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Environmental Performance Reviews

ALBANIA - 2012

highlights

Since 2000 the Albanian economy has improved substantially. Reforms in infrastructure development, tax collection, property law and business administration have worked well. The average growth of gross domestic product (GDP) between 2003 and 2010 was 4.8 per cent.

At the same time, the per capita income measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) has more than doubled: from US\$ 4,545 in 2003 to US\$ 9,102 in 2010. This development has diminished poverty levels markedly. The proportion of people living below the poverty line dropped from 25.4 per cent in 2002 to 12.4 per cent in 2008. However, Albania still remains a poor country by Western European standards. Its GDP per capita (PPP) stood at 27.7 per cent of the European Union (EU) average in 2010.



Water management

Despite being naturally rich in water, Albania suffers from a lack of freshwater in sufficient quantity and of sufficient quality and most of the existing water utilities are not able to cover operating costs. This is linked with a series of causes, including an inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure in each of the water-using sectors, exorbitant water losses in the supply network and water abuses due to illegal connections to the main pipelines.

Water quality has deteriorated due to discharges of untreated wastewater from urban settlements, as well as from industries with obsolete technology, and by the extensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture. The uncontrolled dumping of urban waste on the banks of rivers exacerbates the problem of the quality of surface water.

This high pollution load in surface water is also leading to a deterioration of groundwater quality, especially in low-lying areas, where most of the population lives and most industrial and agricultural activities take place.

Impacts of climate change

As far as water management systems are concerned, climate change impacts in Albania can be expected mainly in the following forms:

- Extreme events such as droughts and floods will occur more often and be more intense; this will increase the cost of flood protection works, as well as that of associated infrastructure
- Due to the increase in temperature and evaporation, aridity will increase in many areas, which will have a direct impact on the irrigation of agricultural areas
- Decreases in river flow will affect water supply, electricity production and tourist activities
- Lack of water will be especially significant in summer, during the tourist season.

Public water supply

There is access to a centralized system of drinking water supply in 62 municipalities, accounting for approximately 60 per cent of the national population.

However, the water supply infrastructure in general is inadequate and poorly maintained. Together with a lack of metering and operational control, this results in significant water losses, estimated to be over 60 per cent in all cities. In addition, insufficient storage capacities and frequent cuts in electricity mean that water supply in urban areas is intermittent.

Wastewater

In Albania the development of sewerage systems has lagged behind that of water supply, resulting in a very serious state of affairs. Because of the poor maintenance of wastewater sewers and small pipe dimensions, leaks from these sewers often threaten to pollute the drinking water network.

About 40 per cent of the urban population has a sewer connection. In rural areas, only a small proportion of the areas with piped water supply is equipped with sewer networks. All industrial activities located near rivers discharge wastewater directly without pre-treatment.

At present there is only one operational treatment facility for wastewater in the municipalities of Kavaja and Pogradec. Wastewater treatment plants in the cities of Lezha, Vlora and Korca are under construction.



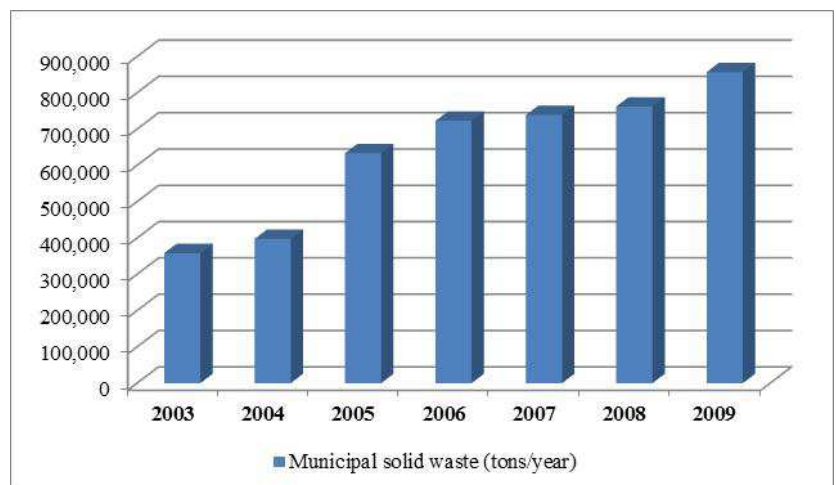
Wastewater Treatment Plant in Kavaja

Waste management

Waste management is at a low level. Systems for the collection of municipal solid waste (MSW) are provided in most cities and towns, but not in rural areas. Urban waste is mostly disposed of at designated landfill sites, but large quantities are also dumped at unauthorized locations at the edges of settlements and along roads. It is estimated that about 65 large sites and numerous small uncontrolled sites are currently in operation in Albania.

In most instances, sites designated for disposal of MSW are not well managed. They have been established without the necessary infrastructure or engineering provisions to collect and contain landfill leachate and gas. Many of these sites are not secure and there are inadequate facilities for their operational management. As a result, unauthorized access and dumping is common, as are fires. The inspection of incoming waste is not commonly practised and records of deposits are not kept. Chemical substances are often washed or

Table 1: Municipal solid and construction and demolition waste (tons/year)



Source: Institute of Statistics of Albania, 2010.

blown away into the environment, contaminating adjacent land and watercourses.

There are no licensed waste incineration facilities for the treatment of MSW in Albania. It is common to burn household and other waste in the open. Some wastes, including used tyres and wood waste, are burned in lime kilns.

Forestry

The accessible forest stands have been significantly degraded through overharvesting and overgrazing, which has changed the forest age structure and species composition and reduced the forest underwood. For several years now, tree felling has exceeded the net annual increment, resulting in a decrease in the growing stock, and forest fires, often human induced, still pose a threat to the forest ecosystems.



Forest in the National Park "Divjake-Karavasta"

Wood is commonly used for heating and cooking purposes in Albania. This is true not only in rural areas and remotely located mountain settlements, but also in peri-urban zones, whenever households have no access to other fuel sources, e.g., through communal gas pipeline installations. Therefore, the timber consumption of households has always been higher than that of industry in Albania.

Illegal cuts often have no commercial purpose. They result from the subsistence needs of the rural population and the commonly understood traditional right to use the natural resources of the area. This practice is to a large extent tolerated by the authorities despite the legally imposed sanctions and fines for such law infringements. However, the intensity of such illegal practices will probably decrease in the future due to the ongoing depopulation of rural areas and decreasing demand for firewood.

Protected areas



Theth National Park

Throughout recent years Albania has achieved progress in the protection of its unique natural and landscape assets. Since 1996, the surface area legally declared as protected areas in Albania has more than tripled, bringing the total proportion of protected areas in the country to 13.17 per cent of its national territory in 2011, as compared with only 5.7 per cent in 2002.

The growth of the protected area network surface is partly the result of the legal designation of large protected landscape areas. However, these are much less effective for habitat and species conservation than strictly protected areas, the current size and proportion of which is almost negligible.

Human health and the environment

Sanitation is a long-standing problem in the country. The poor state of existing sewage collection and treatment systems poses a risk of contamination to both drinking water and soil. There is a significant burden of ill-health associated with these water pollution risks. The levels of shigellosis and typhoid fever are still high in Albania. In addition, the monthly dynamics of selected food- and waterborne diseases show that shigellosis infections persist in the country throughout the entire year, and demonstrate the relative importance of the disease.



Health path

Ambient air pollution is a serious health problem in the main cities. The rapid urbanization and associated major increase in residential and commercial building construction contribute significantly to air pollution, together with the current bad condition of streets and roads within urban areas. With the dramatic increase in the number of cars, and the number of old vehicles in use, traffic in urban areas is now a major cause of air pollution.

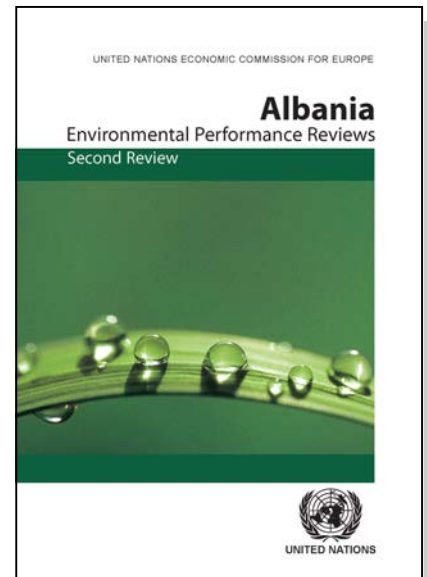
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The second Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Albania was carried out in 2011–2012. Recommendations to the country were adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy in April 2012.

The EPR Programme assesses a country's efforts to reduce its overall pollution burden, manage its natural resources in a sustainable way, integrate environmental and socio-economic policies and strengthen cooperation with the international community.

The most recent reviews include: Georgia (2010), Azerbaijan (2011), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2011) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2011).



Printed EPR reports may be obtained from the United Nations Publications department at: <https://unp.un.org/>

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