

INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

## **Albania`s Struggle to Meet EU Environmental Criteria and Public Perception**

How lack of attention to the environmental issues can delay the accession of Albania in the EU

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With the support of the



Published by the Institute for Environmental Policy, Tirana, Albania  
with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Tirana

Tirana, November 2010

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	4
Executive summary .....	5
Introduction.....	6
Case studies in coping with environmental <i>acquis</i> .....	7
The case of Bulgaria.....	7
EU assistance to Bulgaria.....	8
The case of Romania .....	9
The case of Albania.....	10
Problem Description.....	10
Water and air quality .....	11
Waste management.....	13
Nature protection.....	13
Industrial and chemical pollution .....	14
Noise pollution .....	14
Climate change .....	15
Public perception on environment.....	15
Methodology .....	16
Survey answers in graphs .....	18
Comments .....	32
Media Monitoring.....	32
Workshop .....	35
Policy Options.....	36
Conclusion and Recommendation.....	38
Practical recommendations.....	38
Annex 1.....	40
References.....	44



## **Abstract**

This book presents to the policymakers and to the decision-makers a study on the importance that the fulfillment of the environmental criteria plays for the accession of Albania in the European Union (EU). In this book we try to analyze the main problems Albania faces in the environmental field and the perception of the public and media on these problems.

In the first part, the book analyzes by comparing the case of Albania, with the problems in the environmental field Bulgaria and Romania had before and after the EU accession, and drawing valuable recommendations for Albania in order to prevent the costly and hard EU accession process that Bulgaria and Romania had.

In the second part, the book analyzes the status of the environment in Albania, according to the key fields analyzed by the European Commission Mission in Albania Progress Report, the perception of the public on the status of environment in Albania, and its presentation in the Albanian media. The study concludes by offering a number of policy recommendations while analyzing possible scenarios. The recommendations are based on our evaluations and analysis, but also on the best practices in EU countries.



## Executive summary

The environmental *acquis* is part of the EU legislative body which is required to be incorporated in the domestic legal system of the candidate or potential candidate countries for EU accession. Besides the incorporation of the EU legislative body into their domestic legal system, the country which applies for EU membership, should also comply and implement the EU environmental criteria. This publication focuses on one aspect of the status of the fulfillment of the EU environmental criteria for Albania: public perception of the implementation of these criteria, and it does so from the citizens and media perspective. It explores how the citizens view the implementation of the EU environmental criteria, according to the environmental fields analyzed in the Progress Report which the European Commission in Albania prepares annually.

The objectives of exploring the public perception and the media perception on the fulfillment of the EU environmental criteria in Albania, are crucial to estimate the policy of the government towards EU integration and the inconsistencies between the latter and what the public perceives—the same applies to the inconsistencies between what media reports and what the public perceives. Although randomly understated in media releases and news, the environmental criteria are one of the most important and strategic body of laws that need to be implemented as much as just fully incorporated in the domestic framework, for a successful and effective EU accession.

Currently, the Belgian presidency which took over in July 2010, stressed the five priorities that it would have during its six-months. The third listed priority was environmental *acquis* and focusing on reforms that stimulate the green economies. This priority was as much important as the three (now well recognized) criteria of Copenhagen: political (democratization), legal (rule of law) and economic (ability of market to cope with competition in trade with the Community).

Public perception of the biggest challenges in several issues like: environmental problems, introduction of legislation for environmental standards, EU conditionality in such matters and prioritization of this area vis-a-vis others matters are measured through a survey poll, the results of which will be duly reflected in this study. A special focus is also given to media monitoring, covering the five biggest daily newspapers in circulation for a period of two-months to find out the space and attention in the press, given to environment, especially in relation to the EU integration. The news are organized in two categories: facts/reports and analysis/comments/opinions and the results will help to further understand the society's sensitivity toward environmental agenda.

This policy paper also discusses some general concerns regarding sensitive environmental issues, refers to the contemporary environmental studies and also offers an analytical and comparative angle by taking as a juxtaposing example that of Bulgaria, a country which has already succeeded into its accession in the European Union.

In the end, a few propositions, recommendations and policy prescriptions are laid out in the hope that will be reflected upon by the interested parties that deal with the legislative and executive aspects of environmental law: its incorporation and implementation.



## Introduction

The status of the environment and its trends present a real obstacle for the accession of Albania into the EU in the future. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania in the EU, and the problems they faced with the status of their environment before and after accession, show a similar trend for Albania as well, due to the similarity of problems and cultural context of the countries under discussion. The process of mitigating the environmental degradation left by the communist legacy and the one caused during the transition period, proved hard and costly, costs which are still showing up even after the EU accession of both countries. The challenge did not consist in just the incorporation of the EU directives, regulations and decisions into the national legislation, but it proved extremely expensive to implement.

Albania had a similar history on the environmental situation. It has toxic hotspots spread all over the country—a legacy of 45 years of heavy, polluting industry developed during the communist regime, which did not pay attention to the environmental and health protection. A study commissioned by the UNPD in Albania, in May 2010, revealed that there are still nine hotspots all over Albania, which need immediate clean-up.<sup>1</sup> Besides the environmental damage caused during communism, environment in Albania suffered heavily also during the last 20 years, with a trend of further degradation and in some areas a substantial decline. While Albania has applied for membership and aims at becoming a member of the EU in the near future, it is lagging behind in the environmental criteria which might be a serious costly barrier in the future for the acceleration of the EU accession process.

This book shows that according to the study the Institute for Environmental Policy Albania conducted, the public in Albania is aware and very concerned about the status of the environment in Albania, especially when it is related to the EU integration of Albania. While the public is aware and asks for more action to tackle this problem, their perception shows that the majority of the public think that fulfilling the environmental criteria is not an urgent and major concern for the Albanian political agenda. The media, on the other hand, does not cover this problem adequately, according to the data which we will show further down in this book. According to the interviews from this study, media in Albania does not give the desired importance to the environmental issues, as the public would like. This book shows that there is a discrepancy between what the public wants, what the Albanian politics claim and aim, and what the media presents. This combination bears the risk for future failures to tackle the environmental problems and advance in the integration process, or, at the best scenario, to result into an unbearable economic burden for Albania.

The purpose of this book is to show to the policy and decision makers that environment is a crucial issue in the process of the accession of Albania into the EU, that is an issue of a major concern to the Albanian public, and also to show to the Albanian media that what they present (or lack of presenting) on the area of environment related to the EU integration, does not match with what the public wants. We should acknowledge that a single study cannot address every aspect of the policy problem concerning the environment in Albania in the framework of the EU accession, and limitations may exist related to the quantity and type of data collected for the study.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP Albania, *Nine priority spots in Albania assessed and remediation action plans prepared*:  
<http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=detail&id=138>



## Case studies in coping with environmental *acquis*

### The case of Bulgaria

Bulgarian case is one of the most interesting ones, because it faced some hurdles to enter EU exactly because of environmental benchmarks. More specifically, it had to close down two nuclear reactors in Kozylin in order to get the green light from EU in accession route. It came with no small cost for Bulgaria, which based an important quota of its exports exactly on these two nuclear plants. However, EU environmental protection criteria proved to take the upper hand in the domestic policy-makers` agenda and in the end, they took their decision in full compliance to EU conditionality.

Bulgaria`s road of meeting the environmental *acquis* has continued even after formally meeting the criteria for accession to EU. Because of geo-strategic, geo-political and economic interests, the previous Socialist Bulgarian government had signed two separate deals with Russian Federation for building up new (nuclear) reactors, as well as being one of the participating countries in the Burgas-Aleksandroupos pipeline, both with serious environmental impact, as well as representing other threats to the rest of EU countries. After pressure from the later, the new Bulgarian prime minister, Mr. Borizov, decided to get rid of the two bilateral deals and call for national referendums to back up his decision.

Bulgaria had a rocky start from the beginning in its environmental standards and lack of adequate reforms to properly address them. Until 1996, an OECD study on Bulgaria noted *inter alia* that:

“[the] implementation of environmental policy and investments for environmental improvement have not followed. Development of the regulatory framework has been delayed by a slow legislative process. Mobilizing resources from enterprises, government and households is proving difficult in view of economic constraints. Pollution loads to air and water have been reduced, but mainly because of declines in production; a resumption of economic growth could increase pressures on the environment.”<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the EC`s avis on Bulgaria from 1997 stated that: “Local air quality poses significant risks to human health. Waste is an area of major concern: waste management practices are elementary, especially for disposal activities, and incineration is not regulated. Soil pollution and erosion are also serious.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1997, the European Commission estimated the total financial costs for the implementation of the environmental *acquis* in Bulgaria at € 15 billion, a figure lowered to € 8.6 billion in 2001.<sup>4</sup> Thus, as the Bulgarian example clearly tells, the conditionality of environmental *acquis*, or rather the stick of EU should be accompanied with the carrot of integration, especially in the form of financial aid, to make possible that the results are achieved in a timely fashion. The estimated cost of environmental reforms to copy with EU legislation on environment of € 8.6 to € 15 billion, are approximately the worth of the entire yearly GDP growth of a country the size of Albania. In 1997, Bulgaria had spent a mere € 4.5 million in 1997 on environment. By manner of comparison we might draw the necessary conclusions

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<sup>2</sup> OECD, *Environmental Performance Reviews – Bulgaria*, OECD, 1996, conclusions and recommendations.

<sup>3</sup> EC, *Commission Opinion on Bulgaria`s Application for Membership of the European Union*, 15 July 1997, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> EC, *Communication from the Commission: The Challenge of Environmental Financing in the Candidate Countries*, 2001, quoted in: ECOTEC, *The benefits of compliance with the environmental acquis for the candidate countries*, July 2001, p. 15.



and recommendations. Here we must only stress how much important is the full compliance of our body of laws with the *acquis communautaire*, especially with a growing emphasis on environment and how administrative projects need to be competitive and of higher standards to be able to draw EU funds and financing. This is a *sine qua non* for the implementation, as well as just the formal rite of passing environmental legislation.

## EU assistance to Bulgaria

The EU offered significant assistance to Bulgaria. Among other things, it provided intensive guidance on how Bulgaria's legislation needed to change to meet EU standards and on the kind of institutions needed for implementation. In an exercise called "screening", EC and Bulgarian experts looked at Bulgarian environmental legislation and institutions, analyzing what were compatible with EU legislation and what was not. This took place for the first time in 1998/99, after Bulgaria became a candidate, and again in the run-up to the opening of negotiations on the environment chapter (on 27 July 2001). The exercise was a sort of x-ray of the situation in Bulgaria and showed what the EU expected to change in this area.<sup>5</sup>

The EU also provided technical assistance to help build up required institutional capacity. A total of 22 projects (or sub-projects) were put into place between 1998 and 2005, ranging from general support (development of strategies, plans, transposition of legislation) and the strengthening of individual parts of the administration to implementing specific directives and to the training of officials at regional and local levels. Throughout the whole seven-year period from 2000 to 2006, the EU invested more in the environmental sector than all Bulgarian institutions put together—22 environmental projects with a total value € 643 million were accepted by the Commission.<sup>6</sup> It all seemed well in place for the accession of Bulgaria, on 1 January 2007, with the laws transposed and projects going well. The Government of Bulgaria was exciting for the progress the country made on the environmental field. But the difficulties of turning the system so quickly appeared just two years after Bulgaria's accession into the EU, although the continuous and large amount technical and financial help.

In October 2009, the European Commission sent written warnings to Bulgaria about four separate instances of failure to provide adequate protection for its natural heritage. Three of the warnings concern protected areas, while a fourth warning concerns the legislation currently in place, relating to failure to bring Bulgarian nature legislation fully into line with European requirements.<sup>7</sup> The European Commission had launched an infringement procedure on breaching of the waste law by Bulgaria since its accession on 1 January 2007.<sup>8</sup> After Bulgaria failed to solve the infringement of procedure, concerning inadequate waste disposal in the capital Sofia, which should have had an adequate network of waste disposal installations in place by the time of its accession on 1 January 2007, the European Commission pursued court action against Bulgaria for failing to properly implement EU waste law.

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<sup>5</sup> Bulgaria's quest to meet the Environmental *acquis*. ESI Background paper, 10 December 2008, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.4

<sup>7</sup> Bulgaria to receive four separate warnings about failures to comply with nature conservation legislation: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1484>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission Sues Bulgaria over Poor Waste Disposal: [http://www.novinite.com/view\\_news.php?id=110221](http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=110221)



Community funding was available to upgrade the capital's waste infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> This was the first trial launched by the European Commission against the EU newcomer.

These cases showed that although Bulgaria made a lot of efforts to achieve the EU environmental criteria, and the financial help given by the EU was enormous, there were still several drawbacks which appeared after the accession.

A similar drawback and difficulty might be encountered by Albania, especially considering the lower starting point the country has, and the trend towards more environmental degradation observed in the last years in Albania. The process can be exacerbated by the financial crisis of the EU, and the diminishing of will for further funding the newcomers in the EU. Albania can draw valuable lessons by learning from the Bulgarian experience, and invest more in preventing the source of the problems, rather than trying to mitigate the costly environmental problems accumulated from years of environmental degradation and negligence.

### **The case of Romania**

Before the accession to the EU, Romania, in a similar fashion with Bulgaria although with less fanfare, faced major environmental hurdles to comply with EU's environmental benchmarks. This resulted mostly because of lack of investment in environmental infrastructure and little attention given by the state and government agencies to such sensitive issues, such as environment related ones. According to the National Center for Statistics and other sources, total annual environmental expenditures remained constant at around 0.6 percent of GDP between 1993 and 1996. In 1996, total environmental investments amounted to more than USD 200 million. However, the amount of environmental investment in Romania was very low compared to the EU level, and the situation was worsened by the lack of economic instruments. It should be also noted that Romania required massive environmental investment by both the government and industries to comply with EU standards.<sup>10</sup>

The percentage of GDP dedicated to environmental in all these years had fared well below 1 percent. Such lack of investment and attention from the Romanian government, no doubt had its costs in the environmental standards and quality. Only in 1994 and 1995, it increased to 2.7 percent of the state budget.<sup>11</sup> The only success of the Romanian government in compliance with environmental standards of EU countries was the 'Water Fund' which was used mainly to finance investments in wastewater treatment, discharge control equipment and other water- and wastewater-related investments. However, as the REC report showed "this fund does not provide sufficient financial resources to finance the most urgent water-related projects."<sup>12</sup>

A short, middle and long term strategy planning helped put Romania in the right path in its environmental fulfillment of criteria. Some of the measures planned were as follows:

#### *Short-term objectives (before 2000)*

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<sup>9</sup> Commission takes Bulgaria to court for delays in providing Sofia with adequate waste disposal facilities:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1788&format=HTML>

<sup>10</sup> <http://archive.rec.org/REC/Publications/EmEnvMarket2/Romania3.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*



- reducing by 20-30 percent the emissions in the 14 "hot spots"
- reducing sulfur dioxide and nitrogen emissions by 20 percent, and chlorine and H<sub>2</sub>Cl by 40 percent
- reusing wastes collected from gases and used waters by 10-15 percent
- increasing reuse of solid wastes by 20 percent
- recovering the soils with exhausted capacity deposits of solid residues
- controlling dumping of municipal waste
- irrigating 1.5 million hectares and planting 50,000 hectares of forest belts
- combating soil erosion on 1.5 million hectares used for agriculture
- increasing the forestry area by 200,000 hectares

#### *Medium-term objectives (before 2005)*

- reducing by 50 percent the existing water shortage
- improving the quality of surface waters by raising the length of first category rivers to 60-65 percent of total and reducing the length of degraded rivers (D category) to 10-15 percent of total
- diminishing air pollution by 20-30 percent of 1989 levels for SO<sub>2</sub>, CO, NH<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>
- reducing heavy metals pollution by 80 percent
- zero emissions of greenhouse gases affecting the ozone layer (by 2008 for certain gases)
- increasing forestry area by 30 percent
- recovering 70-80 percent of the Danube Delta

#### *Long-term objectives (before 2025)*

- reaching living conditions compatible with the standards of advanced countries
- reducing pollution to an acceptable level according to EU standards
- complying with international conventions and agreements<sup>13</sup>

## **The case of Albania**

### **Problem Description**

Albania's environmental degradation is not something to be taken lightly or even worse, to be disregarded completely as it has often occurred in the post-communist transition period. While certainly there are tens of documented and non-documented hotspots inherited by the communist regime, there are tens of newly created hotspots and other environmental issues caused during the last twenty years. Although there were some improvements in landfills and wastewater treatment, the progress has been minimal, and in some areas there was regress, setting a dangerous trend for the environment and the achievement of the EU environmental criteria. Destruction of natural parks, pollution of waterways and seas, contamination of soil, annihilation of forests, and fast loss of biodiversity and ecosystems could be

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*



irreversible if continues with the actual pace, and might result in a serious threat for the life of the population in the long run, and an obstacle for the accession of Albania in the EU.

EU environment policy aims to promote sustainable development and protect the environment for present and future generations, trying to prevent rather than engage in costly mitigation of the end result of pollution or environmental degradation. It is based on integration of environmental protection into other EU policies, preventive action, the polluter pays principle, fighting environmental damage at source and shared responsibility.<sup>14</sup> The *acquis* comprises over 200 major legal acts covering horizontal legislation, water and air quality, waste management, nature protection, industrial pollution and risk management, chemicals and noise. Ensuring compliance with the *acquis* requires significant investment, but also brings significant benefits.

Transposing the *acquis* is not enough to achieve the environmental criteria for the accession in the EU. Competent and well equipped administration should be functional in order to successfully implement these laws. This administration should have the right financial, human and legal resources to intervene in the implementation and enforcement of laws. As the European Commission Mission in Albania noted “overall, implementation and enforcement levels are low due to weak legislation, lack of human and financial resources, lack of awareness in government, business and society in general, fragmented responsibilities and a weak judicial system.”

Though it seems that there has been some success in transposing the vertical legislation, the horizontal legislation is weakly aligned with the *acquis*, and major efforts are needed to finalize it.

There seems to be no political will to enforce the newly transposed environmental laws, which has been used by the population in general and businesses, Albanian and foreign, to breach these laws, and take advantage of the ecosystems and natural resources, bringing them to the “tipping point” where damage can become irreversible.

Key areas to be tackled are the areas which the EU analyzes each year in the framework of Albania’s accession to the EU:

### **Water and air quality**

Despite some progress in wastewater treatment and landfill management in Albania, the progress has been slow, and the costs of solving the pollution at the end and not at the source, have been enormous. Some key achievements have been the construction of the sewage treatment facility in Pogradec, and the construction of a simple sewage treatment facility in Saranda, with costs respectively of € 13.5 million and € 4 million. The grant for the Pogradec facility has been donated by the German government, whereas the construction of the facility in Saranda is a co-financing of several international institutions and the Government of Luxembourg. As seen from the success cases above, they were very costly, the funds were usually donated by other government, and they have only solved the problem for two small towns, still not tackling it at the source, but anyway complying with the EU directives. Studies from state and independent institutions, and from NGOs, have shown that the majority of streams and lower courses in the Western Lowland of Albania are **badly or severely polluted** with at least 5 rivers which cannot be called anymore rivers, but “open sewers”. Just Tirana, the capital, hosts two of the most polluted rivers of Albania, Lana River and Tirana River, with figures tens of times higher in every

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<sup>14</sup>Commission Opinion on Albania 's application for membership of the European Union



aspect of pollution, compared with the EU limits and directives for water quality. Implementation of the Nitrate Directive and its requirements concerning pollution from agricultural sources is one of the most complex on that list, where Albania has a long way to go to even start implementing the directive. Actually there is no nutrients reduction implementation in Albania, a process which requires a lot of money. Many candidate countries have asked for transition period, before the EU accession, which seems to be the case with Albania in the future. Another hot topic in water quality has been the pollution of seas, rivers and lakes with solid trash, which is visible and deters tourism development. This is the most debated and evident pollution, which is widely discussed in the media and public, and also tackled sometimes by the government with sporadic, very short times solutions—like destruction of sewage pipes emptying in the Adriatic Sea, but without a masterplan and road map to tackle and solve the problem at the source, or prevent it.

Waste management is the most visible of all the environmental issues in Albania, and the most debated and discussed due to its visibility. It is also connected to the water quality, and as we saw with the example of Bulgaria, might be a serious deterrent for the EU accession, or a source of fines and court cases in case of a successful accession in the future. Rivers have served as a dump site for at least the last 20 years, transforming them not just in open sewers, but also landfills, which carry away the trash in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. This is in clear violation of EU directives and policies, also culminating with the case when the trash accumulated on Albanian coasts was carried by sea-currents to the Croatian coasts, breeding the ground for not just deterrent on EU accession, but also international court cases between Croatia and Albania.

No studies or reports have been carried out on pollution and depletion of aquifers and underground water, but it is believed that there are serious concerns on this field, especially of depletion and aquifer salinization due to massive extraction of water from the aquifers and paving of large areas, thus preventing the rainwater from penetrating the ground.

**Air quality** is the other gravest problem in Albania. Tirana, the capital is considered as one of **the most air polluted capitals** in Europe and the world. There is no plan or strategy to combat air pollution, except from some local strategies, which give limited results if not coordinated with other strategies and central and local authorities. The main urban centers, Shkodër, Durrës, Tiranë, Fier, Korçë and Vlorë, have air monitoring centers which show frightening figures in all parameters for the air quality. All the 6 cities have air pollution 3 times higher than the maximal level of pollution allowed by the EU, with a monitoring point in Tirana surpassing the level of 6 times more polluted than the maximal level of pollution allowed by the EU. In few words, breathing air in some parts of Tirana might be toxic and dangerous for your health. Only small towns, usually situated in hills or mountains, have a good air quality, due also to the lack of industry and traffic.

Municipalities (especially Tirana) across Albania have started the planting of trees to mitigate air pollution, but the results are limited due to the limited space to plant trees and bad (or missing) urban planning. Tirana municipality is the first one to have started the Bus Lanes and Bike Lanes in the streets and sidewalks of Tirana, though with little success due to chaotic traffic which stems from lack of traffic regulations' enforcements and lack of public tradition on how to behave in traffic. Main source of pollution remains the quality of oil (mostly diesel) allowed to enter and sold in Albania, and the quality of cars allowed on the streets of the country. Lack of enforcement of construction regulation, also contributes a lot on PPM 10 excess in the main urban centers. The Institute of Public Health in Albania admits that the air pollution in Tirana shortens by 2 years the lives of citizens in Tirana, but anecdotic testimony by experts and doctors in Tirana tell that this level of pollution might very well shorten by 10-



12 years the lives of citizens of Tirana. A comparison study between the major studies that concluded the shortening of life by air pollution in Washington and London, with the levels of pollution in the air of Tirana, closely reaffirms these claims.

Severe air pollution is also caused by noxious gases emitted by the oil industry in Ballsh region where the air is technically unbreathable and toxic to your lungs.

### **Waste management**

Some progress has been done with landfill rehabilitation, especially with Sharra landfill in Tirana. But, there is no national waste management strategy or plan, and each municipality has its own waste collection method which usually consists of primitive collection of waste from garbage bins and depositing of it in landfills. Waste disposal in almost every village of Albania is done by depositing it on the roadsides, rivers, or just informal dumps in forests or fields where it is usually burnt, thus exacerbating more the air pollution. Recycling is done by private companies, which accept usually plastic, paper, and metal waste. There is no data on how much of the waste goes to these recycling companies, due to the collection almost virtually done by poor or Roma people. Nevertheless, for many tourists, the waste deposited almost everywhere in the territory of Albania, has deterred them from revisiting the country—in many internet blogs you could see the expression “the first thing you see when you approach a city in Albania are plastic bags and piles of garbage on the roadsides..” There is almost a complete lack of culture of waste disposal, and it is very common to see citizens dumping garbage in the Lana River, which runs across Tirana.

The waste management issue could be a real problem in stopping, delaying the accession of Albania in the EU, or it could be an issue for court case by the European Commission against Albania in case of its accession in the EU.

### **Nature protection**

Only up to twelve percent of the country’s territory has protected status officially. This national coverage is too small to have an effective long-term impact on biodiversity protection.<sup>15</sup> Considering EU figures where eighteen percent of the territory of the member states is under protection in the Natura 2000 nature protection network, the Albanian progress in this field can be very slow to catch up with the levels of protection advised in the EU directives.

The protected area in fact is just “protected” on paper, as on the ground there is no authority (or in case when they are, they are easily corrupt and inefficient) to stop illegal hunters and logging companies from annihilating whole populations of mammals and birds, and erasing whole forests in the national parks. Only in the last two years, the National Park of Lura and several forests in Kolonja and Korca region completely disappeared due to illegal logging. The logging of these forests was done in plain day, aided by the local authorities, which in most cases were the actual loggers or partners with the logging companies. Besides the illegal destruction of forests, the problem has been aggravated by the transfer of

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<sup>15</sup> See for more: CLOSING THE GAP Assessing and Improving Environmental Policy Implementation in Albania. Agenda Institute (2009)



two national parks and one coastal forest to industrial companies for the exploitation of the terrain, respectively—the Krasta National Park, Karaburuni Park, and Pylli i Sodës.

Biodiversity and wildlife is gravely harmed. Illegal Albanian and foreign hunters wreaked havoc on the wildlife of Albania, as there is no control on how much they kill, even when they have a license. Most of the migratory birds do not nest in Albania anymore, according to experts on biodiversity in Albania—this caused by the excessive hunting and damaging of nests.

Albania is one of the few countries in Europe to lack an Animal Protection Law, and the conventions and directives for the protection of the wildlife are not enforced with animals which are under protection or endangered in the EU—animals like bears, lynches, and chamois are hunted freely in the forests of Albania, without anyone checking about their actual numbers in the wild. Keeping wildlife in small cages in restaurants is widespread, with at least two restaurants in Tirana which entertain their customers with bears kept in small cages, or stuffed carcasses and heads of bears. Animal abuse is widespread, causing an outcry of EU tourists who visit Albania. There is a widespread mentality of hatred towards wildlife, which will be very hard to change, and might counteract with the efforts of implementing the EU Directives on animals and wildlife.

### **Industrial and chemical pollution**

There is shortage of competent staff and lack of equipment in the environmental inspectorate to conduct proper control, and verification on the site. Several factories, plants and SME work without any environmental permit, or even when they get one, they hardly respect any regulation towards the environment. The principle “the polluters pays” is not functional in practice, with most of the fines put, not paid and with the inability of the inspectors to collect the fines they put on polluting businesses. The number of the environmental inspectors per region is very low, with 2-3 inspectors having to cover a territory with hundred of thousands of inhabitants and thousands of businesses, and usually having no car of even a computer to carry out their work. An example to illustrate the status of environmental inspection is the Tirana Region which comprises several cities like Tirana, Kamza, Vora and Kavaja, and has a population of more than 1 million inhabitants. Although Tirana region had the biggest population in the Republic of Albania, and hosts more than half of the industry of Albania, it has a mere team of 6 environmental inspectors.

The most evident example of industrial pollution is the Ballsh refinery, where the oil extraction waste is dumped directly in streams which end up in Gjanica River, making it the most polluted rivers in Albania, a river which has for decades, dumped oil and bitumen in the Adriatic Sea, severely polluting the coast near the Seman estuary.

There is lack of an authority on hazardous materials and waste, and there is no system for the safe management of hazardous waste.

### **Noise pollution**

There is still no strategy to combat noise, especially in the urban areas where it has turned into a fight between businesses and citizens. A campaign of several months started by the media in fall 2009, managed to raise the awareness on noise, but the enforcement of the law was stuck in the ambiguity of



the law, and lack of division of competences to enforce the actual law. The actual law does not specify the level of noise which the subject should not surpass, and the municipal police charged with the implementation of the law, does not have any equipment to measure the level of noise. Although there are several waves of controls and fines put on bars and discos, enforcement and collection of fines has not been materialized, allowing the businesses to continue producing noise, some time more than 70 dB according the health experts. On the other hand, traffic police does not consider honking in urban and residential areas as a breach of law and noise. This raises the noise level to dangerous levels, especially at peak hours in the major urban centers; the best example is Tirana where in a single minute you could have hundreds of cars in a single street, honking at the same time for a prolonged time.

### **Climate change**

Albania is a non-Annex I country in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), so it has no greenhouse gas emission limit target. This is due to a low level of carbon-emitting industry, almost 98 % of electrical power coming from hydropower, and thus having low CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita than in most industrial countries.

However administrative capacity and technical, and financial resources are weak for a successful implementation of all the requirements of the EU *acquis* on climate change.

The policy of Albania in the recent years has changed considerably, setting the trend for Albania to become a CO<sub>2</sub> contributing country. The government has commissioned the construction of 9 cement factories (4 have been built, and 3 are under construction), which are very polluting not just to the environment in the area where the factories are situated, but also contributing to climate change. The activities of these cement factories have razed to the ground several mountains, and destroyed the scenery in large parts of the Western Lowlands. There is no study to determine the effects of the removal of whole mountains on the biodiversity, air, health, and surface and groundwater. The government commissioned the building of an oil power plant, and is determined to build one or two coal power plants in Durres Region, although the European Commission is planning to phase out subsidies for coal and phase out coal power plants by 2023<sup>16</sup> amid high pressure by the Greens, to bring the phase out deadline closer in order to promote green energy. If Albania would be a candidate or in the accession process by 2020, then the coal power plants the government wants to commission, would be a costly obstacle in aligning Albania with the policy of EU.

### **Public perception on environment**

However, it seems that public perception is not measured and furthermore, a very weak response is noted in regard to environmental crises. Moreover, it seems that the majority of people and society is not familiar with conditionality terms of environmental *acquis*, its obligatory incorporation and implementation by the executive and legislative bodies of Albania. While our survey and other relevant

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<sup>16</sup> EU states give 14 more years to dirty coal plants:  
<http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE65H3L520100618>



data show that the majority of people have a high degree of sensitivity for environmental related problems and issues, they tend to react to them only verbally and when specifically asked for.

Almost all former (general) surveys that have concentrated on the biggest problems that Albanians faced today have not listed environment as one of the priorities alongside economy, unemployment, corruption etc. Thus, the persons interviewed have rarely, not to say never regarded environment as one of the noted day to day problems in the country. This has probably resulted because 'environment' is not often included among the issues. Media plays a powerful role in dissemination of information, so we have included a media monitoring section in this study to understand the catalytic role of printed media in this salient issue that receives little coverage. Furthermore, media serves not only to inform or even to build up public opinion, but also to influence policy-making by rising up sensitive issues and lobbying in its behalf. One of the environmental issues raised powerfully by the media for more than two uninterrupted months, was the case of noise pollution in the Bllok area, in the center of Tirana, by Shekulli daily newspaper, which attracted the attention of the government(s) and resulted in some actions against some bars and night clubs, although not long-term effective.

## Survey results

To have a better empirical understanding of public perceptions of environmental issues and moreover their knowledge of EU environmental *acquis* and the degree of importance to their everyday life vis-a-vis the other daily problems, we conducted a survey in the city of Tirana. Our sample population was two hundred interviewees spread throughout the city, covering some of the major populated areas such as the Bloc area, Komuna e Parisit, Zogu i Zi, 21-shi, Medreseja etc. This enabled us to talk to different social categories with different social, economic and cultural background. This publication presents the main perceptions on environment and its role on the EU integration of Albania. The indicators shown below are based on data gathered during a survey conducted on July-August 2010, by the Institute for Environmental Policy, and financed by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Tirana.

## Methodology

The questionnaire used in the survey contained thirteen questions from the main field that the environment section of the Albania Progress Report, prepared by the European Commission in Albania, covers. The fields are: air, water, waste management, noise pollution, natural and national parks, and chemical and industrial pollution. The survey sample was 200 persons, randomly chosen on different locations in Tirana. The sample of 200 persons was divided according to the main age groups in the population.



The age groups are: age 16-30 years old, 31-45 years old, 46-60 years old, and 61-80 years old.

#### **Age groups**

<b>16-30</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>31-45</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>24.50%</b>
<b>46-60</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>61-80</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13.50%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data from the survey was collected through a questionnaire of 6 pages, by making it sure that there was equal number of males and females interviewed. Anonymity was guaranteed during the interviewing. The questions were mainly multiple choice questions, with most of the questions containing also sub-questions in order to get the personal opinion of the interviewee on the issue of environment as a key element for the accession of Albania in the EU. The questionnaire also contained questions with several sub-questions, like the question on how media portrays the environment in the framework of EU accession of Albania; several questions gave the option to the interviewee to give the answer with his/her own words, or comment.

A certain margin error is expected in this survey, due to turning figures into percentages, small mistakes by the interviewees in some questionnaires, and to the misunderstanding of the questions by the interviewee.

The percentage of the interviewees according to their education levels is:

#### **Education level**

<b>Higher</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>High</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Elementary</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>



## Survey answers in graphs

### 1) How important are the policies and measures taken on air pollution for the EU integration of Albania?

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

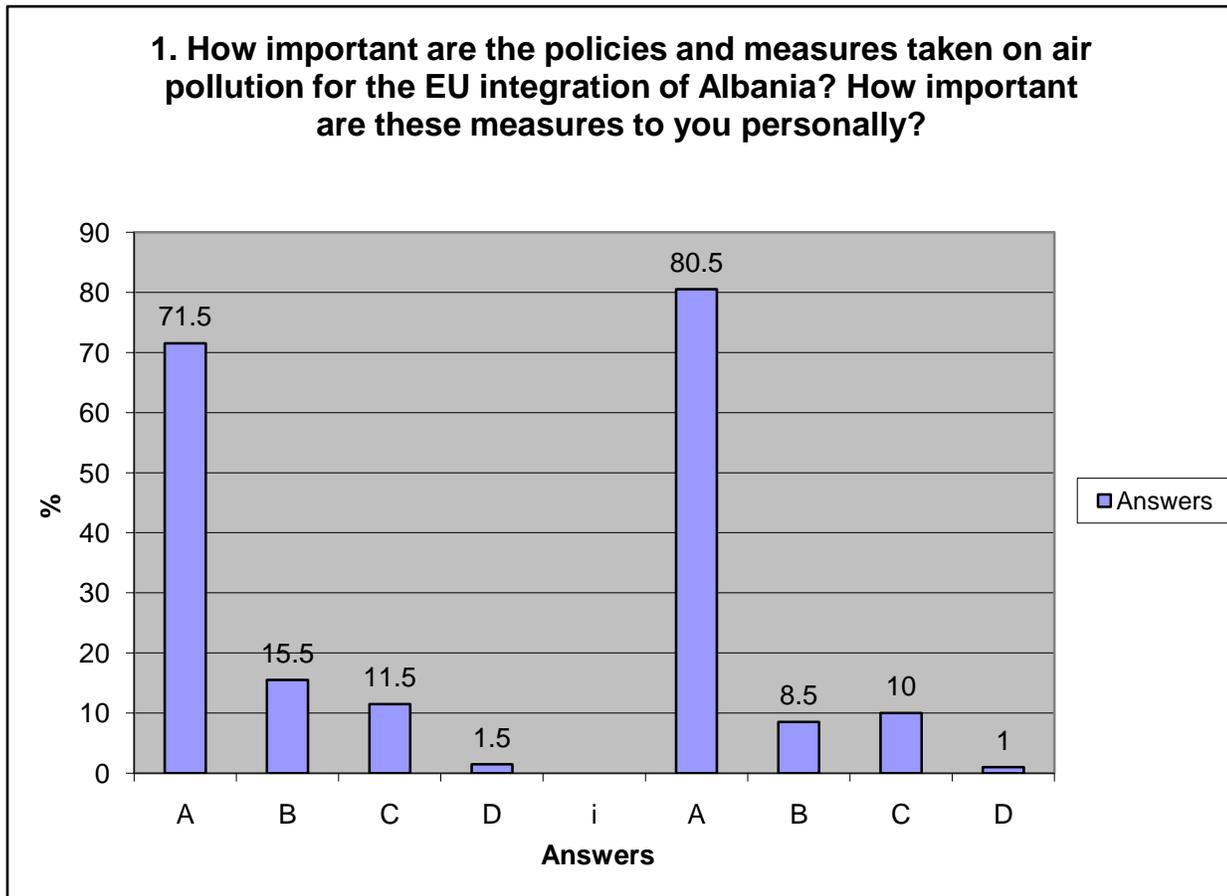
### And how important are these measures to you personally?

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



Air pollution and measures taken to mitigate it are considered as very important in Albania. 71.5 percent of the interviewees think this way, whereas 80.5 percent see the policies and measures against air



pollution as very important. This is considerably high figure which should alarm the decision-makers as more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population sees air pollution as very important personally.

## 2) How important are the policies and measures taken on water pollution for the EU integration of Albania?

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

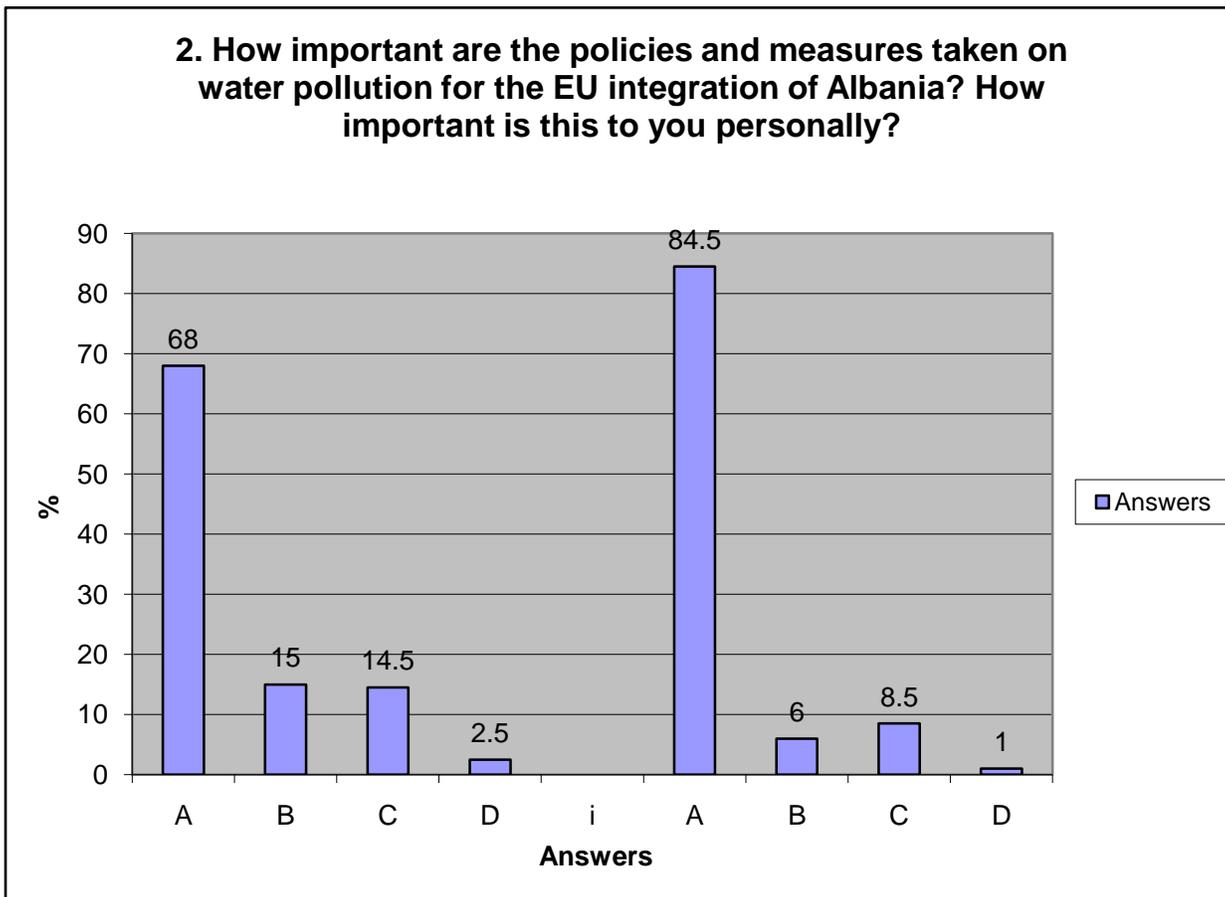
### And how important are these policies and measures to you personally?

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



Measures towards water pollution are considered as very important by a large part of the Albanian society; what you can see from the results is that personally, the public perceives the issue of water pollution as very important.



### 3) How important are the policies and measures taken on pollution of rivers, lakes, and seas for the EU integration of Albania?

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

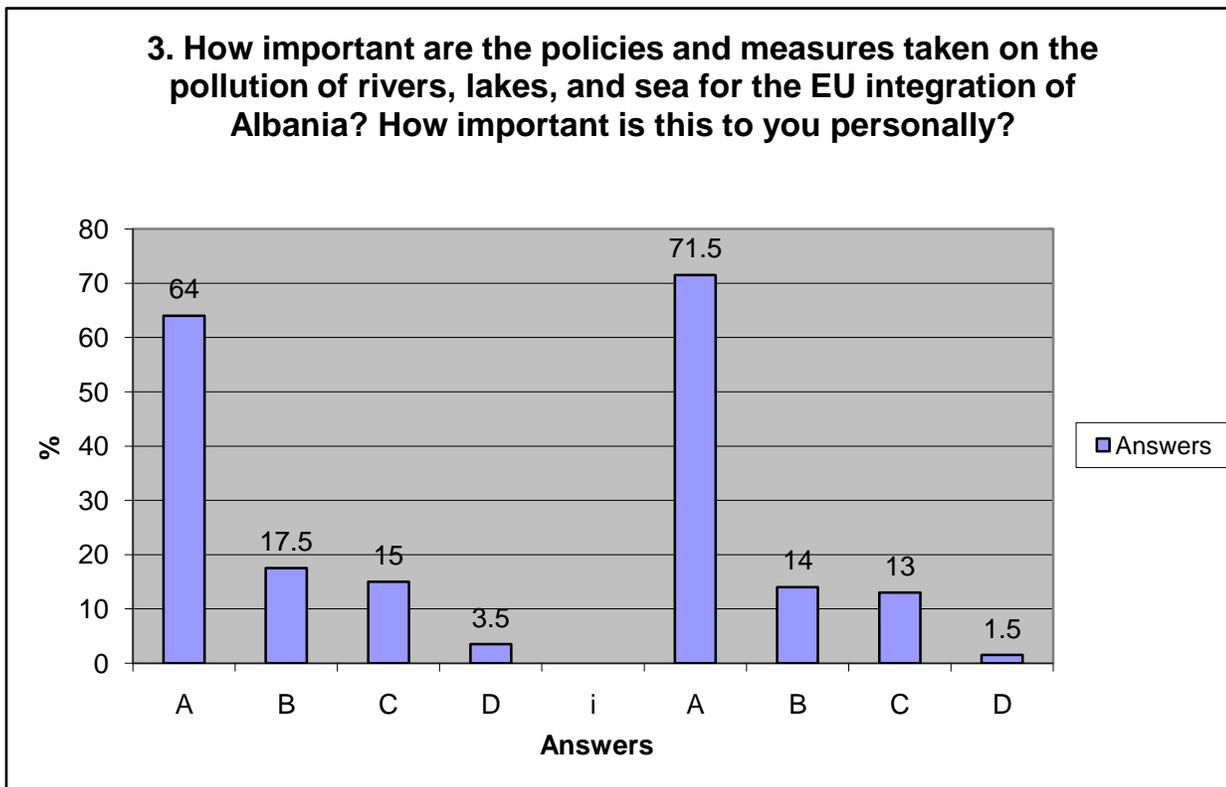
### And how important are these policies and measures to you personally?

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



When asked about how important are for them the policies and measures against the pollution of rivers, lakes and seas for the integration of Albania in the EU, only 64 percent of the respondents think that they are very important (different from the opinion on water pollution), but personally, 71.5 percent think that they are very important. Also, we have around 3.5 percent of the respondents who think that these measures are not important for the integration of Albania in the EU.



**4) How important are the policies and measures taken on waste management for the EU integration of Albania?**

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

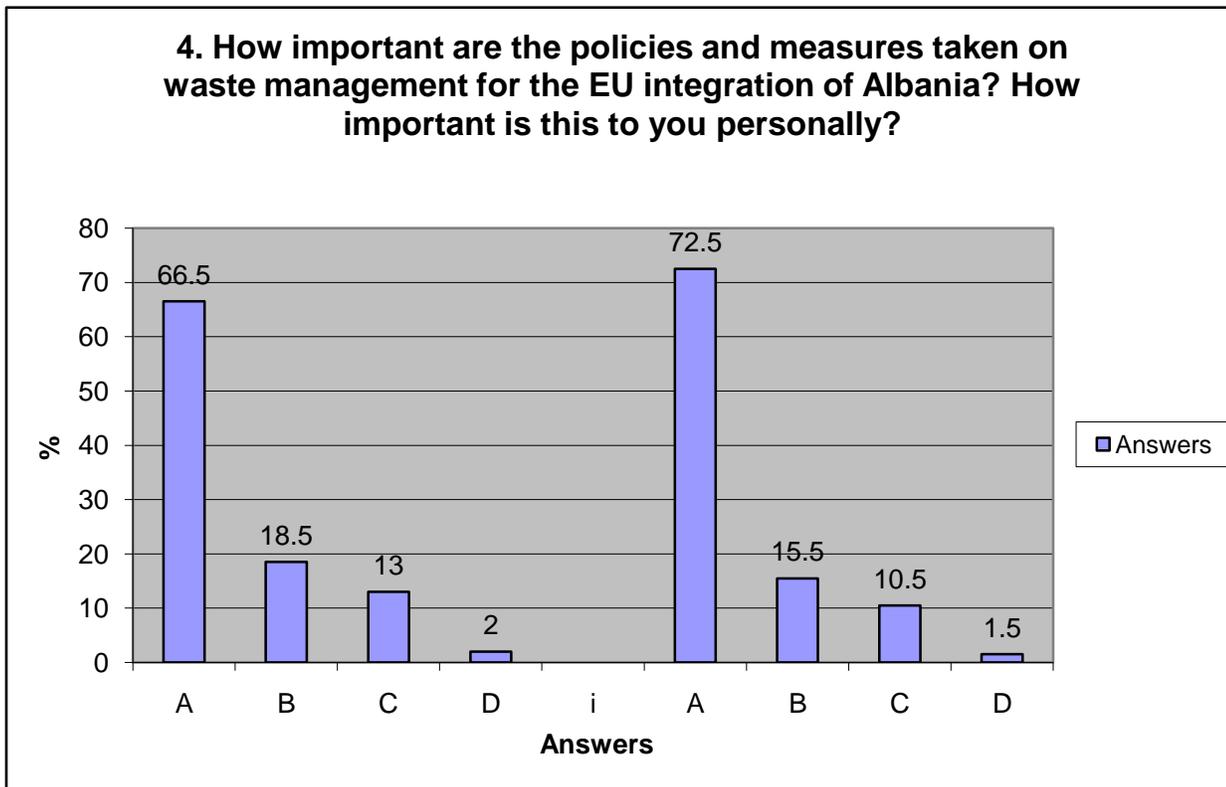
**And how important are these policies and measures to you personally?**

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



The perception on waste management also shows that the public sees it as less important, than air or water cleanness, for the integration of Albania in the EU. Nevertheless, they give a lot of weight to this issue in their personal aspect.



**5) How important are the policies and measures taken on wastewater treatment for the EU integration of Albania?**

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

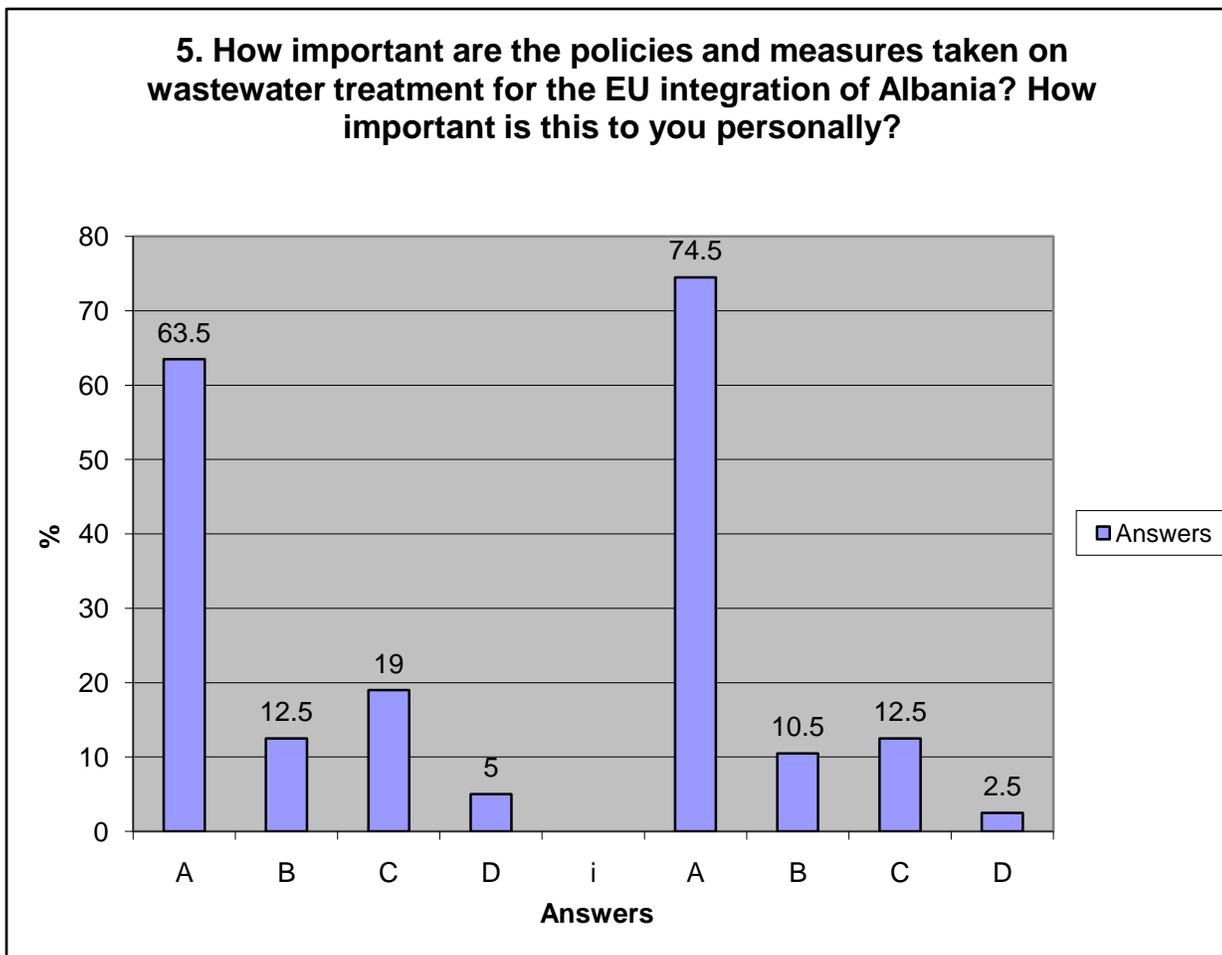
**And how important are these policies and measures to you personally?**

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



Wastewater treatment is perceived by 63.5 percent of the respondents as important for the integration of Albania in the EU, but on the personal aspect they perceive it as very important with 74.5 percent of the respondents thinking this way. What strikes the reader in the results is that 19 percent of the respondents perceive wastewater treatment as something not important for the integration of Albania in the EU, but as something necessary, and 5 percent of the respondents do not see it necessary at all, a higher figure compared with the results of the previous questions.



**6) How important are the policies and measures taken noise pollution for the EU integration of Albania?**

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

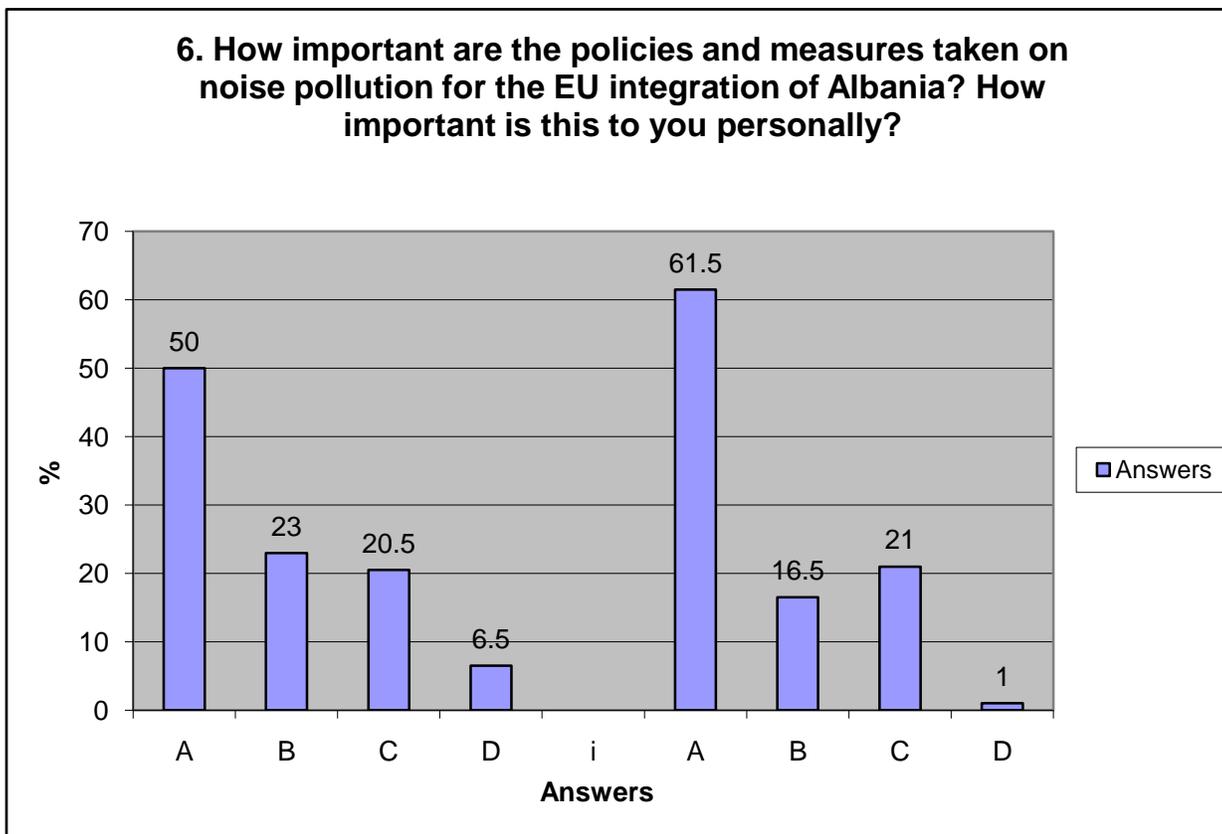
**And how important are these policies and measures to you personally?**

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



Interestingly, when asked about noise pollution, only half of respondents perceived it as important in the integration of Albania in the EU, a figure considerably low compared to the results of the other questions. It is interesting to see that only 23 percent consider it somehow important, 20.5 percent simply necessary, and 6.5 percent not important at all in the EU integration of Albania. In the personal aspect, the measures against noise pollution are highly valued, probably due to an extensive campaign by the media and police on this issue, but it has never been pointed out that noise pollution is one of the key areas of environmental standards for the integration of Albania in the EU.



**7) How important is the protection of national and natural parks for the EU integration of Albania?**

A – Very important

B – Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D – Not important at all

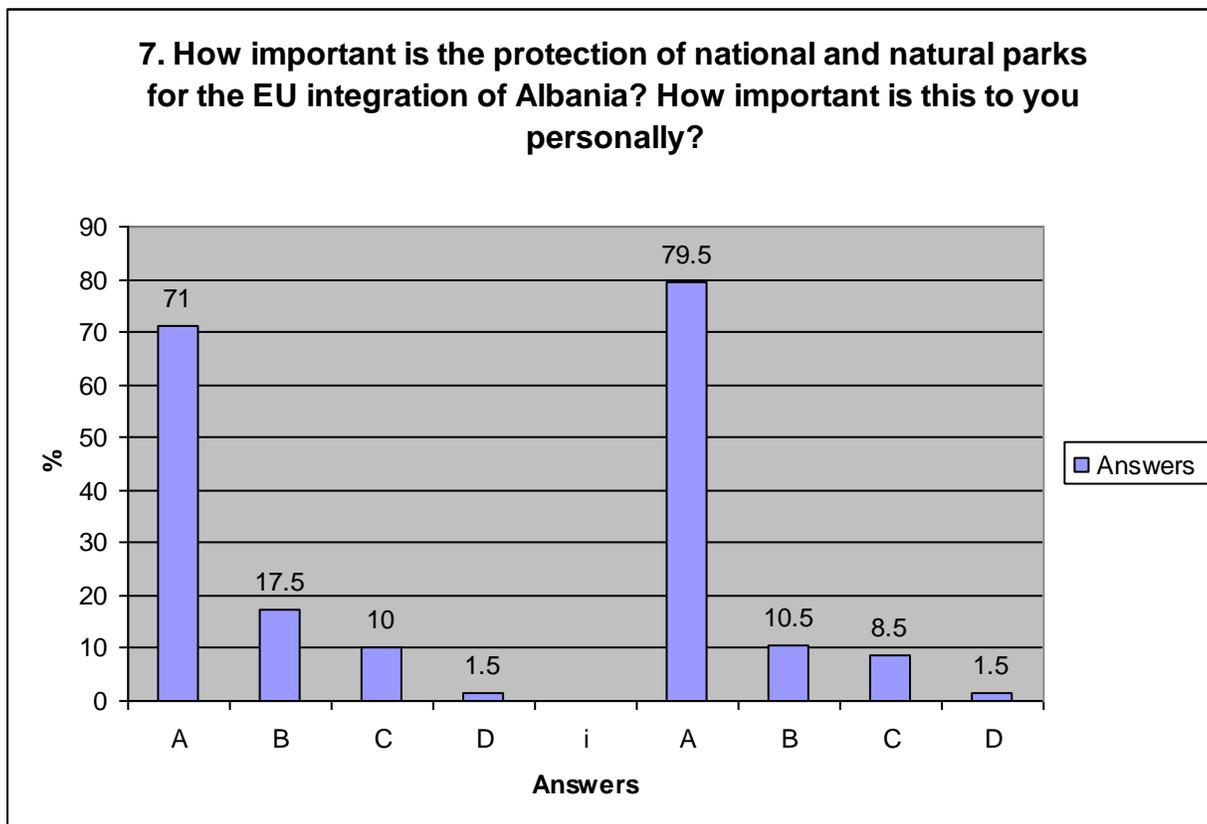
**And how important is the protection of parks for you personally?**

A - Very important

B - Somehow important

C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary

D - Not important at all



The protection of national and natural parks is very important to citizens either in the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU, or in the personal aspect, as seen from the comments that citizens put in the questionnaire. This shows that there has been some awareness raising on this issue, or that citizens are suffering personally the lack of green areas in the urban centers, sending a very important signal to the decision makers.



**8) How well represented are the following policy changes in line with the EU accession criteria in the media, in your opinion?**

**(i) Air pollution; is it:**

- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(ii) Water pollution; is it:**

- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(iii) Pollution of rivers, lakes and seas; is it:**

- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(iv) Waste management; is it:**

- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(v) Wastewater treatment; is it:**

- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(vi) Noise pollution; is it:**

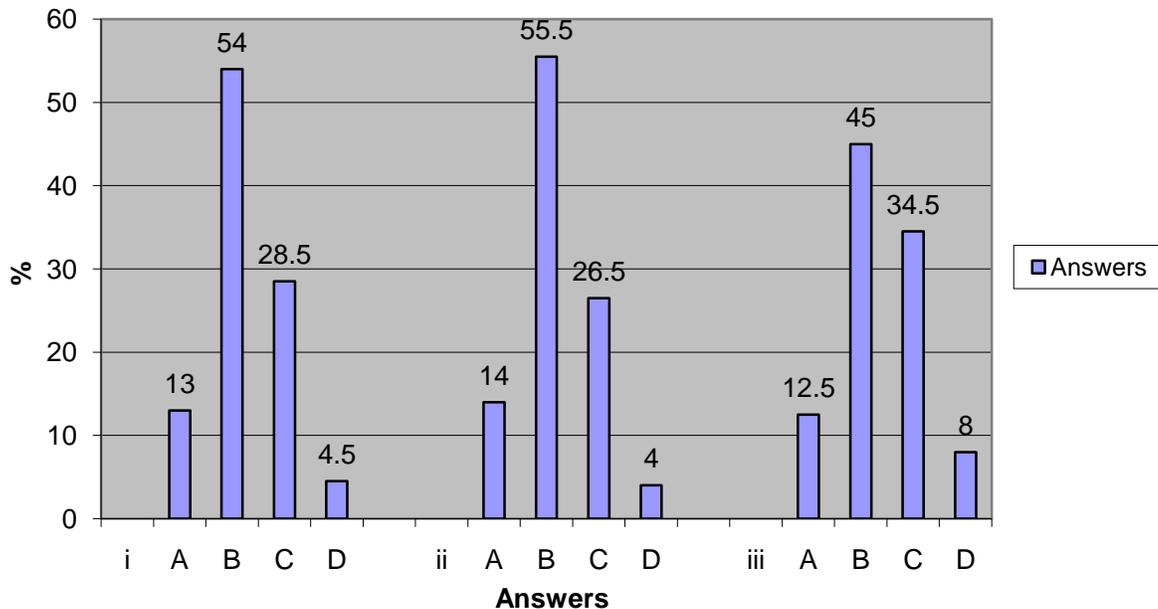
- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented

**(vii) Protection of national and natural parks; is it:**

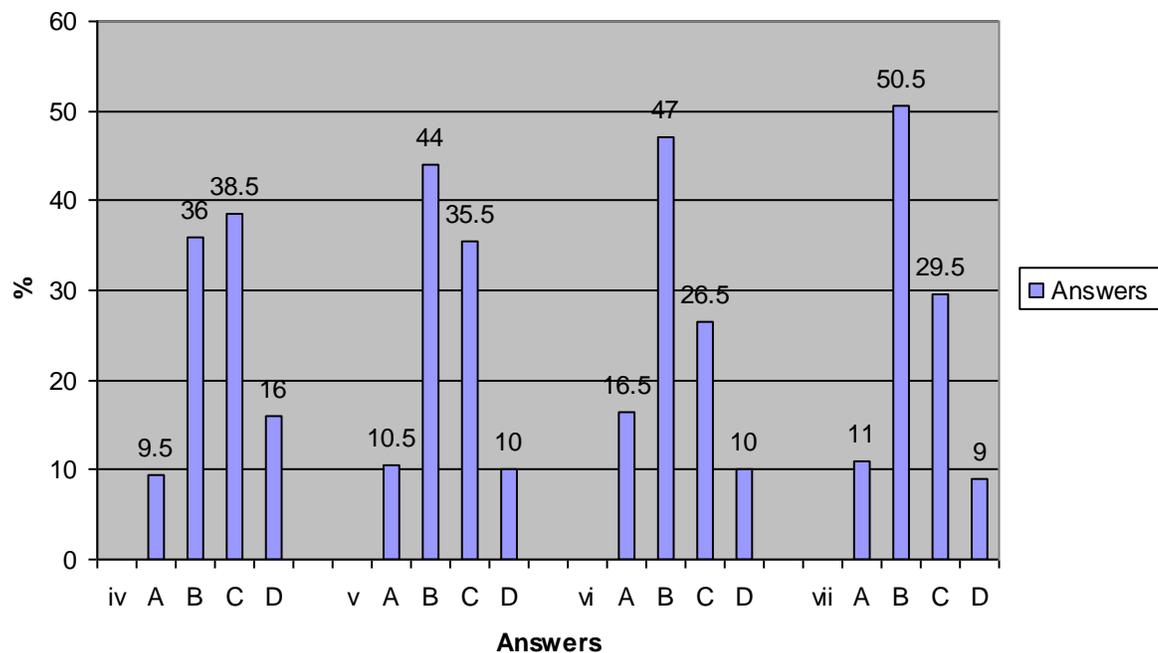
- A - well represented in the media
- B - somehow represented
- C - rarely represented
- D - never represented



**8. How well represented are the following policy changes in line with EU accession criteria in the media, in your opinion? i. Air pollution ii. Water pollution iii. Pollution of rivers, lakes and seas**



**8. How well represented are the following policy changes in line with EU accession criteria in the media, in your opinion? i. Waste management ii. Wastewater treatment iii. Noise pollution iv. National and natural parks protection**





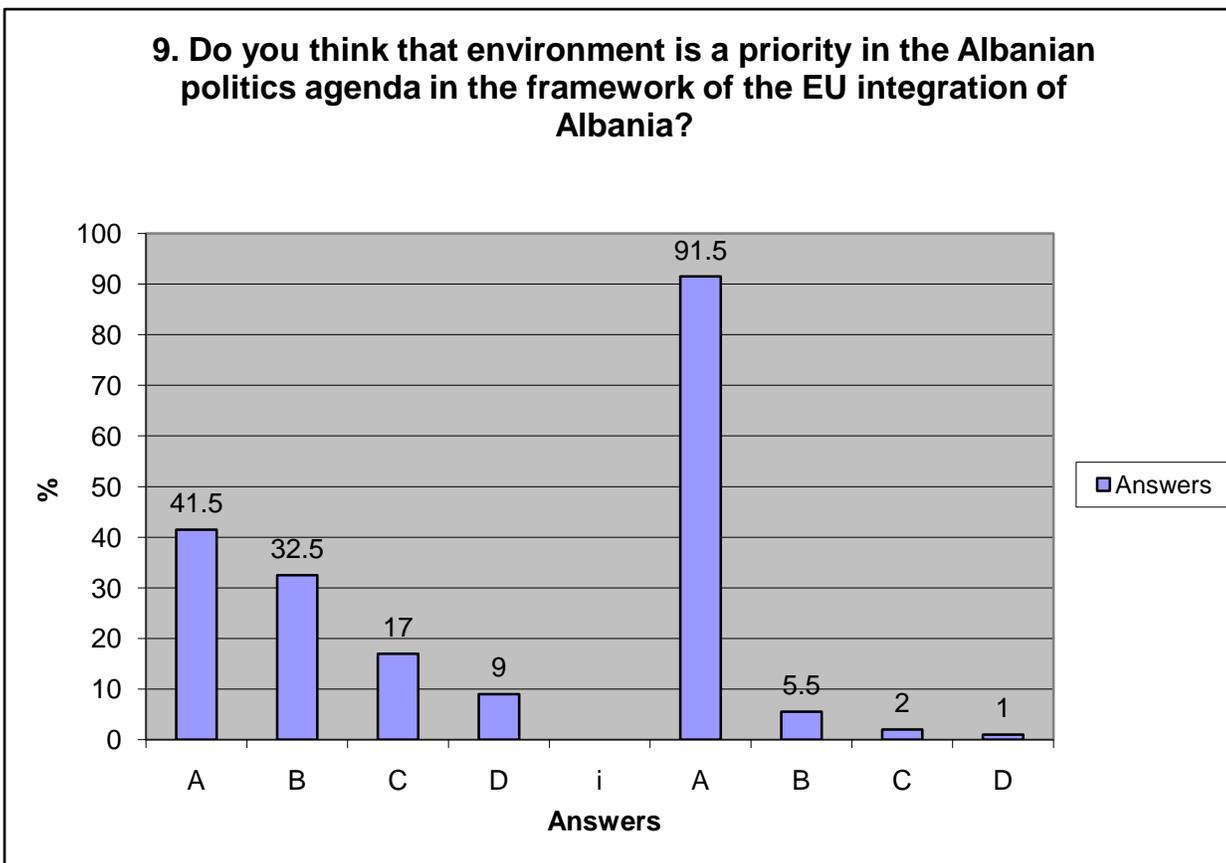
The question on the representation of the main environmental issues in the media in the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU is very important, as media is the key factor to convey information and policies to the public in Albania, according to other surveys conducted by different NGOs in Albania. The questions on the media, and their subquestions according to the key issues analyzed by the European Commission Progress Report for Albania, show that the respondents perceive that these issues are somehow represented in the media in Albania in the framework of the EU integration; in the case of pollution of rivers, lakes and seas, and waste management it shows that it is rarely represented (where we have the rarest represented issue, with 38.5 percent of respondents thinking that waste management is very rarely represented). There are considerable percentages of respondents who think that media has never represented these issues in the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU, with the highest percentage again on waste management—16 percent of the respondents think that it has never been represented in the media. This is a clear message for the media in Albania, showing that they should increase the space and importance given to this issue in their programs.

**9) Do you think that environment is a priority in the Albanian politics' agenda in the framework of the EU integration of Albania?**

- A – Very important
- B – Somehow important
- C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary
- D – Not important at all

**And how important is environment for you personally?**

- A – Very important
- B – Somehow important
- C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary
- D – Not important at all

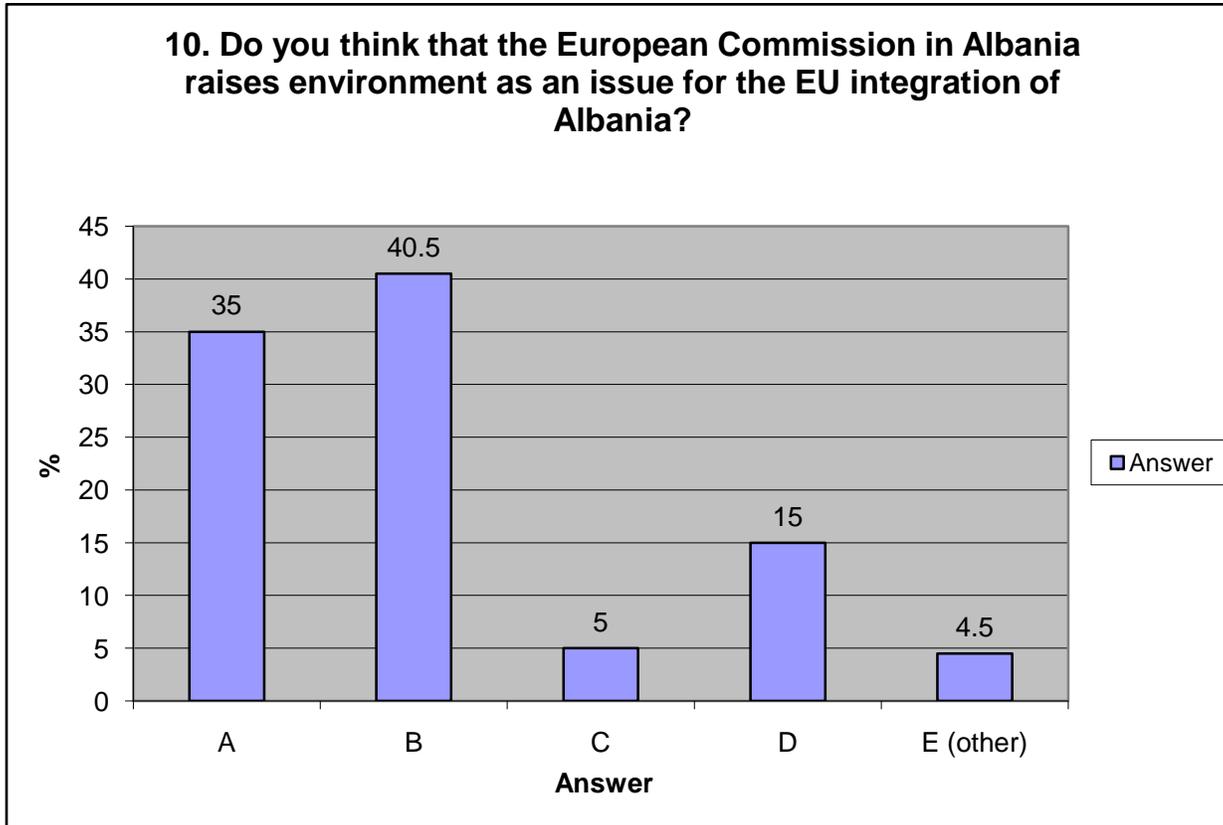


This question takes a special importance for the Albanian politics, as it shows that citizens think that environment is an important priority in the agenda of the Albanian politics, in the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU. Only 41.5 percent think that environment is an important priority in the agenda of the Albanian politics in the framework of EU integration, then the percentages decrease to 32.5 percent of respondents thinking that the environment is somehow a priority for the Albanian politics agenda in the framework of EU integration. 17 percent of them think that environment is just a necessary priority in the agenda of Albanian politics in the framework of EU integration, whereas 9 percent of them think that it is not a priority.

It is interesting to note that a high percentage of 91.5 percent of respondents perceives environment as a very important issue personally, showing a big gap between what the voters want, and what the Albanian politics offers to them.

**10) Do you think that the European Commission Mission in Albania raises environment as an issue for the EU integration of Albania?**

- A - a lot
- B - somehow
- C - not at all
- D - I do not know
- E - other (comment)





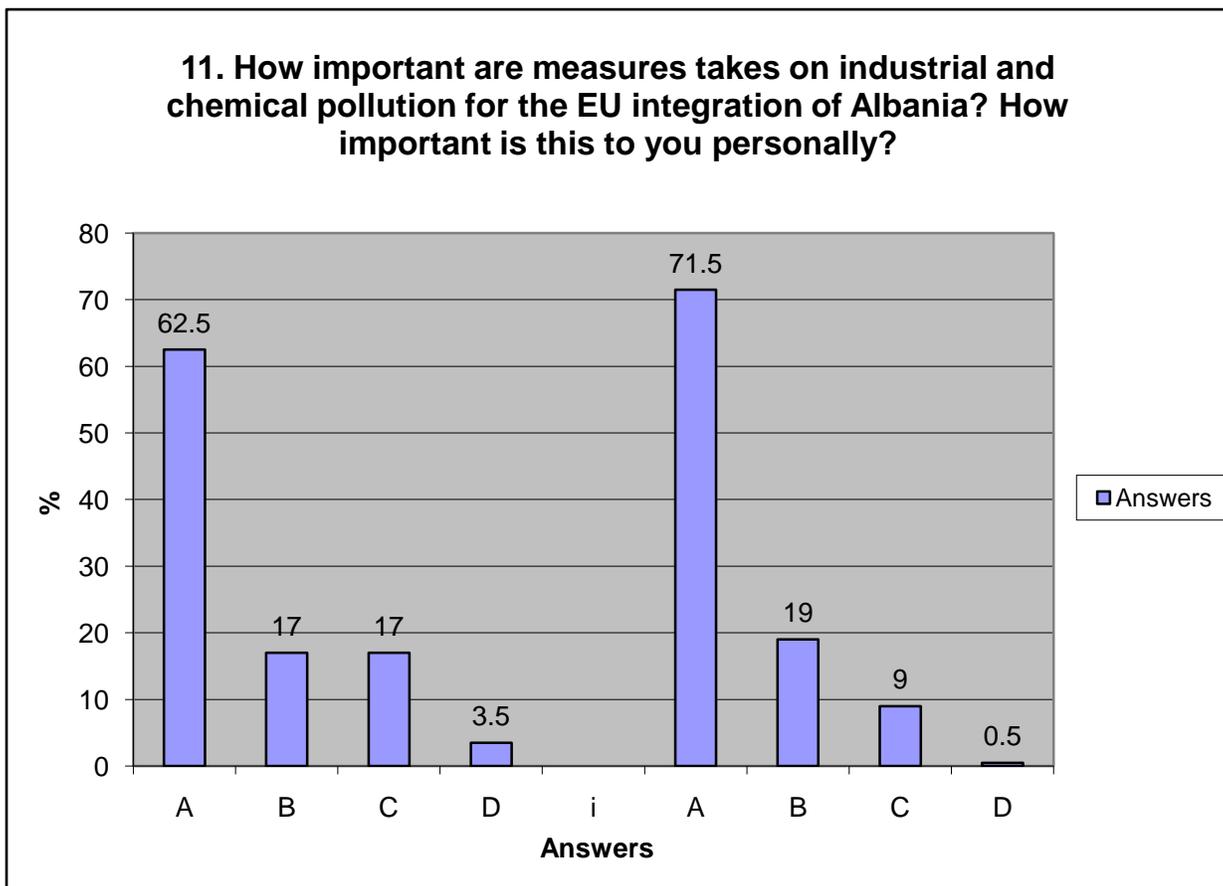
It is very interesting to see from this question, that the European Commission (EC) Mission in Albania that writes the progress reports on Albania, is perceived by the public as “somehow” raising the environment as an issue that plays an important role in the integration of Albania in the EU (with 40.5 percent of respondents thinking this). Only 35 percent of them perceive the EC as raising a lot environment as an important issue in the integration of Albania in the EU, and 5 percent think that EC doesn’t raise at all this issue. 15 percent of the respondents do not know about this, and 4.5 percent write comments as their answer, saying that EC does not exert a sufficient pressure towards the Albanian authorities in this field. These results are very important for the work of EC in Albania, as they show that EC should advertise and raise more this issue in the media, especially during the publication of the progress report for Albania, and also related to the advices that EC sends to the Albanian government. The fact that 15 percent of the respondents do not have any information on this issue, shows that the EC in Albania should work more on disseminating their information to the public.

### 11) How important are the measures taken on industrial and chemical pollution for the EU integration of Albania?

- A – Very important
- B – Somehow important
- C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary
- D – Not important at all

### And how important are these measures to you personally?

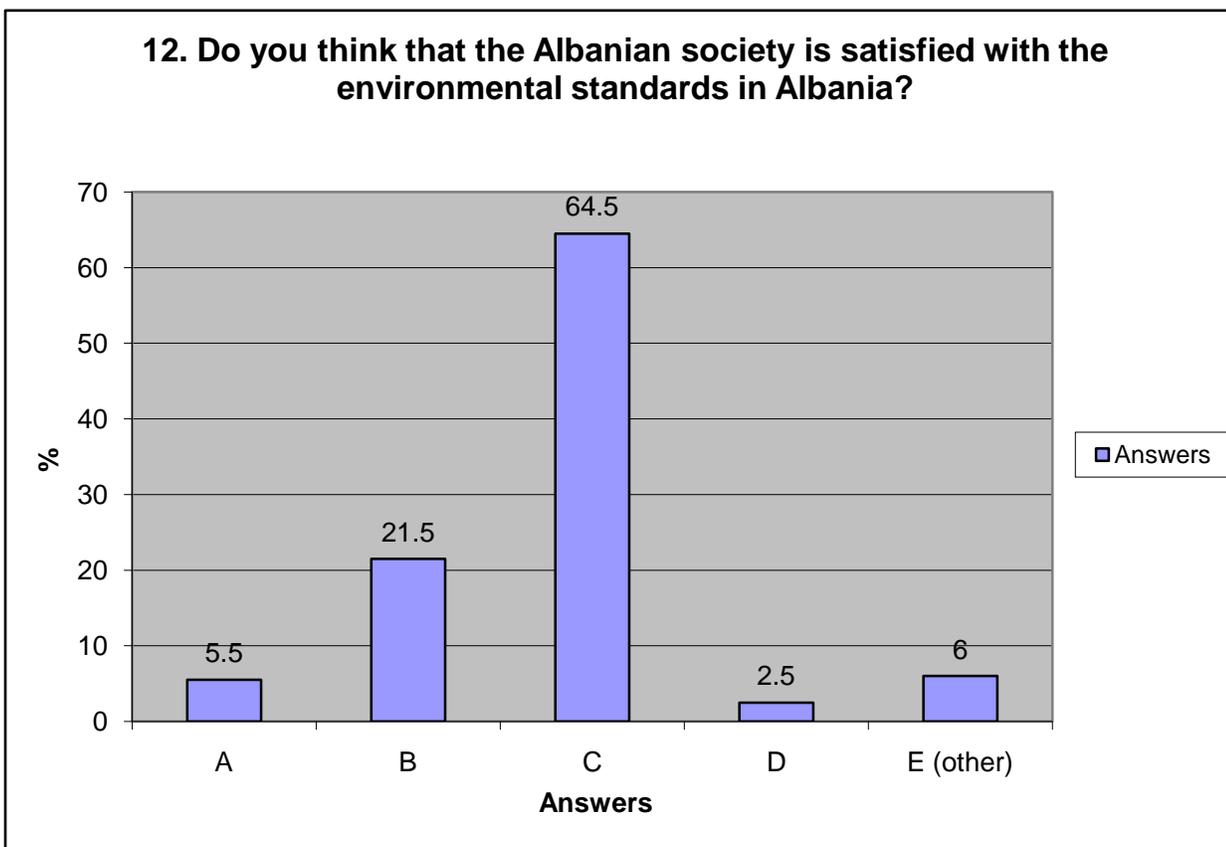
- A - Very important
- B - Somehow important
- C - Neither important nor unimportant - simply necessary
- D - Not important at all



Measures and policies towards industrial and chemical pollution in the framework of the integration of Albania in the EU are perceived as quite important for the respondents, even in the personal aspect.

**12) Do you think that the Albanian society is satisfied with the environmental standards in Albania?**

- A – very satisfied
- B – somehow satisfied
- C – not at all satisfied
- D – I do not know
- E –other (comments)

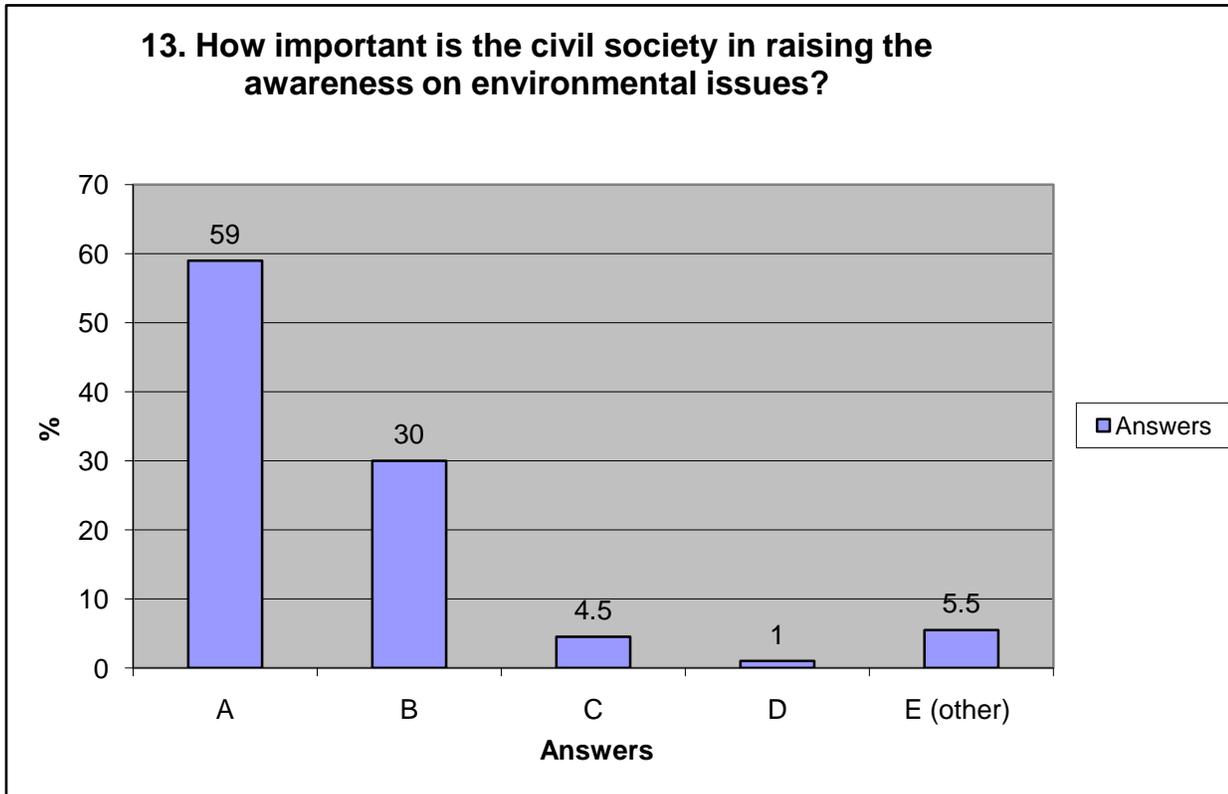


This question shows the frustration of the Albanian society with the environmental standards in Albania, where 64.5 percent of the respondents are not at all satisfied with the actual standards, only 21.5 percent are somehow satisfied with the actual standards, and only 5.5 percent of the respondents are very satisfied with the actual standards. 6 percent of the respondents that have commented express a high dissatisfaction with the actual environmental status in Albania.



**13) How important is the civil society in raising the awareness on environmental issues?**

- A - very important
- B - somehow important
- C - not important at all
- D - I do not know
- E - other (comment)



59 percent of the interviewees think that the civil society plays an important role in raising the awareness on environmental issues. 30 percent of them think that it plays somehow a role in raising the awareness of citizens on environmental issues, and only 4.5 percent think that it does not play at all a role in this issue. Comments show that respondents give an important role to the civil society in raising the awareness on environmental issues, but there were also comments which criticized the indifference or differentiation of a part of the civil society towards this issue.



## Comments

There were 17 comments out of 200 questionnaires completed. The analysis of the comments shows a high frustration and discontent towards the environmental status in Albania. What is striking, is that most of the comments present and criticize the EC Mission in Albania as a party in this problem, which does not exert the proper pressure on Albanian authorities to fulfill the EU environmental standards, and it is criticized as an international institution that is satisfied with the fulfillment of the political and economic criteria only, leaving aside the environmental ones. Other points among the comments, is the concern of the public for the destruction of green spaces and parks, and that civil society plays an important role in raising the awareness of the public. Some of the comments criticize the differentiation of the civil society towards the environmental cause, where some NGOs do more to raise the awareness, and some others not at all.

For detailed data on the results of the survey according to age and education, check **Annex 1**.

## Media Monitoring

We also conducted a two-month media monitoring process, where we observed five most major daily newspapers in the country. The five newspapers selected for analysis are the following independent dailies: Panorama, Shekulli, Shqip, Standard and Gazeta Shqiptare. In addition, we looked for evidence under three main headings: a. information on the article; b. news and c. analysis of the article.

In the information on the article section we listed the following: a. type of the news: article, opinion, coverage, essay, translation from foreign media; b. Location of the article (front page; page number); c. Total of the newspaper pages; d. Title of the article (bold letters, top of the page, large font etc).

Under the section news, we listed the following subsections: topic of the news (air, water, soil, noise pollution, waste, forest, integration and environment etc); b. issue discussed- national, international, regional; c. pictures (yes/no).

Under the section analyses of the article, we listed the following subsection: analyze of the article: language used, neutrality, tone, bias if there is any, especially analyze the article in details if the EU integration of Albania is discussed, is the article clear, which are the prevailing points, are all the parties reported in the article, is there any contradiction etc.

In this short reporting of the results of our survey we recognize the scope and place limitations that make us enable to report all of our findings, which we believe are a photograph of general mass media coverage of environmental issues in Albania. Nevertheless, we will try to briefly expose some of the most important findings such as the number of articles, news, coverage, opinions, commentaries or promotional/publicity by listing their frequency, type, prominence among other news, if the issue is local, regional, or international and what is the environmental topic most frequently discussed: air,



water, soil, noise pollution, waste, forest, integration and environment or something else?<sup>17</sup> We need also point out that the two months period started July 6th and ended September 6th, uninterrupted.

The general findings are the followings. In total we had a total number of **439** short and long articles, news, coverage, opinions, and commentaries or promotional/publicity in this two-month period in the five major newspapers. Panorama had a total number of 82; 35 in July, 40 in August and 7 in the first days of September. Shekulli had 81; 25 in July and 49 in August, plus another 7 in the first week of September. Shqip newspapers had 117 which is the highest number of such recorded articles in each of the papers, out of which 38 belonged to July, whereas August had the highest concentration with 74 pieces, leaving a mere 5 for the analyzed week of September. Gazeta Shqiptare had a total of 109 with 39 different journalistic pieces for July, 74 for August and another 8 for September. And finally, Standart which had the least number with 49 in total, out of which 18 were for July, 25 for August and 6 recorded in the first six days of September. See the number at table 1.1 and 1.2 for more details.

		Articles/news	Opinions/ Commentaries/ Analyses	Reportage	Coverage	Interview	Promotional	Others
Shekulli	N=25	16	3	1	4	1	0	0
Shqip	N=38	25	5	1	0	0	0	4 (trans)
GSH	N=39	30	3	0	1	1	1	1 T
Panorama	N=35	24	9	0	0	0	2	0
Standart	N=18	15	2	0	0	0	1	0
Total	N=155	N=110	N= 17	N=2	N=5	N=2	N=4	N=5

Table 1.1 July 6- August

		Articles/news	Opinions/ Commentaries/ Analyses	Reportage	Coverage	Interview	Promotional	Others
Shekulli	N=56	39	12	0	3	0	1	1 T
Shqip	N=76	62	10	1	0	0	1	1i; 1p/f
GSH	N=69	55	4	1	1	4	0	2 f/a; 1 an;

<sup>17</sup> Regarding this last point we need to stress that not long ago, in a period of time not covered by our two-month survey, Shekulli newspaper conducted a several months media alert on noise pollution, where the Institute for Environmental Policy (IEP) also gave its contribution in the form of an article.



								1T
Panorama	N= 46	39	4	0	1	1	1	
Standart	N= 31	28	1	0	0	0	0	2 an
Total	N= 278	N= 223	N= 31	N= 2	N= 5	N= 5	N= 3	N= 9

Table 1.2 August 6- September 6

From these numbers we can draw some quantitative and qualitative inferences. Quantitatively speaking, Shqip and Gazeta Shqiptare have the highest number of environment-related featuring news, articles, opinions, and commentaries and so on. Standard has the lowest, whereas Panorama and Shekulli, the two biggest dailies with circulation over 20.000 copies only in hardcopy fell somewhat in between.

Regarding the frequency of such articles we might stress that at several dates, the frequency of articles was higher than at other days, because of particular environmental news. One such example is 15 July, when Gazeta Shqiptare had 6 different news in a single edition, Panorama had 4 in the same day, or 21 August when Shqip had 7 articles and Gazeta Shqiptare had 5. The reason why is that at this particular days, something out of ordinary had happened, like the meeting of the Minister of Environment of Albania with Regional Environment Agencies or the water sewage plants issue, or the poisoned drinkable water, which became matters of daily concern. Another such example, but that lasted more than one day, was the action undertaken by the Ministry of Environment to cut the sewage water links in the Golem area, which caused a debate on the postponed but urgently needed action.

Another important point that needs to be analyzed is what type of environmental news had dominated during this period.

Starting from July 7<sup>th</sup>, when the news of the approval of 14 gas deposits and construction of several Hydro Power Plants and a change in the cement factory in Lezha became the primary issue to articles, such as that of 17<sup>th</sup> July which talks about the pollution that military are doing on the beach. Bad smell, the sand polluted, iron waste and so on. Or, for example starting in 8<sup>th</sup> of August and for several days, the issue of sea water polluted from sewage water in Vlora became a matter of concern not only in describing the matter in a journalistic fashion, but also in several commentaries that pointed out about the sensitivity of the matter in question. It happens a lot that environmental articles are given just a small space. It is not rare to find alarming article with a short text. It seems that many short articles are very similar between newspapers. They look like “copy paste” to each other.

Sometimes, editors are very strict to cut NGOs names out of the article. Opinions by professionals, analysts or mailed opinions by readers are found as the most real turmoil or concern for the environmental noises (e.g. Shekulli opinions for the last one). Even when the information is given inappropriate or insufficient, it is evident that a severe, protesting or critical tone is used. However, it is found that in general proper importance is given to the opinions which include large photos, colored photos or entire page occupation.



Full coverage for several international environmental issues is given in proper way e.g. Mexico bay oil pollution; fires in Russia etc. Newspaper investigations (and denounced) are found rare for the environmental issues but when found the importance for this issue seems to be high and full dedicated is given. Examples that can be given here are the pollution on the environment, water and the impact to the health from the oil tanks in Visoka of Fier city etc.

Publicity/ promotional articles such as that of August 14 which talks about the environmental action for aware and cleaning the beaches organized from Volunteers Corpus and AMC and Free Think Forum are not random. Actions are cited in details (what was their focus, organizational action, how and where etc). The ending of this article finishes up by promoting the donator AMC funding all of these actions. However, this article seems to be more a publicity for the organization and donor than a real action (without denying their past actions). More articles like that are outright publicity stunt for the donor, rather than sensible call for environmental action.

And lastly but not least important, is the issue of the important link between the integration process and the environmental news/ informing of the public. How is it reflected in Albanian press? We must say that generally speaking, the articles of such nature were **very few**, not to say **rare**. This has several reasons. The first and most important one is that media's first duty is reporting, which usually makes up for 90 percent of the articles/news. Second function is the education of public opinion, which is usually made by leaving a section for analyses/comments and opinions. The news cannot possibly reflect upon EU integration- environmental reforms, unless there are some data that reflect such links, like activity of Ministry of Environment to pass legislation that is compatible with *acquis communautaire* and similar activity. This leaves only the opinions and independent analyses to perform such tasks, but we found them generally missing in our short media monitoring.

## Workshop

The findings of the survey were also reinforced in the opinions and feedback we got in a workshop organized in Tirana November 8, 2010.

How to increase the attention of decision-makers for the environmental salience in the process of Albania's integration to EU? The feedback we received from this group can be summarized as follows:

1. Albanian legislators have co-opted EU environmental *acquis*, but have failed to take into consideration the Albanian context and the laws are often far from applicable.
2. The need for concentrated public relations from NGO in order to increase their visibility. They need to contract professional PR agencies and do marketing, in order to be able to achieve more success in the future.
3. Founding of a movement 'youth for a cleaner environment' to give a new impetus to the organization of social movement in the field of environment protection.
4. Lobbying for a greater coherence of actors and factors that work in the civil society sector on environmental awareness. Organizing joint conferences, seminars, workshops in conjunction with various media, civil society and academic actors that deal with environmental issues.
5. Organization of concrete activities that have direct impact to political decision-makers.
6. Need for depoliticizing of civil society actors, which sometimes is far from the reality.



7. To spur the creation of specific departments which deal with environment, within visual and printed media.
8. Focusing on causal relationship of health issues and environmental problems.

## Policy Options

How can Albania avoid the unwanted effects of low progress in the field of implementing EU environmental criteria, and avoid repeating the same way Bulgaria and Romania had? There are several ways which one can discuss and propose; we have tackled some of the most feasible and realistic ways:

*Continue with the actual pace of transposing and implementing the EU environmental acquis*

[1] While vertical legislation has been transposed, the horizontal legislation is weakly aligned with the *acquis*. Further efforts are needed to finalize the alignment, and if continued with the actual pace of transposing and the actual trend and pattern of implementation, Albania risks of not meeting the EU criteria, hence its application for membership in the EU might be rejected, even if in the near future Albania becomes a candidate country. The rejection from the European Commission of the application of Albania for a candidate country was made on political criteria, but once these are fulfilled, the environmental criteria might be the hardest one to fulfill and might halt the way of Albania into EU accession. And even if Albania passes the application for a candidate country, the deep environmental problems accumulated until that time, might become a serious obstacle for the membership process, with probably a delayed or dragging process of accession.

*Just try to rely on IPA funds in order to mitigate the environmental damage*

[2] This might be a short term solution, but experience has shown that funding alone, even when coming from various donors, does not solve the problem—it usually mitigates the problem in a specific project which might be implemented in a specific area of the country, but overall, the environmental standards of the country are not substantially changed, and not for a long term target. Depending only on IPA funds might create the illusion that everything is going smooth, and that there will always be outside funding for environmental problems that Albania has.

*Let the civil society deal with environment*

[3] Environment is a huge and costly area to deal with; it is the set where all the human activities are performed—society, economy, politics, they are all happening inside the environment and cannot exist without it. Since the past and actual damage done to the environment in Albania, and the future trends and policies do not seem favorable for sustainability and might cause long delays in the accession

process of Albania in the EU, the costs also seem huge if prevention is not applied as soon as possible. The civil society only cannot change the environmental status, especially if business (and dirty business) is entangled with politics, and also due to the huge costs which only the government can bear in order to change the situation.

*Wait for the EU to intervene in the environmental sector in Albania*

[4] This can be an inefficient strategy on which Albania cannot bet. Waiting for another international body to come and change the situation is not realistic and can prove fatal for the EU accession of Albania, and for the environmental sustainability—which can be create a dangerous situation for the economic sustainability as well.

*Complete reform and change of approach in dealing with environment*

[5] A complete revising of the strategic planning, coordination between all the central and local governmental institutions, funding for implementation needs to be secured, establishing a dedicated environment fund (crucial for the implementation of most of the laws), ensuring proper implementation and enforcement, and strong cooperation with the NGOs-civil society and the media in order to succeed, can be some of the aspects of this complete overhaul of the way of dealing with the environment in Albania. Development of a comprehensive environmental monitoring and information system across all sectors, strengthening and attracting competent administration, earmarked grants and closer cooperation with the local governments, increase of inspectorate capacities and legal power could be the administrative reforms. A complete overhaul of the way how Albanians (including Albanian politics and governments) look and deal with the environment, would be a long term and a secure way to achieve the EU environmental standards and have a secure implementation of the environmental *acquis*. This will not just pave the way for the accession of Albania in the EU, but it could also secure a sustainable future for the country and for its economy.



## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study, although limited, showed that Albania has a long way to go to fulfill the EU environmental *acquis* and catch up with the rest of the EU member countries. The actual pace of progress in this field, will not secure Albania a quick and successful membership in the EU. Romania and Bulgaria had a low starting baseline in the EU environmental standards, and they had huge obstacles to pass in order to join the EU. Although it became a member of the EU, Bulgaria showed the classical example of how hard it is to change the environmental situation and the mentality towards dealing with environment in a relatively short time. The consequences were that even after the accession, Bulgaria is still struggling to fulfill EU directives on environment. Albania on the other hand, has a much lower starting point than Bulgaria, and the situation of the environment in the last years has not been promising for a quick recovery, and sustainability. Taking in consideration the fact that the EU is looking for more stringent rules for the new applicant countries, it makes the position of Albania on its environmental status further more difficult.

The data from the survey showed that the public places a lot of importance to the environment, and it is frustrated with the environmental situation in Albania. There is a big gap between what the voters want, and what the Albanian politics offers to them according to the results of the survey. The other concerning point coming out from the results of the survey, is that part of the public shows signs of confusion and lack of information regarding the importance of the Albanian environmental standards being in line with the EU policy on this area. The public perceives that the media does not represent this issue and does not put the proper emphasis to the environment, perception that came out to be true, from the media monitoring of the printed press. Politics and the media seem to give to the public the opposite of what they want. And the politics and the media can be crucial in changing the attitude of the Albanians towards environment, and in this way, paving the way for a faster and less costly EU accession.

Albania has to make sustained efforts to align its legislation with the environmental *acquis* and to implement and enforce it effectively. Technical and human capacity and resources in the area of environment are limited, and funding for this area is the lowest compared to other areas of intervention from the government (the Ministry of Environment is the least funded ministry).

## Practical recommendations

Are there any practical recommendations stemming from the study? They can be summarized in following points:

- *Increase in the speed of legislation alignment with the environmental *acquis* and coordination between all authorities.* The speed of transposing horizontal legislation has been slow, and this has been recognized also by the European Commission Mission in Albania Progress Report. But there is lack of coordination between authorities and institutions, sometimes clashing on competencies, projects, and policies, or doing nothing to stop the pollution due to unclear responsibilities.



- *Implementation of the approved laws is needed.* Aligning the legislation to the environmental *acquis* will not secure a guaranteed accession to the EU. If laws are not implemented immediately after they are approved, they lose their value in the eyes of the public. The implementation of the laws should be accompanied with the respective financial means.
- *Building of capacities and more staff which works on environment is needed.* There is lack in the number and quality of the staff which works on environment in Albania. Besides increasing their number, they should have clear competencies and legal power to execute their decisions. An EPA type agency could fairly work for Albania, if it is provided with the proper legal and financial power.
- *More funds are needed.* The establishment of an environmental fund, would speed up and ease the process, and start the basis for a future cooperation between the state and the civil society in dealing with the environmental issues. Earmarked grants for local authorities, can bring in a lot of change, and stimulate innovation and competition in the field of environment.
- *Cooperation between the government and the NGOs plus the media is needed.* NGOs can be decisive in setting the policies for a country. They have available skills and staff that the government might lack, and can offer valuable expertise and help to the government in getting more of the pre-accession funds—so far this cooperation has been missing due to lack of will by the government(s). Media is crucial in changing the attitude of the public towards the environment. Either an initiative from the media, or from the government in cooperation with the media, can bring in a big change this field.
- *Favorable policies for recycling and renewable energy businesses.* Lifting of tariffs or other administrative facilities, can stimulate and grow the “green businesses”, setting the basis for a further cooperation government-business in dealing with the environmental issues, thus lifting a great financial burden from the government in implementing some of the directives and policies.



## Annex 1

### Results from the survey according to age and education levels

Figures are turned into percentages:

Age group	16 -30	31 - 45	46 - 60	61 - 80	Education	Higher	High	elementary
<b>Question 1</b>					<b>Question 1</b>			
A	28.5	18	15.5	9.5	A	40.5	26.5	4.5
B	3.5	5.5	3	3.5	B	8.5	7	0
C	6	2	2.5	1	C	5	5.5	1
D	1.5	0	0	0	D	1.5	0	0
A	32.5	20.5	18.5	11	A	45	30.5	5
B	2	3	1.5	0.5	B	4	4.5	0
C	4	2	1	2.5	C	5.5	4	0.5
D	1	0	0	0	D	1	0	0
<b>Question 2</b>					<b>Question 2</b>			
A	28	18	15.5	8.5	A	39	25	4
B	4.5	4.5	4	1.5	B	7	7.5	0.5
C	5.5	3	1	4	C	7.5	6	1
D	1.5	0	0.5	0	D	2	0.5	0
A	31.5	22	20	11.5	A	48	32	4.5
B	2.5	2.5	0.5	0.5	B	3.5	2.5	0
C	5.5	0.5	0.5	1.5	C	4	3.5	1
D	0	0.5	0	0.5	D	0	1	0
<b>Question 3</b>					<b>Question 3</b>			
A	27	14.5	14.5	8	A	36	23	5
B	6.5	6	2.5	2.5	B	8.5	8.5	0.5
C	5	4	3	3	C	8.5	6.5	0
D	1	1	1	0.5	D	2.5	1	0
A	27	17.5	18	8.5	A	41	26.5	4
B	5	4	2	2	B	7	7	0
C	7	3.5	1	2.5	C	7.5	4	1.5
D	0.5	0.5	0	1	D	0	1.5	0
<b>Question 4</b>					<b>Question 4</b>			
A	30	16	14.5	6.5	A	38.5	23	5
B	4	5.5	4	4	B	8.5	9.5	0.5



C	4.5	3	2	3.5	C	7	6	0	
D	1	1	0.5	0	D	1.5	0.5	0	
A	27	19.5	16.5	9	A	43	25.5	4	
B	7	3	3.5	2	B	7.5	8	0	
C	5	2.5	0.5	2.5	C	4.5	4.5	1.5	
D	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	D	0.5	1	0	
<b>Question 5</b>					<b>Question 5</b>				
A	25.5	17.5	13.5	8.5	A	36.5	22	5	
B	4.5	2	3	2	B	7.5	4.5	0.5	
C	8.5	4.5	2.5	3	C	8.5	10.5	0	
D	1	1.5	2	0.5	D	3	2	0	
A	29.5	18.5	18	9.5	A	45.5	25	4	
B	4	3	1.5	1	B	2.5	8	0	
C	5	3	1	3	C	6	5	1.5	
D	1	1	0.5	0.5	D	1.5	1	0	
<b>Question 6</b>					<b>Question 6</b>				
A	18.5	13	11.5	6.5	A	27.5	18.5	4	
B	9.5	4	5.5	3.5	B	15	7	1	
C	9	6.5	2	3.5	C	9.5	10.5	0.5	
D	2.5	2	2	0.5	D	3.5	3	0	
A	21.5	15	16.5	9	A	35	22	4.5	
B	7.5	3.5	1.5	3	B	8	8	0.5	
C	9.5	7	3	2	C	11.5	9	0.5	
D	1	0	0	0	D	1	0	0	
<b>Question 7</b>					<b>Question 7</b>				
A	30	17.5	15	8	A	40	26.5	4.5	
B	4.5	6.5	3.5	2.5	B	9	8	0.5	
C	4.5	1.5	2	3	C	5.5	4	0.5	
D	0.5	0	0.5	0.5	D	1	0.5	0	
A	29.5	21.5	18.5	11	A	45.5	29	5	
B	6	1.5	1.5	1	B	5	5.5	0	
C	4	2	0.5	1.5	C	4	4	0.5	
D	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	D	1	0.5	0	
<b>Question 8</b>					<b>Question 8</b>				
i					i				
A	5	4	2	2.5	A	7.5	4	1.5	
B	20.5	15.5	10.5	8	B	30	21.5	2.5	



C	13	5.5	6.5	2.5	C	15	12	1.5
D	1	0.5	2	1	D	3	1.5	0
ii					ii			
A	5	3.5	2.5	4.5	A	8	4.5	1.5
B	20.5	15.5	12.5	5.5	B	30	22.5	3
C	11	6	5.5	4	C	15	10.5	1
D	3	0.5	0.5	0	D	2.5	1.5	0
iii					iii			
A	3	3.5	2	4	A	6	5	1.5
B	17.5	15	9	4.5	B	22.5	20.5	2
C	14	6	8	4.5	C	23	9.5	2
D	5	1	2	1	D	4	4	0
iv					iv			
A	3	3	1	2.5	A	5.5	2.5	1.5
B	14.5	9.5	8.5	4	B	19	14	3
C	14	10	8	7	C	22.5	15	1
D	8	3	3.5	0.5	D	8.5	7.5	0
v					v			
A	4	4.5	1	2	A	6	3	1.5
B	18.5	9	10.5	8	B	22.5	18	3.5
C	13	10	6	3.5	C	20.5	14.5	0.5
D	4	2	3.5	0.5	D	6.5	3.5	0
vi					vi			
A	8	6.5	1	2.5	A	9	6	1.5
B	18	8.5	11.5	7.5	B	23.5	20.5	3
C	10	7	5.5	3.5	C	17.5	8	1
D	3.5	3.5	3	0.5	D	5.5	4.5	0
vii					vii			
A	3.5	2	1.5	3	A	5.5	4	1.5
B	19	13.5	11	6	B	29.5	18	3
C	15	7	6	3.5	C	16.5	12	1
D	2	3	2.5	1.5	D	4	5	0
<b>Question 9</b>					<b>Question 9</b>			
A	17.5	8.5	10.5	6.5	A	22.5	14	5
B	13	8.5	6.5	3.5	B	17.5	14.5	0.5
C	7	5.5	2	2.5	C	11.5	5.5	0
D	2	3	2	1.5	D	4	5	0



A	34.5	24	20	12.5	A	51	35	5.5
B	2	1	1	1.5	B	3	2.5	0
C	1.5	0.5	0	0	C	1	1	0
D	1.5	0	0	0	D	0.5	0.5	0
<b>Question 10</b>					<b>Question 10</b>			
A	12.5	6.5	9.5	7	A	18.5	12.5	4
B	19.5	12.5	5	4.5	B	27.5	13	0
C	1.5	6.5	0.5	2	C	2.5	2	0.5
D	3	0	5	0.5	D	6.5	8	0.5
E comments	1.5		2	0.5	E comments	2.5	1.5	0.5
<b>Question 11</b>					<b>Question 11</b>			
A	26.5	14	14.5	6.5	A	35.5	22.5	4.5
B	4.5	5.5	4	3	B	7.5	8.5	1
C	6	6	1.5	4	C	10.5	6.5	0
D	2.5	0	1	0.5	D	2	1.5	0
A	30	13.5	17.5	10.5	A	40	26.5	5
B	7	7.5	2	1.5	B	10	8.5	0.5
C	2.5	4.5	1	2	C	5.5	3.5	0
D	0	0	0.5	0	D	0	0.5	0
<b>Question 12</b>					<b>Question 12</b>			
A	2	1.5	0.5	1	A	2	2.5	1
B	9	4.5	6.5	2	B	13.5	7	1
C	25.5	17	12.5	9	C	35	27.5	2
D	1.5	0.5	0	1.5	D	1	1	0.5
E	2.5	0.5	2.5	0	E	4	1.5	0.5
<b>Question 13</b>					<b>Question 13</b>			
A	27.5	14.5	14	5.5	A	32.5	22	4.5
B	10	8	5	5	B	18	11.5	0.5
C	2	1.5	1	0.5	C	2	2	0.5
D	0	1	0	0.5	D	0	1	0
E	1	1	2	0	E	3.5	1	1



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Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals  
Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution  
Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context  
Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal  
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Convention (CITES)  
Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters  
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