



Report on the coverage on the situation of terrorism and extremism in the country via media broadcasting and the Albanian legal framework in response to threats as organized crime and terrorism



This report is produced by the organization “Together for Life” with the support of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in the framework of the project “Are we ready to fight?”. The statements in this publication are those of the author. They do not bear to reflect the opinions or views of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network.

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Abbreviations

AGDPML- Albanian General Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering

ARO - Asset Recovery Office

BIRN- Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

DAT - Directorate of Anti-Terror

FATF - Financial Action Task Force

FIFA - Fédération Internationale de Football Association

FTFs - Foreign Terrorist Fighters

ICT - Information and Communications Technology

PCVE - Preventing Counter Violent Extremism

SPAK - Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure

SP- Special Court

SIU - Special Investigative Unit

R&R programs - Rehabilitation and Reintegration programs

VE - Violent extremism

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Introduction

Before the Syrian conflict the common understanding of terrorism and violent extremism terminology in the Albanian public discussion had little explanation on what do they represent as well as the differences among them. Terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations poses a generic threat to world's peace and security. On the other side, among state authorities such division came through of an ongoing and dynamic process which currently is distinguished by the laws adopted and other strategic documents into force.¹ Specifically, the phenomenon of national and international terrorism is one of the most difficult challenges currently set alone not mentioning the possible transformation during the years and moving closer with organized crime gangs. The national security of the Republic of Albania represents the totality of state means, tools and instruments to ensure the protection of its citizens, the society as a whole and the Albanian state from external and internal threats and menace. Terrorism continues to be one of the main security threats, both nationally and internationally, threatening not only life and property, but also democratic values and the very way of life of society.

The armed violence of several organized groups in the Middle East, specifically in Syria by the infamous ISIS terrorist group, have used on large scale the massive propaganda machine and manipulative recruiting operations in countries outside the conflict area, with an aim at expanding and enlarging its ranks and its support to serve the extremist cause. Such actions of this propaganda and recruiting operations have been present in Albania and other Albanian-speaking territories in the Balkans as well.² Occurrences on terrorist and/or on PCVE domain took place in Albania too, where first the arrest of nine persons and after the indictment of including two self-declared imams who used mosques in the suburb areas of Tirana and other regions for recruiting persons and financing terrorist activities revealed the Albanian troubles with home ground radicalizations and the immediate need to address, firstly, to stop the influx of Albanian citizens to join the conflict in the Middle East, secondly, to distinguish the state institutions dealing with terrorism and PCVE, focusing more in education and awareness raising activities to disrupt the terrorist propaganda that was largely and easy accessed and thirdly, preparing the ground what came next; the process of the rehabilitation and reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their families into the Albanian society.

As such, these acts, internationally and nationally took a large consideration from the politics and large public, for the media outlets such events become a secure resource to get more visibility where

¹Cross-cutting Strategy Against Terrorism and Action Plan 2020-2025. <https://cve.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/vendim-2020-12-16-1137.pdf>. Another reference: National Strategy Fighting against Violent Extremism 2015-2020. https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/strategjia_kombetare_per_luften_kunder_ekstrmizmit.pdf.

²Barret, R. "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees", October 2017. <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>.

at the end of the day it means more incomes for them. The terrorist acts were the main news when happened and the speed of information was instantly on every global media platform. The era we live nowadays, where the internet brought transformations and innovations on getting the news instantly has diversified and reinforced the influence of traditional media. The news is spread on faster, largely detailed, and as a result the impact of terrorism have become powerful, influential and its echo is felt in long distance. In these terms, the social mission of the Albanian journalism, the role and responsibility of the media play an even more important role as well as the readiness of state authorities to address the security issues in cooperation with media platforms and protect its citizens from not joining such terrorist groups and extremist views.

As the terrorism together with PCVE definition is not agreed by the international forum it expressed its complexity how media platforms and media experts should address the abovementioned topics. As such, it includes the responsibility of media to report the truth, but separately is required to achieve a deeper knowledge of the context, and in particular to understand that sensational acts of violence by terrorists' groups are often part of a strategic plan, intended to use and manipulate media coverage for their solely interest.

The aim of the report is twofold. The first is to examine the media analyses on state capacities to address security issues related to terrorism and VE and try to shed light in the field of media coverage in relation to terrorism, VE and hate speech and how the media do understand the steps taken by state authorities on such ground. The report was focused for two months in daily search on media platforms (digital platforms, national TVs and newspapers). The search was carried out using key words such as: *terrorism, violent extremism, hate speech, organized crime, Albanian state, Syria and Iraq*. Secondly, it aims to analyze the legal framework, as the means and measures to achieve the goals and objectives set out in strategic and key documents, if they do align with the EU *acquis*, their implementation and the effectiveness. Such report will provide recommendations for improvement at the end.

The report is structured as following. The first section provides an overview of media coverage and state response to security issues such terrorism, violent extremism, hate speech and organized crime related to terrorism. The following section analyses the legal legislation adopted by the Albanian state in line with EU *acquis* and its effectiveness. The last section draws some recommendations for improvements.

Definitions³

1 - RADICALISM - *“The process of developing extremist ideologies and views. The radicalization may be violent or not”*⁴.

3 - VIOLENT EXTREMISM - *“The process of adopting radical views (political, ideological) or religious) and their conversion into violent acts”*⁵.

4 - COUNTER-RADICALIZATION - *“a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programs specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalized) individuals from resorting to terrorism”*⁶.

5 - RESILIENCE - *“factors, ideas, institutions, issues, trends, or values that enable individuals and communities to resist or prevent violence”*⁷.

6 - TERRORISM - *“The intentional act that could seriously harm a country or an organization international, carried out with the aim of causing great fear in the population, forcing in dishonestly a government or international organization to perform or not to perform one action, seriously destabilizing or destroying basic political, constitutional structures, economic or social through assassinations of the person's life, attacks on physical integrity of a person, the abduction, taking hostage of people, aircraft or ships, or by means of production, possession or transport of weapons and explosives”*⁸.

- TERRORIST ORGANIZATIOIS - *“Terrorist organization is a special form of criminal organization, which aims to commit violent acts for terrorist purposes, such as overthrowing the constitutional order, severe disturbance of public order, arousing fear and mass insecurity”*⁹.

- FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS - *“individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of perpetrating, planning, preparing or participating in terrorist acts, or providing or receiving terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict”*¹⁰.

- ORGANIZED CRIME ORGANIZATIONS - *“A criminal organization is the highest form of cooperation, in which three or more persons belong and which is distinguished by the special degree of organization, structuring, stability, duration, as well as the purpose for committing one or more criminal offenses, to realize material and immaterial benefits”*¹¹.

³ As the definitions related to terrorism and violent extremism are not agreed by international forums and countries as well as international organizations do have different interpretation of what do they consist to contextualize such report the terminology referred to them would be based to the definitions found in the Albanian laws and national strategies into force that do address such topics.

⁴ Decision of the Council of Ministers, No. 1137, date 16.12.2020 “On the Approval of the Cross-cutting Strategy against Fighting Terrorism, 2021–2025, and the action plan 2021–2023”.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Decision of the Council of Ministers, No. 930, date 18.11.2015 “For the Approval of the National Strategy against fighting Violent Extremism and Action Plan”.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Decision of the Council of Ministers, No. 1137, date 16.12.2020 “On the approval of the cross-cutting strategy against fighting Terrorism, 2021–2025, and the Action Plan 2021–2023”.

⁹ Article no 28 of the Albanian Criminal Code, changed by the law No. 9275, dated 16.9.2004.

¹⁰ Decision of the Council of Ministers, No. 930, date 18.11.2015 “For the Approval of the National Strategy against fighting Violent Extremism and Action Plan”.

¹¹ Article no 28 of the Albanian Criminal Code, amended by the law No. 9275, dated 16.9.2004.

- FINCANCING TERRORIST ACTIVITIES – “...granting or raising funds, by any means, directly or indirectly, for the purpose that they to use or knowing that they will be used, in whole or in part: a) to commit acts with terrorist intent; b) by a terrorist organization; c) by a single terrorist...”¹²
- CYBER- CRIME – “is defined as the unauthorized interference with and/or through the use of information and communications technology (ICT); what constitute a cyber-crime offense is provided in the Albanian Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania”.¹³
- HATE SPEECH – “is any form of public expression by any means of promotion, incitement to denigration, hatred or slander, any harassment, insult, negative stereotype, stigmatization or threat against a person or group of persons, as well as any justification of it all forms of expression based on a non-exhaustive list of causes according to article 1 of this the law”.¹⁴
- REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION (R&R) – “are programs that address the FTFs who have committed acts that related to terrorism (in some cases even families their) as well as those who do have some level of radicalization and have expressed levels of violent extremism. Programs R&R can take place in community life as well as in restricted institutions (such like prisons and/or as part of probation service). R&R programs can offer educational, health and mental health support, vocational training, peer to peer counseling, opportunities for employment as well as ideological reeducation. The R&R programs are designed for individual and family support which provide that FTFs can enjoy the same rights the same opportunities as the other members of community that are in need for state support”.¹⁵

¹²Article no 230/a of the Albanian Criminal Code, added by law no. 9086, dated 19.6.2003; amended by law no. 23/2012, dated 1.3.2012; repeal the part that provides also the punishment with a fine, as the main punishment, in addition to the punishment with imprisonment, with law no. 144, dated 2.5.2013.

¹³Albanian Criminal Code, amended by the law No. 7895, dated 27.1.1995.

¹⁴Law no. 124/2020 “For some additions and amendments to law no. 10221, dated 4.2.2010 “On Protection from Discrimination”.

¹⁵ Prime Minister Order “Approving the additional inter-institutional plan for the reception and treatment of Albanian citizens returning from the conflict zones Syria and Iraq”, No. 169, dated 01.11.2018 and the No. 148 dated 05.11.2019.

I. Media analyses on states capacities to address security issues related to terrorism and extremism

When terrorist acts as well as extremist's events take place no matter into the Albanian context or globally, the Albanian media devotes a big portion of time and image on the such topics, starting from the moment the information is circulating in the media up to three to four days after (max one week in total). The information disseminated by the Albanian media usually relays on the internationally recognized media outlets for events taking place outside Albania, while for events within the country the information pretty much is broadcasted uniformly, where the headlines are phrased in a high-sounding modality to catch the momentum and the clicks. Therefore, reporting on VE and terrorism is a major challenge for contemporary media.

The big changes brought by the Internet have reinforced the impact of the media. Daily news is disseminated faster, more explicit and thorough, bringing media to the attention of the terrorism and VE to use it and ensure their impact and influence to be more powerful and echo longer. In these conditions, the public purpose of journalism and the role and responsibility of media becomes even more important to understand the differences that lays down on such topics as well as being able to understand and address professionally how the state authorities do act on security issues associated with.

The Albanian media largely got into the sphere of terrorism in the year 2014 when the infamous trial of the self-proclaimed "imams" got the public attention where the Albanian authorities did arrest eight citizens for terrorist recruitment.¹⁶

Within the year 2014 and the two following years, the media coverage mostly centered the news dissemination for the Albanian citizens that left the country and joined the ranks of the terrorists fractions fighting within the Syrian state in relation to the ongoing trial of the "self-proclaimed imams"¹⁷ without clear indications what was really happening on the ground in Syria.

The events happening in Syria (between 2014-2016) on terrorism and VE had been reported in Albanian media mostly through news translated from international media. Such confirmation was indicated also in the manual for reporting VE and terrorism published by the Albanian Media

¹⁶ Shqiptarja.com "Thirrjet për luftë në Siri lihen në burg 8 xhihadistët", (2016). <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/thirrjet-per-lufte-ne-siri-br-lihen-ne-burg-8-xhihadistet>

¹⁷ Shqiptarja.com "Xhihad 2014, si përfundojnë drejt Sirisë fanatikët shqiptarët", (2014). <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/xhihad-2014-si-përfundojne-br-drejt-sirise-fanatiket-shqiptaret>

Institute¹⁸ which notes that “the inability of Albanian media to send reporters to conflict areas or places where terrorist acts were committed, had long deprived local media of this type of reporting and the ability to learn from this experience”, as such to understand the key elements of what constitutes terrorism and VE.

The years 2014-2016 were followed by a low public information of the Albanian authorities on what measures were taken to further prevent Albanian citizens leaving the country to join the conflict in Syria.¹⁹ The main news following the terrorism and VE topics in 2014 was the establishment by the Ministry of Interior the Directorate of Anti-Terror (DAT) within the Albanian State Police in the same line as the endorsement to the Euro-Atlantic countries as Albania is a member in the international anti-terror coalition.²⁰ The DAT was a decomposition of such structure within the State Police, with a sevenfold increase in the number of agents, which led to 104 effectives, from 15 that have been part of this structure in the past 20 years.²¹ Generally, in all media platforms the information was broadcasted on generic grounds relaying on the State Police statements and press release and no subsequent information was updated later by journalists that cover security issues (which usually are journalists that cover issues related to the police, prosecution or courts as there are no entirely dedicated journalists for security issues).

It is important to underline that the Albanian authorities stated publicly that from 2015 there were no Albanian citizens that left to join the conflict in Syria. In an interview with the former Minister of Interior, Mr. Saimir Tahiri, in which he gave a comprehensive information on how the state authorities, mainly the State Police and the DAT, were working and collaborating with their counterparts regionally and internationally as well as third parties organizations within the Albanian territory to prevent, disrupt and impede further terrorist activities and focus on more awareness raising campaigns online and on site.²² Furthermore, in the same year, 2015, the former General Director of State Police, Mr. Haki Çako did state that without any Albanian citizens leaving the country to join the conflict, the State Police and law enforcement agencies do have a list of at least of 45 citizens that are under monitoring on ground of violent extremist views and beliefs.²³

The Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism is another public institution that addresses topics related to PCVE in Albania, at central and local level. Its role has been crucial in providing a safe and secure information and developing links with different actors, public and civil organizations also in the media literacy and radicalization, violent extremism that leads to terrorism.

¹⁸Albanian Media Institute “Manual for reporting violent extremism and terrorism” (2021). <http://www.institutemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2-Terrorism-english.pdf>.

¹⁹Dita “Krijohet superdrejtori kundër terrorizmit”, (2014). <http://www.gazetadita.al/ngrihet-superdrejtori-kunder-terrorizmit/>.

²⁰Dita “Krijohet superdrejtori kundër terrorizmit”, (2014). <http://www.gazetadita.al/ngrihet-superdrejtori-kunder-terrorizmit/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²²Shqip “Tahiri për Zërin e Amerikës: Nga masat e marra asnjë person nuk ka shkuar të luftojë në Siri”, (2015). <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2015/05/18/tahiri-per-zerin-e-amerikes-nga-masat-e-marra-asnje-person-nuk-ka-shkuar-te-luftoje-ne-siri/>.

²³Shqip “Zonat ku antiterrori po monitoron 45 shqiptarët me prirje ekstremiste”, (2015). <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2015/11/27/zonat-ku-antiterrori-po-monitoron-45-shqiptaret-me-prirje-ekstremiste-2/>.

In 2016, the terrorist and VE's headlines got the front pages again in the Albanian media, when the Albanian Football Federation on the last minute presented an official request to FIFA to change the location of the match between Albania and Israel, that was set to take place at the "Loro Boriçi" stadium in Shkodër. The location was changed to "Elbasan Arena" and the request cited "security" as the main reason. Both FIFA and the Israel Football Federation did accept the request.²⁴ The situation got an immense spotlight as there were no prior similar situations happening within the Albanian territory, for a normal development of a football match to change its location as a result of the threat of terrorism. The State Police and law enforcement agencies were on high alert, which carried out detentions and arrests for terrorism grounds.²⁵

The information published from the media for the detentions and arrests for the football match were made public with names and pictures of those citizens without taking into consideration the protection of personal data. Such arrests revealed the existence of recruitment networks, but despite this, the media failed to make public the working mechanisms, like the additional information about the extent and consequences of activities of this network, their recruitment methods, or the reach out of individuals involved in these activities.

As the topic of terrorism and violent extremism became very attractive to catch the public attention there were a few journalistic articles that did try to investigate and collect more information, opinions from the experts of the field (nationally and/or internationally).²⁶ Consequently, such interest lost its way during the months and time to time was resurrected only when different events took place. There was no continuity over the subject to get more first-hand investigative information on the notorious cases made public from the recent facts as well as to merge the knowledge with foreign practice. To some extent BIRN (Balkan Insight), was the only investigative media that did devote to such topics several articles periodically within Albania and regionally.²⁷

It is important to underline that in the latest reports of Freedom of House (2021), it highlights that the Albanian media independence was further limited in 2020.²⁸ Reporters Without Borders's (RSF) Press Freedom Index and the media freedom assessments state the deteriorations in the country's media landscape, which the government has increasingly sought to control from the year 2019. The

²⁴Ballkanweb "Ndeshja Shqipëri-Izrael/ "Shtettrrethim" në Elbasan, policia merr nën kontroll stadiumin. Masa ekstreme sigurie", (2016). <https://www.balkanweb.com/shqiperi-izrael-shtettrrethim-ne-elbasan-policia-merr-nen-kontroll-stadiumin-masa-ekstreme-sigurie/>. Ballkanweb "Ndeshja me Shqipërinë/ Federata e Izraelit shpjegon ndryshimin e stadiumit: Nuk e kërkuam ne", (2016). <https://www.balkanweb.com/federata-e-izraelit-shpjegon-ndryshimin-per-stadiumin-nuk-e-kerkuam-ne/>.

²⁵Klan Tv "Antiterrori ndalon 4 bashkëpunëtorë të ISIS", (2016). <https://tvklan.al/4-xhihadiste-ne-pranga-mbeshtesnin-dhe-financonin-isis/>. Klan Tv "Arrestimet për terrorizëm në Shqipëri, Interpol Tirana kërkon informacione nga Egjipti", (2016). <https://tvklan.al/arrestimet-per-terrorizem-ne-shqiperi-interpol-tirana-kerkon-informacione-nga-egjipti/>.

²⁶Dritare Gjinishi: Ja pse jemi të kërcënuar nga ISIS! ", (2016). <https://dritare.net/gjinishi-ja-pse-jemi-te-kercenuar-nga-isis>. Dritare "Bombat e ISIS edhe në Tiranë?", (2016). <https://dritare.net/bombat-e-isis-edhe-ne-tirane>.

²⁷Balkan Investigative Regional Reporting Network (BIRN) is a network of non-governmental organizations promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values in Southern and Eastern Europe. It has local organizations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, while the Network is editorially also present in Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. It strives to empower people to access their rights, by providing accurate and relevant information and creating opportunities for them to participate in democratic processes.

²⁸Balkan Insight "COVID-19 Worsening Environment for Media Freedom, Report Warns", (2020). <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/29/covid-19-is-aggravating-an-already-difficult-environment-for-media-freedom-report/>.

government had stepped up its attempts to control the media under the guise of the fight against fake news and disinformation, particularly after the earthquake registered in November 26th.²⁹

Such situation does count in the terrorism and VE content as the security issues are not easily accessed by the investigative journalism and journalists.

Between those years and the years that followed there is difficulty to spot a direct link between the terrorism and organized crime in the media reports (though as reports show, there is a link due to organized crime serving as a supplier for the terrorism) and the reason for this can be twofold:

- firstly, conceivably they do not share a lot in common on ideological and structural terms and
- secondly, if they do exchange services, it is more something for short periods and mainly terrorist groups would need the organized crime structure to get goods that are not easily accessed on legal market, such as illicit trespassing borders from one country to another and/or to buy weapons.³⁰

Hence, in the media, in different occasions were reflected arrests/detentions of Albanian citizens on criminal grounds for creation of criminal groups that would perform terrorist attacks and/or weapon' trafficking.³¹ The requests for arrests mainly came from the counterparts of the Albanian law enforcement authorities from the neighboring countries and broader.³² On such cases the information on the Albanian media was generic and had only the basic insight that mainly was addressed by the media from where the news originated.³³

Usually, events on terrorist grounds that happened on international level had an echo also in the Albanian media. Specifically, in those friendly countries that Albania has a strong affiliation, such events were reported but, as prior acknowledged in this report, the information is basic and not deepened by interviews, opinions from local and international experts as well as with more detailed information from relevant institutions in the country.³⁴ Accordingly, it is needed to highlight that

²⁹Joint Statement, 2019: Mission preliminary findings: Press freedom is deteriorating in Albania. <https://europeanjournalists.org/>. Balkan Insight, 2019, Albania's EU Commitment Questioned over Media 'Censorship' Laws. <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/30/albanias-eu-commitment-questioned-over-media-censorship-laws-2/>. Reporters Without Borders and BIRN Albania (2018), Media Ownership Monitor – Albania: Media Under Fire. <https://albania.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/mediaunderfire/>. Reporters Without Borders (2020) World Press Freedom Index. <https://rsf.org/en/albania>.

³⁰Decision of the Council of Ministers, No. 1137, date 16.12.2020 "On the approval of the cross-cutting strategy against fighting Terrorism, 2021–2025, and the Action Plan 2021–2023".

³¹ Shqiptarja.com "Sulmi në Nice në 2016 me 86 viktima, lirohen nga burgu 2 shqiptarët, i shitën armën terroristit", (2020).

<https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/sulmi-ne-nice-ne-2016-me-86-viktima-lirohen-nga-burgu-2-shqiptaret>.

³²Klan tv "Arrestohet për terrorizëm një 40 – vjeçar në Lushnje" (2015). <https://tvklan.al/arrestohet-per-terrorizem-nje-40-vjecar-ne-lushnje/>.

Klan tv "Dy shqiptarë arrestohen për terrorizëm në Kavajë e Itali" (2015). <https://tvklan.al/dy-shqiptare-arrestohen-per-terrorizem-ne-kavaje-e-itali/>.

³³ Dita "Shqiptari dëbohet nga Italia, ishte përkrahës i ISIS" (2016). <http://www.gazetadita.al/shqiptari-debohet-nga-italia-ishte-perkrahes-i-isis/>.

³⁴Gazeta Shqiptare "Sulmet terroriste/ Grupet e anti-terrorit në Shqipëri nën vëzhgim të të dyshuarve", (2017).

<http://gazetashqiptare.al/2017/08/18/sulmet-terroriste-grupet-e-anti-terrorit-ne-shqiperi-nen-vezhgim-te-te-dyshuarve/>. Shqiptarja.com "Të dënuar jashtë shtetit për terrorizëm dhe municione luftarake, OFL u kërkon llogari për pasurinë 3 personave", (2020).

<https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/te-denuar-jashte-shtetit-per-terrorizem-dhe-municione-luftarake-ofl-u-kerkon-llogari-per-pasurine-3-personave>.

the state authorities, and respectively law enforcement authorities do not share a lot with media institutions. Their press releases on such topics are occasional and mainly address specific events that happened recently, contemplating it with preceding information that took place within the timeframe from one event to the actual one³⁵.

Another major concern of law enforcement authorities when discussing about terrorism and organized crime, is the terrorism financing.³⁶ From 2014, the terrorist financing constitutes a criminal offense, hence, there are possibilities that the measures into force cannot stop it. In Albanian context, from 2015 to 2019, there have been 54 cases in which the Albanian General Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering (AGDPML) has raised suspicions that the financing of terrorism might be involved, mainly related to bank transactions. But, the majority of these cases didn't turn out to be related to the financing of terrorism.³⁷ The latest MONEYVAL report states in its new follow-up report that the Republic of Albania has improved measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, demonstrating good progress in the level of compliance with the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) standards.³⁸ There were several positive actions taken by the Albanian authorities such as: in the areas related to transparency and beneficial ownership (BO) of legal persons, and the regulation and supervision of financial institutions.³⁹ Another positive action is the adoption of the law "On the BO register", which has established the necessary mechanism to obtain and keep accurate and up-to-date BO information.⁴⁰ In the area of mutual legal assistance, Albania has established the necessary mechanisms to execute foreign confiscation orders, an action that in the MONEYVAL report was noticed as a good progressive step towards full compliance with the AML/CTF international standards.⁴¹ However, the risk is present when addressing the terrorism financing by banks and money transfer companies.⁴² Lastly, in the MONEYVAL follow-up report four recommendations relating to targeted financial sanctions on proliferation financing; new technologies; the transparency and beneficial ownership of legal arrangements; and the supervision of designated non-financial businesses and professions, the Republic of Albania did remain scarce in the fulfillment of the requirement and has no "non-

Shqiptarja.com "Rekrutonte luftëtarë për ISIS-in me anë të martesave/ Burg për 43-vjeçaren: Doja të shkoja të kryeja dënimin, por Italia s'më lejoi!", (2020). <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/e-denuar-per-terrorizem-ne-itali-gjykata-jep-masen-arrest-me-burg-per-lubjana-gjecajn>.

³⁵Dritare "Antiterrori dhe Shërbimet Sekrete shoqërojnë 150 persona, të dyshuar për lidhje me ISIS", (2016). <https://dritare.net/antiterrori-dhe-sherbimet-sekrete-shoqerone-150-persona-te-dyshuar-per-lidhje-me-isis>. Gazeta Shqiptare "Sekretari amerikan i Shtetit, Mike Pompeo konfirmon arrestimet antiterrorizëm të marsit në Shqipëri", (2018). <http://gazetashqiptare.al/2018/07/06/sekretari-amerikan-shtetit-mike-pompeo-konfirmon-arrestimet-antiterrorizem-te-marsit-ne-shqiperi/>. Dita "Kush kërkon ta sulmojë Shqipërinë? 40 dosje terrorizmi për 2018-2019", (2019). <http://www.gazetadita.al/kush-kerkon-ta-sulmoje-shqiperine-40-dosje-terrorizmi-per-2018-2019/>.

³⁶Balkan Insight "Balkan States Find Prosecuting Terrorism a Challenge", (2020). <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/06/balkan-states-find-prosecuting-terrorism-a-challenge/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸Council of Europe "Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures –Albania- 3rd Enhanced-Follow-up Report", May 2022. <https://rm.coe.int/fur-albania-3rd/1680a6cea3>

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

compliant” ratings.⁴³ In the media such situation does have reports/chronicles mostly for what international bodies do have to say for the improvement of Albania in this regard.

An illustrative reference for this report was pointed out from a piece addressed from the Gazeta Shqiptare as quoted: *“The year 2017 has been defined by a series of intensive high-level meetings to reduce the risk of money laundering, but it seems that this year has resulted in more pessimistic figures than those of the last two years for Albania. The Basel Institute for Governance has published as every year the Basel AML Index (Anti-Money Laundering Index) where it analyzes 146 countries, including Albania where there is a deterioration of the index. The index measures the risk of money laundering and terrorist financing, based on public data. The index is rated with points from 0 (low risk) to 10 (high risk)”*.⁴⁴

In the same line, in the year 2021 when MONEYVAL addressed Albania’s assessment, the media reported its findings and recommendations.⁴⁵ The majority of media outlets published information that are basic and they depicted the text news mainly from what was said and written in such reports without backing up the story with further expertise or doing periodicals on such fields.

Another illustration is the US State Department annual report on terrorism, a very important one to be referred to for the Albanian authorities, but also for the Albanian media. From the beginning when terrorism was placed at the top of the international agenda as a threat to security, in such report Albania is stated as a strong partner of the global coalition in fighting back the terrorism and violent extremism.⁴⁶ While researching for this report, was noted that US annual report is followed closely by all media outlets, and all of them do address its findings and endorsements with a special focus over the section related to Albania as stated out in the report, but no further discussion is built upon it by media outlets, even at least some comparison among the proceedings ones.⁴⁷

In the year 2018 two different events took place in Albania that were related with terrorist grounds. Those cases were separate from one another and in both events the media did its role, reflecting the situation. The first was the incident that the State Police and its agencies did prevent on the 22 March 2018, on the celebration of Nowruz Day at the premises of the Bektashi World Headquarters in Tirana. The Albanian Intelligence Service, in cooperation with its American counterparts, had

43Ibid.

⁴⁴Gazeta Shqiptare “Pastrimi i parave, Shqipëria renditet ndër 15 vendet me rrezik të lartë”, (2017).

<http://gazetashqiptare.al/2017/08/22/pastrimi-i-parave-shqiperia-renditet-nder-15-vendet-me-rrezik-te-larte/>.

⁴⁵Gazeta Shqiptare “Raporti i MONEYVAL/ Këshilli i Europës: Jo përmirësim i dukshëm në luftën kundër pastrimit të parave në Shqipëri”, (2021).

<http://gazetashqiptare.al/2021/05/25/raporti-moneyval-keshilli-europes-jo-permiresim-dukshem-ne-luften-kunder-pastrimit-te-parave-ne-shqiperi/>.

⁴⁶Shqip “DASH raport për anti-terrorin, vlerësohet Shqipëria dhe Kosova”, (2019). <https://www.gazeta-shqip.com/2019/11/02/dash-raport-per-anti-terrorin-vleresohet-shqiperia-dhe-kosova/>. Gazeta Shqiptare “Raporti i DASH për terrorizmin, SHBA përgëzon Shqipërinë: Në dhjetor u dëbuan dy zyrtarë të Iranit, po planifikonin sulme në Tiranë”, (2019). <http://gazetashqiptare.al/2019/11/02/raporti-dash-per-terrorizmin-shba-pergezton-shqiperine-ne-dhjetor-u-debuan-dy-zyrtare-te-iranit-po-planifikonin-sulme-ne-tirane/>. Dritare “DASH vlerëson bashkëpunimin me Shqipërinë: Policia e Shtetit, operacione të suksesshme”, (2020). <https://dritare.net/ngjarjet-e-dites/dash-vlereson-bashkepunimin-me-shqiperine-policia-e-shtetit-ope-i716331>. Dita “DASH nxjerr raportin e terrorizmit: Kthimi i luftëtarëve të huaj nga Iraku dhe Siria dhe sulmet ndaj muxhahedinëve që janë strehuar në Shqipëri, kërcënim për vendin”, (2021). <http://www.gazetadita.al/dash-nxjerr-raportin-e-terrorizmit-kthimi-i-luftetarëve-te-huaj-nga-iraku-dhe-siria-dhe-sulmet-ndaj-muxhahedineve-qe-jane-strehuar-ne-shqiperi-kercenim-per-vendin/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

managed to provide valuable information that they were preparing to carry out in the following days a possible terrorist act in the mujahedeen camp in Albania, located in Durrës. When searching in the media platforms for detailed information is noted that the event was mainly referred by the senior directors of the law enforcement authorities in their press release and most of the tactical and professional details were not made public for the general audience.⁴⁸

The second event is known as the Kacifas case, when an Albanian citizen with dual citizenship, Greek one, was killed in an exchange of firearms by the Albanian Police in the south of Albania, in Bularat village. Such case was a clear evidence that he had confronted the law enforcement authorities simply because of indoctrination and abuse by extremist and terrorist groups/organizations that have long been operating in some parts in Albania on different extremist views, alike in this case, nationalist views.⁴⁹ The media outlets had largely cover this event and addressed the information made available primarily from the state authorities.

Such event had a wide coverage in the media as from the beginning the event was cited a differently between the Albanian authorities and the counterparts of the Greek authorities, and there were published various opposite press release and declarations.⁵⁰

Once more this event brought into the light the battle within the Albanian media in relation to the publication of the adequate information versus who will publish the news first. Among them (media outlets) there were opinions as well as critiques that no event shall be used intentionally and/or unintentionally to spread distorted information only to reach the audience first, which has brought a misinformation among the Albanian and Greek citizens even today about the truth of the event.⁵¹

The year 2019 was the beginning of the new process in regard to terrorism and violent extremism, the repatriation and the return of the returnees trapped in the camps of Syria. Within the international forums the returning of FTFs into their country of origin started circulating publicly among diplomats, experts, field reporters, journalists, humanitarian workers, etc., specifically in term of returning the women and children that were living in miserable conditions in camps, like Al-Hol and Roj. In Albanian context the first encounter was with the Alvin case.⁵² Alvin was a boy whose mother, after being radicalized online, left the country where she, her husband, two daughters and Alvin were living (in Italy) and flew to Syria. She took only her son, Alvin, at that time 5 years old,

⁴⁸Shqiptarja.com “Ekskluzive/Ndalohen në Tiranë dy iranianë të dyshuar si terroristë”, (2018). <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/ekskluzive-ndalohet-ne-tirane-irani-ian-i-dyshuar-si-terrorist>. Abcnews “Do kryenin sulm terrorist ditën e Sulltan Novruzit, policia zbulon celulën iraniene”, (2019). <https://abcnews.al/do-kryenin-sulm-terrorist-diten-e-sulltan-novruzit-policia-zbulon-celulen-iraniene/>.

⁴⁹Dita “Ngjarja e Bularatit si sprovë”, (2018). <http://www.gazetadita.al/ngjarja-e-bularatit-si-sprove/>.

⁵⁰Voice of America “Vritet në shkëmbim zjarri me policinë i riu në Bularat të Gjirokastrës”, (2018). <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/4632528.html>.

⁵¹Dritare “Çështja “Kacifas”, gazetari masakër, apo masakër e gazetarisë?”, (2018). <https://dritare.net/ceshtja-kacifas-gazetari-apo-e-gazetarise>

⁵²Balkanweb “Pashë mamin kur vdiq nga bombat”! Alvin Berisha tregon tmerrin e luftës në Siri, pritet t’i nënshtrohet një operacioni”, (2019). <https://www.balkanweb.com/pashe-mamin-kur-vdiq-nga-bombat-alvin-berisha-tregon-tmerrin-e-luftes-ne-siri-pritet-ti-nenshtrohet-nje-operacioni/>

without his father permission.⁵³ The boy was able to return back home only after his father addressed Alvin's case to an investigative program in Italy (where he lived back then and currently), known as the LeIENE.⁵⁴ In Albania Alvin's case got immediately the ultimate attentions and touched the hearts of many fellows, hence the media outlets devoted time and articles for a period of time. Likewise, in Alvin's case, the information reflected in the Albanian media, relied on the media and the investigative program that the Italian counterparts were able to acquire on the grounds. As for the Albanian reporters, a ground operation in the territories of Syria was difficult and costly. Noting that, there were some evening shows in the main televisions, like Top-channel and Klan TV that conducted and arranged direct live broadcasting in regard to Alvin's case and his return back to his family.⁵⁵

Another important aspect that was shown in Alvin's case was that in both Albanian and the Italian investigative programs the anonymity and the personal data protection of Alvin as a child were not taken into consideration. His imagine and his voice were publicly transmitted from all.

Almost one year later, Alvin's case was followed by several field operations in Syrian territories by the Albanian law enforcement agencies in which they successfully were able to return home (in Albania) five citizens; one mother with her three minor children and as well one minor orphan boy.⁵⁶ Such returning operation was lead in person by the Albanian Prime Minister, former Minister of Interior and other high ranking law enforcement officers, in which a field reporter was part of the team that went in Lebanon to negotiate finalization of the process.

The whole returning process was firstly published by the international organizations, the Syrian Red Crescent and the Red Cross⁵⁷ and then the Albanian delegation transmitted in detail step by step. Such videos and publications were transmitted in the same way by all other Albanian media outlets. It is worth mentioning that once more the personal data protection, especially, for the four minor children were not taken into consideration by all parties involved in the process. Names, pictures, even interviews with them were broadcasted live and replicated in the same way by other media platforms. Repeatedly, the first-hand information was press released and broadcasted by the

⁵³Lelene "Isis, Alvin, portato in Siria dalla madre, non può uscire dal campo di prigionia", (2019). https://www.iene.mediaset.it/video/isis-siria-campo-prigionia_547325.shtml

⁵⁴In Italian language is written le iene and in English it means hyenas.

⁵⁵Top-channel (2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVYBZZudl68>. Klan tv "Opinion – Sekretet e operacionit Alvin & Atentati Durrës: Politika, krimi dhe drejtësia!", (2019). <https://tvklan.al/opinion-sekretet-e-operacionit-alvin-atentati-durres-politika-krimi-dhe-drejtësia/>.

⁵⁶Ballkanweb "U kthye nga kampi Al Hol bashkë me 3 fëmijët, Antiterrori merr në pyetje Floresha Rashën", (2020).

<https://www.balkanweb.com/u-kthye-nga-kampi-al-hol-bashke-me-3-femijet-antiterrori-merr-ne-pyetje-floresha-rashen/>. Ballkanweb

"Familjarët në Rinas presin në ankth kthimin e fëmijëve nga Siria, nëna e Eva dhe Endri Dumanit shpërthen në lot", (2020).

<https://www.balkanweb.com/familjaret-ne-rinas-presin-ne-ankth-kthimin-e-femijeve-nga-siria-nena-e-eva-dhe-endri-dumanit-shperthen-ne-lot/>

⁵⁷Ballkanweb "Lajm i mirë, nis kthimi i fëmijëve shqiptarë nga kampi Al-Hol në Siri, Gjysmëhëna e Kuqe siriane: Kërkesa nga qeveria shqiptare (Video)", (2020). <https://www.balkanweb.com/lajm-i-mire-per-familjet-nis-kthimi-i-femijeve-shqiptare-nga-kampi-al-hol-ne-siri-gjysmehena-e-kuqe-siriane-kerkesa-nga-qeveria-shqiptare-video/>.

Albanian authorities and subsequently (in the hours and days to come) the main media outlets dedicated evening shows, interviews, chronicles on the recent event.⁵⁸

Same situation was pursued one year later, in 2021, when another group of Albanian citizens, women and children returned in Albania from the Syrian camps. Once more the Albanian Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior and high ranking law enforcement officers went in Lebanon and brought back five women and fourteen children.⁵⁹ The scheme was the same, where the reporting part of the Albanian delegation did cover every moment of the returning process and transmitted in real time. Shortly, pictures/videos with faces, names, were published and broadcasted by all media, followed by interviews, evening shows, chronicles.

At present when this report is being written, the curve in terrorist activities and violent extremism is less visible on media outlets as there was no later event on such terrain, in Albania and globally as well as the center now has shifted to the current war taking place in Ukraine. Nonetheless, there are modest activities in relation to the topic, in which Albanian authorities, respectively, the Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism (CCCVE) in collaboration with the Active Media Center (AMC) did produce and broadcast short informative videos to educate and inform the large Albanian community about the radicalization and violent extremism that leads to terrorism as well as what are the programs in place to further prevent, rehabilitate and reintegrate the FTFs and their family members in Albania.⁶⁰

This section reveals that largely the media reports are often served to its public on a descriptive narrative modality relying and presenting only the facts but do not provide deeper information on the context and reality that surrounds these events, whatever makes the information more understandable, clear and concise. Generally, in Albania, when the topic of terrorism and violent extremism is addressed the media pays very little attention to its analysis over the terrorist propaganda used, and the reason why this propaganda attracts followers; are there common grounds for such followers; what are the differences (if there are any); the social background of the recruits and their economic and cultural circumstances; and especially their relationships with the family and society. These questions and others are important for today's journalists and media outlets as they have the responsibility to inform the public accurately, while such duty has become even more hard in the age of dis and misinformation, when the public falls victim of “fake” information, sometimes even as a result of propaganda produced by extremist groups or terrorist ones.

⁵⁸Klan tv “Drejtori i Antiterrorit: Pse nuk u morën të gjithë fëmijët nga Al-Hol”, (2020). <https://tvklan.al/drejtori-i-antiterrorit-pse-nuk-u-moren-te-gjithe-femijet-nga-al-hol/>. Lapsi.al “Jetimët e Al-Hol/ Nga pengje të kurdëve, në “pengje” të propagandës së Ramës”, (2020). <https://lapsi.al/2020/10/26/jetimet-e-al-hol-nga-pengje-te-kurdeve-ne-pengje-te-propagandes-se-rames/>.

⁵⁹Klan Tv “Rama në Liban për riatdhesimin e 19 shqiptarëve”, (2021). <https://tvklan.al/rama-dhe-cuci-ne-liban-shpetohen-nga-kampi-al-hol-4-gra-dhe-15-femije/>.

⁶⁰The Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism (CCCVE) youtube channel. https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uctw7SIGkiQ8mbOSVbhCgkiA?view_as=subscriber.

When it comes to hate speech the Albanian Criminal Code addresses criminal acts related to hate speech in several of its articles. Hence, the Albanian Criminal Code does not provide a definition of what is considered ‘*hate speech*’⁶¹, which is an issue as well as in the international forum. The Law “*On the Media Services in the Republic of Albania*”⁶², such law regulates the activity of audio-visual media and their support services and addresses the problem of the use of hate speech through several provisions. The law envisages that media outlets have the obligation to not broadcast any programs with content that incites hatred on bases of race, gender, ethnicity, religion or any other form of discrimination.⁶³

During the monitoring process for this report, it resulted that the analyzed media outlets do not have any editorial content that can be classified as hate speech, other than the republication of politicians and public figure’s statements containing elements of such speech.⁶⁴

*The Code of Ethics of Journalists*⁶⁵ is another legal instrument that aims to strengthen and improve the quality of journalism and the sense of responsibility among journalists in Albania. The principles laid down in it are equally applied towards all media outlet and journalism platforms, offline and online, broadcasted in social media and online portals as well.

⁶¹Articles no. 3; 9(2); 18; 20; 24 of the Albanian Criminal Code, changed by the law No. 9275, dated 16.9.2004.

⁶²Law no. 97/2013 “On the Audio-Visual Media in the Republic of Albania”.

⁶³Article 34(4) of the law no. 97/2013 “On the Audio-Visual Media in the Republic of Albania”.

⁶⁴Gazeta Shqiptare “Agron Gjekmarkaj: Mbulimi i Skënderbeut, akt i denjë taleban në kufijtë e terrorizmit”, (2017).

<http://gazetashqiptare.al/2017/09/01/agron-gjekmarkaj-mbulimi-i-skenderbeut-akt-i-denje-taleban-ne-kufijte-e-terrorizmit/>

⁶⁵The Albanian Code of Ethics of Journalist, <https://kshm.al/kodi-i-etikes-se-gazetarit/>.

II. Analyze of the Albanian's legal framework to address organized crime and terrorism

The Republic of Albania was identified as a potential candidate for joining the European Union (EU) family, during the Thessaloniki European Council, in June 2003.⁶⁶ Six years later, in 2009, the Republic of Albania submitted its formal application for EU membership. From this significant moment, the key priorities of the Government of Albania (GoA) should align with the completion of such key priorities recommended by the EU Commission as so the negotiations process would kick off. In October 2012, EU Commission recommended that the Republic of Albania would be granted EU candidate status, as such still subject to achievement of key measures, specially, in the areas of judicial and public administration reform and revision of the parliamentary rules of procedures.

In June 2014, the Republic of Albania was awarded candidate status by the EU Commission. As an EU candidate country, the Republic of Albania must align its legislation with the EU *acquis*. Such a journey was appraised with periodic assessments by both the Albanian institutions and EU Commission, and progress results to be made in this direction by the Albanian Government and its institutions. The evidences and further intensification of Albanian institutions to fight organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism has increased and deepened the cooperation with EU Members States, Europol and Eurojust.⁶⁷

Such progress is noted through a significant number of successful operations and the arrests of leaders of organized criminal groups in cooperation with EU member states and Europol; the increased cooperation between the Albanian police and the prosecution office; and the implementation of the EU laws.⁶⁸

The new justice institutions also brought acknowledgment in this area too.⁶⁹ *The continuation of the implementation of justice reform and work on the fight against organized crime is recognized by other essential and important ally*, as the USA stated in the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, under section, country reports.⁷⁰ In the European Commission in regard to Albanian Report (2021), it addresses other areas that need more work and priority, such as: the implementation of the Action

⁶⁶Thessaloniki European Council, 2518th Council meeting, "General Affairs and External Relations", (2003). https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/76201.pdf.

⁶⁷Albania Report 2021, European Commission, (2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-10/Albania-Report-2021.pdf>.

⁶⁸Ministry of Interior "Strategy against Organized and Serious Crime", (2021-2025). <https://mb.gov.al/plane-dhe-strategji/>.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰United States Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Albania (2021). <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=864771>.

Plan to address FATF requirements and money laundering, tackle cyber-crime and continuous efforts to ensure increased prosecutions and final convictions, especially at high-level.⁷¹

The Republic of Albania in the framework of cooperation in the fight against organized crime and terrorism has signed and ratified international conventions and protocols that constitute the instruments of international law in the field of organized crime and counter-terrorism. As such, the Republic of Albania has joined the UN initiatives to fight terrorism and has already ratified twelve of them. In addition, there are a number of UN Security Council resolutions of binding value to member states, as well as so-called regional conventions and protocols, where Albania is part.

In this context, the Republic of Albania adheres to all conventions and protocols of the Council of Europe against organized crime and terrorism.⁷² Considering that organized crime activities as well as the terrorist ones present a difficult and comprehensive process which generally can occur within the territories of more than one specific country, the Republic of Albania has a closer cooperation and collaboration at the global, regional and national levels with many entities by concluding bilateral agreements on such topics.⁷³

After the Republic of Albania became a democratic country, one of the most important challenges for all governments these three decades has been the fight against organized crime. The organized crime during years has turned into a serious issue, and the effective fight against organized crime has been set as one of the key priorities by the EU on which the Republic of Albania was asked to deliver provisions in terms of adapting new laws and/or amending the existing ones, as well as concrete actions delivered by the law enforcement authorities.

These tasks have been decisive for the Albania's route to joining the EU.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Albanian government has undertaken various measures to tackle the problem, but the phenomenon has shown slight signs of decline.⁷⁵ The Article 28 of the Albanian Criminal Code defines a criminal organization, its forms and specifics regarding, armed groups, terrorist organizations and structured organizations.⁷⁶ Organized crime is considered one of the most serious criminal offenses and the main forms of its expression also lays down in the Article 28.⁷⁷ Even so, regardless the Albanian Government's effort undertaken, organized groups have been able to expand their presence.

⁷¹Albania Report 2021, European Commission, (2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-10/Albania-Report-2021.pdf>.

⁷²Ministry of Interior "Cross-Cutting Strategy of the Fight Against Terrorism and Action Plan", (2020-2025). <https://cve.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/vendim-2020-12-16-1137.pdf>.

⁷³Ministry of Interior "Strategy against Organized and Serious Crime", (2021-2025). <https://mb.gov.al/plane-dhe-strategji/>.

⁷⁴Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance "Baseline Assessment: Intersectoral Strategy on Countering Organized Crime 2013-2020", (2020). <http://csdgalbania.org/baseline-assessment-intersectoral-strategy-for-combating-organised-crime-illicit-trafficking-and-terrorism-2013-2020/>. Council of the European Union Conclusions, Enlargement and Stabilization and Association Process, (2018). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf>.

⁷⁵Global Organized Crime Index "Profile Albania". <https://ocindex.net/country/albania>. Another source: Rama, I. "Overview of the Characteristics of the Albanian Organized Crime -Development Trends Over the Years", (2021). <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/mjss/article/download/12535/12137>

⁷⁶Criminal Code of Albania, Article 28. https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Kodi_Penal-1.pdf.

⁷⁷Ibid.

The Republic of Albania has a tradition in adopting explicit legislation since the early 2000 with the adoption of the first law called *anti-mafia* with reference to the Italian model. Despite frequent changes over the years, the essence of this legislation has not changed. It has been focused in issues, such as the sequestration and confiscation of goods and assets of persons involved in criminal activities.

The adoption of several laws, such as below mentioned expresses the willingness to fight the organized crime and terrorism:

- the law no. 9917, dated 19.05.2008 "*On the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing*"⁷⁸, as amended, which aims to prevent money laundering and proceeds of crime, as well as to prevent the financing of terrorism;
- the law no. 10192, dated 03.12.2009 "*On the elimination and crackdown on organized crime and trafficking, through prohibitive measures against property*", also applies to the property/ies of persons, on whom there is a reasonable suspicion, based on indications, that participate and/or adhere in criminal organizations, terrorist ones and/or in armed gangs;
- the law no. 157/2013 "*On measures against the financing of terrorism*", was adopted in line with the requirements of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001)⁷⁹;
- the Decision of the Supervisory Council of the Bank of Albania no. 44, dated 10.06.2009, "*On the approval of the regulation on the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing*"

Same logic was confirmed also in the adaption of the law no. 138/2015 "*Ensuring the Integrity of Persons Elected, Appointed, or Holding Public Functions*", generally referred as the decriminalization law.⁸⁰ The rational of such law is aiming the prevention and removal of individuals with criminal history and background from entering the public institutions, as well as excluding the others from doing so.

In the same year, 2015, the law "*on Gambling*" was adopted, providing a screening process for those businesses investing in the gambling domain if they had or no background associations with organized crime organizations.⁸¹ Additionally, the law on public procurement was amended in the year 2017.⁸² The newly introduced article identifies as an elimination criteria if any of the candidates

⁷⁸This law also provides obligations and procedures for reporting on law entities to the responsible structures for the purpose of its implementation, the competencies of the supervisory authorities and the responsible authority.

⁷⁹ This law was adopted by a number of institutions and agencies such as the Ministry of Justice, the Bank of Albania, the General Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering (GDPML) and the Financial Supervisory Authority, while the administration of frozen/sequestered/confiscated accounts and assets is performed by the Agency for Administration of Sequestered and Confiscated Assets.

⁸⁰Law no. 138/2015 "*Ensuring the Integrity of Persons Elected, Appointed, or Holding Public Functions*".
https://www.dap.gov.al/images/LegjislacioniAP/ligj_nr._138_dt._17.12.2015.pdf.

⁸¹Some amendments to law no. 155/2015, "*on Gambling's in the Republic of Albania*", amended. <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2018/10/25/75>.

⁸²Amended by Law no. 47/2017 "*On some changes and additions to Law no. 9643, dated 20.11.2006 "On public procurement"*", amended.
http://www.aksedrejtisi.al/dokumenta/1571912693LPP_i_ndryshuar_me_Ligjin_103.pdf.

or bidders in the public procurement procedures are found to have in their background relations with organized crime. Such novelty was introduced in the 2017.⁸³

Afer all, the predominant approach to tackling the organized crime and terrorism phenomenon in Albania was on suppression terms, such a case was the police operation named “*the Power of Law*”.⁸⁴ This operation had an *ad-hoc* nature until the establishment of the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK), and independent body that in its mission has to address the corruption and organized crime in the Republic of Albania as part of the justice reform, which has begun from 2016.⁸⁵

The creation of new institutions, as a result of the reform of the justice system, such a Special Court (SP), a Special Prosecutor (SPAK) and a Special Investigative Unit (SIU) is based over the American model, as a strategic partner in the law enforcement domain, without excluding other domains as well. The abovementioned institutions have as their main objective the fight against organized crime and corruption, have a special legislation for the organization and functioning. They are totally independent institutions from other bodies controlling the justice system and operate only in accordance with the Albanian Constitution and their organic law.

This new organizational and functioning of institutions is expected to eliminate a serious problem known over the years, that of the functional and organizational dependence of the judicial institutions. All these institutions are composed of judges, prosecutors and investigators who have previously undergone a vetting process in terms of personal and family image, wealth and professionalism. The ultimate aspiration is to progress the fight against corruption and organized crime by impartial and competent judges, prosecutors and investigators.

In relation to the FATF (Financial Action Task Force), its latest report notes that the Republic of Albania since February 2020, has made a high-level political commitment to work with the FATF and MONEYVAL to strengthen the effectiveness of its AML/CFT regime, as well as has taken steps towards improving its AML/CFT regime.⁸⁶ Even with the steps taken the FATFs addresses that Albania should continue to work on implementing its action plan to address its strategic deficiencies. From the EU report, the situation of Albanian’s progress is still limited, as there are not systematically accompanying criminal proceedings from the beginning so their effectiveness remains

⁸³The novelty lays down that the contracting institution can take an active role in initiating requests to bidders directly or competent authorities to present documents that display relevant the integrity of the company and the owners/. The contracting institution can exclude from the competition all bidders have been convicted by final court decision for: a) participated in criminal activities, b) corruption, c) fraud, d) money laundering and f) forgery.

⁸⁴Ministry of Interior, “Forca e Ligjit” – Krijohet Task Forca Speciale kundër krimit të organizuar” (2017). <https://mb.gov.al/forca-e-ligjit-krijohet-task-forca-speciale-kunder-krimit-te-organizuar-2/>.

⁸⁵Law no. 95/2016 “For organization and functioning of institutions to fight corruption and organized crime”. <https://spak.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ligj-Nr.-95-2016.pdf>.

⁸⁶Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Albania <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/countries/d-i/iceland/documents/increased-monitoring-october-2020.html>.

narrow.⁸⁷ When it comes to money laundering, the Republic of Albania as a large informal sector and its economy is primarily cash-based, as such crimes that generate large amounts of money include drug trafficking, tax evasion, smuggling and trafficking in human beings are not easy to tackle and/or prevent.⁸⁸

The Albanian legal framework was further aligned with the EU *acquis* during the years 2019-2021. The law on the administration of seized and confiscated assets, adopted in 2019⁸⁹, provides for an asset recovery office (ARO) to be set up. Such an office as a requirement for further EU *acquis*. Another new law was introduced on beneficial ownership register which entered into force in September 2020⁹⁰, which was compulsive that all businesses and non-governmental organizations had to register by the end of June 2021. Another register was established and is operational from July 2021, the centralized bank account register. *“Both registers will provide increased transparency and useful tools in the hand of law enforcement authorities to track down money-launderers”*.⁹¹

Part of its actions the GoA has adopted strategies starting from in the year 2008. The first was primarily focused on fighting criminal organizations ‘Strategy to Fight Organized Crime’ which was followed by other strategies in the years that followed. Such first strategy was a priority and a commitment of the Albanian government to fight organized crime and all of its forms. It also tried to include and interact with the intra-sectorial strategies.⁹² Such strategy was also a need from the global and regional context in which Albania has expressed its commitment against the organized crime. This first strategy opens the approach from the Albanian Government to follow with other national strategies, alike, which was followed by the adoption of the another document for the years 2013-2020.⁹³ The GoA on December 2020 has adopted a new national cross-sector counter-terrorism strategy and its action plan. The national action plan on countering violent extremism has expired and a new strategy and action plan should be adopted. Within the same year, in 2020, Albania adopted a new strategy on cyber security and an action plan for 2020-2025, but more work is needed to be done in this domain, especially establishing a more effective law enforcement response focusing on the detection, traceability and prosecution of cyber criminals. The Republic of Albania should raise awareness among the prosecutors to enhance the use of the 24/7 points of contact network established by the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, was also referred in the latest EU

⁸⁷Albania Report 2021, European Commission, (2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/system/files/2021-10/Albania-Report-2021.pdf>

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Law No. 34/2019 on “Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets” amended by law no. 19/2020 for some additions and changes to law no. 34/2019, “on the Administration of Seized Assets and Confiscated”. https://aapsk.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Ligj_34-2019.pdf.

⁹⁰Decision of the Council of Minister No. 90, dated 17.2.2021 “for Approval of the National Plan for the European Integration 2021–2023”. <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2021/02/17/90/b8a74244-4688-4227-bfb6-f75c873a5708;q=ligji%20nr.%20112%2F2020%20>.

⁹¹Albania Report 2021, European Commission, (2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/system/files/2021-10/Albania-Report-2021.pdf>.

⁹²Decision of the Council of Minister no.1140, date 30.7.2008 “For the approval of the cross-sectoral strategy for the fight against organized crime, trafficking and terrorism”. <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2010/01/27/43>.

⁹³Decision of the Council of Minister no.663, date 17.7.2013 “On the approval of the cross-sectoral strategy for the fight against organized crime, illegal trafficking and terrorism, 2013-2020 and the action plan for 2013-2016”. <https://qbz.gov.al/search;q=Vendim%20nr.%20663,%20dat%C3%AB%2017.7.2013.%20>.

report.⁹⁴ The Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans was highlighted by the EU report as a very good progress in implementing the bilateral arrangement within the domain.⁹⁵

There are also additional national strategies that the GoA has adopted alike the National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism 2016 - 2020 (the new strategy is been drafted); the Cross-cutting Strategy against Organized Crime and Serious Crime 2021 - 2025; the National Strategy for Integrated Border Management 2021 - 2027; the Public Safety Strategy 2021 - 2025; the National Strategy for Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction; do lay down that organized crime and terrorist activities are serious national security threats for the Albanian community and addressing them likewise in such strategic documents expressed the willingness of the GoA to convict such actions. Nevertheless, more correlation between objectives and results within each of them would make more easily to measure their impact in terms of consistency as long as they were in force, as well as address the challenges encounter during their implementation in the new strategic documents to be drafted.

⁹⁴Albania Report 2021, European Commission, (2021). <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/system/files/2021-10/Albania-Report-2021.pdf>.

⁹⁵Ibid.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Media

1.1. The principle of *presumption of innocence* as well as the professional ethics should lead any journalists and media outlets to be discreet and thoughtful when there is no official confirmation of names of responsible persons of any act as well as victim's names, that were involve in a terrorists and/or violent extremism act, avoiding the "terrorists" phrase inadequately.

1.2. The risk of becoming a propaganda tool by the terrorist becomes particularly apparent in cases of publication and repetition of images and videos prepared by unconfirmed channels for the journalists and media outlets. The respect for human dignity and the right for privacy, especially when the news does address the images of children and minors, as the laws in place do protect such category.

1.3. While conveying the news the journalists and media outlets must be careful and maintain an objective and independent attitude, although the truth. The emotional impact of terrorist and violent extremist events over audiences often generates a pressure which can put to test the independence of journalistic reporting.

1.4. A structured and consolidated job division within the media outlets, which have designated journalists that do cover different fields, in this report security, that have the adequate experiences and trainings would enhance more the investigative approach more needed currently in the Albanian media, instead of only repetition of the news (nationally and internationally). Being able to get in depth and understanding not only the fact that accompanies a terrorist and/or violent extremist act would raise more awareness and constructive reaction to the topics by the public at large.

1.5. Media outlets should make a substantial and effective contribution to address hate speech, in particular by developing, updating and applying, professional standards and codes of conduct, adhering to self-regulatory standards and implementing training programmers for media student, journalists and members of staff.

1.6. The necessity of the law enforcement institutions to establish specialized units and further build institutional capacities for continuous monitoring of the propaganda of violent extremism and hate speech circulating on online platforms in the Albanian language.

2. Legal framework

2.1. Currently, the Republic of Albania has modest defenses against organized crime and terrorist attacks. The adopted Albanian legal framework would need to further align and progress in the same path as the EU *acquis*, in fighting the organized crime and terrorism in a multidisciplinary and integrated approach, in addition to more awareness, preventive responses as well as repressive ones.

2.2. The performance and the recognition of the objectives and the performance indicators introduced in the strategic documents adopted recently by the GoA, should be provided by the institutions in charge the source of data for monitoring, data collecting, frequency of measuring data, as well as challenges and shortfalls.

2.3. To effectively perform complex tasks, as there was a substantial absence from previous strategic documents on monitoring and evaluation of implementation of such documents, the GoA should develop and strengthen institutional capacities for those institutions that their mission and assignments are associated with such processes.

2.4. The periodical reports, as referred specifically in each of the strategic documents should be published and disseminated to the large audience by the GoA, in order to communicate and inform directly the people, as such to be more inclusive in the public policy debate.

2.5. Enforce adaptation of the cyber-security laws, standards and good practices across the public and private sector. Major proficiency on regard to technical and human capacities for developing secure online platforms as well as pursuing cyber-crimes needs to be made available by the GoA as the risk is present and increasing daily.

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