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1.) Which topic is currently of particular interest to the ISHR Section Albania? What are your hopes and fears for the future of Albania and Europe?

Balkan countries are dealing with complex and interrelated issues which involve various marginalized groups.

Many young and educated Albanians are leaving their country due to poor economic conditions, high unemployment rates, and limited opportunities for a good future. This trend has become so widespread that leaving Albania is now seen as the only viable option for many. Unfortunately, the situation is made worse by the fact that most of these emigrants have no plans to return home. This is not a new trend; in fact, for decades, the rate of return migration has been quite low.

- The situation for young people in Albania at present is challenging. The younger generation is experiencing a prolonged period of societal transformation, stuck between the past and the future, and facing many different obstacles including administrative and mental barriers.
- Another main concern is related to labor market deficiencies. A significant concern is the ability of the education system to prepare youth for employment. Furthermore, the educational system is considered dysfunctional, and there is no link between education and convenient jobs in the labour market. That is why their future career represents one of their biggest concerns.
- Corruption is a huge factor that influences students, especially at high schools and universities, where their professors still ask for bribes to allow students to pass exams or get better marks and there is no effort being made by the government to clean up the universities and high schools from such corruptive practices.

- Albanian people are politically frustrated due to the neglect of their voices and the political system's inability to represent them. As such a series of studies show political disinterest and apathy especially among Albanian youth.

For many years, the young age of the population has been regarded by scholars as Albania's greatest hope for rapid economic development. But that hope is fading! In the past five years Germany has attracted many young Albanians, particularly after it introduced the Skilled Immigration Act aiming to bring more highly qualified professionals to Germany to fill industry shortages.

The EU always has been concerned about the lack of reform on fundamental rights in Albania, particularly stopping corruption and having a working and fair legal system, one topic of particular interest for IGFM Albania **is the education of young Albanian people on fundamental human rights in order to become a force for social change**. The energy and passion of young, dedicated people to make big changes in mentality and practice are necessary to stamp out old practices of violation of human rights.

The fight against corruption is one of the most priority policies, and for which Albania is advised to pursue priority in the country's European integration process. Another area of great interest for IGFM Albania **is the promoting of Awareness and Education of the General Public on the mechanisms of the fight against corruption**. Even though, that Prevention and punishment of corruption is an obligation that derives from international instruments to combat 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, the Awareness and education of the general public constitutes on the other hand an important pillar from where concrete interventions and proposals in the field are generated not only on the basis of government initiatives but NGO-s initiatives as well.

Pursuing this area of Interest, IGFM Albania is a member organization of the local NGOs anticorruption alliance for some years now.

Albania still is one of the poorest countries in Europe although it made in the list from undeveloped country to countries under development making fighting poverty and social inequalities still through humanitarian Aid an area of remaining interest for IGFM Albania as in the past.





The expectations, hopes and aspirations of many Albanian citizen's rest on Albania to become a member of EU. For Albanian people, the EU represents much more than just the Single Market or a political community of 28 member states. It embodies nothing less than the future of the country. To them, EU accession means a higher standard of living, credible prospects for a better future, functioning of democratic institutions, a reliable rule of law, and guaranteed economic and personal freedoms.

2. The running projects of IGFM Albania;future areas of intervention

1. Blood feud project

Blood feud in Albania still remains one of the toughest problems to tackle and still many children are isolated without contact with the outside world and therefore no education. Due to a financial support from Mrs. Bourmueller, IGFM, Albania was able to start and continue to help those families affected from blood -feud in two directions. First, IGFM,Albania office is acting as an open line for claims of this marginalized groups and address those claims to respective authorities and institutions.





Second, the volunteers and members of IGFM, Albania are continuing the long lasting process of family reconciliation. So far, the number of families reconciled has been increased from four families last year to 7 families this year. Given the fact that those families are extended one with approximately 15 two 25 members IGFM Albania has been able to affect and improve the life of 150 people. **This project is running for three years now despite the funding difficulties.**



2. Joint Projects

IGFM Albania together with ADF International and Advocates Albania organized on 16 February,2024 a round table on Religious Freedom with participation of Dr.Felix Bollman the director of advocacy for ADF Internationl placed in Vienna and Dr, Guiller, A.Morales Sancho Legal Councillor for Europe region of IDF International.





- 3. Recently IGFM Albania has become very vibrant active member of National coalition in support of life and family. IGFM Albania as a member organization participated on the March,2024 Conference organized and discussed children's rights and freedom of speech. Albanian lawyers,**

Human rights activists, teachers ect showed the challenges they face in Albanian justice as well as the problems in the implementation of the law. IGFM Albania signed the resolution which was directed to Albanian Parliament to address the issues related to Children's right and freedom of speech.





4. **IGFM Albania is in the process of establishing a group of 7-8 IGFM Volunteers which will monitor the court delays and as such violation of rights of marginalized communities in courts and incidents of corruptions as such.**





5. **University of New York Tirana & IGFM Memorandum of Understanding**

This memorandum consist of in providing an internship place with IGFM for students of New York University who are interested to pursue a future career on human rights practice.



UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK
TIRANA

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

IGFM Albania
AND

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, TIRANA

University of New York Tirana, operated by the limited liability company with the same name, registered with the National Business Center with NIBS KM17/150001, located at: Bulevardi e Nënë Tereziës, rruga e Kavës, postë 21, Dajçevac (Shehi i Tiranës) Tirana, Albania is a university established in 2002 and represented herein by the Rector, Prof. Dr. Lulzim Lleshi, hereinafter "UNYT".

Acc. *Av. J. Margareta Bole, IGFM Albania*
represented in the commercial register by the National Registration Centre with NIBS 2502/1002001, located at: Bulevardi e Nënë Tereziës, rruga e Kavës, postë 21, Dajçevac (Shehi i Tiranës) Tirana, Albania represented by the Rector, Prof. Dr. Lulzim Lleshi, hereinafter the "Host Institution".

Whereas Parties agree to cooperate on joint projects and trainings based on equality and reciprocity,

With the economic progress of UNYT and the Host Institution as well as students from different academic background, an educational experience through practical work assignments, while offering the latter the assistance of qualified students specializing in various professional fields, providing different part-time and full-time opportunities, mentorship and other professional opportunities to support students' integration in the labor market and under the Parties hereby, agree to enter into this Memorandum of Understanding, which will be valid from the date specified in Article 6.

MEMORANDUM MËRËKUPIMI

IGFM Albania
DHE

UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, TIRANA

University of New York Tirana, i administrohet nga shoqëria me përgjegjësi të kufizuar me të njëjtën emër, e regjistruar në Qendrën Kombëtare të Statutit me NIBS KM17/150001 dhe vendndodhet në Bulevardin e Nënë Tereziës, rruga e Kavës, postë 21, Dajçevac (Shehi i Tiranës) Tiranë, Albania dhe përfaqësohet në këtë marrëveshje nga Rectori, Pro. Dr. Lulzim Lleshi, këtu e mëtej "UNYT".

Duke *Av. J. Margareta Bole, IGFM Albania*
është regjistruar në regjistrin tregtar të shoqërisë nga Qendra Kombëtare e Regjistrimit me NIBS 2502/1002001 dhe me adresën Bulevardi e Nënë Tereziës, rruga e Kavës, postë 21, Dajçevac në vllin "Institucioni Priftë".

Duke konfirmuar të Fallit kësaj detyrimi të bashkëpunimit në projektet e përbashkëta dhe prirja të barabartë dhe reciprocitetit,

Në qellim të përshkruar në UNYT dhe Institucionit Priftë për të ofruar studentëve me përvojë të ndryshme akademike, që përvojë ato në praktikë profesionale, duke siguruar mundësi të ndryshme të punës dhe të bashkëpunimit me të cilat mentorimi dhe mundësi të tjera profesionale për të ardhshmit integrimin e studentëve në tregun e punës dhe paqartësi të kësaj marrëveshjeje nën kushtet e kësaj marrëveshjeje, të cilat do të jenë të vlefshme nga data e specifikuar në Nenet 6.

Article 8
Amendments

1. The Parties may make amendments and/or addenda to this MoU at any given time.
2. The amendments and/or addendums are subject to consultation between the Parties and the approval from both Parties must be established in written form.

Article 9
Dispute Resolution

Any dispute that may arise regarding the interpretation or the implementation of this MoU shall be resolved in understanding through consultation and negotiation between the parties.

Article 11
Final Provisions

This MoU was concluded with the purpose to facilitate the cooperation between the Parties and shall not be used for any other purposes other than the one stated hereby without the mutual written consent of the Parties. This MoU constitutes the sole representation of the purposes of the Parties and is not binding to them.

Signed in Tirana, on 26/03/2024 in 2 (two) original copies, in each language, English and Albanian. Both versions shall be considered equally valid, but in case of discrepancy between the texts, the English text shall prevail.

University of New York Tirana
Represented by
R.L.C. C.A.
Prof. Dr. Eleana ERDEMI

Represented by

Av. Margarita Lloca



e gjatë me kusht që një shtetë t'i shprehë të mos jetë për shkak të shprehjes së kësaj lloji të Paktit të Kësaj.

Article 9
Ndryshimet

1. Pakti mund të bëjë shtesa dhe/ose ndryshime në tekstin e këtij MoU në çdo kohë.
2. Ndryshimet dhe/ose shtesat duhet të jenë përmbledhë dhe të miratohen në mënyrë të përbashkët nga të dyja palët në formë të shkrimit.

Artikulli 9
Zgjidhja e mosmarrëveshjeve

Çdo mosmarrëveshje që mund të lindë në lidhje me interpretimin ose zbatimin e këtij marrëveshjeje do të zgjidhet në mënyrë të përbashkët dhe negociatave midis palëve.

Artikulli 11
Dispozitat përfundimtare

Ky Memorandum i Babëzimit u mbyll me të kërkuesit bashkëpunimorë të Palëve dhe nuk do të përdoret për ndonjë qëllim tjetër përveç atyre të cilat u kërkon këtu përmbledhë dhe të përbashkët nga të dy palët në formë të shkrimit.

Ndeshkruar në Tiranë, më 26/03/2024 në 2 (dy) kopje origjinale, në secilin gjuhë, anglisht dhe shqip. Të dy versionet do të konsiderohen njësoj të vlefshme, por në rast mosmarrëveshjeje midis teksteve, teksti anglez do të mbizotërojë.

University of New York Tirana
Përfaqësuar nga
R.L.C. C.A.
Prof. Dr. Eleana ERDEMI

Përfaqësuar nga
Av. Margarita Lloca

IGFM, Albania will remain committed to the main mission of organization and as such will be very active on each and every initiatives of Civil Society in Albania in denouncing the violation of the Albanian constitution and human rights in different levels and areas. IGFM, Albania is one of the first organizations that became part of a coalition of organizations that have protested against the violation of the rights of citizens for free elections and freedom of media. This year at the very beginning of 2024 IGFM Albania by working closely with German Humanitarian Organization UNHH Unahängige Humanitäre Hilfe e.V provided wheelchairs to disabled people in Northern Albania.



The number of members who have joined IGFM Albania has grown and diversified, and in addition to young people, personalities from art and culture who have a social reputation have joined the organization. Only in the first three months of the year, 2024 the membership was increased by 15 more people.



First, the Kremlin seeks to project great power status globally.

Second, it seeks to obstruct the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region by advocating against NATO and EU integration and by raising instabilities.

Third, the Kremlin uses the Balkans, especially the Kosovo issue, as an argument for its foreign policy agenda elsewhere, particularly when it comes to defending its perceived dominance over its near abroad.

The main strategy of Moscow for the region is to prevent the integration process of the Western Balkan countries with the European Union (EU). Russian influence is the most widespread in Serbia, rising to concerning levels in all domains. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russian political influence is concentrated in Republika Srpska, although it has a concerning influence on the country at large. In Montenegro, Russia has resorted to malign actions to influence the country, as its support for the country's pro-Russian political actors has not managed to obstruct Montenegro's overall pro-Western path. Whereas Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia promptly joined the EU's sanctions regime against Russia.

There are not many pro-Russian political groups in Albania. Russian influence in Albania is limited due to some political and cultural conditions. No Russian President or Prime Minister has visited Albania in the last thirty years. The friendship treaty signed between Russia and Albania in 2004 was never ratified either. In this context, Russian influence in Albania is more limited than in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia in the Western Balkans. Albania differs from other Western Balkan countries due to its membership in NATO. The Kremlin's limited influence in Albania compared to other Western Balkan countries and the progress of Albania towards EU Integration poses a formidable challenge to Moscow. The model offered by Russia of membership to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2019, was not seen as attractive by Albania.

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has moderately affected but not fully altered Russia's approach¹ towards Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. While the invasion has led to sharper dividing lines between Russia and the West and reduced Russian financial and diplomatic capacities, it is observed continuity in terms of Russian strategies and objectives. For Serbia, in particular, the conflict in Ukraine has not changed the country's pro-Russian stance.

Turkey, a NATO ally and a pending EU candidate for decades, is revamping its Balkan policy to restore its geopolitical influence across the Balkan countries. Erdoğan's relationship with Balkan leaders is more than excellent. Erdoğan's visits to the Balkans and the visits of leaders of Balkan states to Istanbul and Ankara are more than frequent. While the Balkans are neither homogenous nor unprecedentedly unique in their

¹ <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2023/little-substance-considerable-impact/discussion-and-conclusions/>

political structures, the relationship between Turkey and the Balkans – being a natural part of the Ottoman past — has flourished, creating a strategic partnership through common heritage².

Turkey's infrastructure and developmental investments are not limited to Albania but in other Western Balkan countries as well.

Turkey opened a highway between Belgrade and Bosnia-Herzegovina that will connect Bosnia-Herzegovina to the other Balkan states. Additionally, Turkey is the third-largest investor in Kosovo, and the TIKA is restoring and rebuilding the cultural heritage of the Ottoman era in different parts of the region. These flagship projects are connecting towns, people, cultures and histories.

Turkey has great interest in Albania as it is considered the most appropriate state to promote Turkish interests within the Western Balkan region. Though there are several obstacles limiting Turkey's full penetration into Albania, the transformations are increasing gradually. In line with Turkey's foreign policy towards Albania, Albanians also view national security, stability, and peace as the first priority objectives before any other policy objectives such as cultural enrichment, national honor, or prosperity. The complicated security situation in the Balkan region makes Turkey a very crucial player in helping Albania attain stability and peace. However, the efforts of Turks to exchange their support in building the destroyed houses after the earthquake in Albania with construction of mosques have been proven unsuccessful as those efforts are faced with the resistance of communities especially in the north where a strong sentiment of Catholicism exist.

The fact that Turkey's foreign policy considers Albania its close friend and ally in the Balkan region has made Turkey to actively support the stability of Kosovar Albanians but because of Turkey past dilemmas towards Kosovo and no any significant contribution to settle the conflict in Kosovo, Turkey it is not perceived by Albanians as a supporter of Kosovo. One of the constant line of Turkish policy toward Kosovo is the insistence on the participation of the Turkish minority in the peace talks. This minority has rather tenses relations with the Albanian majority and tend to stand on the Serbian side³.

Eventhough some of the albanians refer to the Turks as "brothers" and that they "love" the turks the majority of population don't find any relation between our people other than the parts of their cultures that they enforced upon Albanians during the Turkish Invasion. Generally speaking Albanians have a negative view of Turks and see them as people who conquered and repressed Albanians.

- Turkey's raising role as a balancing influence in the Balkans and negotiator for conflicts in the region poses a challenge for the EU in its backyard.

² <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/turkeys-role-in-the-balkans-diplomacy-at-its-best>

³ journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/517

China is not a newcomer in the Western Balkans. While diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with Beijing have existed for decades for Albania and the countries of the former Yugoslavia, activities in recent years have shown that China is laying the groundwork for a long-term, multi-faceted, and ever-deeper presence in the Western Balkans⁴. Beijing aims at highlighting the shared socialist past towards the Western Balkans, using the existence of some degree of post-communist nostalgia in the Balkans, focusing on “traditional friendship” and a “shared past”.

The Western Balkans has seen a significant expansion of Chinese influence over the last decade, in line with Beijing’s geo-economic and diplomatic vision of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and in the broader strategic context of China-EU relations.

Relations between Belgrade and Beijing extend beyond economic ones, as Serbia has also signed a USD 3 billion package of economic support and military purchases that has boosted the Chinese influence in the country. The special bond between the two countries was further strengthened during the COVID-19 crisis, where the Chinese vaccine gave an important boost to the government of Serbia as it struggled to deal with the pandemic⁵.

Albania is among the countries of the region with the longest and deepest track record of cooperation with communist **China**, before the two countries fell out at the beginning of the 1970s.

Albania presents an opportunity for China’s agenda in Europe, and by following a low profile, the Chinese political pragmatism and long-term economic interests have resulted in a certain level of investment penetration in the country⁶.

Albania’s diplomatic relations with China nowadays follow quite a different path and can be characterized as formal and with limited visits at the highest level. **Both countries follow a diametrical positioning on many foreign policy issues, including the issue of Kosovo’s independence. As long as China has no intention to recognize Kosovo as an independent country, no breakthrough can be expected.**

- Albania masters a clear strategic vocation and cross-party commitment to join the European Union. However, one thing is sure that the prolonged regional geopolitical ambivalence and delayed EU membership undoubtedly impacted on Albanian perceptions and calculations.

4) *Are there also ukrainian refugees in Albania? What is the mood among the population against refugees at all? In Febuary, the albanian parliament approved a controversial migration agreement with Italy. Refugees taken on board by Italian authorities in the*

⁴ <https://www.iwm.at/blog/chinese-influence-in-the-western-balkans-and-its-impact-on-the-regions-european-union>

⁵ <https://www.iwm.at/blog/chinese-influence-in-the-western-balkans-and-its-impact-on-the-regions-european-union>

⁶ <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/18783.pdf>

Mediterranean can be brought to refugee camps to Albania. Will this change the population's attitude towards refugees?

- I. According to the report of IOM Albania⁷, from 24 February to 31 December 2022, nearly 32,000 Ukrainians entered Albania. About 2,500 displaced Ukrainians who have fled the war, were estimated to be still present at the end of December, 2022. As of mid-February 2023, 2,686 refugees from Ukraine were present in Albania.

The majority of Ukrainian refugees traveled in groups consisting of household members usually groups of up to three persons, mostly coming from Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhzhia. Sixty per cent were traveling with children. More than one fifth of the children were infants. The level of education among the interviewees was high too, two-thirds declared that they had a Master's degree or PhD. Almost two-thirds of the interviewees stated that they were planning to search for work in Albania. Those who have children have stated their children were attending school, with the majority receiving online education from Ukraine.

When asked if they intended to stay, move elsewhere in Albania or in Europe or return to Ukraine, 60% said they were planning to return to Ukraine and almost 40% stated they did not intend to move elsewhere. Only two per cent planned to move to another country.

On 18 March 2022, the Albanian Government has adopted two decisions related to the legal status of the Ukrainians in Albania. The first decision granted a right of residence in Albania for a period of up to one year without the need of obtaining residence permit. With the second decision, the temporary protection provision entered into force, and Ukrainians could express an intention to apply and obtain this type of protection. Recently, the government of Albania extended the period of stay of Ukrainians on the basis of temporary protection.

Many Albanians have a soft spot for people who suffer in large scale and many of them have a high opinion of bravery so, seeing all of this in Ukraine, they are rooting for Ukrainians. Albanians know that Ukraine was against Kosovo, at some point, but this doesn't stop many of us to feel empathy for Ukrainians today.

The last but not the least, Albanians (in Kosovo) were killed and expelled by Serbia as subjects of ethnic cleansing not so long ago, so Albanians understand very well the pain in all of this. Albanians are no foreigners to the phenomenon of mass migration and being chased out of your country. They understand what it means and how much suffering it can cause.

- II. The reaction of European Commission at the very beginning of Italian plan to offshore asylum to Albania was that the⁸ *EU asylum laws do not apply on vessels operating in international waters, the European Commission said on*

⁷ <https://albania.iom.int/news/rapid-displacement-and-needs-assessment-ukrainian-refugees-albania>

⁸ <https://euobserver.com/migration/157662>

Tuesday (7 November) in response to questions on the legality of a fresh Italian deal to offshore asylum to Albania.

Regarding of controversial migration agreement of Albania with Italy the general mood of population can be described as Some of them hate it, others are neutral but no one loves it.

Mostly people under the huge pressure of the extension of the phenomenon of the depopulation of Albania as a result of the emigration of Albanians are concerned that

- 1. The migrants will attract family and relatives to be relocated to Albania*
- 2. The ones that are involved in terrorism will attract other terrorists to come to Albania and possibly make Albania a platform to attack other countries.*
- 3. Are suspicious of Albania PM benefiting personally from this deal.*

It is an international trend now that The media and some politicians suggest that countries are being overrun by asylum seekers and refugees. Albanian population is not immune from such prejudices as well. This increases the negative emotions that Albanian citizens feel towards refugees, including perceptions of threat. Citizens do not necessarily apply UNHCR definitions in their evaluations of asylum seekers or refugees, and they come to their own conclusions who should be helped and under which circumstances. In addition to, the lack of transparency in the approval of this agreement by the side of Albanian government and the fact that not long ago Albanian Government did sign another agreement with USA government to host Afghan refugees while they are being vetted for visas for the US while the country is struggling enough as it is, it is a contributing factor in changing the attitude towards refugees

In the Albanian context, under the circumstances that Albanian government offered more protection for refugees from Ukraine, the Ukrainians are perceived as resettled refugees after the war is finished, whereas refugees from other countries generally need to somehow make their way to Europe and only then apply for refugee or asylum seekers status so to say are perceived as non-resettled refugees.





