

Smart Albania: Priorities and the Way Forward

PARTNERSHIP WITH ACTORS OF THE "QUADRUPLE HELIX"
(Central and Local Government, Business, Academia, Civil Society)
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL S3 STRATEGY

Hotel Plaza Tirana
"Queen Geraldine" hall, 3rd floor.
October 31st, 2023
Time 09:30 - 15:00

- Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) have been devised and developed by countries and regions in the European Union (EU) as a new tool for fostering innovation and regional development. The S3 approach represents a concept of innovation policy based on the respective country, and aims to identify some priority areas of the regional/national economy where the impact of public investments in research, development and innovation can be very important. It emphasizes the potential of cross-sectoral linkages, apart from traditional industries, and promotes diversification based on these linkages.
- S3 is part of the Common Regional Market Action Plan 2021-2024 in the context of the Berlin Process, as well as the EU Agenda for Innovation in the Western Balkans 2021-2027. S3 is also part of Chapter 20 "Enterprises and Industrial Policies" and 25 "Science and Research" in the context of Albania's EU integration.

Albania started the S3 preparation process and registered on the European Commission's Joint Research Center (JRC) platform for S3 in 2017. The Albanian S3 team drafted a roadmap for S3 based on the JRC framework and so far some important steps have been taken in terms of developing the strategy at the national level, also assessing the regional perspective. According to the S3 roadmap, Albania finalized the first steps of the context analysis, through quantitative and qualitative mapping of the country's economic, innovative, scientific and technological potential, identifying possible S3 vertical and horizontal priority areas to be explored further during the stage of the *Entrepreneurial Discovery Process* (EDP) as follows:

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Vertical priorities: Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture; Manufacturing (Manufacturing); Energy; Tourism; Information and Communication Technologies; Administrative and Support Services activities (BPO).

Identified cross-cutting areas: Blue Economy, Healthy Food, Renewable Energy, Expanded BPOs.

To be explored and developed: Clusters, Diaspora Inclusion, Human Capital/Skills, Evidence Based Policymaking, Industrial Policies.

- The EDP is a comprehensive dialogue between stakeholders in all sectors, also known as the actors of the "Quadruple Helix" (central and local government, business, academia and civil society). The discussions between these actors during the EDP, based on the findings of the preliminary mapping phase, helped to define the priority areas of S3 for Albania. The National Team of S3, under the special attention of the Deputy Prime Minister Mrs. Belinda BALLUKU, organized 32 events (round tables and workshops) during the EDP phase (of which 3 were regional workshops with neighboring countries Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia), from October 2022 to July 2023, where 1275 representatives from the quadruple helix actors were involved according to a new methodological approach. The discussions at the events organized with the neighbors have been translated into important policy recommendations that address the challenges and opportunities related to the common priority areas. Regional events have successfully promoted also regional cooperation and the recognition of its importance in the process of integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU. For more info please visit the website: <https://s3albania.org/>

To discuss the results achieved so far during the S3 process, emphasizing the importance of all actors involved in the process, the Albanian Government organizes the conference:

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Discussions at this conference will focus on:

- ② **Presentation of EDP results**
- ② **The importance of involving all actors in the design process according to a new bottom - up approach**
- ② **Thematic discussions according to the priority areas identified during the S3 process**
- ② **Engagement and inclusiveness of actors until the finalization of the process**

The areas with innovative development potential that were identified at the end of the EDP will also be the subject of discussion in the conference panels:

- ② **Renewable Energy and Natural Resources**
- ② **Healthy and Sustainable Food Chain**
- ② **Sustainable and Diversified Tourism**

The panels will also discuss horizontal/cross-sectoral topics that are evidenced as necessary steps towards a smart specialization of Albania, such as: human capital development and the role of education, rural development and talent retention, the role and engagement of the diaspora, the impact of digitalization and new technologies in economic development, access to finance, etc.

We welcome you!

AGENDA

09:30 - 10:00

Registration of the participants

Moderator: Ms. Aurora Sulçe

10:00 - 10:15

Welcome speech

Ms. Belinda Balluku

Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Infrastructure and Energy

10:15 - 10:35

Mr. Emanuele Fabbri

Joint Research Centre, European Commission

The framework of the Smart Specialization Strategy in the context of the EU Integration process

Ms. Linda Pustina

Head of the National S3 Team, Advisor of the Deputy Prime Minister

S3 EDP, a comprehensive consultation process: findings and priorities for the future

10:35 - 11:30

**Renewable Energy and Natural Resources:
Albania towards regional leadership***

Moderator: Mr. Arben Shkodra

Secretary General of the Union of Albanian Producers

Panelists

Ms. Belinda Balluku, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Transport and Energy

Mr. Enea Karakaci, General Director of OSHEE

Mr. Constantin Von Alvensleben, CEO of Voltalia in Albania

Mr. Francesco Italiano, Managing Director of ENI SpA

PhD. Ledi Moisiu, Faculty of Geology and Mining, Polytechnic University of Tirana

Ms. Rigela Gegprifti, CEO Statkraft Albania & Devoll Hydropower Sh.A.

Mr. Dritan Nako, CEO Antea Cement Sh.A.

11:35 - 12:30

**Innovation and Development in Agriculture:
Transformation into a Healthy and Sustainable Food Chain***

Moderator: Mr. Enio Civici

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Panelists

Ms. Anila Denaj, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr. Balázs Révész, CEO Vodafone Sh.A.

Mr. Fatbardh Sallaku, Rector of the Agricultural University of Tirana

Mr. Arbi Bamllari, CEO Skaitech Sh.p.k.

Mr. Ylver Bylykbashi, Sweet Farm, Dishnica, Korça

Ms. Evelina Azizaj, National Coordinator, Albanian Network for Rural Development

12:35 - 13:30

Albania's journey towards tourism of excellence and preservation of tradition*

Moderator: Ms. Florensa Haxhi

Director for Business Development, Albanian Investment Corporation

Panelists

Ms. Vilma Bello, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment

Mr. Ermal Dredha, Mayor of Vlora Municipality

Prof. Assoc. Bernard Dosti, Vice Rector, University of Tirana

Mrs. Nevila Dudaj, CEO/Founder Adriatik Hotel & Adriatik Tours LLC

Ms. Blerina Bombaj, President of the Albanian Agritourism Association

Ms. Mariana Koceku, CEO Neomalsore, Nanbli, Vau i Dejës, Shkodër

Mr. Sulejman Hysa, CEO Bee Therapy, Stërmas, Tirana

13:35 - 13:45

Conclusions

13:45 - 15:00

Networking buffet: Albanian taste

*The panel discussions will focus on the following topics:

Panel 1:

"Renewable Energy and Natural Resources: Albania towards regional leadership"

This panel will discuss Albania's journey towards renewable energy and natural resource excellence, where we will explore Albania's strategic vision to become a regional leader in renewable energy production and sustainable natural resource management. This vision is driven by a commitment to long-term energy security, respecting environmental sustainability, achieved through green transition and strategic investments, innovative contemporary technologies and reforms of the sector itself.

Albania is working to diversify its sources of renewable energy supply, aiming to use solar energy, wind, hydro, geothermal energy, etc., with the sole aim of ensuring a sustainable supply in the future. But at the same time, we will invest in the transition from a linear and hybrid economy to a circular economy, which reuses and recycles non-renewable resources, processing and extracting useful elements until "Zero waste" in the environment is achieved. Innovative technologies in the recycling of technological industrial waste for energy production would not only have a positive

impact on the environment, as they would zero the waste, but would promote resource efficiency, accompanied by a more environmentally friendly approach. Albania is promoting and planning the combination of renewable energy sources to ensure not only meeting national needs with 100% renewable energy, but also to export it, as well as to provide flexible grid infrastructure to efficiently handle these sources and to facilitate the inter-regional distribution of energy.

The panel will also discuss the steps being taken for the sustainable management of raw materials, focusing on the support of innovative practices and the application of new technologies in their exploration, exploitation and efficient processing, in accordance with the objectives of the "European Green Deal" and "Zero waste", including environmentally friendly practices, recycling and management of mining waste, or raw material processing technologies, and the participation of Albanian actors in the European supply chain of raw materials.

This panel provides a unique insight into Albania's path towards becoming a regional leader for renewable energy and the sustainable use of natural resources, promoting and ensuring a sustainable future in the energy sector, while respecting and being responsible for the environment and turning Albania into a leading actor in the global landscape of renewable energy and natural resources.

Panel 2:



"Innovation and Development in Agriculture: Transforming into a Healthy and Sustainable Food Chain"

The panel discussions will focus on exploring the strategic vision to transform the Agriculture Sector into a dynamic force for the provision of healthy food, as well as the role of innovation and of the application of advanced methodologies for the development of a sustainable food chain in Albania.

The focus will be on innovations in agricultural practices, organic farming and the certification process, which improves the production of agricultural and organic products and addresses the increased demands for them, the examination of new food processing technologies, promoting local brands and products of the territory, and guaranteeing high standards of food safety and quality, the implementation of AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge Information System) to further improve the sector, and how innovation, scientific research and new technologies can be used to promote the production of healthy and sustainable food, improving the quality and efficiency of the food chain and simultaneously contributing to the well-being of citizens.

The measures that will be taken in the future for the development of the agriculture and tourism sectors are interlinked together with those of rural and regional development and will have a significant impact on rural communities and the development of young talents in these areas that will provide the necessary human capital for the transformation of these sectors towards their ambitious vision, and that will significantly impact these regions bringing development and well-being. The role of education, but also the creation of conditions for young people in these areas, will serve as a prerequisite for a smart development of the agricultural sector and other activities in rural areas, as well as the construction of a healthy and sustainable food chain. The discussions will include the contribution of the diaspora to the innovation, development and growth of Albania, including the encouragement of talents and successful Albanians returning to the country, as well as the exchange of knowledge, new and innovative ideas.

This panel is an important forum to share ideas and experiences regarding innovation and sustainability in the agriculture sector and the food chain, and to reflect on the impact of this sector on the development of rural communities. The participants will share their vision on the transformation



into a healthy and sustainable food chain that contributes to the well-being of citizens and the economic growth of the country.

Panel 3:

"Albania's journey towards tourism of excellence and preservation of tradition"

The discussions will focus on the strategic vision that sees Albania as a leading sustainable and diversified tourism destination, through authentic experiences that promote its cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, culinary delights and health tourism offers, which simultaneously aim to increase the well-being of local communities. The exciting world of ecotourism and farm-to-table experiences that connect visitors to local farms, promote the sustainable production of quality and organic local food, support small-scale farmers and preserve and respect the environment, will contribute to sustainable tourism development, preserving the country's tradition, natural and cultural treasures, in accordance with responsible practices, and minimizing environmental and social impact.

This panel will be a very good opportunity to learn about recent technological developments and innovation in the tourism sector and how supporting innovation can transform this sector, turning it into added value for the country's economic development. Addressing rural emigration, brain and talent drain, but also engagement of the Albanian diaspora and experts, bringing knowledge, skills and increasing innovation, cooperation and joint projects, is a challenge and in the same time an opportunity that, through incentives aimed at increasing investments in the areas diaspora come from, the creation of platforms and networks, and the growth of the innovation ecosystem, will play a key role in defining a smart and sustainable future for Albania.

The global change of the need to increase human and cultural interaction is bringing about a re-dimensioning of strategies at the world level towards sustainable development and, therefore, it is an aspect that needs to be researched and studied in order to guide policy-making based on evidence and plan appropriate interventions in the field of tourism at the country level, at the central and local level, to increase not only the impact on the economic development of the country, but also to influence the rural development and revitalization of these areas. The new approach on the possibilities of development of public properties in the areas of interest for development will especially affect the tourism sector, bringing new investments and increasing quality.

This panel provides a platform for all stakeholders for an inspiring discussion that explores the future of the tourism sector in Albania, the impact of new and innovative ideas, as well as the role of the diaspora, for the development of sustainable tourism, and how this development will affect the future of the country and its communities.

