

**Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade
Logistics and Trade Facilitation
11th Session**

Maritime Transport in Times of Polycrisis

23-24 October 2024, Geneva

**Challenges and Opportunities for Building
Sustainable and Resilient Maritime
Transport in Albania**

By

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Albania

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**"Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation, eleventh session",
Geneva 23-25 October 2024**

Transport Sector in Albania

In recent years, the Albanian government has made substantial investments in the transport sector, especially in enhancing road infrastructure to foster economic development. The government aims to integrate Albania's transport system with regional and European networks while developing a cohesive market that connects land and maritime transport infrastructure. Aligning Albania's transport policies with European Transport Policy and coordinating efforts with neighbouring Western Balkan countries have become essential objectives. Although Albania's transport sector is progressing, it continues to face challenges related to modernization and sustainability.

Maritime Transport

Maritime transport policy is an integral part of Albania overall economic policy and an economic catalyst. In Albania, the policies, objectives and goals of the maritime strategy are included in the national transport sector strategy, as well as in the wider economic and development strategy of the country. It is part of a broader vision to make Albania a key player in regional trade, tourism, and logistics in the Western Balkans.

The key strategic objectives in Albania's maritime sector include developing maritime transport to align with EU standards and increasing the number of certified seafarers in compliance with IMO standards. Additionally, the government aims to boost the volume of goods handled at Albanian ports and increase ferry passenger numbers, alongside the rehabilitation of infrastructure and superstructures at four ports, including those for tourism.

The Port of Durrës is the largest port in Albania and serves as a crucial trade gateway. It has limited rail connectivity, with only the eastern port terminal linked to the national rail network. However, the port benefits from strong road connectivity, including direct access to the Tirana-Durrës motorway and Corridor VIII. Durrës functions as the sole port authority and landowner, operating with full financial autonomy.

Other notable *ports* in Albania include those in *Vlorë, Shëngjin, and Sarandë*, which provide both cargo and passenger services. These ports continue to operate under the traditional public service model.

Albania has regular ferry connections to Italy and Greece, which are vital for trade and tourism. Passenger ferries operate between Durrës and Italian cities: Bari and Ancona.

The Port of Durrës in Albania and the Port of Bar in Montenegro are the only core ports in the Western Balkans included in the extension of the TEN-T Network, while the Port of Vlora is classified as a comprehensive port within the TEN-T Network.

Inland waterway transport in Albania is limited, primarily serving seasonal domestic tourist traffic along the Drin River.

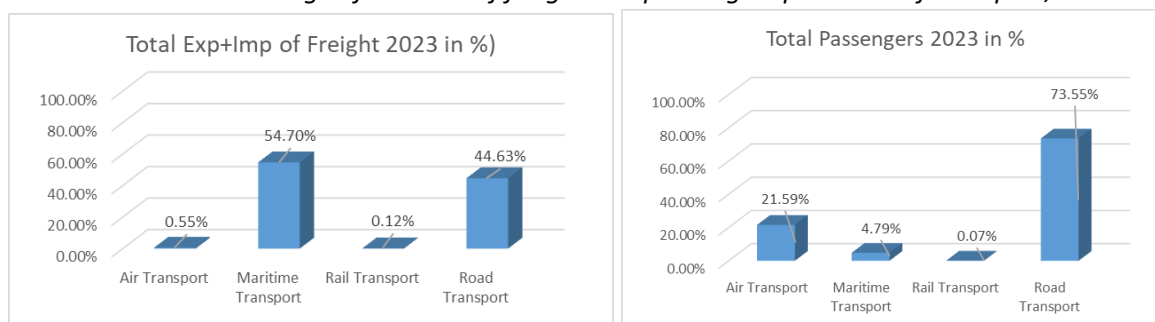
Table 1: Volumes of passengers and cargo in Albanian ports, 2019-2023

Passenger Traffic in the core ports of Albania (nr. of passengers)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Passengers	1,574,095	379,084	862,757	1,367,008	1,613,528
Durrës	878,687	311,302	688,586	802,679	901,457
Vlorë	179,220	62,193	109,969	198,175	228,809
Sarandë	516,188	5,589	64,202	366,154	483,186
Shengjin	0	0	0	0	76
Cargo traffic in the core ports of Albania (in 000 tons)					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total cargo	4,455	4,276.66	4,839.62	6,248.190	6,252,830
Durrës	4,072.50	3,882.10	4,438.61	5,977.24	5,261,562
Durrës Port	4,072.50	3,882.10	4,438.61	3,569.47	4,436,695
MBM Port (Oil Refining)	0	0	0	2,407.77	824,867
Vlorë	53.99	102.48	121.74	106.66	729,985
Sarandë	100.63	58.72	41.50	41.00	114,863
Shengjin	227.88	233.36	237.77	123.29	146,421

Source: Institute of Transport Database

The port traffic analysis from the table indicates that in 2023, the Durrës Port Authority, managed approximately 71% of Albania’s total cargo traffic. This solidifies the Port of Durrës as the most significant port in the country.

Table 2: Percentage of volumes of freight and passengers per mode of transport, 2023



Source: Institute of Transport Database

According to customs data for 2023, maritime transport dominated freight volumes, accounting for 54.70% of the total freight volumes for all modes of transport. In terms of passenger traffic, road transport led with 73.55%, while maritime transport remained relatively low. However, air transport saw a significant increase in passenger numbers in recent years, driven by the government's liberalization policies and substantial investments in Rinas International Airport.

Port of Durrës Revitalization: The Albanian government has ambitious plans to transform the Port of Durrës into a major trade hub. A significant part of this plan includes shifting commercial operations to a new port in Porto Romano, which will handle industrial cargo, while Durrës will focus more on tourism and passenger traffic.

The New Port in Porto Romano will:

- develop a world-class, international, technologically advanced and efficient, deep-water “Green” port that will handle the projected future seaborne cargo for Albania and the wider region.
- Centre for development of logistics and port-related commercial development in the area of Durrës and Tirana and a gateway for handling transit cargoes for adjacent countries.

- Develop a new multipurpose cargo port which is critical for Albania's national market connectivity, competitiveness and socio-economic growth potential.
- Extend the gateway function of Porto Romano and make it the catalyst for improving the levels of connectivity and inter-modalism for the whole Western Balkans region.

The construction of the new commercial port of Porto Romano is expected to be completed by 2028.

The Port of Vlora is set to be developed into a modern tourist port, with freight transport services relocated to the new integrated port at Triport, Vlorë.

The Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System (VTMIS) has not yet been implemented in Albania but is scheduled to be operational by 2025.

Institutional framework for maritime transport sector in Albania

Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy is responsible for developing maritime transport policies and overseeing their implementation. It also supervises the General Maritime Directorate and the port authorities.

The General Maritime Directorate (GDM) is responsible for implementing the Ministry's policies and overseeing maritime activities in line with national laws and ratified international conventions. Specifically, the GDM manages the Albanian ship register, enforces Flag State and Port State Control, monitors navigation within ports, ensures compliance with safety regulations for ships and ports, issues and accredits professional certifications for seafarers and maritime personnel, and licenses maritime service companies.

The Albanian Coast Guard is responsible for monitoring and regulating maritime traffic within the country's territorial waters and along its coast. Its duties include managing hydrographic services, maritime signalling, and overseeing the operation and coordination of Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) operations.

Inter-Institutional Maritime Operational Center (IMOC), is an inter-agency center dedicated to coordinating, managing, and overseeing Albania's maritime borders, as well as ensuring the safety of life at sea.

The Albanian fleet of ships equipped with an IMO number does not currently exceed 20 ships, of which 10 are general cargo ships, 4 are passenger ships and 6 are tugboats.

An **Incident/Accident Investigation Body for Maritime and Rail Accidents** has been established in 2022.

In the field of maritime education and training, two universities offer Navigation, Maritime Management and Maritime Engineering studies: University "Aleksander Moisiu" Durrës and University "Ismail Qemali" Vlorë.

The establishment of "Centre of Excellence in Maritime Affairs" (CEMA) was successfully completed in September 2021. CEMA has since been actively engaged in enhancing the human resources and institutional capacities of port operators in Durres and other ports in the region. It has also played a role in advancing the roadmap for improving the performance of the Albanian flag.

Legislation

From a legal and regulatory perspective, as a candidate for EU membership, Albania must implement the National Integration Plan, focusing on aligning its legislation, undertaking institutional reforms, and developing a transport strategy within the EU legal framework and the community acquis. Albania has made significant progress in harmonizing its legal system with the maritime acquis, particularly in the areas of maritime accident and incident investigations, as well as in establishing specific stability standards for passenger vessels.

Albania is developing a new Transport Sector Strategy and Action Plan for 2030, fully aligned with the key principles of European Transport Policy. The objectives of this plan are to advance the national transport system by promoting cleaner, safer, smarter, greener, more flexible, and competitive mobility. Additionally, it aims to enhance sustainability, interconnectivity, interoperability, and broader integration with regional, European, and international transport systems.

The new sector strategy identifies several strategic priorities for the maritime sector, including the development of efficient and responsible maritime and port systems, as well as sustainable growth in maritime and port markets. Additionally, the strategy seeks to implement targeted measures to improve the situation of Albanian-flagged ships. The Albanian Maritime Administration's efforts to enhance the performance of the national fleet have successfully moved the country from the black list to the grey list of the Paris MoU for Port State Control.

From May 2020 to June 2023, Albania received technical assistance from EMSA under the IPA II program to improve the implementation of international conventions and the transposition of European legislation. During this period, EMSA supported Albania in transposing two EU directives, completed ISO 9001:2015 certification for Flag, Port, and Coastal State Control, assessed four seafarer training centers, and donated five Automatic Identification System (AIS) base stations for AIS Data Exchange.

Participation in Regional, European and International Agreements

Albania has been actively involved in numerous regional, European, and international maritime agreements, which support its initiatives to improve maritime safety, protect the environment, and promote the sustainable use of marine resources. These agreements enable Albania to align with global maritime standards and foster collaboration on critical issues such as security, trade, and environmental conservation.

Here are key areas of Albania's participation:

1. International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Albania is a member of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Through its membership, Albania adheres to various IMO conventions, including:

- **International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)**
- **International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)**
- **International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW)**

2. European Union and Regional Agreements

As a candidate country for EU membership, Albania engages in various EU initiatives concerning maritime affairs through agreements and regional cooperation. These include:

- **EU Maritime Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (EUSAIR)** which aims to promote economic development and environmental protection in the region, focusing on sustainable tourism, fisheries, maritime transport, and blue growth.
- **Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP):** As part of the Barcelona Convention framework, Albania collaborates with other Mediterranean countries to protect the marine and coastal environment of the Mediterranean Sea.

3. Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

Albania is a participant in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which facilitates maritime collaboration among its member states. This initiative emphasizes trade, transport, and energy security within the Black Sea region.

4. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Albania is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which governs maritime boundaries, navigation rights, and the management of marine resources. This allows Albania to assert its rights over territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

5. International Maritime Security and Environmental Initiatives

- **Paris Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Port State Control:** Albania has ratified the memorandum and turned it into a legal act, but is not yet a member.
- **Regional Cooperation for Marine Pollution (REMPEC):** Albania collaborates with the Mediterranean region to prevent and address marine pollution incidents, particularly those caused by oil spills.

6. Transport Community Treaty

The Contracting Parties of the Transport Community Treaty (TCT) are the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of Serbia. The Transport Community Treaty aims the creation of a Transport Community in the field of road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport as well as the development of the transport network between the European Union and the South East European Parties. Rules applicable to Maritime Transport are included in Annex I.4 of the Treaty.

A Waterborne Transport and Multimodality Technical Committee (WTM TC) has been established as an ad hoc working group. With support from the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community, the WTM TC has developed a comprehensive Action Plan that prioritizes projects in the region within the extended TEN-T network. This plan focuses on enhancing multimodal, maritime, and inland waterway infrastructure, introducing digitalization initiatives (such as RIS, VTMISS, PCS, e-maritime, and other intelligent transport systems), and incorporating green and innovative solutions. It also addresses supply chain challenges, operational efficiency, and coordination between different transport modes. The action plan has been endorsed by all TCT member countries.

** This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

7. Bilateral Agreements

Albania also has several bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries, such as Greece, Italy, and Montenegro, focusing on issues like maritime boundaries, search and rescue operations (SAR), and collaboration on environmental protection and fisheries management.

Table below show Albania's compliance status with some important maritime regulations. Still improvements are required in key areas such as state flag and port state controls, maritime safety and environmental protection, seafarers' training and working conditions.

*Table 38 - Status of Albania's compliance with IMO conventions
(X: compliance / ratification, d: breach)*

Convention IMO 48	X	IMSO Amendments 2006		PAL Convention 74	D
SOLAS Convention 74	X	Amendments IMSO 2008		PAL Protocol 76	D
SOLAS protocol 78	X	FACILITATION CONVENTION 65	X	Protocol PAL 90	D
SOLAS protocol 88		MARPOL 73/78 (Annex I / II)	X	Protocol PAL 02	X
SOLAS Agreement 96		MARPOL 73/78 (Annex III)	X	LLMC Convention 76	X
CARGO LINE CONVENTION 66	X	MARPOL 73/78 (Annex IV)	X	LLMC Protocol 96	X
LOAD LINE PROTOCOL 88		MARPOL 73/78 (Annex V)	X	SUA Convention 88	X
TONAGE CONVENTION 69	X	MARPOL Protocol 73/97 (Annex VI)		SUA Protocol 88	X
COLREG Convention 72	X	London Convention 72		SUA Convention 2005	
CSC Convention 72		London Convention Protocol 96		SUA Protocol 2005	
Amendment CSC 93		INTERVENTION Convention 69		SALVAGE Convention 89	X
SFV Protocol 93		INTERVENTION PROTOCOL 73		OPRC Convention 90	X
Cape Town Agreement 2012		CLC Convention 69	D	HNS Convention 96	
STCW Convention 78	X	CLC Protocol 76	X	HNS Protocol 2010	
Convention STCW-F 95		CLC Protocol 92	X	OPRC / HNS 2000	X
SAR Convention 79	X	CONVENTION FUND 71	X	CONVENTION BUNKERS 01	X
STP Agreement 71		Protocol FUND 76	X	ANTI POLLUTION 01	
Space Protocol STP 73		Protocol FUND 92	X	BALLASTWATER 2004	X
IMSO Convention 76		Protocol FUND 2003		NAIROBI WRC 2007	
INMARSAT OA 76		Nuclear Convention 71		HONG KONG CONVENTION	

Source: Transport Sector Strategy and Action Plan 2030

The Albanian maritime regulatory system still needs to adapt to increased traffic, industry needs, and global and regional regulatory frameworks.

Country experience in Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation in the Current Context of Polycrisis

Maritime transport in Albania is currently navigating a complex environment influenced by a global polycrisis, by economic instability, energy shortages, and climate change.

Impact on Transport Costs and Trade

The ongoing global crises have significantly affected transport costs. Rising fuel prices and supply chain disruptions have led to increased shipping fees, which in turn raise the prices of imported goods. For Albania, a country reliant on maritime transport for trade, this poses challenges, particularly in securing affordable food and essential goods. The cost fluctuations impact not just consumers but also local businesses that depend on stable logistics for their operations.

Food Security

Given that a substantial amount of food products are imported via maritime routes, any disruptions in shipping can directly affect food security. Increased costs may lead to higher prices for consumers, making it more difficult for vulnerable populations to access adequate nutrition. Ensuring a resilient maritime transport system is crucial for stabilizing food supplies.

Challenges and Opportunities in Alternative Energy

The Albanian maritime sector has the opportunity to adopt alternative energy sources to enhance sustainability. Investing in renewable energy technologies, such as wind and solar for port operations, and green fuels for ships can help reduce carbon emissions and improve the sector's resilience. Implementing new technologies to promote alternative fuels, including LNG, and modernizing infrastructure for transport operations in port areas can be achieved through the development of the green ports concept, which would significantly enhance transport sustainability.

However, challenges persist, including the need for infrastructure upgrades, financial investments, and personnel training to manage new technologies. Aligning with EU regulations on emissions and sustainability standards is also essential for Albania's integration into broader European markets.

Decarbonization Efforts

Efforts towards decarbonization in the maritime sector are vital. Initiatives to retrofit existing vessels with cleaner technologies and to develop new ships that run on alternative fuels are being explored. Furthermore, enhancing port infrastructure to support electric and hybrid vessels can make a significant impact. This aligns with broader European and international goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Currently electric and hybrid vessels are not yet part of the ports operations, being not yet included in national policies.

Future-Proofing Maritime Transport

To future-proof the maritime transport sector, Albania needs to enhance its preparedness for disruptions caused by climate change, geopolitical tensions, and economic shifts. This includes:

Investing in Infrastructure: Modernizing ports to handle fluctuations in cargo volumes and integrating digital technologies for efficient logistics management.

Building Resilience: Developing contingency plans for food and essential goods supply chains to ensure stability during crises.

Enhancing Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships with international shipping companies and stakeholders to improve logistics and response strategies.

Training and Capacity Building: Investing in human capital to equip personnel with skills in new technologies and crisis management

Exchange of Electronic Data

Since its initial implementation in 2010, the Systematic Exchange of Electronic Data (SEED) supported by EU funds has improved border management in the Western Balkans by fostering cooperation and information sharing among customs administrations. SEED has effectively addressed inefficiencies at crossing points, simplifying procedures for legitimate trade and reducing security risks in the region. It serves as the foundation for the Green/Blue initiatives, providing secure IT infrastructure to expedite customs processes between CEFTA Parties and the EU. The SEED system has contributed to improve the exchange of data at customs level with positive impact on trade flows.

SEED infrastructure: 7 SEED nodes (Tirana, Banja Luka, Podgorica, Skopje, Belgrade, Pristina, Rome) and each node is composed of SEED servers and communication equipment.

In September 2022, the customs administrations of Italy, Albania, and Montenegro signed Memorandums of Understanding on electronic data exchange in Rome, promoting the Blue Lanes initiative and enhancing trade relationships in the Adriatic Sea.

Port of Durres (main and core port in TEN-T Network Extension) in terms of sustainability and decarbonization

In April 2021, the Port of Durrës was certified with 4 international standards:

ISO 9001:2015 – Quality Management,

ISO 14001:2015 – Environmental Management,

ISO 45001:2018 – Occupational Health and Safety Management,

ISO 50001:2018 – Energy Management.

These certifications clearly indicate an improvement in the quality of services provided at the Port of Durrës and serve as a positive signal to international clients and port users.

Infrastructure, digital and green elements of Port of Durres

The Port of Durrës has consistently focused on implementing initiatives related to infrastructure, digitalization and environmental sustainability. While there has been limited progress in providing alternative fuels at the port, significant advancements have been made in the concept of green ports, with preparations underway for the introduction of alternative fuel options.

The establishment of the Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System (VTMIS) is in its final stages of implementation and will be ready for testing by the end of 2025.

Energy efficiency

Certification under ISO 50001 has enabled the Durres Port Authority to establish the necessary systems and processes to enhance energy performance, including energy efficiency, utilization, and consumption. The Energy Efficiency Unit is tasked with implementing policies and promoting energy efficiency initiatives within the APD jurisdiction. Its goal is to efficiently manage energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through investments, maintenance, the use of energy-efficient equipment, energy services, and other measures aimed at improving energy efficiency.

As a major energy consumer, the Port of Durrës conducts an energy audit every three years by certified energy auditors, as mandated by law. The port is also exploring investments in photovoltaic panels within its area to reduce energy consumption. In the context of two INTERREG projects (RENEWPORT and ADRIREC), which aim to green the port and enhance its efficiency, the installation of solar panels is anticipated by the second half of 2025.

Actions related to infrastructure interventions related to multimodality

The Port of Durrës has seen only minimal progress concerning intermodal terminals, with no major infrastructure developments in multimodality.

Water, air and noise monitoring

The Durrës Port Authority is responsible for guiding, planning, coordinating, promoting, and monitoring port operations while ensuring environmental protection and conservation of marine areas. The Environmental Standards Unit plays a crucial role in safeguarding the environment and preventing land and sea pollution by utilizing modern laboratory equipment. Additionally, it manages maritime emergencies in accordance with the Port Emergency Plan.

Planning and addressing emergencies at the Port of Durrës

The "Port Emergency Plan" is developed by the Durrës Port Authority in collaboration with the Durres Port Security Force (FSPD) and the Fire Department (PMNZSH) to address potential incidents during commercial activities and project implementations. Additionally, the Environmental Standards Unit prepares the "Plan of Response to Marine Pollution from Hydrocarbons and Chemicals."

In summary, despite facing significant challenges due to a global polycrisis, Albania's maritime transport sector has substantial opportunities to improve sustainability through alternative energy sources and strategic infrastructure investments. These initiatives are essential for creating a stable and efficient maritime transport system capable of adapting to future uncertainties.