

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

ASSEMBLY

LAW

No. 14/2024

ON THE APPROVAL OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Pursuant to articles 78 and 83, clause 1, of the Constitution, by proposal of the Council of Ministers,

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

DECIDED:

Article 1

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania is approved according to the text attached to this law and is an integral part of it.

Article 2

Law no. 103/2014 "On the approval of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania" is repealed.

Article 3

The Council of Ministers will be responsible for approving the by-laws proposed by the institutions responsible for implementing this strategy.

Article 4

This law enters into force 15 days after its publication in the Official Gazette.

SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT

Lindita NIKOLLA

Approved on 8.2.2024

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

1. INTRODUCTION:

The National Security Strategy for the expected period 2023-2028, following the previous strategy of 2014, aims to reflect as comprehensively as possible the main challenges and threats to the national security of our country, as well as to include institutional responses to them in the period 2023-2028.

Since 2014, we have witnessed a significant deterioration of international security and its negative impact on the security of Europe, the region and our country. At the same time, other major events, such as the earthquake of November 26, 2019, and the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic of the last three years, have significantly affected the security of our country, causing human, economic and social costs, highlighting, in particular, the need to draw the appropriate lessons for effective management of such phenomena, as well as the necessary improvement in the structural and organizational dimensions.

As of February 24, 2022, we are facing even more dramatic changes in the international security arena that have challenged the entire European security architecture since the Cold War. Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine has brought frontal war to Europe, creating a fierce political-military confrontation, but also an extreme polarization between democratic countries and authoritarian powers, some of which increasingly appear as systemic rivals of democratic values. Moreover, the rise of authoritarianism at the global level, accompanied by the erosion of democracy, threatens to undermine the multilateralism that has characterized international relations since the Cold War.

The rules-based international order is currently being challenged by the aggressive use of military force to occupy territory, while the arms control regime has been almost completely dismantled. In addition to geopolitical changes and increased security threats, significant challenges are emerging in cyberspace, where technology can be used at any time as a weapon against social, economic, and political stability. Security threats are further exacerbated by the lack of a cyber-arms control regime.

These negative developments have further aggravated the geostrategic rivalry of recent years and exacerbated the existing socio-economic problems on a large scale, negatively affecting the energy sphere on a global scale and causing a significant contraction of global economic growth expectations, an increase in inflation, as well as a sharp rise in commodity prices. In this regard, the above-mentioned developments seriously affect food security, making the risk of a serious food crisis in the next two to three years real, which could have far-reaching socio-political effects, especially in developing countries, with all possible negative consequences, including regional conflicts and renewed waves of immigration to Europe.

These negative effects also affect our country, but in addition to them, the security of the country has now faced the exponential emphasis of some sophisticated threats specifically, such as cyber-attacks in the past year against our online systems, or intelligence and influence

activities to increase the impact of political and economic global actors opposed to the democratic system.

The current situation has thus created an accumulation of challenges and threats, ranging from the classical dimension of the re-actualization of the military defense of territories, to terrorism and the use of the effects of developing technologies in a harmful/disorienting form, to climate change and environmental risks. As such, they are highly unpredictable and present objective difficulties for effective management at a purely national level.

2. STRATEGIC INTERESTS:

At the global level, Albania's strategic interests are related to its Western political affiliation, as a NATO member, a candidate country for the European Union, as well as its democratic political system. Thus, the main strategic interests of Albania are the defense and security of the territory covered by the clauses of the North Atlantic Treaty, the restoration of peace on the borders of the EU territory, the restoration and proper functioning of the European security architecture, the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of democracy and multilateralism at the global level, the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts between states, the restoration of the international architecture of arms control, the global commitment against climate change, the increase of energy and food security, the joint international efforts to reduce social problems in the countries of origin of waves of emigration to Europe, as well as the strengthening of Albania's role and international commitment as a factor of peace and stability.

At the regional level, Albania's strategic interests stem from its Western political affiliation, which also includes its national interests. They are the further consolidation of peace and stability in the region, the consolidation and acceleration of the Euro-Atlantic and European perspective of the region through the enlargement of NATO and the enlargement of the EU, the peaceful resolution of interstate issues, the effective confrontation of harmful interventions, malicious and influential third parties, the active prevention of the possible spread of destabilization, as a result of the deterioration of the European security situation, the transformation of the region into an integrated market through the removal of barriers and the construction of common infrastructures for the free movement of people, ideas, goods and capital, the deepening of economic and energy cooperation of mutual interest, as well as the protection of national minorities.

At the national level, Albania's strategic interests certainly coincide with its national interests. They derive from the fundamental values defined in the Constitution, from its political affiliation and from its democratic political system. At their core are the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Albania, the security and well-being of citizens, as a basic condition for the existence of the state with all its functions and a stable society, accelerating the process of membership in the European Union, strengthening cyber defense and the sustainability dimension, with special emphasis on further strengthening the capabilities to prevent attempts of economic-financial penetration of unfriendly foreign powers as well as their malicious interventions, strengthening the security of critical and important infrastructures, increasing energy, food and health security are of strategic importance for

Albania. In this context, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, the proper management of natural disasters, the intensification of the fight against organized crime and corruption, the strengthening of the democratic rule of law, the creation of a favourable climate for attracting safe foreign investments, as well as the educational and cultural development of the country. Of particular importance is also the national education in times of peace with the values of democracy, ethnic and religious tolerance, as well as inclusive and multicultural values". Albania's strategic interests include actively contributing to the consolidation of Kosovo's independence and supporting its path towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as its participation in regional initiatives such as A-5, etc.

3. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT:

The analysis of the strategic security environment, detailed at the global, regional and national levels, serves to determine the institutional responses of the Republic of Albania to threats to its national security at all three levels for the period 2023-2028.

Since the beginning of Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, the strategic security environment appears to have deteriorated more than at any time since the end of the Cold War. NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted in July 2022, states that we are already in a critical period for international security, peace and stability, and that the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has significantly affected the stability of peace and security in the region. NATO's Strategic Concept also emphasizes that the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order have been violated and that, in the current conditions, the possibility of an attack against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Alliance's territory cannot be excluded. NATO's Strategic Concept also states that the current security environment is characterized by strategic competition, widespread instability and recurrent crises, while the threats we face, such as the continuing threat of terrorism, are global, interconnected and unpredictable.

Even the EU Strategic Compass, adopted in 2022, emphasizes that the EU zone is plagued by instability and conflict and faces war on its borders. The Compass also states that we are facing a dangerous combination of armed aggression, illegal annexation, fragile states, revisionist powers and authoritarian regimes, and that this strategic environment is a fertile ground for numerous threats to European security, such as terrorism, extremism, violent and organized crime, hybrid conflicts and cyber-attacks, the exploitation of illegal immigration, weapons proliferation and the progressive weakening of the arms control architecture.

This situation underscores the fact that, despite the clearly positive trend of consolidation, the security of our country, as a member of NATO and a candidate country for the European Union, is interdependent with the security of the territory of the Atlantic Alliance and that of the EU, and therefore developments in the international security situation should take precedence over internal risks. Thus, the current situation in the security environment has created an accumulation of challenges and threats with a high degree of unpredictability, which also corresponds to the provisions of The Hague Convention "On the Protection of Cultural Values

in the Event of Armed Conflict", as well as the Protocol and Regulations for the implementation of this Convention, adopted by the UNESCO Conference in The Hague on May 14, 1954.

In parallel with the increase of the above mentioned risks, the Republic of Albania has intensified its efforts to increase the capabilities to face internal and external threats through an increasingly intensive interaction in the field of security with NATO, the European Union, strategic partners, as well as with other international organizations.

a. Global scale

The military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the year-long frontal war on the borders of the territory covered by the prerogatives of the North Atlantic Treaty have led to a sharp geopolitical clash between democratic and authoritarian countries, seriously challenging the entire architecture of post-Cold War security in Europe and beyond. The conflict in Ukraine has also brought closer than ever the possibility of a conventional armed conflict between the Russian Federation and NATO, as well as the risk of this conflict escalating into a nuclear conflict. The war in Ukraine has also affected the energy dimension on a global scale, causing a significant contraction of the global economy, a sharp increase in the price of raw materials, and a serious impact on food security. At the same time, the non-constructive and hostile actions and attitudes of authoritarian powers such as China, Iran and North Korea, which have chosen to side with Russia by supporting it politically and, in the case of Iran and North Korea, also militarily. The post-Cold War global order, and in particular its security architecture, is threatened by the more aggressive approach of authoritarian powers with hegemonic and anti-democratic aims and their intensive diplomatic, military, intelligence and hybrid efforts to shape international decision-making according to their geostrategic interests. These actors will continue to pose significant conventional, non-conventional, hybrid and asymmetric challenges and threats in the political, military and economic spheres. The disintegration of the arms control architecture as a result of unilateral violations of international commitments and withdrawals from international arms control agreements, which have made it possible to maintain European security for decades, risks the uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, defined in the NATO Strategic Concept as the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of NATO countries, remains a constant threat alongside the range of asymmetric and hybrid threats. The creation of new terrorist groups or extremist factions from known groups with the aim of expanding the territory under control, their ability to adapt the strategy, organization and methods of action, to exploit areas and regions with a security vacuum, or to fill the spaces left behind by political instability and conflict, continues to pose a threat to international security. Emerging and confounding technologies are bringing new threats to the international security scene, especially those related to cyberspace, data manipulation, misuse of artificial intelligence and its use for military and security purposes. The development of advanced programs for harmful and misleading technologies in the complete absence of transparency, by certain actors with goals of geopolitical dominance, motives of radicalization, terrorist activity and financing of these

activities as well as other illegal activities, risks turning into threats potential for security, highlighting the importance of energy and cyber security.

These threats are accompanied by changing climate conditions, which have the potential to bring new socio-economic implications for security. They are causing a chain effect, which goes from global warming and environmental degradation to competition for resources, increased immigration, the spread of diseases and pandemics with a global impact on health and food security through the depletion of vital resources, such as potable water as well as the increase in the destructive force of natural disasters, which has resulted in uncontrolled movements of people, both towards urban areas and emigration. Thus, climate change is taking on a more important role in changing the global geopolitical environment, causing instability and greater political friction within and between countries, and affecting the effectiveness of state and international actors for the management of natural disasters and humanitarian crises. Also, they can affect the growth of existing competition and threats, as well as geopolitical balances. The global security situation has also led to an increase in uncontrolled immigration, challenging the capacities of governments around the world to manage immigration flows, which are becoming more and more unpredictable. This phenomenon has caused sharp political tensions in the host countries, risking to potentially factionalizing societies, creating conditions for the growth of nominalism and xenophobia, the increase of political and religious radicalization, but also the marginalization of groups due to ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation. Furthermore, these flows can be exploited by criminal groups or organizations for human trafficking, but also by terrorist organizations for the movement of operatives with terrorist activities.

The use of energy and food as weapons and instruments of pressure by the Russian Federation has led to the disruption of global markets and prices of hydrocarbons and grains, consolidating a new strategic reality in Europe. The sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines in the international waters of the Baltic Sea has made NATO and its member countries pay increased attention to the protection of critical energy and underwater infrastructure in the territory of allied countries. The passage of the TAP gas pipeline through the territory of our country and in the Adriatic Sea acquires increased strategic importance in the current context. At the same time, the current energy situation has intensified efforts to diversify energy sources, while in the EU in particular efforts are being made to transition to the use of green energy, which also requires a radical industrial transformation. This gradual transition from carbon energy to clean energy will also have an impact on the behavior of countries that use or intend to use energy as a weapon or tool of pressure, reducing their political advantages and bringing changes in regional and global geopolitical relations.

b. Regional scale

NATO's Strategic Concept emphasizes that the countries of the Western Balkans face threats and challenges, including harmful and malign interventions by third parties. The EU Strategic Compass also emphasizes that security and stability in the Western Balkans are not yet guaranteed, also due to the increase of foreign interventions, including information

manipulation campaigns, as well as the possible spread of destabilization from the current deterioration of the European security situation.

The countries of the region have made significant progress in democratization, economic development and peaceful coexistence. Relations between the countries of the region have improved and cooperation has increased both qualitatively and quantitatively. The consolidation and institutionalization of the Euro-Atlantic and European perspective, the enlargement of NATO or the expected enlargement of the EU in the Western Balkans have brought radical positive changes in the region, acting as catalysts for democratic reforms, cooperation, good neighbourliness and the reconciliation process. Today, the region in its larger part, compared to years ago, has an ever-increasing will and already aims to be able to produce internal regional stability, but also to contribute to security and peace in geopolitics beyond it. In bilateral and regional cooperation, the trend is towards the removal of barriers through the construction of common infrastructures for the free movement of people, ideas, goods and capital, with the aim of transforming the region into an integrated, attractive and competitive market for foreign investment. The countries of the region have strengthened institutions and mechanisms for countering terrorism and violent extremism, reducing the influence of radicalization processes and other illegal activities, such as organized crime, and cooperation among them has deepened and had positive effects in strengthening counteraction.

At the same time, the region is facing the intentions of global actors and their regional supporters, who are trying to derail the Euro-Atlantic orientation of the countries of the region through diplomatic means, intelligence activities, and malign influence. Foreign actors intend to use inter-ethnic issues aimed at influencing internal political developments, promoting nationalism and extremism, and exacerbating existing problems for geopolitical and geo-economic goals and benefits. Similarly, the region continues to face a number of common threats, such as the existence of organized crime with regional and wider links, external influences and internal factors that enable radicalism and violent extremist tendencies, inter-ethnic violations, high levels of corruption, economic crime also favored by the degree of informality, problematic economic and social situation, protracted transition and unconsolidated democratic culture, inter-state problems and increased nationalist rhetoric.

Despite the government's will to move forward with integration processes, reforms, and fulfillment of criteria, in certain situations that are important for decision-making and for moving forward with integration processes, there are attempts to exploit, condition, and thus delay historical problems.

The region remains a transit route for organized crime with regional and international connections and traffic. Criminal groups, under the influence of international groups, have refined their methods of operation and increased the financial capacity generated by criminal activities. The sophistication of the methods of operation includes the transfer of the activities of criminal groups to cyberspace, the use of cyberspace to facilitate the coordination of their operations through digital communications, and the increase in financial capacity through cybercrime. In the countries of the region, there have been no terrorist acts, plans and intentions have been neutralized in a timely manner by law enforcement agencies, anti-terrorism measures

have been strengthened, effective strategies have been implemented, legal reforms in the fight against terrorism and regional and international cooperation have been strengthened. However, a high number of converted individuals and supporters radicalized by the ideology of terrorist organizations, online propaganda for indoctrination and radicalization activities, foreign influences for radicalization of communities towards fundamentalist and radical lines, pose a long-term threat to security.

The region is an important junction of the Balkan line of illegal immigration aimed at the countries of Europe, which causes the groups involved in human trafficking to increase their activities in the region. The possibility of being used by terrorist organizations to infiltrate active terrorists is not excluded and represents a security threat.

The countries of the region share common problems, with the need to ensure energy security remaining a priority. Obsolete technology, interdependence, the need for diversification of resources are the real challenges for ensuring the energy supply of the economic sectors. In addition, obsolete technology and lack of investment in technology modernization make this sector more vulnerable to potential cyber-attacks. Diversifying energy resources and minimizing dependence on imports remains a priority. The countries of the region are the transit route for oil and gas pipelines to Western countries. As consumers, but also as part of transit corridors, energy projects increase cooperation among Balkan countries, but also pose cybersecurity challenges.

c. National level

In the current international security situation, our country remains an important and committed actor in maintaining regional peace and stability. The internal security environment of our country is stable, without any imminent risks leading to the violation of the territorial integrity of the country or the violation of the constitutional order.

As a country with a clear Western geostrategic orientation, a member of NATO and a candidate for EU membership, with positive contributions to international decision-making on issues of international security, peace and stability, the Republic of Albania remains a country of interest for global actors opposed to these processes. Their activity is expected to intensify with the increase of confrontation and the aggressive approach of the opposing states with geostrategic goals in violation of the current architecture of international and European security, but also the position and the active and clear role of Albania in coordination with these organizations. This activity is aimed at negatively influencing our political system, politically and economically influencing important strategic decisions, promoting instability, influencing public perception according to their interests, increasing scepticism and hindering the country's efforts in relation to the Euro-integration processes.

Classified information and secure communication systems are exposed to security risks and threats from various state and non-state actors. The activities of the intelligence services of unfriendly countries are aimed at gaining access to information classified as "state secret", NATO, EU and other countries with which the Republic of Albania has signed a security agreement, with the aim of undermining national security and damaging relations with allies.

Malicious influence activities will continue in all forms by third actors to shape the information environment according to their interests, without excluding attempts to interfere and influence democratic processes, an instrument already used in the countries of the European Union and beyond, for which the Albanian Parliament has also adopted a resolution against interference in democratic processes.

Large-scale cyber-attacks on critical and important information infrastructure by state-sponsored malicious cyber actors, such as the one last year originating from Iran, prove that cyber security must be prioritized, even in the development of the digitization of public services for citizens. Existing critical information infrastructures and projects under development, in addition to the positive progress made in ensuring the quality of services and reducing the scope for corruption, remain under threat of cyber-attacks by state and non-state actors on their behalf, who not only have the objectives but also the capabilities to carry them out.

State or non-state actors with hostile intent may conduct cyber-attacks to harm, disable, disrupt services to citizens, create chaos and panic, for political purposes or for financial gain. Threatening cyber capabilities are used by states and hostile intelligence services as a means of operating at specific moments of important international developments to achieve their geopolitical interests. Cyber-attacks can also be used for cyber-espionage motives, for information operations, for obtaining unauthorized targeted access, as this allows achieving objectives in a shorter time and with less possibility of exposure and identification.

The security of critical and important infrastructure is a priority in the context of growing cyber threats, but also because the problems associated with equipment depreciation are vulnerabilities that can be exploited by terrorism and organized crime, amplifying other threats to the country's security.

Energy security is not only a global threat, but is also of primary importance in terms of threats to the national security of the Republic of Albania, which is related to the availability of resources, the reduction of water resources due to climatic conditions, the amortization of existing capacities, the increase of population needs for consumption. Moreover, the disruption of global markets due to the need for alternative markets to reduce and avoid dependence on opposing countries that also use energy for geopolitical pressure motives will affect the energy security. In these conditions, the efficient management of the existing infrastructure becomes a priority, increasing the security measures of this infrastructure against possible cyber-attacks, which could be acts of sabotage with the capacity to bring the country into crisis.

Malicious influencing activities, Malicious influence operations, fake news, disinformation, conspiracy theories with influential purposes have increased, affecting public perception of the effectiveness of the functioning of the democratic system and security as a whole. International realities prove that this form of collection and dissemination of information/disinformation affects economies, social cohesion, political relations, democratic processes and security. Rapid interoperability, wide audience has increased the use of this tool, thus challenging the credibility of real, scientific information and the effectiveness of governance, creating panic and chaos with implications for national security.

Environmental degradation will continue to pose a growing threat in terms of unpredictability and human and economic impact. Earthquakes, floods, massive fires, massive landslides have already demonstrated in terms of dimension the growing threat and significant impact on human and economic security and have challenged the existing capacities for their management. The global phenomenon of climate change negatively affects the natural balances of Albania. As a result, the country may face high temperatures that have a significant impact on the flora and fauna of the terrestrial and aquatic environment, prolonged droughts and major floods with increased risk to dams and reservoirs, with significant costs for the human dimension and the national economy. The Republic of Albania is affected and endangered by erosion, especially in the western lowlands, in the valleys of the major rivers, and along the Adriatic coast, where the baseline of the sea is advancing more and more. Environmental crimes also affect the further degradation of the environment, which has long-term consequences for the territory, urban landscape, health, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and the country's economy in general.

Pandemic and epidemic outbreaks of a microbiological nature, from drinking water or from various chemical substances, pose a high risk to national security. The SARS COV 2 pandemic in 2020-2022, H5N8 in poultry in 2020-2021 are among the most recent epidemic outbreaks that have affected our country. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 witnessed the extent of its impact on health and economic security. It significantly challenged the existing health infrastructure, weakened public perception of the effectiveness of government management, caused economic stress, consumer and investor anxiety, increased unemployment and, consequently, social problems. The impact on the economy added a new dimension to the competition between authoritarian and democratic regimes. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that a situation with such high public and international attention can be used by opposing actors for geopolitical motives.

According to the 2019 Strategic Risk Assessment, seven potential disasters have been identified as very high and high risk: antibiotic resistance, snow and avalanche blockage, earthquakes, seasonal influenza, floods and air pollution, and food and waterborne diseases; also of moderate risk are major fires, invasive meningococcal disease, hemorrhagic fever, CCHF, pandemic influenza, SARS, avian influenza, TB and measles. Protecting the population from the health effects of pandemics and emerging infectious diseases, as well as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, should also be considered a priority.

Terrorism and radicalization towards violent extremism, the financing of these activities, due to external influences and internal and regional actors and factors will continue to pose a risk to the cohesion and values of Albanian society as well as to the harmony and traditional coexistence between religious beliefs. in place. Although there have been no terrorist acts in our country, they are not excluded due to the instigation of coordination by terrorist organizations, the presence of the LHT from the country and the region still aligned with these organizations, but also their supporters who, in being indoctrinated by online propaganda, may act as lone actors. External influences of religious extremist lines continue to influence the radicalization processes at home with the aim of introducing the virus of extremism in the few

religious communities at home, undermining the harmony and coexistence between religious beliefs.

Organized crime continues to be a complex and dynamic phenomenon, even though its impact has increased significantly and countermeasures have been strengthened. The groups/individuals involved in organized crime, mainly in the trafficking and production of narcotics, despite the significant impact of their criminal activity, assets and income from this activity, have shown the ability to adapt their methods of action in relation to the opposition. The income from criminal activities, secured over the years by the degree of informality, impunity or low punishment, favored by corruption in the judicial system, has brought the injection into the formal and informal economy of money generated by criminal activity, the displacement of prominent elements of criminal groups in European countries, but also the production and origin of narcotics. In addition, the use of information technologies by criminal networks and the relocation of their activities to cyberspace makes it more difficult to track them down and bring them to justice, thus increasing their impunity. These elements, already integrated into international organized crime networks, continue to promote and coordinate the criminal activities of groups and their members within the country.

Economic security is mainly related to the consequences of earthquakes and pandemics, which affect the state budget dedicated to economic growth. Economic security can also be undermined by the efforts of global actors to penetrate the economy for geo-economic purposes and to use the economy as a means of political pressure. Economic crimes, despite concrete reforms to reduce informality and increase the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in combating these phenomena, continue to exist and have an impact on the country's economy and its sustainable growth, the strengthening of State institutions and the rule of law. They remain a dangerous factor for sustainable economic growth, reliability and stability of the financial and economic system in the country. Economic crimes have become more sophisticated through new financial technologies and are of concern because of their impact on the economy. Laundering of money and criminal products is a current problem with high impact on the country's economy and the rule of law.

Corruption and the perception of its level undermine public confidence in good governance and the rule of law, undermine the country's development, the strengthening of institutions and sustainable economic growth, and remain a factor that slows down and damages the reform process, as well as discouraging domestic and foreign investment necessary to create employment opportunities for all.

Public security Public security continues to be threatened by criminal activities involving the use of explosives, paid assassins who target individuals mainly for personal conflicts, financial interests, property disputes, illegal trafficking, and rivalry between criminal groups.

Social and economic problems are the main factor encouraging the irregular emigration of Albanian citizens, whose number has increased. Freedom of movement, the opportunities offered by the global market, has also led to an increase in the number of Albanian citizens leaving the country, including a number of vital professions and educated generations.

Food security as a very important element of human security with an impact on the health of the population, takes on special importance in the event of an economic crisis, changing climatic conditions and pandemics. The thirst for quick financial benefits has influenced the non-implementation of standards and their violation.

Illegal immigration through the territory of our country is connected with the Balkan route, which remains an important line leading to Europe, and our country remains a transit country for the passage of illegal immigrants. Our country, as a transit point on the Balkan route, is not excluded from the influence of the flow of immigrants from the countries in conflict.

The emigration of Albanian citizens has increased. Free movement and the opportunities offered by the global market, as well as several other factors, have led to an increase in the number of Albanian citizens leaving the country, including those from key professions and the educated classes. The socio-economic problems remain the main factor promoting the irregular emigration of Albanian citizens, whose number has increased, while the needs of the local labor market have promoted the new phenomenon of meeting the needs with labor from third countries. Another issue is the migration from rural areas to urban areas, which reduces the labor force and production capacities, turning farmers from producers to consumers of agricultural products, thus undermining the guarantee of the supply of food products to the population and creating an increasing dependency on imports of these products.

The risk of a military aggression against the territory of Albania is considered low, but the current international security situation on the borders of the Atlantic Alliance has increased the possibility of a military attack against one of the allied countries of NATO or against the territory of Albania itself, as well as the obligations arising from the implementation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, involving Albania in a conventional conflict that can be escalated through the use of weapons of mass destruction. Albania does not support and does not intend to use military force for reasons of aggression against another country.

4. THE INCREASING ROLE OF FOREIGN POLICY:

The foreign policy of the Republic of Albania is one of the most important instruments of its national security. The protection of national interests is carried out only through diplomatic means and constructive democratic engagement, in accordance with international legislation, avoiding deceptive and offensive rhetoric that undermines the democratic coexistence of the Albanian factor in the countries of the region.

In the current international security situation, Albania's foreign policy aims to be even more active in representing, protecting and promoting national interests, strengthening Albania's regional and international position and role, while promoting the values of peace, democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration. This policy is characterized by the consistency and stability of its priorities. The protection of national interests and their harmonization with those of the country's main strategic partners, such as the United States, the European Union, etc., will continue to be the main focus of diplomatic actions, where maintaining coherence between political decisions and solid public support is a necessary element.

The international system in which the Republic of Albania intends to pursue its interests is based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts between States. The use of force, in accordance with international law and in the service of restoring peace, stability, justice, human dignity and the common good, is considered by Albania only as a last resort, when all other means have been exhausted. Given the growing interdependence of many issues related to our national security and interests, our country will continue to be even more active in the field of multilateral diplomacy, especially in international or regional organizations dealing with security issues, as it has been in recent years.

The Republic of Albania successfully chaired the OSCE for the first time in 2020, where it achieved tangible and appreciated results in the field of security and cooperation of the Organization. This success will continue during its non-permanent membership in the Security Council for the period 2022-2023, where Albania has become a serious contributor to international peace and stability.

As a first-time elected member of the UN Security Council for the period 2022 - 2023, Albania is an active and determined supporter of Ukraine. As a co-sponsor with the US for Ukraine, and in close cooperation and coordination with other Western countries, Albania has made an important contribution to raising the issue of accountability and creating the Group of Friends for Accountability in Ukraine, as well as to the adoption of several important resolutions on the current conflict in the UN General Assembly.

As a valued member of NATO, an EU candidate country, a former member of ECOSOC, also of the HRC, of UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA, on the Executive Board of UNESCO, with concrete commitments in international peacekeeping forces, but also in climate protection, in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, etc., Albania not only demonstrates political will for a peaceful and secure world, but also contributes concretely with its resources in this direction.

Based on its political orientation towards multilateral cooperation and considering multilateralism as an important instrument for the maintenance and strengthening of peace in the world, the Republic of Albania will continue to actively contribute to the activities of the UN and its agencies, as well as other international and regional organizations.

In the current international security situation, which has led NATO to shift its focus from crisis management and out-of-area operations to territorial defense, Albania considers the Atlantic Alliance as the cornerstone of the common security of the member countries and considers its security inseparable from the security of the territory covered by the prerogatives of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Republic of Albania is an active part of NATO's unwavering will to secure and defend every inch of Allied territory, contributing militarily to the largest NATO build-up in the east of Allied territory since the Cold War. As part of this mission, the Republic of Albania has prioritized the increase of the defense budget at the national level, actively contributing to the unity of the Alliance and the essential importance of the transatlantic link so that NATO remains a pillar of stability for future generations.

Albania also supports NATO's comprehensive approach to the defense and security of Allied countries, including NATO's enhanced role in the fight against terrorism, as well as the strengthening of stability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area. Albania is fully aware that the new range of threats cannot be countered by military means alone, and therefore, in its dual capacity as a NATO member and a candidate country for the European Union, it favors the intensification of NATO-EU strategic cooperation to counter these threats. A stronger and more capable European Union in the field of security and defense will make a positive contribution to global and transatlantic security, while complementing NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defense for its members.

Of particular importance for Albania is the NATO-EU cooperation on security in our region, which is considered of strategic importance by both NATO and the EU, where this cooperation materializes in joint efforts to support peace and stability in various parts of the region, such as Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Membership in the European Union is the strategic choice and the most important geostrategic and political goal of the Republic of Albania, which is at the core of its domestic and foreign policy. The standards of the European Union and the universal values it promotes fully correspond to the aspirations and ideals of the Albanian people. Human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, including those of national minorities, are fundamental European values that the Republic of Albania embraces, respects and protects. These principles are the foundations of a rule-based political and social order, which brings social peace, respect for democratic institutions and the rule of law. Therefore, tangible progress in the rule of law and reforms based on European values, rules and standards are essential for the Republic of Albania on its way towards the EU and conditions as *ne qua non* for individual security and equality of all before the law.

The European integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU remains an investment in peace, stability and prosperity with mutual benefits. The final anchoring of the Western Balkans in the family of values that the EU represents is the best strategic investment in our common future. The return of war in Europe, with Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, as well as major geopolitical changes and challenges, have put pressure on the common European vision and the vital interests of security and stability in a wider European space. Security and stability in the Western Balkans remain fragile, also due to the emergence of new hybrid threats and foreign interventions, including information manipulation campaigns, as well as the need for a more comprehensive and modern package of EU engagement with the Western Balkan partners. Therefore, the acceleration and reinvigoration of the enlargement process is more urgent than ever in order to consolidate the EU's role in the region in relation to other interests, including those of security and peace. In order to address these dangerous trends, the Republic of Albania supports the growth of the EU's autonomous security capabilities. The Republic of Albania will strengthen the security dialogue with the Euro-Atlantic partners and its capacity to react in solidarity with them; will continue the 100% alignment of its foreign policy with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy; and will continue to contribute to the EU's civilian and military missions, making the Republic of Albania not only a beneficiary, but also a security contributor.

On the bilateral level, the foreign policy of the Republic of Albania reflects the intention to strengthen bilateral relations of mutual interest with NATO countries, EU countries, neighboring countries, as well as other democratic countries in the world. The core of bilateral relations remains the strengthening and deepening of relations and partnership with strategic partners and allied countries in North America and Europe, to which Albania aligns its foreign and security policy as a reliable partner and factor of peace and stability in the region and beyond. Special importance is attached to the intensification of relations with neighboring countries with which Albania shares common interests in the further strengthening of peace and stability in the region, its Euro-Atlantic path, the deepening of economic cooperation of mutual interest and the protection of national minorities. In this regard, the Republic of Albania promotes good bilateral relations, is committed to improving strategic relations, active participation in organizations and regional initiatives that contribute to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.

Albania is an important and proactive actor in the Western Balkans region, considered as strategic by NATO in recent summits, and already has a consolidated constructive and responsible approach to its regional policy, based on the principles of good neighborliness, Euro-Atlantic perspective, comprehensive cooperation, regional economic integration, respect for and promotion of minority rights. Strategic partnerships in the region and beyond, tripartite and quadrilateral activities, joint meetings of governments as well as regional initiatives are important instruments for a proactive regional foreign policy of the Republic of Albania. Regarding the challenges related to cyber security, Albania attaches special importance to the promotion of national interests in cyberspace and the development of strategic partnerships, with the aim of strengthening national cyber security also through cyber diplomacy.

The consolidation and institutionalization of the Euro-Atlantic and European perspective, the enlargement of NATO or the expected enlargement of the EU in the Western Balkans have brought about radical positive changes in the region, acting as catalysts for democratic reforms, cooperation, good neighborliness and reconciliation processes. In terms of bilateral and regional cooperation, the trend is towards the removal of barriers through the construction of common infrastructure for the free movement of people, ideas, goods and capital, with the aim of transforming the region into an integrated, attractive and competitive market for foreign investment. In the region, Albanians are and will continue to be a stronger stabilizing, constructive, contributing and cohesive factor, steadfast supporters of Euro-Atlantic integration, contributing to the further development of interstate relations among different communities as a commitment for the future.

At the same time, the region is facing internal political tensions, in some cases directly instigated by third parties seeking to increase their influence and to deviate from or slow down Euro-Atlantic integration. The intervention of third actors, the non-respect of the rights of certain ethnic groups or national minorities, as well as extreme nationalism and the existence of divided societies, in addition to unresolved inter-state disputes and problems, can still create tensions and negative consequences in bilateral, regional and multilateral relations.

The Albanian diaspora, the historical and the new, is one of the largest in the world, compared to the population in the country of origin. The Republic of Albania will continue its efforts to fulfill its constitutional obligation to respect and protect the rights of the Albanian communities abroad, promoting state cooperation with the institutions of the host countries, implementing international agreements and using all diplomatic, political, economic, educational or communicative mechanisms. The Republic of Albania also contributes to the stability of the region and harmonizes relations with its neighbors through its relations with Albanians outside its borders and by supporting their legitimacy.

In order to provide solutions to the problems of the Albanian community, major projects will be carried out that serve the cooperation with the Albanian communities in the Diaspora, such as the complete digitalization of consular services, population registration; voting in the Diaspora; improving the legal framework for the socio-economic development of the country; Preservation of identity, language and culture through the creation of cultural centers, certification of teachers to teach Albanian language and culture in the diaspora, and the realization of special educational and cultural television programs dedicated to the diaspora. Another important goal is related to the creation of institutional structures to achieve the "Brain Return", the attraction of diaspora professionals for short and long term engagements, as well as excellent Albanian students who can be a contributing force in the country of origin.

5. ENHANCING THE SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSION:

In line with the current international security situation, increased threats and its commitments as a NATO country, Albania will give priority to further strengthening the dimension of national stability as part of NATO's collective stability. This important dimension, based on Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, is defined by NATO as the ability of a state to withstand, recover and continue to provide services after a major shock, such as a natural disaster, failure of critical infrastructure, hybrid or armed attack. According to the Atlantic Alliance, this important dimension is elaborated by ensuring the continuity of government and critical services, stable energy supplies, the ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people, stable food supplies, the ability to cope with health crises, sustainable communications systems, and sustainable civil transportation systems.

Critical infrastructure protection consists of actions taken to prevent, increase resilience to, or mitigate risks resulting from vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure assets, while increasing resilience through risk analysis, risk assessment, and the ability to respond to potential threats. Ensuring the supply of food, medicine, and other essential and emergency products is critical not only for the government sector, but also for society in times of crisis or war.

Our national approach to enhancing sustainability must be guided by three essential elements:

- Understand: Gain a clearer picture of risks and vulnerabilities.
- Protect: Improve the sustainability and protection of infrastructures, including information infrastructures and information as a whole, people, and institutions.
- Respond: Develop and establish capabilities and procedures to prevent, manage, and mitigate potential risks.

In view of the aforementioned scope of this important dimension, Albania has recently appointed a National Contact Point for Sustainability in NATO; more specifically, the Minister of State for Relations with Parliament, who will be the coordinator between internal actors and the Sustainability Committee in NATO at the political level. In this perspective, it is necessary to allocate the necessary financial resources to increase the capacities and material reserves of the state to enable successful operational intervention for the protection of the population, the economy and the country in situations of state emergency, civil emergency, terrorist actions and military actions. Each sector should define a list of essential goods and services relevant to the sector-level response to the threat.

Increasing the security level of population protection and critical infrastructure.

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, in addition to their primary role stemming from the constitutional mission of preserving the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Albania, contributing to the collective defense of the Alliance, participating in NATO-led missions and operations, the European Union and the United Nations, as well as providing assistance in dealing with civil emergencies, also provide their resources to other national security institutions to deal with virtual and hybrid threats. In order to strengthen the management of existing critical infrastructure systems, Albania has already adopted its first risk assessment document at the central level, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy 2023-2030 and the National Civil Emergencies Plan.

6. ADVANCEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SECURITY AND DEFENCE SYSTEMS:

The Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania, as one of the main elements of the national power, are conceived, built and used as a NATO force. In the conditions of the changing international, regional and domestic security environment, the Armed Forces will develop by focusing on providing the necessary combat, combat support and combat service support, systems and equipment, cyber defense and human power enhancement capabilities, independently or in cooperation with Allies, as well as the infrastructure capabilities available to the Alliance, until the activation of the collective defense mechanism of the Alliance.

Based on the risks, threats, and requirements for the capabilities necessary to accomplish the mission, the Armed Forces will grow in quantity and quality by creating the capacities and capabilities to meet the threats through the realization of these objectives:

- The continued participation of the Armed Forces in NATO/UN/EU and coalition-led missions, as well as the unification of part of the national defense plans with those of the Alliance;
- Drafting the new military strategy of the Republic of Albania and the long-term plan for the development of the Armed Forces, as a reflection of the needs created by the changes in the new strategic environment;
- Improving the legal framework to enable the full implementation of national obligations arising from the North Atlantic Treaty's principle of collective defense, ensuring airport infrastructure capable of supporting the Alliance's needs and

operational requirements, and continuously improving the operation of the armed forces;

- Creation, development and modernization with new combat capabilities and military infrastructure at the pace of contemporary technological developments, as well as the inclusion of the Reserve Component as an integral part of the Armed Forces structure. This component, in addition to enhancing the capabilities and capacities of the Armed Forces, will also strengthen the relationship between the Armed Forces and the public;
- Continued commitment to serving citizens and supporting civil authorities in dealing with emergencies and controlling the territory.

The defense budget, in accordance with the commitment of the NATO HOSG, will gradually increase until 2024, when it will reach 2% of the GDP, and after this year it will be aimed at this minimum level, where at least 20% of the defense budget will be spent on the modernization of important military equipment. The provision of defense resources and the numerical and qualitative growth of the human capacities of the Armed Forces will enable the fulfillment of obligations in the entire spectrum of commitments within the national framework and those of the Alliance, as well as the realization of the above-mentioned goals.

7. ENHANCING AND DEVELOPING STATE CAPABILITIES TO DEFEND AGAINST HYBRID THREATS:

In recent years, the speed, scope and intensity of hybrid threats have increased significantly. Preparing to prevent, counter and respond to hybrid attacks remains a priority for Albania as a NATO member and a candidate for the European Union. Hybrid activities pose one of the greatest challenges to our security and the integrity of our democratic institutions. Hybrid techniques can affect both the military and civilian spheres, harming our interests and threatening our cohesion.

The use of hybrid tactics is not new; the use of propaganda and disinformation is as old as conflict itself. Hybrid threats combine military and non-military means, as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyber-attacks, economic pressure, and the displacement of irregular military groups, with the goal of destabilizing society. Cyber and hybrid threats, which appear in the form of disinformation, cyber-attacks, and economic pressure, aim to disorient and destabilize the state and society, making it necessary to take measures to prevent and protect against them through an inter-institutional approach of the structures that contribute to the protection of national security.

Our national approach to hybrid threats must be guided by these three essential elements:

- Understand: Gain a clearer picture of risks and vulnerabilities.
- Defend: Strengthen resilience and protect information, people, institutions, and infrastructure from hybrid threats and hostile activities against the country.
- Respond: Develop and establish capabilities and procedures to prevent, manage, and mitigate potential risks. Understanding: creating a clearer picture of risks and vulnerabilities.

8. CYBER SECURITY AND PROTECTION:

The overall global approach to digitizing and automating work processes must go hand in hand with investments in cyber defense. Naturally, this approach is associated with a potential increase in the risk of cyber-attacks.

Cyber-attacks and cyber-crime transcend physical borders and are becoming part of major global security challenges. The perpetrators have a transnational profile and are increasingly involved in other criminal activities such as terrorism, human trafficking, money laundering, system theft, fraud, etc. These activities contribute to the increase in crime and the spread of violence in our communities, endangering public safety and affecting other socio-economic aspects. They also violate the rule of law, promote corruption and, in certain cases, encourage activities hostile to the State.

Consequently, they require a visionary, well-defined and comprehensive strategic framework to address the dynamic and evolving nature of cyber threats and ensure national cyber security. In this context, five main pillars are defined to enable a holistic approach such as preventing, managing and responding to cyber threats by improving security techniques, procedures and standards; building capacity through education and awareness; continuously improving technology; ensuring online safety for children and youth; and strengthening public-private partnerships at the national and international levels by developing cyber diplomacy.

As a proactive strategy, the importance of public and private investment in technologies that comply with the latest cybersecurity standards is increasingly recognized. Technology is very important to realize and protect national interests, as well as to gain strategic advantages in the geopolitical space to achieve the goals for a secure future of the country through the strengthening of security, economy and democracy. Cyber security is an essential part of national security and for this reason, Albania is committed to increase the cyber security of its information infrastructures through strengthening capacities and national and international cooperation, joining in this approach with other democratic countries.

Unauthorized interference through cyber-attacks on digital systems, theft of information, and any malicious activity in cyberspace, as well as any other attempt to destroy or weaken our networks and information systems, will be minimized through increased investment in this area, controls on infrastructures and services, and investigative resources.

At the same time, it is intended to strengthen cooperation with national and international allies and partners in technical expertise and human capacity building, equipping with advanced technology, improving preventive activities and coping with attempts that may be made to compromise our public or private technological systems. It is also intended to strengthen the mechanisms of control and investigation, as well as the prosecution of such criminal tendencies, in order to prevent the threat to national security.

Securing our critical infrastructure is essential to promote and ensure the baseline cybersecurity and continuity of critical sectors. Protecting investments in these infrastructures and strengthening their sustainability through prevention, detection, response, attribution and

protection measures against the activities of malicious actors in cyberspace are also considered priorities.

Improving the legal and regulatory framework and enhancing inter-institutional cooperation are also important objectives.

It is necessary to develop mechanisms to raise the standards of critical infrastructure to rapidly improve cyber flexibility and sustainability, as well as to build inter-institutional capabilities to have the most secure implementation of digital infrastructure and systems, to continuously monitor any suspicious activity and to quickly respond to any attack. As an open society, Albania has a clear interest in strengthening norms that mitigate cyber threats and increase stability in cyberspace.

Considering the measures taken, it aims to increase human and institutional capacities that will then make it possible to protect digital infrastructures and systems from cyber-attacks by state and non-state actors. Increasing and strengthening these capabilities will also make it possible to respond decisively and with all appropriate national means to hostile acts in cyberspace, including those that compromise or weaken vital government functions or critical national infrastructure.

At the same time, we are committed to fulfilling national obligations for responsible state behavior in cyberspace under the framework adopted by the UN General Assembly, according to which international law applies online as it does offline.

In addition, the threat to the security of the computer systems and networks of the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces is real; therefore, the AF will provide capacity for cyber protection by offering monitoring of networks and systems. The goal is to ensure cyberspace in all activities of the MoD and the AF by developing cyber security capabilities, consolidating defense capabilities, increasing awareness and professionalism, and strengthening cooperation and coordination with national and international institutions.

9. CIVIL EMERGENCIES:

Events in recent years have shown that there is an urgent need to strengthen disaster preparedness and risk management capabilities, adopt appropriate response systems and procedures, and improve institutional capacity for disaster risk reduction coordination and management for interaction between public levels of government as well as with private and civil society actors. The priority is to prevent environmental degradation and mitigate the effects of climate change through effective management of watersheds, increasing forest cover, integrated management of urban waste, and working with civil society to raise public awareness of environmental protection and ensure the safety of dams.

The civil protection system has been re-dimensioned through the establishment and operation of the National Agency for Civil Protection, which is the authority responsible for the coordination, cooperation, design and harmonization of procedures for disaster risk reduction throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania. The disaster risk reduction framework has been improved through identification, periodic risk assessment and monitoring, mitigating the

negative consequences of disasters, as well as creating a database of losses from natural emergencies and disasters. With the approval of the National Risk Assessment Strategy, which entered into force in February 2023, the strategic priorities identified by each responsible institution will be implemented, such as the drafting of the law on critical infrastructure in accordance with EU laws and directives.

By fulfilling the above mentioned criteria, the conditions were created for Albania to become a participating state in the European Civil Protection Mechanism. As a full member, Albania will not only be able to receive immediate assistance, but will also be able to send assistance to disaster-stricken countries through the Mechanism, leading to a stronger and more coordinated response to crises in Europe and the rest of the world.

This system will have the strategic goal of preventive and rehabilitative measures in infrastructure, cooperation between military and civilian structures, the establishment and functionalization of civil protection structures at the central and local levels, cooperation and interaction with regional homologous structures in terms of mutual support within the framework of civil protection, as well as increasing the international role of the Republic of Albania in the field of disaster risk reduction and civil protection, through its greater and more active role and the fulfillment of international contributions, as well as inter-institutional cooperation within the support of the relevant procedures.

10. FURTHER STRENGTHENING THE WORK OF INTELLIGENT SERVICES:

The changing strategic environment towards a complex and uncertain world, where threats are increasingly complex and interconnected, poses new challenges to the nation's intelligence community in guiding and supporting strategic decisions to counter these threats. The transnational and sophisticated nature of threats necessitates deepening cooperation among them, with domestic law enforcement agencies, and with international partners and allies.

The Intelligence Community must strengthen its capacity to warn of strategic implications for national security and adapt its structures to the nature of the threats. This community should promote and identify best practices and functions to create an ongoing culture of cooperation and partnership. Fulfilling the statutory mission of this community requires responsibility and effort to appropriately share knowledge, information, and capabilities across organizational boundaries and to effectively utilize available resources. In addition, the Community must make long-term strategic investments to develop professionalism and enhance capabilities for the new nature of threats. To achieve these goals, the Intelligence Community must:

- Continue to develop and adopt processes for a dynamic intelligence system that supports strategic decision making with assessments and forecasts of threats to national security in accordance with the legal mission and area of responsibility.
- Expand and deepen strategic knowledge of the strategic environment to provide information on developing trends, opportunities and threats in areas of responsibility and interest to maximize the advantage in decision-making and increase the contribution to international organizations.

- Increase community interaction within the country and cooperation between it and law enforcement agencies to enhance countermeasures in accordance with the legal mission.
- Strengthen existing partnerships with allies and partners and develop new ones in accordance with mission needs and legal requirements.
- Develop and implement new capabilities and capacities related to the evolution and nature of threats to national security.
- Advance efforts to protect information, infrastructure, and its own personnel, and develop a dynamic approach to continuously evaluate common security practices and standards to strengthen the security of the Community's infrastructure.
- Base its work and development strategies on this strategic document.

11. SECURITY SECTOR ENFORCEMENT ISSUES - LAW ENFORCEMENT AND INFORMATION SECURITY AGENCIES:

Information security

For the application and implementation of the best standards in the discipline of security of classified information, the Republic of Albania will develop an effective system to guarantee the protection of this information and secure communication systems through the revision of the existing legislation, modernization, technological strengthening, capacity building, security education, and inter-institutional and international cooperation. Increased attention will be paid to the adoption of the National List of Products, which provides guarantees for the security of classified information, as well as to the identification and control of "foreign influence" from unfriendly countries through the ownership of economic operators who enter into contractual relations in the framework of procurements in the field of defense and security that contain classified information.

The fight against organized crime:

The continuous and uncompromising fight against it is one of the main priorities of the Albanian government and a key criterion in the process of Albania's membership in the EU. The vision and continuous efforts will be aimed at ensuring a safe environment for the development of the country and society from the threat of organized crime by ensuring the life of the individual, free enterprise and respect for legality as a whole in the country. To this end, work will be carried out to create and strengthen the necessary institutional capacities and to develop systems, technology, intelligence and analysis. In particular, efforts will be made to increase the investigative capacity against organized crime, economic and financial crime, cybercrime and drugs by reorganizing, profiling and increasing the professionalism of special structures in the State Police in accordance with European and Europol requirements and standards.

Therefore, cooperation among law enforcement agencies in the country and with regional and international partners will be continued and intensified. One of the strategic goals in the fight against organized crime will be to trace, seize and confiscate the finances and assets of criminal

groups, thus weakening them and returning these assets to the community and strengthening the sustainability of institutions.

Migration:

Migration remains an important phenomenon with a significant impact on Albania's social and economic development. Ensuring good governance in this regard is an important objective and a criterion for the country's membership in the European Union. Albania remains both a source of economic migrants and a transit and destination country for individuals from third countries, including economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

In line with global migration processes and Albania's integration into the European Union, a holistic approach to the challenges and opportunities of migration will be provided. In this context, the institutions will prioritize the development and management of effective migration policies aimed at addressing and managing the issues and challenges arising from migration flows to and from Albania. In addition, efforts will be made to optimize the positive effects of migration on the development of the country and Albanian society.

The main efforts for good governance of migration are related to:

- Complete prevention of irregular emigration by Albanian citizens and abuse of the visa-free regime in the Schengen area and the EU;
- Effective management of mixed migratory flows from conflict areas;
- Strengthening the reintegration mechanism to ensure a stable return of Albanian citizens through the provision of assistance;
- The impact of migration on the development of the country by encouraging human and financial investment by Albanians living abroad for the betterment of their homeland;
- Strengthening migration management structures and immigration policies to improve the integration of immigrants in accordance with international rights and standards.

Enhancing border security:

One of the key strategies to control and manage irregular migration remains the strengthening of border security along the state border and the implementation of integrated border traffic management measures. To ensure and strengthen border security, efforts will focus on developing border services through technology projects, preventing cross-border crime and trafficking, and promoting cooperation with FRONTEX and neighbouring countries.

Terrorism and Violent Extremism:

Albania is at the forefront of nations fighting terrorism. Over the years, it has refined its legal framework and established new specialized capacities to effectively combat this phenomenon. Albania is actively engaged in coordinated efforts alongside strategic allies such as the US and the EU. Since 2014, Albania has been a member of the Global Coalition against the Islamic State and has ratified various conventions and resolutions on counterterrorism. In recent years, Albania has made remarkable progress in implementing preventive measures against terrorism,

radicalism and violent extremism. This progress is evidenced by the strengthening of law enforcement capacities and the development of effective policies in this area.

According to studies and risk reports, the actual threat of terrorism in Albania is at a "low" level. Albania has experienced the phenomenon of individuals participating as terrorist fighters, often accompanied by their families, in conflict areas.

At present, a large number of Albanian citizens, mainly women and children, are accommodated in reception centers awaiting repatriation. These persons are undergoing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, accompanied by continuous monitoring by the relevant structures.

However, recent developments, such as those in the Middle East and North Africa, including attacks by international terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and others, have raised the challenge against terrorism and its financing to a whole new level, both nationally and internationally. Given the current developments in the Syrian conflict (loss of territory and control by ISIL/DAESH), the possibility of their activation cannot be excluded.

Preventive measures through the "soft" approach will include the development of a strategic communication programme aimed at promoting respect for human rights. In addition, efforts will be intensified within educational institutions and civil society to address the causes and effects of stereotypes, prejudice and social discrimination based on ideology. Addressing all forms of violent extremism will be guided by the principles of community resilience and inclusive dialogue. In addition, special attention will be given to supporting host communities, in particular by facilitating the sustainable reintegration of returnees.

In this context, increased attention will be given to the implementation of an effective State policy for the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of Albanian citizens and their family members. Consolidating the capacities of intelligence structures, using platforms and technologies for the timely and secure exchange of information, conducting joint risk assessments by institutions and law enforcement agencies, enhancing investigation and detection capacities, in particular with regard to terrorist financing, and improving the responsiveness and preparedness of institutions to minimize the consequences of potential terrorist acts will be key priorities. Protecting critical infrastructure within the country, enhancing monitoring and control capabilities for the transportation of goods, especially weapons and CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) materials, and intensifying the monitoring of individuals at border crossings and within the territory will be some of the most important aspects of mitigating the threat of terrorist activities. There will also be an increased focus on combating the financing of terrorism by strengthening the legal framework for implementing international coercive measures against terrorism and improving the effectiveness of law enforcement structures in investigating and prosecuting suspected cases.

12. ENERGY SECURITY:

According to the National Energy Strategy approved by DCM no. 480/2018 and referring to the EU recommendation, the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) 2020-2030 was approved in 2021. This plan complements the National Energy Strategy and sets new and more ambitious targets for energy efficiency, use of renewable energy sources and decarbonization. The National Energy and Climate Plan sets the following targets and measures for energy efficiency and renewable energy by 2030:

- Contributions to GSE discharge -18.7%; (reduction via WEM).
- Energy efficiency -8.4%; (reduction of final consumption via WEM).
- The share of renewable energy in the final energy demand is 54.4%.

The Law on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources, recently adopted by the Parliament of Albania, defines binding national targets and reporting obligations regarding the contribution of renewable energy sources to gross final energy consumption, rules on information, statistics, certification, cooperation mechanisms and support. In addition, it addresses rules related to access and operation of networks for renewable energy sources and their connection to the electricity grid, as well as guidelines for granting, transferring and cancelling guarantees of origin for energy produced from renewable sources. In addition, the law covers resources and rules for the integration of self-producers and communities of renewable energy in the electricity sector.

Electricity production: Electricity in Albania is produced 100% from renewable sources (99% from HECs (hydroelectric power plants) and 1% from (solar photovoltaic) FV sources). This represents one of the highest shares of renewable energy in the energy mix among countries worldwide. The total installed power generation capacity in Albania until December 31, 2022 is 2614 MW. This capacity has a growth level in 2022 of about 9 MW, compared to 2021. The total power generation capacity of the public company KESH Ltd. is 1,448 MW and represents approximately 55.4% of the country's total installed capacity. The total installed capacity of other power producers is 1166 MW and makes up about 44.6% of the total installed capacity in our country. The number of independent power producers, which will account for about 45% of the total domestic production in 2022, is increasing every year, which increases the importance of these producers in the market and marks an important step towards the liberalization of the electricity market in our country.

The installed capacity of generation facilities connected to the transmission system in 2022 is approximately 2,266 MW with a net production of 6,149,229 MWh. The installed capacity of electricity producers connected to the distribution network in the same year is approximately 348 MW with a net production of 853,414 MWh. Due to its sensitivity to hydrological conditions and its inability to meet its energy supply needs, Albania operates as a net importer of electricity. This dependence on energy imports, which accounts for 20-30% of energy demand, poses a challenge to ensuring the security of electricity supply. The system needs to rely on domestic production while remaining affordable for consumers, thus supporting poverty reduction efforts.

In response to the ongoing energy crisis and to prevent price increases in the country while ensuring uninterrupted energy supply, the Albanian government declared a state of emergency in the electricity sector in October 2021, which will remain in effect until June 30, 2023. To ensure power generation, the Albanian government has contracted two diesel-powered power vessels to operate out of Vlora starting in September 2022. These vessels are expected to have a generating capacity of 100-114 MW. This will cover up to 15% of Albania's general consumption needs.

Once operational, ALPEX (Albanian Power Exchange) will change the dynamics between market participants by eliminating bilateral relations between them. The aim is to have a market that efficiently produces, transmits and consumes electricity, as well as a market that leads to higher profits, organized according to the EU model, guided by the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and sustainability in the long term, based on competitive pricing, for further integration into the wider regional and ultimately the EU internal energy market. ALPEX will be operational in both countries: Albania and Kosovo, following the signing of a service provider agreement. The establishment of this market will increase the security of electricity supply for both countries (Albania and Kosovo), with the expectation that it will significantly increase competition, resulting in lower electricity prices in the retail market.

In recent years, photovoltaic power plants have been installed in our country, contributing to the diversification of electricity production sources. These plants have a total installed capacity of 23 MW and produce a total of 5092 MWh.

Based on the strategic framework of the National Energy Strategy (2018-2030), the National Energy and Climate Plan (2020-2030) and the Government's vision for the development of the energy sector, which emphasizes the expansion of production capacities through diversification of sources, ongoing investments in renewable energy sources are being pursued through private initiatives and competitive processes.

The tender process for the construction of a 140 MW photovoltaic plant in Rema-Karavasta (near Lushnja) has been completed. Of this capacity, 70 MW will be allocated as part of support measures, while the remaining 70 MW will be for the free market. The APP was signed in 2020 and is currently being implemented. The selected bidder has started the construction phase in accordance with the obtained permits.

The tender process for the construction of the Spitalla PV Plant in the area of Spitalla, Durrës District, with an installed capacity of 100 MW (70 MW as part of the support measures and an additional 30 MW for the free market) has been completed. The bidder is currently in the process of obtaining permits in accordance with the provisions of the contracts signed in June 2021.

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy has announced a competitive process for wind turbines with an installed capacity between 10 MW and 75 MW. Through this tender, the Ministry aims to select projects with a total capacity of 100 MW that will benefit from support measures. The contracting authority may later decide to expand the total tendered capacity up to 150 MW. The process is currently underway.

Continued efforts are being made to diversify power generation through various renewable sources. A solar photovoltaic plant with an estimated capacity of 5.2 MW, owned by the Albanian Electricity Corporation (KESH), and two small hydropower plants (HPPs) with a combined capacity of approximately 5 MW have been integrated into the local power generation capacity.

According to the directive of the Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, both companies and individual household customers are allowed to install a maximum total capacity of 500 KWP for solar electricity self-production. Currently, the total installed capacity is about 100 MW.

The construction of the Skavica hydropower plant is an important step towards increasing energy security, reducing electricity imports and increasing the efficiency and energy production of the remaining hydropower plants in the Drin River cascade. The Skavica hydropower plant, like the other three hydropower plants in the Drin River cascade, will be operated by the Albanian Power Corporation (KESH).

Law No. 38/2021 establishes the special procedure for the negotiation and approval of the contract with "Bechtel International, Inc." or its subsidiaries for the design and construction of the Skavica hydropower plant.

In 2022, the ERE (National Regulatory Authority) has proceeded with the approval of several sub-legal acts that have affected both the possibility of constructing transmission and distribution networks in the gas sector. In order to align with MIE's strategy alongside Albغاز and KESH, it is imperative to achieve the following objectives in the short and medium term:

- TEC Vlora,
- construction of a liquefied natural gas distribution terminal, and
- construction of a natural gas pipeline from the Vlora terminal to Fier.

There is a multidimensional commitment to facilitate gas supply to the Vlora TEC. The introduction of LNG in any capacity to the Vlora area, together with the construction of the Fier-Vlora gas pipeline, will contribute to the development of the gas sector in Albania. This initiative will improve the viability of the gas transmission and distribution system through the bi-directional connection of the TAP exit point.

13. REFORM IN JUSTICE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION:

The implementation of the Judicial Reform, through the full operation of the new institutional architecture in the judiciary, was essential for a State governed by the rule of law, towards an open, impartial, transparent, professional, efficient and accessible service for all. The legal framework of this reform, the process of establishing new judicial institutions and equipping them with the necessary infrastructural and human capacities to support the implementation of strategic priorities are aimed at aligning our justice system with the highest European standards, with a comprehensive vision to restore citizens' confidence in the justice system. Despite the numerous challenges that the implementation of this reform has faced, in a very short period of time, along with the adoption of the relevant legislation, a stable institutional structure has been created, which has demonstrated tangible and qualitative results that underscore the

transformative impact of profound constitutional, legal and institutional changes. The reform would be meaningless without the establishment and functioning of new judicial institutions, such as the High Judicial Council, the High Prosecutorial Council and the High Inspector of Justice, which continue to fulfill their objectives for an independent, professional and high integrity judiciary.

Corruption is a major threat to democracy, good governance, fair competition and sustainable economic, social and political development of a country. The Albanian government has shown and will continue to show unwavering determination in the fight against corruption through preventive measures, punitive actions and awareness-raising campaigns. The fight against corruption is not only a priority for the Albanian government, but also one of the 5 key priorities set by the European Union for Albania on its way to integration into the European family. According to the European Commission's progress report for 2022, Albania has made some progress in its efforts to fight corruption. Despite this progress, increased efforts and political commitment in the fight against corruption, it remains an area of serious concern. Tangible results have been achieved in the fight against organized crime, including enhanced cooperation with EU Member States and Europol, a precondition for the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), which continues to be met. Similarly, the prevention and punishment of corruption are obligations derived from Albania's accession to international instruments in the fight against corruption, such as The United Nations Convention against Corruption, the Criminal Convention of the Council of Europe against Corruption, the Civil Convention of the Council of Europe against Corruption, etc.

The newly established comprehensive institutional architecture for the fight against corruption and organized crime, already implemented by the Special Prosecutor's Office for Corruption and Organized Crime, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Special Court of First Instance and the Special Court of Appeal for Sentences on Corruption and Organized Crime, has strengthened the investigation and trial mechanisms for high-level corruption and organized crime. This initiative aims to achieve results in investigations and convictions in order to combat corruption in all its dimensions. The process of implementing a comprehensive and well-designed system for the transitional reassessment of judges and prosecutors is progressing rapidly and satisfactorily. This process is leading to a continuous transformation of the Albanian judicial system, based on the evaluation of the professional competence, integrity and moral uprightness of judges and prosecutors. The ultimate goal is to restore and enhance public confidence in the judiciary, thereby ensuring the independence of the judiciary and promoting a robust rule of law. Extending the term of the vetting bodies will improve the results and allow for the successful completion and thorough vetting of the entire judiciary, including judges and prosecutors.

The Intersectoral Justice Strategy 2021-2025 and its Action Plan (December 2021) embody the second phase of justice reform to consolidate the institutional framework, implement modern European criminal justice policies, improve the infrastructure of the justice system and exploit new opportunities in information technology. This includes innovative electronic solutions aimed at significantly increasing the efficiency and transparency of the justice system. The third phase, covering 45 years (until 2030), is seen as the final phase of major reforms. Its goals

include: 1) eliminating backlogs, 2) improving the quality of services, and 3) aligning with EU judicial standards.

The fight against corruption is also one of the priorities of the political program of the Council of Ministers, approved by DCM no. 68/2021 "On the approval of the composition and political program of the Council of Ministers". In this program, this priority is expected to be achieved through modernization of services, consolidation of digital infrastructure, ongoing reforms to strengthen the rule of law, and strengthening of institutional capacities to fight corruption.

Regarding the modernization of services and the consolidation of digital infrastructure, which are outlined in the sections "Modernization for Development" and "Digital Society", the program foresees the Albanian government's ambition to ensure the digital delivery of all possible services to citizens. This effort is also aimed at improving the quality of services as an important and irreplaceable tool for preventing corruption. Meanwhile, regarding the continuation of reforms and the strengthening of institutional capacities to fight corruption, the program outlines the government's objective to improve citizens' access to the justice system through the digitalization of the system, as well as the expansion and strengthening of the network of anti-corruption coordinators.

Furthermore, in order to reorganize the anti-corruption structures, one of the priorities of the Government is the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Agency. The mission of this agency will be to prevent and combat corruption within the public administration through the development of anti-corruption policies, programs and projects, as well as the conduct of follow-up and administrative investigations into suspected cases of corrupt practices.

Political commitment to a national anti-corruption agenda and the improvement of the institutional and legislative framework in the field of anti-corruption are of paramount importance. There is also a need to strengthen the assessment of corruption risks and vulnerabilities, as well as the effectiveness of prevention mechanisms. The fight against corruption is a horizontal approach, encompassing various sectors such as transparency, public procurement, e-services, inspections and financial controls within the public administration. It also includes promoting integrity among central and local public authorities, fostering cooperation among law enforcement agencies, and raising public awareness and education about the fight against corruption.

Anti-corruption education remains a priority. The implementation of the legal framework by the employees of public institutions should be brought up to the standards of the best international practices in this field. The Specialized Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), consisting of the Special Prosecutor's Office and the National Bureau of Investigation, is operational. SPAK has conducted trials and financial investigations in a number of high-profile cases. Several final verdicts against high-ranking officials have been announced. The interim evaluation of members of the judiciary continues to produce results in the fight against corruption within the judiciary. Increasing the number of final court decisions against high-ranking officials remains a key priority to effectively combat the culture of impunity. The implementation of the intersectoral anti-corruption strategy is generally on

track. The vetting of members of the judiciary has yielded results in the fight against corruption. Challenges for the future in the fight against corruption, including recommendations from international anti-corruption reports, are:

- Continue to intensify the fight against corruption; make further progress in establishing a solid track record in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating corruption cases, as well as in seizing and confiscating/returning criminal assets derived from corruption-related crimes;
- Ensure that the Special Structure for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), the Special Prosecutor's Office and the National Bureau of Investigation, as well as the SPAK courts, deal effectively with high-level corruption; ensure adequate resources, expertise and cooperation between these new bodies and other prosecutorial and judicial bodies;
- Ensure that criminal proceedings are consistently and systematically initiated against judges and prosecutors accused of criminal conduct during the re-evaluation process;
- Effectively address GRECO's recommendations and implement the relevant action plan.

14. FURTHER CONSOLIDATE THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:

The establishment of stable institutions and a modern, professional and depoliticized civil service remains a crucial aspect of public administration reform. This is one of the main priorities of the Albanian government in the European integration process.

As a result of the implementation of the Intersectoral Public Administration Reform Strategy and its Action Plan 2015-2022, significant achievements have been made in civil service reform. The immediate priority and challenge is to develop a new public administration reform strategy. In addition, our future efforts will focus on the consolidation of public institutions and the civil service:

- Strengthen the institutional capacity of the public administration, improving accountability mechanisms and results-based performance management;
- Enhance the attractiveness of the public administration, ensuring fair and competitive remuneration packages through the implementation of the salary reform;
- Further develop the merit-based civil service recruitment system;
- Improve civil service legislation and standardize human resource management practices across all public administration institutions, including local government;
- Strengthen institutional capacity, particularly in light of the increased challenges associated with the commencement of EU membership negotiations, through the implementation of effective training programs offered by ASPA.

15. HEALTH SECURITY:

The Government of Albania responded effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic through social and health services, protecting high-risk groups, maintaining control and reducing the risk of further spread of the virus. It also provided essential health services beyond COVID-19 cases

to all age groups, including the elderly. It protected and socially integrated families and children by mitigating the effects of the crisis, continued to provide comprehensive social services, and consistently provided specialized support services for children and families affected by violence and abuse.

In this context, the coordination of all response activities at different levels of the health system and beyond, and the integration of activities with all sectors and other interested partners, constitute a comprehensive institutional approach that strengthens policies, procedures and capacities for the prevention of epidemics, pandemics and emergencies. This will ensure national and regional preparedness for coordinated responses to health emergencies; strengthen food, biological, chemical and radioactive safety based on international standards; strengthen overall surveillance systems, from timely emergency response to risk communication; and improve and expand mental health care.

16. FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS:

Food security is closely linked to the physical access of populations to staple foods, ensuring a timely supply chain, and ensuring the highest level of public health protection and consumer interests. The current international security situation has disrupted agricultural and food markets, causing an immediate increase in the prices of staple foods on the market. Similarly, the prices of agricultural inputs, which are entirely imported, have increased, as has the price of oil. The situation created has prompted the government to focus on finding mechanisms to subsidize and support the domestic agricultural sector, with priority given to meeting the population's needs for basic food products.

By regulatory acts, the amount of support for farmers in the National Program for the year 2022 was increased to 5.1 billion lek, which will benefit about 48 thousand farmers. In addition to the support with free fuel for agriculture on an area of about 126 thousand hectares for about 35 thousand farmers, the main support was given to the livestock sector, greenhouse vegetable cultivation and wheat cultivation planted last fall. Wheat production for the year 2022 showed a slight increase compared to 2021, while potatoes and beans remained almost at the same level. Import data show a decrease in the amount of imported cereals, while the amount of imported dairy products remained the same as the previous year.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has prepared programs for the control of zoonotic diseases as part of consumer protection for the year 2022. In 2022, farms with more than 5 livestock units will be monitored, while farms with more than 10 livestock units were monitored in previous years. For the control of tuberculosis in goats, a long-term program has been implemented, which consists of monitoring goats for bovine and avian tuberculosis. In addition, the control of rabies through the vaccination of red foxes continued with the support of the EU.

In addition, for the year 2023, it is planned to develop and implement programs for the control of bovine brucellosis, brucellosis in goats, tuberculosis, anthrax, rabies control through vaccination of red foxes with the support of the EU, as well as surveillance programs for the early detection of avian influenza.

A large part of these issues and measures of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development are also included in the National Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021-2027, approved by the Council of Ministers by Decree No. 460 of 29.06.2022 "On Approval of the Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, 2021-2027" and Decree No. 366 of 16.06.2023 "On Approval of the National Food Security Strategy 2023-2027".

Food safety is another critical element that affects the health of the population. The National Food Authority (NFA) is the institution responsible for nationwide control of food safety and consumer protection at all stages of the chain: import, production, processing, storage and marketing of food, animal feed, agricultural inputs and tobacco-cigarette production activities, as well as animal health safety at border points, in accordance with the requirements of existing legislation. Strengthening the capacity of the National Food Authority by improving the quality of inspections in the field of food, animal feed and agricultural inputs, as well as cooperation with other law enforcement agencies to strengthen control over entities engaged in illegal activities that compromise food safety, aims to ensure compliance of food with required standards and protect consumer interests.

17. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY:

Social cohesion is a crucial factor for national security. Our country has a largely homogeneous population; at the same time, the guarantee and protection of the rights of national minorities has achieved sustainable successes through appropriate legal frameworks as well as specific measures and programs.

However, the dictatorial past has left its mark on the internal social organization, affecting the normal democratic, political, social and economic development and influencing the further promotion of values of social solidarity, tolerance and multiculturalism. For this reason, support for underprivileged social strata or groups should remain at the center of social policy in order to build a just and solidary society that serves the further consolidation of the country's security. In this context, it is necessary to complete the process of economic and moral reparation for those politically persecuted by the communist dictatorship, with a view to their full integration into society. In addition, in order to improve social cohesion, efforts should be made to implement inclusive policies regarding education and employment for marginalized groups and individuals with special needs. Furthermore, our country should continue to work towards advancing the gender equality agenda, economic empowerment, prevention of gender-based violence and increasing women's participation in the political, social and economic life of Albania.

With regard to welfare, the promotion of social cohesion and the protection of women, children, the elderly and vulnerable groups, steps and reforms have been taken through socio-economic support to combat insecurity resulting from violence, including online violence.

The implementation of ratified international instruments and sustainable development is at the core of socio-economic strategies and support for these groups during COVID-19 conditions. Furthermore, the management of cases of children in need of protection during natural

disasters, COVID-19 and beyond has been carried out. Protection during natural disasters, especially during the 2019 earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic, should provide equal access to both humanitarian assistance and human rights protection, taking into account gender, gender-based violence, child protection, age and disability.

18. DEVELOPMENT OF A QUALITATIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM:

A quality education system is the foundation for social development and economic growth. The provision of quality education to successive generations has an impact on social cohesion, ensures the preservation and transmission of national values, contributes to increasing civic awareness and responsibility, and strengthens public institutions and policy-making processes. The main strategic document that addresses and details policies, objectives and specific commitments in the field of education is the National Education Strategy (NES) 2021-2026, a document that is fully consistent with the strategic objectives of the European framework for cooperation between the countries of the European Union in the field of education and training. The vision of the Strategy, approved by Decree No. 621 of October 22, 2021, aims at a quality education system based on the principles of inclusiveness, while prioritizing the provision of quality education at all levels, as well as scientific research, improving teaching and learning conditions, and ensuring equal participation opportunities, with the aim of meeting European standards.

The constant changes in economic development and various global or local phenomena require not only the strengthening of infrastructural capacities, but above all the strengthening of human capacities. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a crisis in various sectors, with education being one of the most affected areas, and addressing the situation required significant commitment. Strengthening the capacity of the human component is the basis for enhancing national security.

Inclusive education is valued as a fundamental component for civic education within the framework of personal development and also in addressing critical situations such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks, terrorism, territorial threats, etc., which jeopardize our national security. The Albanian education system will be synchronized with the demands and expectations of the economy and security challenges, ensuring a skilled workforce ready to compete in the national and international markets. The increasing new threats in cyber security have increased the need for specialized experts in this field, highlighting the need to update university curricula of existing programs in the field of information technology, as well as the need to create new programs to meet national needs. Investment in knowledge and scientific research in the field of security is considered a strategic goal with long-term benefits for national security.

The development of digital literacy through the optimal use of information and communication technologies for teaching and learning plays a crucial role in today's world, where security can suddenly be threatened. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching, increasing motivation and improving student performance. In the case of unforeseen situations such as pandemics or natural

disasters, ICT offers opportunities to organize distance learning, while in normal situations, technology can be used to enhance the teaching process in schools and classrooms. At the same time, this should be combined with awareness raising on Internet safety, protection of personal data, privacy issues and online child protection.

The consolidation of a safe and friendly environment for children in schools, through the development and adoption of a Safe Schools Action Plan, the establishment of a system to identify, prevent and report violence, bullying and violent extremism, and the minimization of hate speech in schools, is another goal related to safety in education. In addition, protecting children online is an important goal to ensure child safety at the national level. The Ministry of Education and Sport, in cooperation with international partners, will continue intervention programs aimed at improving the school climate as a prerequisite for violence prevention.

Based on the experience gained from the project with the Council of Europe on prevention of bullying and radicalization and the ongoing project on strengthening education for democratic citizenship, efforts are being made to extend these experiences to all schools by creating a democratic and friendly school environment. The prevention of cybercrime and the fight against cyberbullying are also specific priorities of the Minister of State for Youth and Children, in line with the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, with particular focus on Objective 3.1 "Protect, support and ensure the safety of young people, especially those at risk, in the physical and digital spaces where they live".

In implementation of Decree No. 930 of 18.11.2015 "On the Approval of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and the Action Plan", since the academic year 2019-2021, the Ministry of Education and Sports, in cooperation with the Center for Coordination against Violent Extremism (CVE Center), has been working to strengthen the capacities in school environments to identify the presence of violent extremism, as well as to improve the knowledge and capacities of stakeholders (teachers, principals, psychosocial services, security officers) to prevent and combat violent extremism. Each pre-university educational institution has a teacher coordinator for the prevention of violent extremism, and efforts have been made to consolidate the network of teacher coordinators for the prevention of extremism and violent radicalization in pre-university education. Annual plans to prevent and combat bullying, extremism and violent radicalization have been developed in educational institutions.

The Ministry of Education and Sports, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, aims to increase security through interaction and prevention by implementing the agreement signed between the parties, which aims to create a new approach through the project "Safe Schools - Security Officers in Schools". For the academic year 2021-2022, public educational institutions have been offered the service of 150 security officers. For the academic year 2022-2023, an additional 70 security officers have been assigned to educational institutions.

19. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:

The Albanian language is the fundamental element of our national identity. It is the common bond of all Albanians in the region and the world. The Albanian language creates a wide cultural, social and economic space with a high potential to create security and stability for the

region and beyond. Under the conditions of globalization and the spread of new communication technologies, the Albanian language, like other languages, is constantly confronted with the introduction of new phraseologies and terminologies related to new technological and social phenomena at the global level. This inevitable process underscores the need for the establishment of scientific control and analysis mechanisms to monitor the development of the Albanian language, with the aim of well-considered interventions for its preservation, standardization, harmonious development, as well as for the promotion of the Albanian language and culture worldwide.

With regard to the Albanian language in particular, the current challenge in the sector is the development of a legal, strategic and institutional framework to protect and enhance its status through:

- Legal reforms for the protection of the Albanian language (spoken and written, its dialects and sub-dialects, literary folklore, etc.);
- Creating an appropriate environment and promoting constructive discussion for the preservation, protection, transmission and popularization of the linguistic heritage, including the protection and cultivation of minority languages;
- Preserving and strengthening national identity through the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and the Albanian language as a medium for transmitting this heritage;
- Keeping alive the traditions and the Albanian language in the Diaspora by organizing National Days, but also by publishing the Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements online, continuously increasing the presence of Albanian information on the web, etc.

Albanian society possesses a rich cultural, historical, archaeological and ethnographic heritage, which constitutes an invaluable spiritual and identity value of the nation. The protection and preservation of this cultural, historical, archaeological and ethnographic heritage of Albania will be carried out in the interest of the nation through the implementation of specific cross-sectoral policies. Considering the leading role of UNESCO in the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism (UNESCO General Conference Resolution 38.C48), our country will intensify the cooperation with UNESCO, the European Union, the Council of Europe and other international bodies in the preservation of cultural heritage and diversity as a means for development and peace.

Special emphasis will be placed on the prevention, protection and effective response to natural disasters and other emergencies affecting cultural and museum property, with the aim of preserving, rehabilitating and restoring such property and preventing its illicit trafficking. This objective will be achieved through measures such as:

- Dedicated organizational structures and inter-institutional coordination in the event of natural disasters;
- Action plan for civil emergencies affecting cultural heritage and museums at the national and regional levels;

- Civil emergency protocols in cultural heritage institutions with standard procedures for response methods in case of natural disasters and other emergencies;
- Development of an integrated database for risk assessment of cultural heritage and museum assets (risk mapping);
- Documentation, inventory and digitization of cultural and museum heritage;
- Strengthening the capacity of inter-institutional authorities to prevent and mitigate risks to cultural and museum property and its illicit trafficking, and to ensure effective response to natural disasters;
- Educate, raise public awareness and encourage voluntary initiatives to prevent risks and preserve cultural property in the event of natural disasters and other emergencies.

The important objective of preserving, protecting and valorizing cultural and historical heritage in the service of national interests, the preservation of memory and national identity as tools for development and peace shall be achieved through the implementation of measures such as the following:

- Documentation, inventory and digitization of material and intangible cultural assets, as well as museum assets in times of peace;
- Educational, awareness-raising and promotional programs on the importance of preserving and protecting cultural heritage in times of peace;
- Increasing and enhancing the capacity of responsible structures of the cultural heritage system and volunteer groups in peacetime to deal with situations of armed conflict;
- Dedicated leadership structure and interagency coordination in the event of armed conflict;
- An interagency action plan for the protection of cultural heritage and the relocation of movable cultural property and museums based on UNESCO, European Union, Council of Europe, and other relevant international guidelines;
- Inclusion in current military regulations of provisions for the protection of cultural and museum heritage and the prevention of illicit trafficking based on UNESCO guidelines;
- Cooperation and coordination between the armed forces, civil protection and cultural heritage authorities;
- Integrating the protection of cultural property into humanitarian actions and responses.

The capacity of public administrations responsible for cultural heritage will also be strengthened to prevent, mitigate and restore damage to cultural property in the event of natural disasters or potential armed conflicts.

20. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

The National Security Strategy is implemented by the National Security System, whose powers are defined by the Constitution and laws of the country. The successful implementation of this Strategy will be achieved through a comprehensive process involving all actors and other factors in society that have the potential and ability to contribute to security. The primary institutional responsibility for the implementation of the NSS lies with the Council of Ministers, its dependent institutions and line ministries.

Within six (6) months of the approval of the NSS, the relevant institutions are tasked with drafting sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies for the implementation of this strategy. The Prime Minister presents an annual report on the state of national security to the Parliament of the Republic of Albania and the President of the Republic. The Parliament of the Republic of Albania shall monitor the implementation of the Strategy through the oversight instruments provided by the Constitution and laws of the country.

The NSS shall be reviewed, as a rule, every five (5) years, depending on the development of the security situation, both domestically and internationally.