The Republic of Albania

Action Plan

Open Government Partnership Initiative

April 2012

"Great work toward transparency in all public practices has been done, but we need to continue this intense battle, every hour, every minute, every day!"—Mr. Sali Berisha, Albanian Prime Minister, 2011

Introduction

In 2005, the newly elected Albanian government set as a priority the improvement of transparency for governmental services, while in its program for 2009-2013, considering the use of new technologies as a fast track towards development, the government announced the national program "Digital Albania" as one of its major projects, reconfirming its commitment to move forward as a knowledge based economy and the creation of an Information Society.

Albania has engaged this road in early 2006, with only 4.8% of internet penetration, a figure that today stands at approximately 60%. According to a World Economic Forum Publication, Albanians are among the most passionate internet users in Europe, having achieved the second highest growth in this area in the world from 2006 to 2010. Albanians have one of the highest mobile phone usage rates in Europe. The mobile phone penetration in the end of 2011 breached the 185% level. This figure that has placed Albania the 18th in the global rank is higher than the EU average.

Albania is the first country in the world having achieved the 100% electronic public procurement services. In the last few years there has been a noticeable progress concerning e-government, as well as the facilitating of making business using online services. The registration of a new business online through the portal from the Albanian Business Registration and Licensing Center; the digitalization of the National Civil Registry; the creation of e-laboratories in public schools; the online e-Tax System; the e-Customs System; the e-Registration of Motor Vehicles, and many other services are among the achievements of the digitalization E-government services are migrating into cloud.

On its 100th independence anniversary, Albania aims to be an e-governed country.

"Albania is a country that is making serious efforts towards transparent governance. At this Forum, Albania found inspiration and support to implement an action plan that complies with all the engagements arising from the membership agreement." — Mr. Sali Berisha, Albanian Prime Minister, statement during the launching ceremony of the OGP initiative in New York on September 21st, 2011

The Albanian Government is focusing on the following OGP's challenges:

Challenge 1: Increasing Public Integrity

1.1   Open Data

The National Agency for Information Society is establishing a governmental portal in the open data format. This portal initially will include the Ministry of Finance and Department of Treasury data for daily expenses by all central institutions and agencies. This online data is close to the fulfillment of the Open Budget standards requirements.
(http://www.minfin.gov.al/minfin/Pagesa_te_kryera_nga_Drejtoria_e_Pergjithshme_e_Thesarit_1890_1.php).

The same practice will be implemented by the National Postal and Electronic Communications Authority database (http://www.akep.al).

Another institution, the National Statistics Institute (INSTAT) will implement on its long term strategy the open data format for its database. As the national coordinator for collecting data on Albania's economy and society, INSTAT will standardize the entire process of publishing the public sector's statistical open data during its long term program. This goal also fits with the European Commission's Directives requirements on the disclosure of public data.

This process will then continue on a larger scale, encompassing all central public institutions and agencies.

1.2 e-Governance: 2012 and onward

Many of the public services related to businesses and individuals are already online. These public e-services have contributed towards better governance and the fulfillment of the government's objectives of increasing transparency and fighting corruption.

The e-Cabinet system, implemented during a Government Meeting in 2009, and the new 2012 platform e-Acts incorporated into the system more than 1500 users from all ministries. This platform includes all the necessary steps for composing and approving a law or bylaw with an entirely electronic procedure. This process will be followed by the implementation of other systems, such as e-Parliament, e-President and e-Publications of the Official Gazette. These systems will complete the whole process of electronic lawmaking, saving time and expense.

In 2012 the Governmental Network Govnet will be extended to local governmental institutions. By the end of next year, many essential public services, such as private property register and health services, will be electronic.

During 2012, the e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) will be established, which will enable the exchange of information between public administration institutions. This infrastructure will be managed by the National Agency for Information Society and will enable fully electronic service delivery. In this way, the efficiency and transparency of public administration institutions will increase in accordance with European electronic services standards for the protection of personal data.

The National Agency of Information Society is establishing a high capacity Datacenter, that will enable all online public services to be centralized and integrated.

The General Directorate of Customs will achieve several objectives related to the information offered to economic operators via internet access. In July 2012, the new Excise system will be implemented, which will include online access and services for economic operators; the system will enable operators to check online the status of their statement, transit and account balance, and it will begin to prepare the processing of online payments.

This year, the Tax Administration will develop the terms of reference and bidding procedures for starting the full implementation of the e-Tax system. This project aims to integrate the current tax system and subsystem into a single one, intending to increase the tax administration performance (http://www.tatime.gov.al). Also, within the year 2012, the personal income declaration system (G2C) will be developed, as well as, gradually, the M-service technology, which will provide individuals with the ability to check their tax statements via cell phone, not only via computer.

In the field of education, in 2006 the Albanian government established the State Matura Exams system. This year, the government will implement the State Matura online process, which will

enhance the quality, accuracy, effectiveness of this system and facilitate greater access to information and services for all (http://www.mash.gov.al).

For the first time in Albania the National Exam Agency organized in January-February 2012, the regulated professions exams in a digital mode, thus developing an international standard of entirely digital tests, with maximum of transparency and a reduced number of complains. (http://www.akp.gov.al).

The Management of Pre-university Information system—this database contains the entire pre-university student system, including the number of registers, certificates and information about the academic team. This system significantly enhances the quality of services of pre-university educational structures in monitoring system performance, producing statistics and indicators and simplifying auditing inspections.
The SIMS system, which is in the final stages of development, will contain the complete database for all records and an inventory of schools infrastructure.

The Public Agency for Higher Education Accreditation (APAAL) is completing the digitalization of its management system, which will facilitate the evaluation and accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and will serve to strengthen cooperation and awareness with both stakeholders and the general public.

The first module of the U-Gov system, a system at the service of universities for internal information management, is underway. General benefits include: reduced processing time and data distribution, reduced costs for financial transactions and enhanced efficiency in resource management for educational structures.

In the justice sector in 2012, measures are being undertaken in order to initiate the online inspection of courts and judicial hearings in the country, which is one of the new functionalities that the Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) provides. By introducing these measures, the administration seeks to minimize the time needed for the compilation of inspected reports.

Another initiative in progress within the justice sector is to digitalize the file transfer process within and between the various levels of the judicial system. This will significantly reduce the time needed for registration and other court procedures.

The E-employment project will be implemented in 2012, with the aim of digitalizing the information in all employment offices, consolidating the databases for the labor market and creating a registry of job seekers and employers (www.kerkojpune.gov.al).

A Social Services website will be created, along with a map of all such services offered in Albania (www.sherbimeshoqerore.gov.al) and an updated database on gender equality (www.mpcs.gov.al).

Territorial planning data and concessions procedures will be available online at the website of the National Agency for Territorial Planning and Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) in order to obtain permits and licenses (www.**akpt.gov.al** www.mppt.gov.al).

In terms of increasing transparency in staff management, the Ministry of Defense will publish in 2012 its human resources statistics, in order to enable the monitoring of recruitment, and it will establish an online system for digitalizing, monitoring, inventorying and accounting for logistical materials.

In 2009, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) created the electronic National Civil Status Registry, which enables online issuance of civil registry documents from the 354 registry units connected with the central database. All civic documents are provided online in about 10 seconds with the highest standard of electronic operation.

Another achievement in this sector was the establishment of producing the ID documents electronically; and also the application of the MEMEX system for all criminal records—a system which enables the state police to operate with an online connection to other criminal records, especially those to Interpol, Europol etc.

The MoI is planning to establish an open data platform for the State Police, and will also start publishing its audit and inspection reports online.

1.3 Increasing public access in decision-making

1.3.1 Public information and consultation law

This year, the Albanian government and the Ministry of Justice are committed to amending the law "On the Right to Information for Official Documents" (Law No. 8503, dated 30.06.1999), based on a broad consultation with civil society organizations, in order to improve and clarify the legal dispositions.

The Minister for Innovation and ICT will also draft a special law "On Notice and Consultation" for the legal regulation of structured consultation processes with civil society actors and interest groups, including economic and social partners.

1.3.2 User friendly website

In the framework of OGP, the Albanian government is conducting a survey of all official websites of central institutions and agencies, in order to make them more user friendly. An inspection of the official websites of local institutions has also been launched and an update of the content of these websites is expected to occur this year.

In this context, in order to increase citizens' access to public consultation, especially regarding the legal acts issued by the Albanian government, a Registry of Business Legislation has been set up (http://www.rlb.gov.al), where in addition to access to the legal acts, up to the instruction/command level, it is possible for business representatives to draft and send their own comments. Also, several central institutions have begun to publish laws/policy papers on social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, in order to get input/suggestions from the public:
http://www.facebook.com/Mitik.gov.al ; http://twitter.com/#!/mitikgoval ;
Këshilli Teknik për Qeverisjen Elektronike | LinkedIn

In accordance with this, next year the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT) will implement an online application of simplified concessions procedures for all State assets that MPWT administers, which will be conducted directly on the ministry website through standard and interactive forms.

1.3. 3 Public claims

During 2012, the National Agency for Information Society will develop the Tracking Project, a functionality which will enable each citizen or business that applies to a State office to follow the progress of their application online, until the official response, in order to increase the working efficiency and accountability of the public administration.

This year the State Police and the Ministry of Interior (http://moi.gov.al) will establish a consolidated system of recording data about investigations, prosecutions and convictions of official corruption. Also this year an online compilation of the claims form for citizens will be launched on the Internal Audit Service website (http://moi.gov.al/?page_id=967).

From June 2012 until the end of the year, the digitalization of the notary system and a public claims system will be standardized and reviewed, particularly regarding property issues.

Also this year, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) will start a project for the online processing of citizens' claims at the MoJ and the High Council of Justice (HCJ). The goals of the project are to shorten the processing time of claims in the judiciary system, increase the transparency of the processing of claims and avoid overlap between the HCJ and MoJ during judicial auditing.

In 2009, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Energy (METE) set up the Consumer Protection Commission portal (www.kmk.al), where every citizen can find relevant information about consumer rights, and citizens are able to lodge an online complaint about violations, unfair trade practices or fraud.

Concerning work inspection, aside from the publication of a toll-free phone number on the State Labor Inspectorate website (www.sli.gov.al), the website can also be used to make an online complaint or to report violations. The goal is to achieve timely review of the complaint and to take appropriate measures. The Ministry of Defense will publish this year three toll-free fixed phone lines in order to increase staff awareness of combating corruption. This practice has already been developed at a number of central institutions—for example the toll-free phone numbers for emergencies published on the Ministry of Interior website.

To further strengthen transparency in public policy-making and legislative initiatives, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration (MEFWA) will hold several seminars this year for public consultation in relation to the Protected Areas proclamation (relevant map: http://www.moe.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=69), will organize several meetings of the Board for the Aarhus Convention, as well as publish on its website all environmental permits issued by this Ministry:
(http://www.moe.gov.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100&Itemid=81).

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection will publish on its website 50 legal acts and regulations in the field of rural development, food safety and consumer protection for public consultation (http://www.mbumk.gov.al).

The Tourist Service Office of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport (MTCYS) has examined for many years now the complaints that Albanian and foreign tourists have made against tourist enterprises over goods and services. In this respect, all tourists can complain directly to the Tourist Service Office, by mail or electronically, via a complaint form which is published on the official website (www.zsht.gov.al).

Challenge 2: Improving public services

2.1 Digitalization to improve public services

Customs digitalization, conducted since 2008, was an initiative which aimed at increasing the efficiency of the system, gathering information in real time at all customs points. The commitment is to improve the customs system by monitoring the work of customs officers (through the installation of cameras), increasing transparency and informing citizens about their rights and obligations at customs points (http://www.dogana.gov.al).

The Financial Module of all educational institutions - Last year, a system was created to manage the finances and budget of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MES) and all regional education departments in order to built on a central/unique database platform. The system enhances the quality of interaction, avoids duplication of information, increases transparency and tracks educational institutions' expenses electronically. The second phase of the module is expected to begin in April 2012.

Concerning transparency and anticorruption in the education system, MES has also drafted the pre-university Teachers' Code of Conduct, which gives information on permitted and prohibited activities in educational institutions.

Concerning Albanian cultural heritage, the Ministry of Tourism's website is currently issuing a list of licenses for restorations and private museums, as well as an annual list of investments in cultural monuments.

In order to increase efficiency, the Ministry of Health (MoH) established an online database for the biggest hospital "Nënë Tereza" ("Mother Teresa"). This year the MoH and health agencies published on their own websites (http://www.moh.gov.al) all types of contracts concerning public and private health institutions, all medical protocols, a full medication price list, along with a basic package of primary health services, as well as the results from the assessment of standards implementation in all health institutions in the country (http://www.moh.gov.al/index.php?module=2&item=53).

In the field of justice, from March to October 2012, the government will implement the process of recording the audio and video of judicial hearings and will develop a court personnel training for this process. The materials will be published on the court's informational portal (www.gjykata.gov.al).

The Minister for Innovation and ICT (MIICT) began an awareness and cooperation campaign this year with the mobile operators and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) with the goal of committing these stakeholders to a safer Internet, especially for minors. Many practices for the cautious use of mobile phones by children or adolescents are currently part of the practices developed by mobile operators and ISPs in Albania, through instructions given, brochures distributed at sale points, etc. But, MIICT has encouraged entrepreneurs to develop the practices mentioned above into a general national framework, working in collaboration to draw up a common code of ethics, according to European and worldwide best practices, in order to create a common self-regulating framework to protect youth and children from inappropriate content that can be transmitted via the Internet.

Regarding the transparency of political party financing, the Council of Europe has directed to Albania 7 recommendations, which are nearly fulfilled with the Parliament's approval of the "Law for Political Parties." The aim is to implement detailed rules concerning the financing of political parties after the electoral campaign; to set up an independent mechanism to oversee the funding of political parties after the electoral campaign; to enable the same body, the Central Election Commission (CEC) (http://www.cec.org.al), to control and monitor the overall political party financing both during and after the electoral campaign; and to improve and enhance the standards of electoral campaign finance control by outsourcing licensed auditors.

In the context of reforms for improving the quality of higher education, the Research Center of the Ministry of Education has adopted and published the regulation: "Ethics in research and publishing" (http://www.mash.gov.al/File/arsimi_larte/rregullore-etika-veprimtari-kerkimore-botuese.pdf).
This regulation provides, inter alia, the obligation of institutions and researchers to publish and verify by modern methods on the relevant official website every scientific Master's thesis, PHD dissertation, monograph, book, scientific article or reference, and other forms of research and publication, in order to maintain the originality and authenticity of the work and to fight plagiarism. Online publication of theses will also enable researchers to be informed about other research group projects, in this way helping to spread scientific achievements locally and internationally.

2.2 Creation of portals

During 2012, a new functional governmental portal will be established, e-albania.al. This portal will be oriented toward users' needs, providing updated and easily accessible information for them. In the future, this portal will serve as a single point of contact for e-government services offered to citizens, businesses and public employees.

The Albanian government will create a single portal of inspections, "e-Inspection", relevant for the coordination, management, unification and monitoring of inspection procedures. This portal will help improve the transparency and accountability of the inspection system in the country and will reduce corruption.

The www.gjykata.gov.al portal will be established in order to download data to citizens, including the publication of judicial decisions.

The National Labor Council portal will also be created. The role of this Council is to coordinate the three key decision-making actors in this sector: the Ministry, the unions and the employers.

To improve implementation of the national territorial plan and taking community concerns into account, next year the Albanian National Territorial Planning Agency will create a portal for the national registry of territorial planning (http://www.akpt.gov.al/default.aspx).

Created by METE to increase the transparency of the process, the portal of state asset privatization (www.privatizime.al) is designed in such a way that the search engine quickly delivers the required results, displaying each object, accompanied by a picture, the county or city where it is located and, most importantly, the status of the object, such as "ongoing evaluation," "sent for sale" or "approved for privatization."

In terms of tourism in Albania, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (MTCYS) has set up a portal for Albanian tourism (http://www.albaniantourism.com). MTCYS also created the Albanian database of iso-polyphony, a UNESCO-recognized intangible world heritage, published on the website: http://www.isopolifonia.com.

2.3 Audit

The Albanian government has adopted a decision on the criteria for establishing internal audit structures in public institutions. Within the above OGP challenge, from this year and onward any act of inspection and audit of the central administration will be published on the official website of the appropriate institution. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture is committed to publishing the final internal audit reports of this ministry's institutions, as well as the list of beneficiaries (farmers, agro-businesses) of support schemes and registered products.

Challenge 3: More effectively managing public resources

3.1 Open Budget

Based on the law "On the Right to Information," as well as the Albanian government's initiative to fight corruption and increase transparency, the Ministry of Finance's General Directorate of the Treasury has disclosed the list of payments made daily by all general government units since January 2012. This document reflects such details as: the beneficiary, invoice number, description, the institution to which the treasury branch makes the payment, the respective amount and the date of registration of this bill in the Treasury system. This document is available on the official website of the Ministry of Finance (link above in section 1.1 Open Data). Periodically, this ministry also publishes online the budget law (every June), the statistical bulletin of finance, periodic data about the public debt, etc.

3.2 Public Procurement

In 2009 Albania was the first country in the world that carried out a mandatory electronic procurement system for all public sector procurements above the threshold of 3000 Euros. For implementing this project, our country received the second prize of the 2010 UN Public Service Award for excellence in

public service. This e-procurement platform is a web-based application that enables secure transactions between Albanian public institutions and national and international business. This system provides a secure and transparent administration for the preparation of all tender documents, thus avoiding unnecessary paperwork and providing data about the entire process (www.app.gov.al).

This year, the Public Procurement Agency will implement the electronic system of all agreements and develop electronic concessions procedures until the opening phase of the offerings.

3.3 EITI

In 2010, the Albanian government approved the Decision (No. 540, dated 07.07.2010) to follow the procedures for the accession of Albania as a country implementing the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) (http://www.albeiti.org).

Based on recommendations made by the International Secretariat of EITI, the Albanian Secretariat for EITI (ALBEITI) developed a work plan for 2011-2013 and approved a Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat and hydrocarbon companies for the publication of data from the latter. Currently, this memorandum has been signed by a number of these companies.

During the final six months of 2011 and into this year, ALBEITI has organized seminars and workshops with the Albanian EITI working group, stakeholders, civil society, communities in areas of extractive industry, etc.

On October 25-26, 2011, the EITI International Board met in Jakarta, Indonesia and concluded that "Albania has made meaningful progress" in implementing the EITI framework.

The EITI International Board has extended the nomination deadline for Albania another 18 months (until April 25, 2013), in order for Albania to complete an assessment showing compliance with the 2010 rules of EITI. The principal reason for this decision was the functioning and decision-making of the Albanian Inter-ministerial Working Group for EITI. Therefore the IWG for EITI has been reorganized and recomposed by ALBEITI.

Closing remarks

The Albanian government OGP Action Plan has been consulted and drafted in a 3 month period with the input of all the central institutions and agencies. The IWG held in February 2012 a round table with several representatives of the country's NGOs, who have followed with interest the OGP initiative and the drafting of this Action Plan and have contributed in it.

Consultation with NGOs and the public in general will continue and we trust that the OGP initiative will benefit further from it next year. Also we believe that next year the OGP national action plan update will cover the engagement of local government.

"My country has achieved much in the last years in terms of fighting corruption, rendering government more open and transparent to citizens. I am confident that participating in the OGP will enable us to learn from other countries as well as to provide to others our own record of challenges and successes" highlighted in the intent to partnership letter Mr. Genc Pollo, Minister for Innovation and ICT who chairs the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IWG) in charge of the national OGP Action Plan.