

Multi-stakeholder Forum on Anti-Money Laundering in Albania

EVENT SUMMARY | APRIL 13th 2022

The forum brought together representatives of civil society, investigative media, academia, private sector associations, public institutions, policymakers and international partners to discuss the common challenges of the fight against money laundering in Albania. The forum aimed to contribute to the greater role, visibility and influence of non-state actors in anti-money laundering policies.

The multi-stakeholder forum was part of the "Supporting the Fight against Money Laundering in Albania" program, implemented by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation in cooperation with the American Bar Association, with the support of the US Department of State.

Main takeaways:

- Effective regimes against money laundering and terrorist financing require an interdisciplinary approach and the full involvement of non-state actors, including civil society, media and academia.
- Preventing money laundering requires the cooperation of all parties at all levels, including the international level.
- It is necessary to update the curricula in the main faculties and increase the cooperation of the academy with civil society organizations for the organization of thematic academic conferences to present the works of researchers and to build the necessary resources regarding anti-money laundering;
- Media organizations have an important role in investigating money laundering cases, particularly those

related to high-level corruption or organized crime. This requires a stronger cooperation with other actors, including civil society or private sector, in order to increase the necessary capacities for investigation.

Discussion summary

During the opening speech, the Executive Director of IDM, Sotiraq Hroni, said that IDM aims to bring increased attention to money laundering issues and encourage non-state actors to systematically focus on anti-money laundering processes and challenges. Collaboration among non-state actors to address mutual needs, to approach challenges together, and to support public institutions with new sources of knowledge is still a missing component. Mr. Hroni explained that the purpose of the forum is precisely to establish a sustainable practice of consultation between public institutions and stakeholders.

Sotiraq Hroni
Executive Director,
IDM

Adea Pirdeni, Deputy Minister of Justice, said that the priority of the Ministry of Justice, in the framework of the implementation of the ICRG/FATF Action Plan is to strengthen the control of certain designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBPs). In this context, intensive work has been done to improve the legal framework to

avoid potential links between organized crime and these professions. During 2021, two important legal acts were drafted and adopted that regulate the notary and real estate agents. Ms. Pirdeni praised the cooperation of stakeholders in the process of drafting legal acts. At the end of her speech, Ms. Pirdeni stressed the urgent need to periodically hold consultation roundtables to raise public awareness of the measures taken to prevent money laundering and to have increased coordination with non-state actors and international partners.

Adea Pirdeni
Deputy Minister of Justice

The representative of the US Embassy in Tirana, Benjamin Rockwell, said that Albania is making significant progress on the justice reform and the fight against corruption but the presence in FATF gray list is a society-wide problem with deep impact. The U.S. Government is supporting the Ministry of Justice in improving oversight of the notarial and real estate sector through a partnership with the American Bar Association. This partnership includes the work of IDM in including civil society on money laundering prevention issues. Mr. Rockwell stressed that effectively tackling money laundering will require the active involvement of civil society, whether investigative journalists placing a spotlight on the nexus of money laundering and corruption, academics and NGOs advising on needed legislative

changes and keeping up public pressure for change, or private sector associations pointing out how to make the system work to fix problems and spur growth.

Benjamin Rockwell
U.S Embassy in Tirana

The representative of the Delegation of the European Union in Albania, Aurélien Juliard reminded that anti-money laundering is a challenge for all countries. The rule of law section of the European Commission's latest progress report contains many details about the anti-money laundering regime. Mr. Juliard said that the European Union has supported the institutions in the harmonization process with the EU *acquis* but more implementation and compliance with the legal framework is required. To this end, the capacity of district prosecutors to investigate money laundering needs to be increased, as this offense is within their scope. In this regard, the EU is supporting through the EU4FOCAL project.

Aurélien Juliard
Delegation of the European Union in Albania

The discussion panel, moderated by Gjergji Vurmo, Program Director at IDM, provided the perspectives of various actors on the challenges and priorities regarding anti-money laundering and

the role of civil society, academia and the media in efforts to improve the regime.

Ardita Shehaj, advisor at GIZ Albania, stressed that international experiences show that effective regimes against money laundering and terrorist financing require the full involvement of civil society. Ms. Shehaj said that despite the focus of Recommendation no. 8 of the FATF (*on the NGO sector*) on the sufficiency of rules and laws, there needs to be a high level of law enforcement. Ms. Shehaj highlighted that think tanks and journalists are also important target groups. Given that we are moving towards a global economy, it is important for journalists to investigate at the regional level. Ms. Shehaj said that the fact that many categories of data that should have been public are not part of the register of beneficiaries is an obstacle to the investigation of cases.

Ardita Shehaj
GIZ Albania

Fabian Zhilla, researcher at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, argued that, alongside the legal framework, soft interventions should be worked out to improve efficiency. Several suggestions for the academia were provided, such as the updating of the curricula in the Faculty of Law, Economics, Social Sciences and Engineering and the cooperation with the civil society organizations for the organization of thematic academic

conferences to present the works of the researchers. Insights from many disciplines are needed because money laundering schemes are becoming increasingly sophisticated. As a result, EU directives are pushing towards prevention through administrative, not criminal instruments. Mr. Zhilla stressed that business chambers should be included in the conversation as the business itself is concerned about the distortion that the market suffers as a result of high volumes of money laundering. At the end of his speech, Mr. Zhilla underlined the difficulty of the investigation by civil society or the media due to the limited access to data and data platforms of institutions which make research impossible.

Fabian Zhilla
***Global Initiative against
Transnational Organized Crime***

Kristina Voko, Executive Director of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Albania, explained that the discussion should not be limited to investigative journalism but should be expanded, as many investigations are conducted in close collaboration with journalists from other fields, for example, economic journalists. Ms. Voko stressed that the purpose and function of journalism is to bring to light information unknown to the public. But restricting access to courts and court decisions hinders the work of the media. Mrs. Voko also stressed that there is a significant lack of

statistical data regarding the fight against money laundering, especially data related to organized crime. Ms. Voko concluded her speech by drawing attention to the scant reflection of money laundering issues in the media.

Kristina Voko
BIRN Albania

The panel discussions were followed by comments from key stakeholders: National Chamber of Notaries; National Albanian Real Estate Association (NAREA); and representatives of auditors/accountants sector.

The representative of the National Chamber of Notaries, Mr. Fatmir Laçe, said that the awareness of notaries has been increasing, which is reflected in the number of reports by notaries on suspicious cases of money laundering. Every notary office now has a special regulation and a register for anti-money laundering.

Representatives of NAREA, Mr. Reinaldo Pipiria and Ms. Ilda Zaloshnja, stressed the importance of including the real estate sector, despite being a relatively new actor. Mr. Pipiria said that NAREA has raised its concerns with the Ministry of Justice and are ready to continue cooperating in the adoption of bylaws, part of the new law governing the profession of real estate agents.

Mr. Hysen Çela, professor at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, said that the accountant community has self-regulatory bodies and supervisory

instruments that should escalate the cooperation. He also praised the establishment of good practices through the highest international expertise.

The representative of FIIAPP (*International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies*), which is engaged in the EU4FOCAL project, said that the money and assets of organized crime should be pursued, alongside prevention and awareness-raising efforts. The

implementation of the criminal justice framework needs to be strengthened. Ms. Garcia Iglesias stressed that this issue requires the cooperation of all parties at all levels, including the international level. At the end of the speech, it was underlined that efforts should be stepped up to accelerate international cooperation initiatives so that prosecutors can get in touch with each other directly, not through a central authority.



The Institute for Democracy and Mediation – IDM was established in November 1999 as a non-governmental organization, dedicated to consolidating participatory governance and democratic institutions, EU integration processes, civil society development, regional cooperation and security affairs through independent research, capacity building and engagement of societal players.

