

The EU Policy Hub closely monitors EU integration process and the institutions involved, focusing primarily on inter-institutional coordination among domestic governmental institutional bodies and their legal documents and reports. The monitoring indicators and the methodological guidelines include the enacted regulatory and/or legislative acts; the activities performed (no. of meetings, action plans, reports, strategies to address EC Report shortcomings, etc.); the evolution stage of draft instruments; and the institutional and public scrutiny over results achieved.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING CAPABILITIES AND THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE IN THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS

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### Introduction

This issue brief examines the role of the Government of Albania in strategic planning, policy development and coordination capabilities with regard to the European Union accession process. The main tools for strategic planning and policy development in place are financial resources, human resources, timetable with settled goals and deadlines, a shared agenda of meetings, a monitoring system and a clear decision making method. The Albanian Government has included all these tools for strategically planning the Integration process but there are gaps in achieving commitments and the monitoring system appears yet unable to correct procedures, before the deadlines have expired.

### Managing the European Integration Process

For managing and coordinating the EU Integration process, the Albanian Government has set up the following [management bodies](#):

- Inter-ministerial Committee on European Integration (ICEI)
- Inter-institutional Coordination Committee on European Integration (ICCEI)
- Board of European Integration (BEI)
- Ministry of European Integration (MEI)
- Inter-institutional Working Groups (IWGs)
- Integration Units in the line Ministries (IUMs)

On the other hand, the two most fundamental documents laid out by the Albanian Government in view of the integration process are:

- The National Plan for European Integration (NPEI)**: used as planning tool for measures to meet the obligations arising from the European Integration process, which asks for the fulfilment of all obligations within the deadline of 31 March 2019.
- The Roadmap for addressing the five key priorities**:<sup>1</sup> public administration reform, a functioning judiciary, fighting corruption, tackling organized crime, and protecting human rights.

Both documents are synchronized but have different purposes and scope. While the NPEI serves as a planning and monitoring tool for the approximation of the EU acquis in the national legal order, the Roadmap specifically aims to address the five key priorities, including the pertinent legal acts and the implementing activities necessary to address them.

The preparation of the NPEI 2016-2020 and its annual revisions are coordinated by MEI and IWGs. The Ministry of European Integration provides the methodology and guidelines on NPEI drafting and

1. The 5 key priorities for Albania on opening the accession negotiations were defined in the Enlargement Strategy 2013.

monitoring. It is to spot out that NPEI is in line with the Mid-Term Budget Programme (MTBP). Also, MEI participates and assists in the review of draft-budget programs of line ministries.

The structure of the NPEI 2016 - 2020 is composed of three main parts: 1- introduction, 2- Political Criteria and Economic Criteria; 3- planning section divided into 33 chapters (negotiation chapters). In this framework are also included the drafting costs of the Albanian acts aligned with the EU legislation. Hence, a costing of all measures provided in this Action Plan is in place, and it has been realised by the Ministry of European Integration in collaboration with the Technical Assistance Project, SMEI III. The intention of this novelty is to help all Ministries and Institutions in line with the Integration process for their preparation and the adoption of planned legislative acts as well as for the accuracy in meeting all demands. For example, types of expenditures are costs of salaries for existing staff; costs of salaries for new staff to be hired; training costs, costs for consultants, etc. Furthermore, for each chapter a list of foreign assistance project, with their provided budgets as well as a description of the expected activities for each project is present.

The 2016-2020 NPEI helps Albania in its way forward with the European integration process through the pursuing of approximation of national legislation with EU acquis. In fact, the actions planned to be implemented in this plan coincide perfectly with the aims of the integration requirements, set by European Union.

### 2020 Vision of Albania

The Albanian Government has laid down its own [2020 Vision](#) strategy and it has adopted the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) and the main pillars for 2015-2020 are:

1. Growth through macro-economic and fiscal stability;
2. Growth by increasing competitiveness;
3. Investment in human capital and social cohesion;
4. Growth through sustainable use of resources and territorial development.

The four pillars are supported at the foundation by the principles of good governance, democracy and rule of law.

On the one hand, the main objective of the strategic vision 2020 is EU membership<sup>2</sup> and its achievement will be measured through the degree of implementation of the membership criteria, with a focus on the 5 key priorities, as already mentioned above.

On the other hand we see that the four pillars of the strategy are closely linked to the government's priorities (six) which can be summarized in innovative public services citizen- centered (good governance); recovery and the financial consolidation of the energy sector (efficient energy system); promoting innovation and competitiveness (foreign and domestic direct investment); integrated water management; integrated land management; and financial structural reforms.

NSDI is aligned with the national plan for European integration; the national program for economic reforms; the medium-term budgeting program and the sector and cross-cutting strategies adopted. It is also in line with the indicative strategic document of the EU for Albania (2014-2020) and with the progress reports issued by EU and the World Bank.

### Identified shortcomings

The Ministry of European Integration monitors the process of the EU integration and according to its last Report issued in January 2017, the number of the adopted legal acts remains yet low compared to the planned number on the NPEI, even though the realization percentage from one quarter to another has been evaluated as positive.

Based on reports of the institutions responsible for preparing the chapters of National Action Plan for European Integration, the state of execution of NPEI for the first six months of 2016 results are presented in the table below:

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2. "The realization of this vision will be translated into three main results: sustainable economic growth which does not harm the environment, social welfare and more cohesive society, and getting the country ready to join the EU", [National Strategy for Development and Integration](#), p.30.

**Table 1:** Implementation of NPEI for the year 2016

	Planned Acts (January-September 2016)	Approved Acts (Jan-Sept 2016)	Percentage of implementation
Draft legal acts	197	114	<b>57%</b>
Strategic/Policy documents	39	19	<b>49%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>56.4%</b>

Hence, the total implementation of NPEI for the period **January-September 2016 is 56.4%**.

According to the report, the main reasons for the delays are as follows:

- Poor planning of the appropriate level of resources and time needed for preparation of draft legal acts by ministries;
- Insufficient inter-institutional coordination during the preparation of the draft legal acts and lack of timely review by other ministries, leading to delays in approval of the draft act after its submission to the Council of Ministers.

Following these deficiencies, since February 2016, the Ministry of European Integration has asked to all line ministries to report the level of implementation of the NPEI on a monthly basis instead of quarterly. In fact, making the monitoring more rigorous will help Ministries in planning their work better and in compliance with the Integration process resulting in optimizing the timeframe before deadlines. It is important to stress that a solid and coherent planning with a regular tracking progress against performance goals and objectives is a confirmed successful method for achieving tangible results.

Also, it has been asked by the Ministry of European Integration that during the inter-institutional meetings of ICCEI, the representatives of ministries from their technical directories should be present, accompanied if necessary by employees of integration directories, and not the

opposite. This is because staff from technical departments can in principle provide the adequate knowledge and information.

Meetings are an important organizational tool for the coordination of the integration process as they can be used to solve problems, make decisions, create and develop understanding, encourage enthusiasm and initiative, provide sense of direction, create a common purpose, plan, pool and develop ideas. Hence, the effective meetings have an important role, not to be underestimated by all involved parties within the executive branch. Nevertheless, increasing and strengthening the working groups' capacities in order to address the obligations related to the integration process seems to be the road that the Albanian Government is following.

### Conclusions and recommendations

From the institutional point of view, there is a formal set of governmental institutions and strategies to be used for the management of the European Integration process. Today's challenges of the EU integration process of Albania don't fit into a single ministerial portfolio but they depend on the joint performance targets, better information sharing, and more effective meetings for solving the current problems, increasing the sense of responsibility and the feeling of support internally as well as for communicating with coherence externally. Therefore, we call on our Government to improve the mechanisms in charge of the inter-Institutional coordination, an area which will become even more important with the opening of the negotiations.

A positive consideration can be the fact that the Albanian Government takes into account the recommendations given by the EU through the progress reports and also tends to follow the suggestions of the international experts and consultants in charge of helping the government in complying with the reforms requested by the EU. For example, as said above, the NSDI besides getting the country ready to join the EU, wants to achieve a sustainable economic growth which does not harm the environment, social welfare and more cohesive society. These are all priorities that [EU 2020 strategy](#) has set for their own countries (smart, sustainable and inclusive growth). Another example is the recent law on higher education adopted by the Albanian Government which falls under recommendation nr. 5 of the progress report 2015, issued by European Commission: *“Adopt and start to implement the law on higher education”*.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of this adoption is highlighted by EU in the report 2016 where it says: *“Some progress has been made in education, especially by adopting the pre-university education strategy and implementing the higher education reform”*.<sup>4</sup>

However, we want to emphasize here that meeting recommendations is certainly a positive signal in Albania's commitment vis-a-vis future accession. Nevertheless, its repercussions may not always match with national consensus and citizens' acceptance. Cause of limited space, we will develop this part more, in a future analysis.

Believing that a better functioning of the inter-Institutional bodies in charge of the European integration process can make positive change, we recommend the following:

1. Adopting each year a common work plan for the all six management bodies and make it available to the public, through websites and printed versions;

2. Creating solid links, by working together, between the bodies that monitor the Integration process and the implementation of the National Strategy for Development and;
3. Preparing and stabilizing the meeting dates for the management bodies, in the beginning of each year and publishing the list on the websites of each line Ministry and institutions as well as keeping it up to date;
4. Building a functional online platform that all bodies can use for coordinating their meetings, exchanging information and following up with each other, instead of the existing institutional back-and-forth way of acting;
5. The Ministry of Integration that has the responsibility to monitor the integration process, should reinforce its monitoring capacities by:
  - a. Putting in place an adequate digital system which can help with the monitoring tasks;
  - b. Drafting recommendations regularly, each month, after the other ministries report about their achievements and problems related to the adoption of the legal acts;
  - c. Publishing their monitoring reports regularly on their website by using PDF versions and /or open source as well as preparing a summary of each of them so the wider public can read them as well.

The success of the European integration process depends more than ever, on the ability and the willingness of the Albanian government to reform the country, by including everyone into the process. Therefore, delivering by planning vigorously through long term reasoning is the key to it.

3. European Commission, [Report on Albania 2015](#), pg.29.  
4. European Commission, [Report on Albania 2016](#), p.77.