

A large, stylized silhouette of a tree with many leaves and a thick trunk, positioned on the left side of the cover. The tree is dark green and its roots are visible at the bottom.

ENVIRONMENT MANIFESTO of ALBANIA (EMA)

CIVIL SOCIETY ROLE IN ALBANIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL LANDSCAPE

Recommendations for a smooth EU Integration
and Green Transition.

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Adress: Tirana-Durres Highway, 5th km, Bylis Str.

Author:

Ph.D. C. Rodion Gjoka

Design:

Klesta Galanxhi

Author Note: The narrative of this Manifesto reflects upon the experience and exchange of the author during his 10-year experience with Civil Society Organizations working on Environment, Authorities, Communities and International Stakeholders operating in Albania. This document builds upon evidence-based information but it is not a collection of facts. It rather is an expression of the author perception upon the environmental landscape reality from a non-diplomatic nor political but straight-forward approach.

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CONTEXT

Embedded within the very fabric of Albania's history lies a profound reverence for its natural landscapes—a legacy treasured and safeguarded across generations. The lush beauty, diverse ecosystems, and abundant resources have long been hailed as a cherished gift to its inhabitants, shaping the essence of Albanian identity. Throughout history, Albania's landscapes have woven themselves into the tales, traditions, and cultural expressions of its people. From ancient **FOLKLORE** to modern practices, the majesty of its diversity has been muse and mentor alike.

Furthermore, more during **RENAISSANCE**, a pivotal period, the entwined relationship between Albania's people and its natural wonders found eloquent expression. Renowned authors and artists of the time drew profound inspiration from the landscapes, crafting works that echoed the harmony between humans and nature, enriching Albania's cultural legacy and rooting its relationship with natural properties.

The reverence for this natural inheritance runs deep within Albania's societal fabric. Passed down through folklore, traditions, and values, the commitment to preserving this wealth of natural splendor remains steadfast. From ancestral practices to modern conservation efforts, the ethos of stewardship endures. In the embrace of Albania's natural beauty, a timeless legacy thrives—one that nurtures, inspires, and resonates to the hearts of millions that nowadays either populate or miss their home country.

The allure of Albania's natural abundance drew considerable fascination in the early 1900s, casting a covetous gaze upon its riches from afar. However, the tale of these lands has been one entwined with the resolute spirit of its people, marked by a steadfast commitment to self-governance over their cherished landscapes. With the advent of the **INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**, the pristine resources of Albania became an alluring target for exploitation. This era witnessed a transformation as the once-untouched natural treasures faced the pressures of industrialization. Subsequently, the imposition of communism further reshaped Albania's environmental landscape.

The interventions during the period from 1945 to 1985 remain a subject of debate, their adequacy and consequences a matter of contention. Yet, amid this tumultuous communist phase, Albania, a nation of two million, embarked on a unique journey, like no other country in Europe, total **ISOLATION** and self-reliance. While not universally lauded as an achievement or an ideal policy, this period stands out remarkably from an environmental and sustainability perspective. In a seldom-seen chapter of modern human history, Albania, isolated from much of the world, managed to sustain its needs for one to two decades—an unparalleled feat in the modern programs of self-sufficiency.

Outcomes from these events provoke arguments that resilience and adaptability in Albania could be navigated if shortcomings and oppressive mechanisms are to be fully avoided, otherwise as we experienced, collapse is *ante portas*.

The advent of the "**TRANSITION**" period marked a climactic moment in Albania's history therefore comprising its environmental landscape. It was during the early '90s that the first environmentally-focused Civil Society Organizations emerged, coinciding with a socio-economic transition that left an indelible imprint on the country's environmental trajectory—unfortunately, a legacy still resonating three decades later.

While international missions were among the first to articulate the pressing environmental concerns during this period, local experts and certain public/non-profit entities initially exhibited a sluggish response in acknowledging or incorporating these environmental issues. Nevertheless, the unimaginable and inexplicable damages peaked in the late '90s, signaling an irreparable shift. By this time, the social-political-economic landscape had been significantly altered, and the transition ceased to be viewed solely as an opportunity but rather transformed into a formidable obstacle, to which even today our conscious if we overpassed it yet.

The repercussions of the delayed response and the increasing environmental toll during the '90s reverberate through Albania's environmental discourse. How to mitigate the adverse environmental impacts that emerged within one generation, initially raised by principles of commons but further transformed into a society with a severe allergy to public assets?

Albania's **CONUNDRUM**: In today's global context, the environment stands as a paramount concern, albeit often diverging into two contrasting paths—an earnest attempt and actions to mitigate climate deterioration in some quarters, while in others, a mere avenue for propagandistic discourse.

Against a backdrop of increasing admiration for Albania's natural splendor and a surge in tourism, which thrived upon the exploitation of abundant resources in 2023, the reality of the social, economic, and environmental landscape is far more intricate. However, the aspirations of the commons are framed into the success of the few. Such a situation, pertinent during the last 2 decades has had a drastic effect on the decrease of people's critical thinking, an ability that appears to be highly vulnerable to prolonged exposure to what could be considered elementary issues but that refract basic human rights. How is it conceivable that a country blessed with such abundance fails to consistently progress toward sustainable prosperity even three decades after the fall of a totalitarian regime? European Accession **ODYSSEY**, for Albania the prospect of European accession stands as a beacon of collective aspirations—an embodiment of shared dreams cascading from the echelons of central governance to the very heart of local communities. This vision reverberates across the nation, from the bustling capital to the remote corners of rural landscapes, embodying a collective longing for integration and progress. The people's resounding support for EU integration within Albania surpasses that of neighboring Western Balkan countries, underscoring an unprecedented level of fervor and acceptance within the populace. The behavior as well as the impact from both local and national authorities has induced a stagnant climate, with a minimal level of accountability when it comes to taking responsibility. What actually and substantially changed in Albania's environmental landscape since officially being recognized as a candidate country in 2000, to SAA in 2006, from an EU candidate country in 2014 to the first intergovernmental conference in July 2022?

Pick one of the following aspects: horizontal legislation, waste, water quality, air quality, public health, hygiene, nature protection, civil protection, climate and either compare

the progress reports from EU that comfort their diplomatic stance into “**Limited Progress**” obviously referring to the impact of their large support concerning on capacity building and infrastructure projects whilst coping with a counterpart that appears to neglect law enforcement, standardization, public information, and inclusion whilst appears keen to sustaining inequalities. This in short words, and with high similarities, has been the Odyssey of EU accession of Albania, whilst people at large have already distanced themselves from the polarized and fake political situation, showing no interest nor willingness to execute their rights on governing the commons as well as be informed and participate in certain processes.

Internally, such a predicament has already sounded some alarms while it should serve as a clarion call to the EU structures, highlighting the perils of tolerating governments solely for the expediency of diplomatic relations, geopolitics or even certain processes. This situation in Albania, stands as an unprecedented moment, urging a reevaluation of policies that prioritize process over accountability and democratic principles. Looking ahead into later next decade, the Union might witness a historic enlargement on the Western Balkans and not only. However, to Albania this moment might mark an unprecedented case—marking the first time that the Union would host a new country accession whose majority of the population migrated during and due to the process. This scenario poses unique challenges, emphasizing the critical need for a recalibration of accession processes from both parties to uphold democratic values and governance standards.

This document serves merely as an alternative step towards fostering a comprehensive understanding of the invaluable commons in Albania. It seeks to inspire not just Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), but also engaged experts, enthusiasts, and community leaders to navigate through conflicting developments and facilitate immediate resolutions. The current trajectory lacks visible progress toward achieving an accountable environmental governance system for Albania's resources, presenting an urgent need for proactive action.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANIFESTO OF ALBANIA (EMA) arises as an intellectual beacon amidst the clustered landscape where CSOs often find themselves embroiled in para-diplomatic standoffs with both donors and institutions. Obviously their positioning is rather an effort to safeguard continuity but do they achieve this objective without compromising or refracting their principled stances.

Herby, EMA's main aim to COSs and its readers is to be bold and take a stance in front of environmental abuse. MA call to all CSOs, experts, enthusiasts, and community leaders to pivot from personal standoffs or competition towards concerted and calibrated action. EMA incites you all to unify efforts, promoting immediate resolutions in the face of conflicting developments. This concerted effort is crucial in propelling Albania towards a transparent and accountable environmental governance model for its resources. *When? - How does tomorrow sound for you... - Ohhh, you think it's too early. Well, remember that elections are already here and both of us won't be prepared enough to influence or impact anything.*

Now on a positive note, the environment has gained its overdue attention owing to the prerequisites and persistence of EU integration, mandating and recalling for heightened stewardship over various environmental facets. Initial strides to transpose legislation, standards, and regulations concerning water, waste, air quality, biodiversity, and climate action have been taken. However, authorities appear comfort entangled in the quagmire they have created. A behavior characterized by insufficient efforts, capacities, and willingness towards implementing these laws and standards.

EU integration poses immense challenges, demanding robust political coordination and a collective willingness to adapt and fine-tune across all sectors. While the current government portrays an eagerness to address daily environmental progress—often conveyed through propagandistic means, the tangible actions and impacts are different

Waste a success story?

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Above anyone else, it's the Government of Albania to be held accountable for the degradation of environmental resources, failure to monitor-inspect-inform, non-participatory decision-making processes, lax law enforcement, and an apparent disregard for environmental impact, openly favoring development over conservation. This approach has exacerbated conflicts between investors and local communities and on numerous occasions related to environmental crime either clashed on site or are in litigation.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Albania, obviously to match the demand and opportunity, have increased significantly in numbers. However, their capacities to effectively address or support such critical processes have not proportionately matched the sector growth. On the contrary, we note an increase in the inflation of CSOs as a significant number of them appear to support authorities to legitimate processes and practices until these CSOs disappear in coincidence with the period when leaders of that specific authority are replaced/removed. The public at large is not to blame since the most prevailing perception remains as friendly as cynical: "NGOs and CSOs in Albania are either appendage of political propaganda or profit-oriented entities that implement impact-less activities"

What happens next?

An aerial photograph of a solar farm. The image shows multiple rows of blue solar panels installed on a green grassy field. The panels are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with rows running diagonally across the frame. The perspective is from directly above, looking down at the panels and the grass between them. The lighting is bright, casting soft shadows from the panels onto the grass.

FOLLOW THE TRANSITION

Another transition, this time Green Transition.
How many transitions could a generation
endure and usher to success?

Countless arguments can fuel this deceptively simple question, but one perspective emerges as particularly poignant. At the core of it lies the essence of human nature. Aren't we an entity perpetually adapting to an ever-evolving environment, continually in transition and evolving with it!

Everyone who builds and harnesses existing knowledge, from lessons learned, contextual understanding, and shared experiences—finds themselves better equipped to navigate through transitions, either embracing them with ease or fearlessly exploring alternative pathways to comfort impacts. This category I assume operates with a mindfulness that from involuntary missteps serves to them as conduits for expanding their comprehension of the unknown. Such a perspective resonates deeply in our contemporary landscape, where generations face a multitude of transitions, societal shifts, and technological advancements. Embracing the amalgamation of wisdom from past experiences while fearlessly exploring new avenues becomes not just a necessity but a testament to the adaptability and resilience inherent within our societies.

Subtracting from philosophical exploration into today's context, it becomes remarkably straightforward that necessity leads to change, and change leads to transition prior to birth to evolution. Let's try a simple 3 step exercise:

- 1** Begin by pondering what the concept of a 'Green Transition' means to you personally and from there, consider 3 primary implications and 3 potential opportunities that this transition might entail for you, and your family, both in personal and professional realms.
- 2** Delve deeper into assuming the implications and opportunities at a community, regional or country-wide level, thereby expanding your initial assumptions.
- 3** Finally, synthesize your insights and try to determine in which direction (positive or negative) the balance tips.

Green Transition stands as the paramount challenge of our era. Decarbonizing our economy to attain climate neutrality surpasses all the challenges ever known since the Industrial Revolution. While road-maps were designed, strategies crafted, and further official agreements signed, the objectives are already established, and some are being actively implemented there is yet a universe full of details to be explored. Herby, it's crucial to demand comprehensive information as this transition unfolds, ensuring its fairness and accountability while recognizing that every individual has a role to play in this monumental shift for it to be just and inclusive.

What are we doing about it? By far, in Albania, few are those who managed to go beyond the classical approach of just orbiting the buzzword. Co-PLAN Institute for Habitat Development has been a dynamic force in the country since its inception in 1995, actively championing a seamless transition, particularly in pivotal sectors such as urban planning, built and natural environment, public services and finances, policy development as well as innovation and supporting activism, start-ups etc. With a steadfast commitment to citizen engagement, Co-PLAN has consistently navigated reforms, emerging as a central figure in bolstering capacity building and pioneering research and innovation through diverse programs.

Just as the New Green Deal and the EU Green Agenda were being conceptualized, we dedicated countless efforts to develop programs that would explore the implications and potentials of this major shift to a community level. Aiming to provide information that would lead to a just transition and an informed decision-making practice. Green-FORCE, a project worth exploring, is pioneering such an approach throughout the Western Balkans.

On the other hand, many EU-based countries but especially Sweden through Sida "Swedish International Development Agency" together with the Embassy in Tirana have a distinguished platform of support for the environment sector in Albania. More than a decade of applying the most modern and simplified philosophy of supporting another country, consisting on:

1 SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS
STANDARDIZATION AND
LEGISLATION ALIGNMENT

2 CAPACITY
BUILDING AND
EMPOWERMENT

3 PARTNERSHIP AND
COLLABORATION

4 HUMAN RIGHTS

5 IMPACT
INVESTING

6 INNOVATION AND
TECHNOLOGY



These philosophies are not mutually exclusive, and many organizations combine multiple approaches to create holistic and impactful interventions here in Albania as well. The effectiveness of each approach often depends on the specific context, local needs, available resources, and long-term sustainability goals.

Consequently, dear reader, the donor community might occasionally appear inconsistent in their application of diverse approaches, which can lead to disappointment among us, CSOs and the public. Herby, it is highly recommended you reconsider your stance in the current landscape, take time to reflect, and invest in honing your expertise. Effectively and with determination mark your territory, expand your influence through collaboration with diverse stakeholders and interdisciplinary participants.

“While our singular viewpoint on the environment may differ, its significance remains universal for all. ”

Moreover since 2021, Co-PLAN together with VIS Albania, and COSV *Cooperazione per lo Sviluppo* we have stimulated the creation of a structured and highly influential network of environmental CSOs/NGOs within the Green-AL. A program supported by Sida “Swedish International Development Agency”. Providing direct technical, administrative, and financial support to more than 70 CSOs across Albania.

Approximately 800,000 Euros were allocated through a transparent, merit-based grant mechanism, distributing 31 contracts to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Over 110 applications were diligently reviewed, underscoring the remarkable interest of environmental CSOs towards Green-AL. In parallel, Green-AL delivered a series of 40 contextualized training sessions (with modules developed based on the actual needs of interested CSOs) aimed at enhancing the capabilities, and inspiring and fostering networking among CSOs. Additionally, Green-AL convened a total of 4 National Forums, consolidating key insights gleaned from CSO projects at a central level and issuing collective statements representing Environmental CSOs' concerns to the authorities.



“ While our singular viewpoint
on the environment may differ,
its significance remains universal for all. ”

These joint declarations, meticulously formulated, were shared with the EU Delegation during consultations for Albania's Progress Report, providing a comprehensive overview of the country's climate change vulnerability, energy, pollution, and protected areas status. Furthermore, Green-AL compiled its regional engagements and interactions with CSOs and communities into 4 Regional Thematic Reports, offering a panoramic view of environmental issues spanning from the remotest corners to densely populated regions of Albania.

While these efforts offer valuable insights into the environmental landscape, they remain incomplete, considering the myriad environmental challenges facing our country. They, however, stand as complementary contributions, reflecting the diligent work carried out by CSOs, and cast a spotlight on the state of the environment. This is especially notable given the deliberate neglect of environmental monitoring by authorities at various levels over the past decade.

Capitalizing on our experience and active engagement in Green-AL-supported projects, we've observed a concerning trend: Central and Local Authorities often seem indifferent to calls for action and invitations for collaboration extended by CSOs and NGOs. This apathy becomes more pronounced when remote CSOs or localized communities seek institutional responses amidst contentious developments or decision-making processes that encroach upon their fundamental rights—access to fresh water, safeguarding natural resources, breathing clean air, or even roam within national protected areas.

This seemingly unthinkable reality finds further substantiation in the increasing number of complaints and litigations sourced by environment-related concerns.

Even though the focus on the environment has intensified across multiple dimensions in the past three years, a significant number of CSOs have underscored the lack of transparency in crucial local-level processes and decisions. The national-level processes take place mainly through e-consultation platforms or round-table discussions facilitated by “actors” and designed primarily for information dissemination and further ratification of a specific project objective.

Such a situation, combined with the limited availability of funds for CSOs is causing a lack of cohesion, hindering their effective functioning, and in some occasions, it even led to deviations from the principled approaches of some colleagues. At Co-PLAN, we encountered challenges related to the professionalism and diligence of our support scheme, and of course, by the end of Green-AL, we have a clear overview of CSOs who deserve further support in their work and those who doesn't.

One of many observations made throughout Green-AL consists on the inclination that certain CSOs have towards the business-oriented model of project implementation rather than an actual contribution or factorization of a specific environment. This highlights the fact that the environment isn't just a sector for public authorities' propaganda or abuse but it was navigated similarly by CSOs as well. Having in mind this situation we suggest that support programs applying a large-scale grant scheme **invest more efforts on the grant evaluation phase and double the efforts on monitoring practices during the implementations.** An impact assessment matrix equipped both with qualitative and quantitative indicators leaves no room for subjectivity when assessing the work carried out by supported CSOs.

We recognize and congratulate the significant contributions made by CSOs, particularly in raising awareness and applying positive pressure to tackle environmental concerns nationwide. Nevertheless, as you might have noticed, this Manifesto is quite suspicious when it comes to having positive expectations the existing public administration and governance in Albania would lead communities toward a Just Green Transition. Albania's environmental landscape not only inherited but also, in some instances, exacerbated risks related to climate change, increased citizens' and habitats' exposure to pollution, and witnessed a decline in the implementation of environmental laws to low historical levels since 1990.

The absence of robust monitoring capacities and funds within national and local authorities remains a pressing concern regarding the general public's health and the environment's status in Albania. Civil Society Organizations through their initiative as well as communities have documented and reported numerous flagrant violations and environmental crimes. Regrettably, there has been a glaring lack of reactions or sanctions taken in response to any of these reported cases. Consequently, litigation has become a

prevailing recourse nowadays. However, it's important to note that the dearth of evidence-based monitoring from authorities has created the ideal recipe for subjective conjectures, propagated by experts affiliated with CSOs, the private sector with their self-monitoring practices, certainly led by the government propaganda and lack of professional coverage from national media.

There's a noticeable decline in the expertise of human resources addressing environmental issues and this has been the trend for quite some time now as it remains an ongoing challenge for central authorities. Whilst for local authorities, the situation is rather desperate, it resonates directly with the low level of reforms and amendments buy-in throughout the country, but this is just the tip of the iceberg.

It is just too unfair to all taxpayers in Albania that institutions prioritize social media specialists over expertise in governance, planning, monitoring, inspection, and management. While communities struggle today to voice their concerns, they must discern between environmental propaganda and genuine policy geared toward preservation. Public health, alongside sectors pivotal to Albania's national economy such as energy, agriculture, tourism, and spatial planning, remains under relentless pressure from degradation, pollution, and a changing climate. Albania urgently needs to position itself strategically to mitigate these risks.

To all actors directly working with the environment or with crosscutting sectors, aim to amplify results from your critical thinking since there is a pertinent lack of readiness exhibited by public and private authorities.

An aerial photograph showing a vast landscape of flooded fields, likely rice paddies, under a heavy, overcast sky. A straight road with a few cars runs through the center of the flooded area. In the background, a range of mountains is visible, with a prominent peak on the right. The water in the fields reflects the light from the sky.

MANIFESTO ON CLIMATE & ENERGY 2024

According to the IPCC assessment report from March 2023, global climate change has become an undeniable reality, with temperatures rising by approximately +1.09°C from 2011 to 2020 compared to 1850-1900. This occurrence poses an amplified danger to countries like Albania, particularly due to the increased frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, prolonged droughts, heat waves, and forest fires. Moreover, the specific factsheets on the Mediterranean basin point out to Albania's high vulnerability.

This not given the extremely low preparation towards risk reduction and poor capacities to address even minimalist scenarios, but rather due to Albania's topographic features. Diversity does not come cheap to anyone. Approximately 55% of our country's population, primarily residing in the Western Lowlands, is projected to experience significant exposure to increased climate-related risks. This figure surpasses the previous global estimate of 40-45%. Yet again this reading shall not indicate references to specific occurrences and figures across sectors in Albania as those are more than evident.

On the other hand, this Manifesto emphasizes the consequences of these phenomena. *Will Climate directly affect our economy? Or it already did whilst we continue business as usual.* The investments in hydro-power have a track record of 17 years of unsustainable interventions and investments. *Did it lead to fulfilling Albania's annual gross domestic demand?* - Not yet, but it led to the most aggressive deterioration of Albania's freshwater resources. On the other hand, Energy Community reports, based on the outcomes of 2022 energy shortages revealed that the percentage of Albanian citizens facing energy poverty is among the highest in WB, 37% of the population. Well to put this in perspective, the reform on Energy Sector in Albania is an ongoing process from 4 years now and it has not yet produced a consensus on a legal determination of Energy Poverty in Albania, let alone providing substantial support for vulnerable groups.

The rise in temperatures, accompanied by climatic changes, has resulted in alterations to natural habitats and biodiversity. Our most pristine landscape is endangered, and habitats and species are distressed since such changes have led to frequent changes particularly in the lagoon and coastal ecosystems, whereas we have also noted and monitored a rise in the presence of alien and invasive species and a decrease of diversity. Well to add to this situation, certainly the GoA thought that decreasing protected areas in the Western Plain would certainly contribute positively.

Notably, urban areas are equally impacted by these phenomena, as three decades of transition, urbanization, and sprawl encapsulated more than 90% of the surface area with concrete and asphalt. Not sparing archaeological sites let alone urban parks. Such loss exposes many citizens, often unwillingly, to higher temperatures, for instance, 5-7°C higher than officially recorded by meteorological centers.

Some call this Urban Heat Island but to some is just a “siesta”.

Numerous commitments have been ratified and reported by GoA, Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20.9% by 2030, zero emissions in 2050. Frankly speaking no one out of the environmental community knows or cares about them. I would even presume that no one from this legislature in the parliament of Albania fully understands the matter. Hypothetically assuming, since there has been no speech from anyone from that chamber ever addressing the matter to colleagues, media, or his/her electorate. And yes, we do have a formal Green Parliamentary Group of democrats and socialists.

Despite recent advancements in establishing a legal framework and strategic documents for climate, energy, and disaster risk reduction, as well as institutional developments in the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, our country's level of preparedness to address the climate emergency and achieve the stated goals by 2030 remains inadequate. Climate-related concerns represent a significant commitment for the European Union, which, through the Green Agenda, is spearheading a substantial shift across the entire European economy. We emphasize that the effects of these changes have exacerbated existing gender inequalities in Albania, placing a significantly greater burden on women in mitigating these impacts, both within the family unit and in broader socio-economic dimensions. Our country's policies and programs must address and alleviate these impacts, as they are currently neither recognized nor acknowledged as such.

Drawing conclusions from the monthly and yearly bulletins of the Albanian Institute of Geo-sciences, dept. of Meteorology, Albania's need for Energy import comes not because of the installed capacity (generating capacity of HPPs) not meeting domestic demand but because the production of electricity has decreased progressively in the last 15 years as a result of **changes in the patterns of rainfall regime**. Not to forget here the *spicy planning practices* and inefficient end-user consumption.

Energy vulnerability in Albania has been warned that it will have strong effects at least 10 years ago. Specifically, in the energy sector, it is necessary to intervene immediately to approximate the remaining provisions of the Energy Package III as well as the Clean Energy Package under the Energy Community Treaty. Central authorities should urge to recognize the vulnerability and dependence of hydropower generation, as an unstable relationship and entirely dependent on changing meteorological conditions and climate projections. So, it should be unjustified to use climate as an argument but recognize it as a factor in further planning processes. In these conditions, Albania should aim at diversification with renewables (solar, wind) of the total energy that goes for consumption. The energy production initiatives similar to floating TPP in Vlora are as cynical as the UAE hosting COP28 this year.

Decarbonization shall affect heavily WB, Albania appears to be less vulnerable in this regard yet again without a nationwide support scheme facilitating self-production from solar and wind to families, farmers, small enterprises, and public services, decarbonization will hit hard here too. As a reminder, since 2017 when the Renewables Law was approved in Albania, until today MEI processed more than 200 applications, and numerous licenses have been issued. Well, the impact is to be felt, maybe in the years to come, maybe until marketing these licenses would finally conclude to the highest bidders.



EMA CONCLUSIONS ON CLIMATE

- 1** The National Strategy for Climate Change and the expedited advancement of other strategic documents, such as the National Adaptation Plan, Local Plans for Energy and Climate, and Local Plans for Disaster Risk Reduction should be approved no later than January 2025.
- 2** The revision of the government's decision on the Gas Masterplan, taking into consideration CO2 emissions and measures to balance them.
- 3** KESH should find terms to withdraw the Excelerate Energy and Renco TPP in Vlora. In times of decarbonization, de-pollution, and cutting emissions the TPP Vlora EIA for the floating power plants, refers to a 7-13% increase in CO2 emissions compared to Albania's baseline national emission in 2016.
- 4** Green Transition refers to Just Transition being achieved through increasing public engagement in discussions on climate issues, prioritizing first the vulnerable and marginalized.
- 5** Enhancing transparency regarding funds and investments dedicated to or influencing the climate, particularly in key sectors of the economy such as energy, agriculture, transportation, and waste management.
- 6** Focus on professional capacities to address climate-related issues in responsible institutions, including local government units and civil society combined with specific education programs in coordination with Higher Education Institutions and Research entities.



MANIFESTO ON NATURE 2024

During recent years, Albania has witnessed a surge in new infrastructures, including hydro-power plants, more recently solar energy projects, airports, resorts, and urban expansion, all of which have significantly contributed to the country's economic growth—a reality we acknowledge. However, it's imperative to recognize the concurrent serious threat these developments pose to protected habitats. The erosion began when the emphasis on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) in Albania shifted towards minimizing costs for investors rather than adequately addressing and mitigating potential environmental impacts.

The true value of Nature/Ecosystem for the people in Albania consists of the goods and services they do not have to pay for. Whereas, for instance, if you alter an urban park, the impacted communities now that the park is out of their reach, will start to pay to get those recreative or ecosystem services again. Thus the frustration, leading to community unrest, being a post-factum reaction does not safeguard nor prevent the alteration ecosystem itself.

Modern science today can quantify easily such services both in qualitative and monetary indicators, even though certain services are invisible like clean air or freshwater.

Green Transition, foresees to impact nature and resources through conservation applied on the novel concept of circular economy. Herby nature should be part of the National Bank and GoA economic and financial decision-making practices.

Incorporating natural capital into national accounting systems is a critical step in making "inclusive wealth" our indicator of progress. Also, in parallel, people should be educated that it is a moral and ethical duty to participate and contribute in processes related to commons governance.

To ensure the long-term conservation of natural resources and biodiversity and their sustainable use, it is of fundamental importance that decisions and actions related to nature conservation are supported by sound scientific evidence. Albania needs to build and improve knowledge on the use of new technologies to advance the preservation of its natural capital. Biodiversity information, adequately collected, managed, and shared, is necessary for evidence-based decision-making and keeping track of environmental impacts. CSOs in Albania today have multiple capacities and potential to contribute and impact for better nature conservation, considering what is occurring CSOs working on nature have proven to be a diligent safeguard.



EMA CONCLUSIONS ON NATURE

- 1 Halt of any development initiative from local or central authorities on territories revised by DCM no. 59, dated 26.01.2022, and DCM no. 60, dated 26.1.20221 until the decision upon the ongoing litigation at The Administrative Court of Appeals or later The Supreme Court is reached.
- 2 Vjosë Narta is considered to nest of over 200 bird species, while during the migration period, Narta becomes a "sanctuary" for endangered species, attracting over 20,000 waterbirds on average every winter and hundreds of breeding pairs every summer. An airport instead? Again, we suggest that Goa find terms to stop works in Narta until the decision upon the ongoing litigation is reached by the Albanian Court.
- 3 Even though considered a personal or isolated case, dismissing public servants such as Mr. Ardian Koci is considered to be the most discouraging event from 2023 even to the most enthusiastic ranger in Albania.
- 4 Within 2024 we suggest amending and upgrading the procedures for any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) planned for interventions within the protected areas
- 5 The National Agency on Protected Areas is invited to come out of its shell, hopefully as soon as possible, and further coordinate CSOs, Institutions, and scientific research centers contributing with practical field surveys, identifying and analyzing habitats and species, to further nurturing a central but public database with such valuable information
- 6 To the executive, by spring 2024 clarify all intentions and consult the draft amendments dating 12.11.2023 proposed by 12 members of parliament on the Law No.81/2017 on Protected Areas.

A photograph of a street scene with several large trees on the left side. A road curves into the distance where a dark car is visible. A tall street lamp stands on the right. The sky is a pale blue. The text 'MANIFESTO ON POLLUTION 2024' is overlaid in white at the bottom.

MANIFESTO ON POLLUTION 2024

Is there an escalating impact of pollutant concentration in the air, water, and soil in Albania? Well, it has been a decade since the last figures were published by the Public Health Institute and more than 5 years since the National Environmental Agency reported an accurate status of pollution. The lack of monitoring capacities has reached an unprecedented low during 2022-2023. As a result, it is evident that the legal framework governing air, noise, water, and soil pollution issues, as well as the monitoring and inspection of pollution in the country, is not being implemented, nor anyone is being held accountable. This situation has given rise to numerous unresolved conflicts between polluters and the affected communities or habitats. These cases often linger in prolonged court proceedings due to the subjective nature of decision-making in the absence of accredited references provided by relevant authorities. Given those minor issues require so much effort in our context. Consequently, it is correct to estimate that Albania is significantly neglecting obligations arising from the EU Integration and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The lack of monitoring has created an unjust scenario for communities exposed to pollution. This negligence has inadvertently provided a haven for polluters who, in the absence of effective monitoring, can freely discharge pollutants into water, soil, and air. It's essential to emphasize that relying solely on self-monitoring, devoid of public inspections and oversight, leads to subjective assessments that can easily favor certain interests. Unsurprisingly, approximately 90% of self-declarations claim zero incidents, no pollution, and in some occasions not even a slight exceedance of limit values. This stark contrast between what people perceive and the self-declarations, in the absence of proper monitoring tools, underscores a concerning discrepancy.

An illustrative instance occurred during the 2023 local election campaign in Tirana. When asked upon air pollution, Mayor referenced in his articulation a weather app indicating how healthy and unpolluted the urban air is in Tirana. In the meantime, not on a single a single monitoring practice is reported on the air quality in Tirana since 2019. However, satellite-based monitoring (Copernicus) interpreted by the European Environmental Agency contradicted these claims, revealing a stark reality: in Tirana alone, there were more premature deaths linked to air pollution than the total pandemic-related casualties.

Although the pandemic has passed, the Mayor's actions and their purported contribution to healthy air quality persist as part of the ongoing scenario. Those who are confident that these interventions are increasing property values in Tirana should also consider that exposure to increases the health costs.

Numerous scientific articles highlight the direct correlation between human exposure to PM and NO₂ particles and their detrimental impact on human health. Furthermore, it is alarming to note that micro-plastics have already infiltrated the food chain, posing additional risks. Also, the negative effects of noise pollution on the socio-psychological well-being of citizens should not be overlooked. It is important to recognize that all these consequences incur costs both on the health and financial fronts for individuals. Moreover, it is important to reiterate that pollution is a global challenge. In recognition of this, the United Nations has recently adopted Resolution A/76/L.7, which incorporates the provision of a healthy and sustainable environment into the framework of basic human rights. This resolution underscores the significance of ensuring a stable and healthy environment for all individuals.

It can be argued that neglecting environmental monitoring in Albania was intentional. Monitoring practices, inspection, and even public consultation were reshaped after the 2014 Territorial Reform. Such reform led to elaborating Regional and Local Urban Plans which in most cases were approved by 2016. Huge interventions and investments were foreseen and it is unthinkable for those masterminds to have forgotten environmental impact. The only credible report anyone can access upon air pollution dates prior to 2016. *Coincidence again?*



EMA CONCLUSIONS ON POLLUTION

- 1** Dedicated budget for monitoring purposes, from the upcoming 2025 budget, at least 25% of the income from Carbon Tax, applied on fuels. Insufficient financial resources allocated to tackle pollution and its consequences hinder the achievement of objectives outlined in the law and the national air quality plan. Evaluating the effectiveness of state budget and foreign fund utilization remains challenging due to the lack of traceability for funds dedicated to pollution within the country's accounting system. The implementation of the carbon tax, known as the 3 ALL/liter tax on oil pumps, has generated by over 125 million Euros, yet no discernible improvements in monitoring or pollution reduction within this sector have been observed.
- 2** Execute full monitoring practice for at least 15% of the stations foreseen by the National Environmental Monitoring Program during 2024. The Ministry and its affiliated agencies fail to enforce the existing legal framework concerning monitoring, tracking, and penalizing violations related to pollution discharges, we urge any responsible policymaking and law enforcement institutions to react similarly to the reaction of Supreme State Control Authority on 2023.
- 3** MTE and NEA to require and support next year that at least 6 main Municipalities initiate drafting their Local Air Quality Management plans and Local Noise Management plans.

4 Install at least 10 air monitoring stations in Tirana and provide accurate real-time information for its habitants whereas equipping NEA and PHI with 5 mobile monitoring kits to conduct inspections upon complaints or accidents jeopardizing public health (similar situation with emissions from Elbasan Industrial Dumpsite part of KURUM company)

5 Avoid total reliance on self-monitoring declarations by 2024. On a more specific level, the environmental inspection system, under the authority of NEA, should cease to avoid implementation of Article 63, sections "b" and "d" of Law No.10431, dated 09.06.2011, "On the protection of the environment," as amended. These obligations include: (i) monitoring the environmental impact of activities to assess the need for additional measures, such as the revocation of environmental permits, to ensure compliance with relevant laws; (ii) verifying and evaluating the compliance monitoring carried out by the activity operator. Such obligations outlined in the current legal framework aimed at mitigating pollution and degradation are mandatory to further ensure that "Right to life" and "The right to a healthy environment" as fundamental human rights sanctioned by the Stockholm Conference (1972) and constitutionally protected by GoA.



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