on public drafts of each national document.

Interviews and focus groups
Focus group— Tirana, 30 September, 2015

The stakeholders' focus group discussion (30 September, 2015) elaborated on the AP's implementation and priorities for the next round of the process mainly from the perspective of relevance with OGP values (rather than grand challenges). The group gathered both OGP-aware and unaware stakeholders from civil society and thedonor community, which operate in the sectors targeted by the Action Plan 2014–16, and other areas with potential to develop OGP commitments. The profile of the group included a balanced gender ratio. Additional interviews were conducted by IRM (after the focus group) with few players suggested by the focus group discussion, and (prior the focus group) with business and state sectors' stakeholders who were unable to join the discussion.

Focus Group participants (30 September, 2015)

- Aldo Merkoci, MJAFT! Movement

- Dritan Ziu, Roma Active Albania

- Elona Dini, UNDP Albania

- Erisa Lame, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)

- Klodian Seferaj, Open Society Foundation for Albania – OSFA

- Klotilda Tavani, Partners Albania

- Sabina Ymeri, Private Consultant specialized in evaluation of government and international donor programmes

- Shefqet Shyti, Civic Education Project

Focus group participants were provided in advance with introductory notes and information on OGP, Albania's 2014–16 Action Plan, and the consultation process in the first half of 2014. Following brief introduction, the focus group discussion targeted the AP's institutional context and implementation modalities, commitments' progress (results and impact), and priorities for the next OGP Action Plan.

List of IRM Report's interviewees*

Adriatik Hasantari, Roma Active Albania

Aldo Merkoci, MJAFT! Movement

Anisa Gjika, Office of the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration

Aranita Brahaj, Albanian Institute of Science

Arben Dhima, Ministry of Energy and Industry

Arben Nikshiqi, General Directorate of Customs

Arian Dyrmishi, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)

Brunilda Paskali, Ministry of Economic development, tourism, trade and entrepreneurship

Staff member of Center for Public Information Issues

Edlira Nasi, PM Office

Eduart Cani, REC Albania

Elga Mitre, Dutch Embassy in Albania

Eridana Cano, Office of the Minister of State for Local Affairs

Erin Mlloja, State Authority of Geospatial Information

Erisa Cela, UN WOMEN Albania

Erisa Lame, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)

Erisa Proko, Office of the Minister of State for Local Affairs

Former representative of the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania

Jonida Cerekja, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth

Jonida Osmanlliu, National Agency for Information Society (NAIS)

Juliana Hoxha, Partners Albania

Klaudio Collaku, State Authority of Geospatial Information

Klodian Seferaj, Open Society Foundation for Albania – OSFA

Loran Sevi, Ministry of Interior

Lorin Ymeri, Office of the Minister of State for Innovation and Public Administration

Mirjam Reci, Civil Society Development Center

Naun Prifti, Ministry of Economic development, tourism, trade and entrepreneurship

Renaldo Agolli, State Authority of Geospatial Information

Representative of Albanian State Police

Representative of INSTAT – Institute of Statistics

Representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, rural development and water administration

Representative of Tirana Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Sabina Ymeri, Private Consultant

Shefqet Shyti, Civic Education Project

Zhaneta Prifti, Ministry of Environment

*The majority of interviews were conducted between July and September 2015. A limited number of interviews have been carried out between June 2014 and June 2015 to better understand commitment intent and purpose and national context. Certain interviewees' names and organizations have been withheld. The IRM respects the ability of individuals to make relevant commentary anonymously.

C. Survey-based data

The survey was answered by a total of 15 respondents: civil society (9 respondents),public administration (3 respondents), and private sector (3 respondents).Nearly half of them (7) were fully or significantly informed about OGP: somewhat informed, 3 respondents; too little informed, 4 respondents; not at all informed, 1 respondent.

The main source of information on OGP is civil society for 9 respondents; another 4 are informed via MSIPA or Council of Ministers website, while others point outmedia or other sources of information.

The majority of respondents (8 respondents) are informed about the OGP Action Plan of the Government. Four respondents have never heard of it, and another three have very few information.

Six respondents consider the AP's content as fully or mostly relevant for the country's challenges in the area of good governance. Five respondents say it is partly or not very relevant, and another four have no opinion about it.

Eight respondents have not been involved in the design and consultations of the OGP action plan. Five respondents report that they have been part of the open consultations with civil society.

Some of the challenges and deficiencies of the consultation process according to respondents are the following:

- Unclear role of experts involved in the design of the AP
- Lack of an information campaign with interest groups and the public
- Lack of consultations outside the capital
- Lack of presence of the OGP agenda in the media
- Lack of coordination with civil society
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of due attention by the civil society
- Lack of involvement from other stakeholders (academia, opinion makers, media, and other stakeholders in the governance system)

When asked about **challenges or deficiencies during the implementation** of the action plan, respondents declare the following:

- Lack of transparency in the monitoring of implementation
- Lack of a civil society-government joint forum to monitor implementation and develop capacities
- Lack of standardized procedures and of a long term strategy
- Lack of financial resources
- OGP commitments were not accompanied with details on their financial cost

The **top 3 commitments of the current AP with most potential** for open government in Albania according to respondents are the following:

- Implementation of public expenses module in "open data" format (4 votes)
- Standardization of processes on complaints related to corruption (stopkorrupsionit.al) (3 votes)

- Police service offices (3 votes)

Asked specifically about the **top 3 commitments that have delivered most impact** and **results** during 2014–15, most respondents have suggested the following:

- Standardization of processes on complaints related to corruption (stopkorrupsionit.al) (3 votes)
- Police service offices (3 votes)

The anti-corruption portal is one of the commitments on which respondents suggest **further focus** by the government, along with the following measures to improve governance such as Promoting OGP at local level; Improving access to information and the law on whistleblowers; Open data and public expenses also at local level; Improving accountability and transparency in political party financing, use of national public resources; Judiciary etc.

The main **measures that will improve the impact of OGP** in Albania according to respondents are the following: strengthening the role of civil society in the design and implementation of the AP (10 respondents); improving monitoring mechanisms of AP's implementation (9 respondents); public information campaigns (6 respondents); and information campaign with state institutions' employees (5 respondents).

Last but not least important, respondents are asked to what extent has **OGP produced impact and results** in improving governance in Albania. Six of them believe only "to a certain extent"; another five do not know. Two respondents believe it has certainly produced positive impact, and another two believe the results have been very limited.

About the Independent Reporting Mechanism

The IRM is a key means by which government, civil society, and the private sector can track government development and implementation of OGP action plans on a bi-annual basis. The design of research and quality control of such reports is carried out by the International Experts' Panel, comprised of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

The current membership of the International Experts' Panel is:

- Yamini Aiyar

- Debbie Budlender

- Hazel Feigenblatt

- Jonathan Fox

- Hille Hinsberg

- Anuradha Joshi

- Liliane Klaus

- Rosemary McGee

- Gerardo Munck

- Ernesto Velasco

A small staff based in Washington, DC, shepherds reports through the IRM process in close coordination with the researcher. Questions and comments about this report can be directed to the staff at irm@opengovpartnership.org

1 IRM Procedures Manual, accessible at bit.ly/1rki45i

IX. Eligibility Annex

In September 2012, OGP decided to begin strongly encouraging participating governments to adopt ambitious commitments in relation to their performance in the OGP eligibility criteria. The OGP Support Unit collates eligibility criteria on an annual basis. These scores are presented below. When appropriate, the IRM reports will discuss the context surrounding progress or regress on specific criteria in the Country Context section.

Eligibility Requirements: To participate in OGP, governments must demonstrate commitment to open government by meeting minimum criteria on key dimensions of open government. Third-party indicators are used to determine country progress on each of the dimensions. For more information, visit bit.ly/1929F1I.

Criteria	2011	Current	Change	Explanation
Budget transparency[1]	4	4	No change	4 = Executive's Budget Proposal and Audit Report published 2 = One of two published 0 = Neither published
Access to information[2]	4	4	No change	4 = Access to information (ATI) Law 3 = Constitutional ATI provision 1 = Draft ATI law 0 = No ATI law
Asset Declaration[3]	4	4	No change	4 = Asset disclosure law, data public 2 = Asset disclosure law, no public data 0 = No law
Citizen Engagement (Raw score)	3 (7.35) [4]	3 (7.35) [5]	No change	*EIU Citizen Engagement Index* raw score: 1 > 0 2 > 2.5 3 > 5 4 > 7.5
Total / Possible (Percent)	15/16 (94%)	15/16 (94%)	No change	75% of possible points to be eligible

[1] For more information, see Table 1 bit.ly/1Q6kx11. For up-to-date assessments, see bit.ly/1REJi6r

[2] The two databases used are Constitutional Provisions at bit.ly/1IlnjKB and Laws and draft laws at bit.ly/1byKbT1

[3] Simeon Djankov, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer, "Disclosure by Politicians," (Tuck School of Business Working Paper 2009-60, 2009): bit.ly/19nDEfK; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Types of Information Decision Makers Are Required to Formally Disclose, and Level Of Transparency," in *Government at a Glance 2009*, (OECD, 2009). bit.ly/13vGtqS; Ricard Messick, "Income and Asset Disclosure by World Bank Client Countries" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009). bit.ly/1cIokyf; For more recent information, see bit.ly/1hjHfEJ. In 2014, the OGP Steering Committee approved a change in the asset disclosure measurement. The existence of a law and *de facto* public access to the disclosed information replaced the old measures of disclosure by politicians and disclosure of high-level officials. For additional information, see the guidance note on 2014 OGP Eligibility Requirements at bit.ly/1EjLJ4Y

[4] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat" (London: Economist, 2010), accessible at bit.ly/eLC1rE

[5] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2014: Democracy and its Discontents" (London: Economist, 2014), accessible at bit.ly/18kEzCt