

Corruption, Governance and the Challenges of the Rule of Law: Law Enforcement and Corruption: An Assessment of the Functioning of the Albanian State Police

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Abstract

Corruption remains one of the most severe and persistent afflictions in Albania, having continued unabated for more than three decades since the country embarked upon its initial democratic transformations. The first democratic governments that emerged following the collapse of the communist regime—which had isolated Albania from the rest of the world for over forty-five years—proved largely incapable of preventing or containing this destabilizing phenomenon. Its spread, akin to a virulent pathogen of the highest severity, within national security institutions—most notably the State Police—led not only to nationwide instability in the security environment but, during particularly dark periods, brought these institutions to the brink of total collapse under the pressure of newly formed criminal gangs and an increasingly rampant local organized crime. The steps and policies undertaken by successive governments in pursuit of Albania’s integration into the broader European family could not exclude the State Police, which faced an urgent need not only for restructuring and improved operational effectiveness, but also for a profound institutional reform aimed at purging its ranks of compromised and corrupt elements. The formulation and implementation of such policies constituted a major

challenge not only for governments and the State Police as a frontline institution, but also for the very principle of the rule of law and its enforcement in the Republic of Albania, in the interest of citizens and justice alike. Despite these ambitious reform initiatives, political interference within the structures of the State Police remains a deeply troubling phenomenon which, beyond its broader negative implications, directly undermines the effectiveness of law enforcement and the professionalism of the police force. The methodology used in this paper is based on the interpretation of the theoretical framework and the analysis of different authors' approaches and perspectives, as well as various studies.

Key words: *state police, corruption, governance, rule of law.*

The emergence and evolution of structured criminal groups in Albania.

Discussing organized crime in Albania is a highly sensitive issue and one that carries considerable weight in public opinion. The very term “*organized crime*” is a relatively recent concept within the framework of Albania’s security institutions. Following the victory over Nazi-Fascist forces in 1945, Albania saw the establishment of a communist regime modeled on the Soviet–Eastern bloc system. This same institutional approach was reflected in the creation of national security bodies, beginning with the Armed Forces (the People’s Army), the People’s Police, and the intelligence and surveillance structures of the State Security (*Sigurimi i Shtetit*). For forty-five consecutive years, these institutions—operating under the strict guidance of the Political Bureau and the Party of Labour of Albania—controlled, regulated, and directed virtually all aspects of life in Albania and among its citizens. During this period, criminal activity in the country remained at a relatively low level and was predominantly of an ordinary or petty nature. The death penalty, which was not uncommon in court rulings, served as an additional and particularly severe mechanism for reinforcing public order and security.

With the advent of 1991 and the democratic developments that unfolded in the country—marking the transition from a Marxist–Leninist–Stalinist “dictatorship of the proletariat” to Western liberal democracy—Albania’s security institutions likewise underwent nearly fundamental transformations and were confronted with profound challenges. The State Security (*Sigurimi i Shtetit*) was dismantled, and in its place the National Intelligence Service was established, an institution that no longer possessed the extensive attributes and powers of its predecessor. Instead, it was primarily oriented toward the collection and analysis of intelligence, both domestically and internationally, with the aim of safeguarding the integrity and security of the Republic of Albania. The Armed Forces of Albania, across

all their sectors, also experienced radical change, as the military was no longer the sole focal point of governmental authority. Last, but no less importantly, the People's Police—now reconstituted as the State Police—was subjected to reform and transformation; however, it faced exceptionally severe challenges with a direct impact on the lives and security of citizens. On a daily basis, and in virtually every region of Albania, the proliferation of individuals and groups posing considerable and growing risks to society became increasingly evident. The replacement of the totalitarian communist order with the newly formed structures of the State Police quickly revealed significant deficiencies and institutional gaps, rendering them incapable of effectively addressing the emerging security challenges. A lack of experience, combined with outdated methods, almost entirely neutralized the State Police in the face of armed individuals and criminal gangs that were increasingly asserting territorial control. Another important factor in the fight against armed groups and gangs was the political character they often assumed. This latter factor exerted a direct—and in many cases overt—influence on the investigations conducted by the State Police, which were subsequently compromised, failing to produce the expected results. As noted, *“the political dimension constitutes a significant aspect of the activities of these gangs and of the rivalries among them. The relationships or cooperation between political actors and the leaders of these gangs have never been subject to judicial scrutiny, remaining instead at the level of speculation by various actors or accusations voiced by convicted members or leaders of armed gangs.”*¹

In Albania's major cities—such as Tiranë, Durrës, Elbasan, Lushnje, Vlorë, and to a certain extent Korça—the first armed gangs began to emerge, exhibiting the internal organization of structured criminal groups. Whereas in early 1992 their composition consisted primarily of so-called “neighborhood youths” (Çunat e lagjjes) or very narrow social circles that enjoyed local reputation and authority in specific areas; over the years the structure of these groups expanded significantly. It soon became evident to gang leaders and local “gangsters” that the absence or weakness of law-enforcement structures afforded them not only the opportunity to control specific territories, but also to extend their criminal activities far beyond territorial dominance. The earliest representatives of organized crime in Albania included figures such as Aldo Bare and his rival Artur Daja in Lushnje; Tan Kateshi, Arjan Toska, and Eduart Peqini, also known as “Mandela,” in Elbasan; Zani Çaushti and Gazmend Braka in Vlorë; Nehat Kulla in Tirana; Altin Dardha in Berat; among others. For an extended period, these individuals not only terrorized the country through their brutal crimes, but also engaged in violent conflicts with one another—not only over territorial control, but also over dominance of trafficking routes involving narcotics, prostitution, kidnappings, extortion, and related illicit activities.

The turbulent year of 1997 officially marked the triumph of armed groups and gangs with criminal elements over state law-enforcement structures, as they assumed control of territory in the country's most important cities for several consecutive months. Albania had by then descended into a state of total anarchy. The collapse of the prison system and the looting of military depots containing weapons and ammunition further exacerbated the situation, plunging the country into complete chaos. During this period of turmoil, the much-discussed figures Aldo Bare and Artur Daja emerged prominently on the scene—two well-known names in the city of Lushnjë. Aldo Bare, born Fredi Idajet Shkurti, had previously served for a considerable period as an officer within the police structures, a position he left in 1992. That same year, he fled to Greece after being suspected of involvement in a homicide—an allegation that was never proven. With the onset of the unrest of March 1997, Aldo Bare returned to Lushnjë, where he soon entered into open conflict with his rival, Artur Daja. Drawing on his extensive experience within police structures, Aldo Bare began to organize his own criminal group. His residence, located adjacent to the police commissariat in the city of Lushnjë, would soon become known colloquially as “Police Commissariat No. 2.” Artur Daja, on the other hand, *“represented the prototype of a small-time gangster seeking to make a name for himself in the city of Lushnjë. Police reports indicate that conflicts between the two ‘bosses’ had arisen early, prior to the events of 1997, likely over disrupted deals in trafficking matters.”* It quickly became clear in Lushnjë that coexistence between these two individuals was entirely impossible. Before long, both parties began eliminating, through open assassinations in the city center, the close familial, social, and cooperative networks of one another. All of these actions had a singular objective: the elimination of the rival. Throughout this dark period, the State Police and all other law-enforcement structures responsible for maintaining public order and security were virtually nonexistent—incapable of taking effective action and completely paralyzed by the daily occurrences of macabre violence in the city.

In an authentic document prepared by the Lushnje city police commissariat in 1997, the officer who authored the report, in addition to presenting an extremely alarming situation with a very high risk to the lives of citizens, refused to be identified, providing only general details at the end of the document out of fear that the information might leak and fall into the hands of the groups that had by then effectively held the country hostage. Among other observations, the unidentified officer wrote:

“In the city of Lushnje, the state of criminal activity is extremely severe. Since March 1997, crime has not only persisted but has escalated significantly and become organized. The residents of this city are profoundly terrorized by the macabre scenes they witness and hear about. The Police are inferior to the criminals and lack the initiative to defeat them. At no point does a citizen of Lushnje feel safe or trust the

Police. Full authority now rests with the criminal organizations. The challenge they pose to the state is overt: they commit open murders, conduct demonstrations with weapons and explosives, set houses on fire, detonate explosives inside them, shoot at vehicles with anti-tank weapons, behead people and display the bodies publicly in the city, and exert pressure on justice officials and the Police. Through these actions, all judicial bodies have been subordinated to criminal power. No material against them dares to be written, and no individual, institution, or organization deals with them. In other words, they have subordinated everything and become the rulers. Police officers are extremely terrorized and do not dare to speak, even with their closest associates. All of this terror and criminal activity finds its origin in the conflict between the two rival groups: Fredi Idajet Shkurti and Artur Ahmet Daja.”³

Following this escalating state of chaos and terror, the two rivals eventually attempted to eliminate each other. After numerous assassination attempts and the targeting of trusted associates on both sides, the decisive confrontation arrived. The first to act, having secured reliable intelligence, was Artur Daja, who attempted to eliminate Aldo Bare and his most trusted men through a surprise attack using anti-tank weaponry. The assassination failed, leaving Bare unharmed and only two individuals wounded. This moment would ultimately mark the downfall of Artur Daja. On the other side, Aldo Bare succeeded in recruiting one of his rival’s most trusted associates, through whom he managed to eliminate Artur Daja in a brutally violent manner. The horrifying scenes following Daja’s killing remain vivid in the memory of Lushnjë’s citizens even today. *“Artur Daja would be killed under mysterious circumstances, his head severed and carried on a tray to their leader. Subsequently, his head was paraded through every corner of the city of Lushnjë, bringing an end to the gangland rivalry. The macabre scene shocked the city’s residents and ultimately imposed what crime always seeks: silence. One witness would recount much later: ‘I turned around and went outside. Some local boys were holding a human head in their hands. I crossed the street and stopped in front of the city fountain to watch what was happening. I saw these boys throw the head onto the boulevard and start kicking it back and forth, just as children play football with small goals. ... On 21 October 1998, in the place known as “Tre Urat e Tërbufit,” the body of Artur Daja was found—headless and dismembered with explosives.”⁴*

Following his triumph over his sworn rival, Bare now exercised full control over the city of Lushnje and all suspicious or illicit activities within it. Every move was directed and sanctioned by him. Yet, Bare did not stop there. With the reestablishment of state law-enforcement and security structures, he and his associates soon perceived the threat posed by justice. Bare and his group quickly began threatening and executing, through mafia-style assassinations, State Police officers and officials who obstructed their activities. It was not until 6 January 2006 that Bare was arrested in Bulgaria and subsequently extradited to Albania to face final judgment, receiving a life sentence. His arrest marked the end of one

of the most dangerous structured criminal groups in Albania. Indeed, it must be noted that this group “*was one of the criminal organizations that directly challenged the state.*”⁵ A careful examination of all the actions undertaken by the Lushnje gang against state authorities, particularly in the targeting of State Police officers, reveals a striking resemblance to Italy in the 1980s, when mafia clans led by Toto Riina had effectively held entire regions of the country hostage. The organizational methods employed in the assassinations of State Police officers—who lost their lives in the line of duty because they obstructed local organized crime figures—bear a direct resemblance to the macabre strategies used to eliminate Italian police officers. These include, among others, Boris Giuliano (Chief of Police in Palermo, executed in Palermo on 21 July 1979), Emanuele Basile (Carabinieri Captain, executed on 4 May 1980), Calogero Zucchetto (anti-mafia investigator, executed on 6 August 1985), Giuseppe Montana (anti-mafia investigator, executed on 28 July 1985), and Antonino Cassarà (senior police officer, executed on 6 August 1985).

From all the actions undertaken by this group, the same objectives and goals are evident as those pursued by Italian mafia organizations, which sought to eliminate state authority through killings and violence in order to assert their own dominance over the territory. Bare and his group, it seems, succeeded in dominating the city of Lushnje—and beyond—for a relatively long period, sometimes through violence, sometimes through fear, and at times through illegal influence within central government structures. With complete success, the Lushnje gang and its members established what, in Italian mafia terminology, is called *omertà*, or the code of silence. This code became fully entrenched in the Albanian context, as no one dared speak about the macabre events and actions orchestrated and directed by the Lushnje gang. No citizen was willing to cooperate or provide information that could aid security structures in investigating these criminal organizations. Depositions at local police stations were extremely weak and often lacked actionable data. Unfortunately, the culture of cooperation with law enforcement and security institutions remains at very low levels even today, as public trust in these institutions has yet to be fully restored.

Aldo Bare and his Lushnje gang were not the only criminal groups operating within Albania. Equally macabre activities were carried out by parallel groups in other cities across the country. Tan Kateshi, for a relatively long period, held the city of Elbasan hostage, showing no fear of law enforcement and security forces, which were, for the most part, incapable of neutralizing the chief gangster and, at times, were reportedly paid off by him. A similar scenario unfolded in Vlora, where Zani Çausi—a figure previously arrested by Greek authorities for various criminal offenses—mysteriously escaped from a high-security prison in Greece while serving his sentence, arriving in Vlora precisely at the onset of the 1997 unrest. His group, known as the “Çole Gang,” terrorized the city of Vlora and

its surrounding areas. In response, central government authorities, anticipating a rapidly deteriorating situation, deployed high-ranking State Police officials to Vlora, leading a force of 1,000 personnel to restore order and stability. In this highly charged environment, amid an internally destabilizing political situation, the security forces sent from Tirana proved ineffective in reestablishing law and order. Naturally, this situation was exploited by all criminal actors operating in Vlora to advance their illegal interests, establishing dominance over areas of influence, controlling international trafficking routes for narcotics, prostitution, arms, and human trafficking from Albania to Italy, and further consolidating their criminal hegemony. As expected, the situation quickly spiraled completely out of control, leaving the city of Vlora entirely beyond state authority for several months, with armed gangs and groups enforcing their own law without interference or constraint from anyone.

In this way, structured criminal groups flourished throughout Albania, some more active than others, becoming a highly dangerous challenge not only for national security institutions but also for Albanian society as a whole. The chaotic period from 1992 to 2000, which shook the Albanian state to its foundations, demonstrated that individuals with political or state power often collaborated with criminal groups for mutual profit. *“Ministers of the Interior have been particularly accused of supporting armed gangs and specific criminal organizations. Such support is believed to have been extended to criminal groups in Berat until 1997, an armed gang in Elbasan and Tropojë, criminal groups in Tirana and Durrës, as well as members of criminal organizations in Shijak ... Political parties in Albania have also received funds from individuals convicted of illegal activities abroad.”*²⁶

State Police – Pioneer in the Fight Against Corruption and Organized Crime, or Complicit in Their Schemes?!

The State Police in Albania has undergone multiple phases of reform and restructuring in order to confront, effectively and competently, the challenges posed by domestic organized crime, transnational organized crime, corruption, economic crime, the trafficking of narcotics and hard drugs, arms and remote-detonation explosives, human trafficking, and other criminal activities. According to Article 4 of the Law on the State Police, the mission of the State Police is clearly defined as *the “protection of public order and safety, the prevention and combat of crime, the guarantee of law enforcement, the protection of life and property, and the respect for human rights and freedoms, in accordance with the Constitution, international acts ratified by the Republic of Albania, and the applicable legislation, as well as the provision of assistance and services to the public.”*²⁷

The former British Home Secretary and founder of the London Metropolitan Police, Robert Peel, famously stated that the Police are the public, and the public are the Police; the officers are merely members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community life and welfare. But does this definition still accurately reflect the role and function of the State Police in Albania today?

The dark events of the disastrous year 1997, in which a combination of external and internal actors dealt a fatal blow to the Albanian state, spared none of its institutions, including the State Police, which emerged not only destroyed but also degraded. The rebuilding of police structures after regaining control over the destabilized situation posed a distinct challenge, not only for the officials in charge but also for the political leadership of the time. The lack of basic police education, politically motivated appointments dictated by influential figures, and the arbitrary distribution of ranks and positions left the State Police in a condition both miserable and powerless, unable to confront professionally the challenges of the era that were essential for ensuring the rule of law.

The employment of individuals in the ranks of the State Police without any established criteria or thorough verification has been, and continues to be, an open wound that visibly marks its personnel. The administration of superficial tests for applicants wishing to join the State Police functions as an ineffective and fundamentally failed mechanism, as it does not provide a comprehensive assessment of the individual's personality, social and familial connections—which may or may not involve prior criminal records—or their basic cultural and educational background. By failing to conduct these verifications systematically and responsibly, and instead treating them as routine formalities, many unsuitable individuals have been able to enter the institution and subsequently ascend its career ladder. The inclusion of personnel with questionable backgrounds and connections has often paved the way for various forms of corruption, interference in investigations, and even the compromise of major operations. *“In an environment characterized by widespread corruption, the Police have been among the institutions most exposed to and affected by corrupt practices. Despite ongoing efforts to address this issue, police corruption in Albania has not shown any significant decline. ... Strategic frameworks and anti-corruption measures have only been partially implemented, and their enforceability has encountered obstacles such as insufficient resources and capacities, a deeply entrenched culture of tolerance toward corruption, low public trust, and the politicization of anti-corruption efforts. Although the number of police officers investigated and convicted for corruption has increased over the past two years, the vast majority are from lower and mid-level ranks, while public perception of corruption at higher levels of the Police continues to grow. Bribery remains the most prevalent form of corruption and has remained almost unchanged compared to two years ago, while other forms of corruption have*

*shown an upward trend. The types of corruption that have increased most significantly include collusion with criminal organizations, involvement in trafficking, evidence manipulation, and corrupt procurement practices.*⁸

The former Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Albania, Fatmir Xhafaj, during his tenure as head of the country's highest security institution, stated that “*numerous data indicate that within the ranks of the police there are officers who are criminally involved or corrupt, as well as those who are incompetent.*”⁹ Faced with this situation, political authorities decided to implement the *Vetting* process within the State Police as a method for conducting a comprehensive evaluation. Initially, this process would be applied to senior/officer-level personnel to assess their professional conduct, connections with criminal elements, personal and family income, and moral standing. The Transitional Re-evaluation Process (*Vetting*) within the State Police, provided for under Law No. 12/2018, “On the Transitional Re-evaluation of Employees of the State Police, the Republic Guard, and SHÇBA,” was conceived as a tool to enhance institutional integrity and restore public trust in law enforcement agencies.

Despite the extensive publicity surrounding this much-needed process aimed at purging the State Police of criminally involved or corrupt elements, it became evident that its results were negligible and fell far short of expectations. The process highlighted the lack of reliable documentation and deficiencies in the internal control system, which immediately called for further institutional reforms. From the outset of this process until the end of 2024, its implementation has been observed to be slow and selective, as only a small portion of State Police leadership has been evaluated, while the remainder of the command and managerial chain has remained outside the scope of this process.

The *Vetting* process within the ranks of the State Police has been characterized by a marked lack of transparency and public reporting, as the External Evaluation Commission has published very limited data on the concrete results of the re-evaluation. This has hindered the development of an objective, scientifically grounded analysis of its effectiveness. Furthermore, the real impact on the fight against corruption has been limited, as even after several years of implementation, cases of abuse of power and connections with criminal elements among State Police personnel continue to be observed, openly demonstrating the absence of a sustained institutional impact. Under these conditions, it is evident that the *Vetting* process has not directly influenced the reform of police culture, failing entirely to consolidate a stable standard of professionalism, institutional integrity, and ethical conduct in accordance with the principles of the rule of law and the expectations of the justice reform.

Despite the sporadic cases highlighted by the *Vetting* process, which were addressed through attempts to hold individuals legally accountable, the process can essentially be considered an important institutional experiment that produced

mixed results. While it succeeded in identifying instances of corruption and unlawful influence, it did not establish a sustainable culture of integrity. Despite some partial and temporary successes, it is increasingly evident that the long-term effects of the process depend on the establishment of robust internal control mechanisms and the de politicization of the structures and ranks of the State Police.

In April 2025, the General Directorate of the State Police approved the “State Police Integration Plan and Action Plan 2025–2028,” which identified six areas “most exposed to the risk of corruption and integrity violations,” namely: *corruption within criminal investigation units; bureaucratic corruption in human resources; low-level or so-called “street” corruption; bureaucratic corruption in management; bureaucratic corruption in public procurement; and the “code of silence” alongside the law on “whistle-blowers and data protection.”*¹⁰ The manner in which these areas—deemed the highest-risk for State Police personnel—are monitored, and the measures taken against those responsible, will demonstrate whether this law-enforcement and public-order institution is moving toward genuine improvement or will remain at its current levels of corruption and inefficiency.

Challenges of the Rule of Law for the Albanian State Police

The rule of law is considered one of the fundamental principles of a democratic state and an essential condition for the effective functioning of public institutions. Within this framework, the police represent the primary link in law enforcement and in ensuring public order and safety. Their role is particularly critical in transitional societies, such as Albania, where the establishment of stable institutions and public trust remains an ongoing challenge. “*The Albanian State Police has been the subject of continuous reforms, particularly within the framework of the European integration process, but the practical implementation of the principles of the rule of law continues to face structural, institutional, and cultural difficulties.*”¹¹

Respect for human rights is an essential component of the rule of law and a key criterion for evaluating police performance. “*Reports from international organizations have documented cases of disproportionate use of force, undignified treatment of detainees, and procedural violations during arrests.*”¹² Such practices not only undermine individual rights but also compromise criminal justice processes. Continuous training of police personnel in the field of human rights and the strengthening of oversight mechanisms are crucial for preventing violations. Independent supervisory institutions play an important role in enhancing accountability and transparency in police activities.

The legal framework governing the activities of the Albanian State Police is built upon constitutional principles, international standards, and obligations

arising from the European integration process. The Constitution of the Republic of Albania enshrines the principle of the rule of law and guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms, positioning the police as an institution tasked with protecting public order and serving the interests of citizens. Within this context, the Law on the State Police clearly defines the competencies, responsibilities, and limits of police authority, aiming to strike a balance between the need for security and the respect for individual freedoms. However, academic literature and international reports emphasize a significant gap between the normative framework and its practical implementation. As noted by the European Commission, *“the adoption of legislation harmonized with European standards does not automatically ensure effective implementation in practice.”*¹³ This assessment is particularly relevant for the State Police, where selective or incomplete enforcement of the law can have serious consequences for the rule of law and public trust.

One of the main challenges concerns the interpretation and application of legal norms by police structures in the field. In many cases, the lack of continuous legal and professional training leads to misunderstandings regarding police authority, particularly in situations involving detention, arrest, and the use of force. According to UNODC, *“formal knowledge of the law by police personnel is not sufficient; it must be accompanied by practical skills to apply it in a proportionate and lawful manner.”*¹⁴ In the Albanian context, this gap between legal norms and their implementation is also evident in the inter-institutional relationship between the police, the prosecution, and the judiciary. Legal procedures require close cooperation and continuous coordination, but analytical reports indicate that the absence of standardized practices and institutional communication often results in failed investigations or compromised procedural evidence. This situation undermines not only police effectiveness but also the credibility of the justice system as a whole.

Another problematic aspect of the practical implementation of the legal framework relates to mechanisms of control and accountability. The law provides for internal control structures and oversight of police activities, but their effectiveness depends on functional independence and the actual resources available. According to the European Code of Police Ethics, *“police oversight must be real, independent, and capable of producing concrete consequences in cases of violations.”*¹⁵ If these mechanisms operate merely as formalities, the legal framework loses its real force. Furthermore, the implementation of the legal framework is significantly influenced by the organizational culture within the State Police. Although the law promotes professionalism, political neutrality, and respect for human rights, entrenched practices and internal hierarchical pressures can create deviations from legal norms. As noted by the OECD, *“effective laws require institutions that not only enforce them but also believe in the values they represent.”*¹⁶

Public trust in the State Police is a key indicator of the rule of law. In the absence of such trust, citizens hesitate to cooperate with the police, weakening the prevention and investigation of criminal offenses. In Albania, perceptions of corruption, politicization, and lack of transparency have negatively affected the relationship between the police and the community. Community policing models represent a contemporary approach to strengthening this relationship. Active citizen participation in identifying security issues and building ongoing dialogue contributes to increasing trust and improving the rule of law. The relationship between the State Police and the community constitutes one of the most important elements for the rule of law and the democratic functioning of security institutions. Public trust in the police is not merely a perceptual indicator but a functional prerequisite for effective police activity, crime prevention, and the maintenance of public order. Academic literature emphasizes that, in a democratic state, the police cannot exercise authority solely on the basis of legal force; they must also rely on the social legitimacy derived from citizens' trust.

In the Albanian context, the relationship between the police and the community has been shaped by historical, institutional, and cultural factors. The legacy of the authoritarian period has fostered a perception of the police as an instrument of control rather than a public service—a perception that continues to influence how citizens view and experience interactions with police structures. This reality makes the building of public trust a long and complex process, requiring profound changes not only in policies and laws but also in the organizational culture of the Police itself. Public trust in law enforcement institutions is directly linked to the principle of the rule of law. According to contemporary theories of democratic governance, citizens are more likely to respect the law and cooperate with authorities when they perceive those authorities as fair, impartial, and accountable. In this sense, trust is not a secondary element but a fundamental component of the legal order. As Tyler notes, *“the legitimacy of the police derives more from perceptions of procedural justice than from fear of punishment.”*¹⁷ This argument is particularly relevant for the Albanian State Police, where the exercise of authority is often perceived as arbitrary or influenced by non-legal factors. In the absence of trust, police interventions—even when legally justified—risk being perceived as repressive and unfair.

Community trust in the State Police is influenced by a range of factors, among which the most important are transparency, professionalism, equal treatment of citizens, and institutional accountability. International reports highlight that cases of abuse of power, corruption, and the lack of effective sanctions for disciplinary violations have a direct negative impact on public perception. According to Transparency International, *“corruption within law enforcement undermines citizen trust and weakens the foundations of the rule of law.”*¹⁸ In Albania, perceptions of police corruption—even when not always based on personal experience—create a climate of mistrust that hinders cooperation between citizens and the

police. Another key factor is the manner in which the police communicate and interact with the community. The individual behaviour of police officers in daily interactions with citizens plays a crucial role in either building or eroding trust. As noted by the OSCE, “*respectful and professional interaction at the local level forms the foundation upon which institutional trust is built.*”¹⁹

Community policing represents one of the most important contemporary approaches for improving relations between the police and citizens. This model aims to shift the police’s focus from reactive crime response to crime prevention and active collaboration with the community. In academic literature, community policing is defined as an organizational philosophy that promotes partnership, joint problem-solving, and shared responsibility for public safety. Skogan emphasizes that “*community policing is not an isolated program, but a fundamental change in the way the police conceive their role in society.*”²⁰ In Albania, although initiatives have been undertaken to implement this model, the primary challenge remains its institutionalization and integration into everyday police practice. Frequently, community policing is applied in a fragmented and formal manner, without sufficient resources or specialized training for police officers. This limits the model’s real impact and creates a gap between institutional discourse and practical reality.

A central dimension of public trust is linked to the concept of procedural justice. This concept emphasizes that citizens evaluate institutions not only based on outcomes but also on how they are treated during institutional processes. In the policing context, this entails equal treatment, active listening, clear explanations of actions, and respect for human dignity. According to Tyler and Huo, “*when citizens feel they are treated fairly and with respect, they are more likely to accept police authority even in situations that are unfavourable to them.*”²¹ In Albania, reports from human rights organizations indicate that procedural violations and undignified treatment during police stops and controls have contributed to a decline in public trust.

Institutional transparency and open communication with the public are essential elements for building trust. Providing accurate and timely information regarding police activities, achievements, and failures helps establish a more genuine relationship with the community. As noted by the European Commission, “*a lack of transparency fosters suspicion and speculation, undermining public trust.*”²² In Albania, institutional communication by the State Police has improved, but it remains primarily oriented toward promoting successes rather than ensuring accountability for failures or violations. Such an approach limits the positive impact of transparency and does not fully contribute to the development of long-term public trust.

Community trust in the police has a direct impact on the effectiveness of crime prevention and law enforcement. Without citizen cooperation, the police face significant challenges in obtaining information, evidence, and support for criminal investigations. The UNODC emphasizes that “*community cooperation is one of the*

most important sources of police intelligence.”²³ In contexts of mistrust, citizens often choose not to report crimes or avoid contact with the police, creating areas of informality and insecurity. This situation reinforces a negative cycle, where the lack of trust weakens police effectiveness, and poor police performance further fuels public distrust.

The relationship with the community and public trust represents one of the most complex challenges for the Albanian State Police within the framework of the rule of law. Building trust cannot be achieved solely through legal reforms or public information campaigns; it requires profound structural, cultural, and professional changes. As academic literature emphasizes, trust is the result of citizens’ daily experiences with the police, not merely institutional discourse. Without a stable relationship grounded in mutual respect between the police and the community, the rule of law remains fragile and vulnerable. For this reason, strengthening public trust should be considered not a secondary objective but a fundamental component of police reform and democratic consolidation in Albania.

The Albanian State Police also faces significant operational challenges, such as a lack of financial resources, modern equipment, and advanced technology. These deficiencies limit its capacity to address contemporary forms of crime, including transnational organized crime and cybercrime. Additionally, the need for professional specialization and effective human resource management remains pronounced. Albania’s integration process into the European Union has served as a driving factor for reforming the State Police and strengthening the rule of law. However, the main challenge remains the transition from formal reforms to tangible and sustainable changes in practice. Without strong political will and institutional commitment, reforms risk remaining superficial.

In this context, the practical implementation of the legal framework governing the Albanian State Police cannot be analysed merely as a technical or procedural matter. It represents a structural challenge related to institutional capacities, professional integrity, and the political will necessary to ensure the rule of law is applied equally to all. Without addressing these factors, the legal framework risks remaining a formal instrument, incapable of producing tangible changes in police practice.

Governance and Its Impact on the Albanian State Police – Present Challenges and the Path Forward

Governance and its mechanisms play a key role in the functioning and effectiveness of law enforcement institutions. The Albanian State Police, as the executive body responsible for maintaining public order and enforcing the law, is among the structures most sensitive to government policies and decisions. In a democratic

society, governance should not be viewed merely as political leadership, but as a system that ensures stability, transparency, accountability, and equal support for public institutions. In this context, analysing the impact of current governance on the Albanian State Police is critically important for understanding its challenges and for defining measures to enhance both operational effectiveness and public trust.

Current governance in Albania is characterized by a complex interplay of political, economic, and institutional factors that directly influence the State Police. The politicization of police structures, frequent leadership changes, and interventions in career advancement have created the perception of an unstable institution, vulnerable to political pressures. This perception affects both employee morale and the legitimacy the police enjoy in the eyes of citizens. According to the European Commission, *“political interference in the operational decision-making of the police weakens its capacity to function independently and to enforce the law equally for all”*²⁴. This assessment highlights that current governance impacts not only the administrative structure of the police but also its public perception, thereby increasing challenges to legitimacy and citizen trust.

Another dimension of governance influence concerns the resources allocated to the police. Despite efforts to increase budgets and modernize equipment, strategic decisions are often uncoordinated and misaligned with actual operational needs. According to the OECD, *“a lack of strategic planning and alignment of the budget with operational requirements weakens the police’s capacity to address modern security challenges”*²⁵. This situation underscores that governance, beyond political factors, must focus on efficient resource management and the establishment of priorities based on empirical evidence.

One of the main challenges is ensuring institutional independence and professionalism. According to the law, the State Police must operate based on the law and not on the political interests of the moment. However, current practices show that decisions regarding appointments and promotions often reflect political interests, which undermines the institution’s credibility. Another challenge relates to training and professional development. The current Albanian government often relies on international projects and technical assistance but has not established a sustainable system for the continuous training of police personnel in the local context. As the OSCE argues, *“investment in human resources is as important as investment in technology, because a well-trained police officer is more effective and more trusted within the community”*²⁶. This indicates that governance must take an active role in building professional capacities and organizational culture.

Citizen trust in the police depends not only on the individual actions of officers but also on how governance provides support, transparency, and accountability. The police cannot function as a credible institution if governance does not establish a framework that promotes integrity, political neutrality, and respect for human

rights. In Albania, the absence of a sustainable strategy for building public trust has resulted in a perception of the police as an institution incapable of protecting citizens from abuse or legal violations. Governance must implement policies that encourage transparency, performance reporting, and active dialogue with the community, so that citizens feel part of the process rather than mere objects of it.

In European Union countries and the United States, governance plays a strategic role in strengthening the police by providing institutional independence, adequate resources, and robust transparency mechanisms. According to Skogan, *“police success is measured not only by crime statistics but also by citizens’ perceptions of fairness, credibility, and police integrity”*²⁷. For Albania, this implies that government policies should be designed not only for operational performance but also for building legitimacy and public trust.

The current governance has a direct impact on the Albanian State Police, but this impact has not always been positive. In fact, today its influence is not only limited but also harmful. Politicization, lack of institutional independence, and sometimes poor resource coordination have constrained the police’s effectiveness and legitimacy. Effective governance should promote institutional independence, transparency, adequate resources, continuous training, and support for community engagement. Only through such governance can the Albanian State Police operate optimally, earn public trust, and uphold the rule of law in Albanian society.

Conclusions

National security institutions are the frontline guarantors and enforcers of the law in a democratic state. Their proper functioning is a crucial link for both national security and the protection of citizens. The State Police in Albania, as a key institution responsible for public order and safety, continues to operate at low levels of professionalism and functionality. Its fundamental problems begin at the very genesis: from the selection of candidates applying to become police officers, to basic police training, and further promotions often influenced by political or personal connections. The lack of a thorough evaluation of the personality of applicants, as well as the absence of verification of their social and familial ties, creates an extremely delicate, almost alarming situation in selecting the individuals who are supposed to be the guarantors of the future rule of law and public safety.

Current basic police education in Albania has proven inadequate to meet the challenges imposed by evolving societal needs and technological advancements, producing police officers who cannot be compared to their European or broader international counterparts. In the European Union and the United States, basic police education is characterized by well-established professional standards, a strong practical orientation, and a continuous integration of theoretical training,

professional ethics, and operational skills. In most EU countries, initial police training takes place in academies or higher education institutions dedicated to policing, often integrated into the national higher education system. These programs typically last between two and three years and culminate in a university-level degree or an equivalent qualification. They emphasize respect for human rights, the rule of law, community policing, and ongoing professional development.

Basic police education in Albania has undergone significant reforms over the past decades but remains limited in terms of duration, academic integration, and teaching resources. Initial training focuses primarily on operational preparation and basic legal knowledge, while components such as professional ethics, human rights, scientific research, and modern policing are less developed compared to EU and U.S. models. Although efforts have been made to align curricula with international standards, challenges such as political influence, lack of institutional autonomy, and limited ongoing training continue to affect the quality of police education. In the EU and the U.S., basic police education aims to develop professional, ethical, and independent police officers. In Albania, further strengthening of the academic dimension, long-term standardization, and sustained institutional investment are needed to achieve a level comparable to the best international practices.

All political factions that govern Albania and hold responsibility for the country over a given period must recognize that, when it comes to national security institutions—in this case, the State Police—and their effectiveness in upholding the law, order, and public safety, they need to act transparently and implement concrete policies aimed at enhancing capacity, professionalism, and integrity.

These influences can be categorized into several levels:

Institutional independence: Governance must ensure that police operational decisions remain free from political pressure. **Adequate resources and equipment:** Providing sufficient budgets, modern equipment, and necessary technology is a primary responsibility of governance. Without this support, even the most academically capable police force cannot fulfill its mission. **Training and professional development:** Governance should establish sustainable programs for the continuous training of police personnel, including topics such as human rights, professional ethics, conflict management, and proportional use of force. **Accountability and transparency:** Government policies must promote mechanisms that enable effective oversight, public reporting, and strict sanctions for violations. **Support for community policing:** Governance should create legal and financial frameworks that encourage community policing strategies, strengthen police–citizen relations, and build long-term trust.

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that corruption within the State Police constitutes a structural phenomenon, rooted in the period of democratic transition, which has significantly affected institutional functioning,

national security, and public trust in law enforcement agencies. Although the reforms undertaken in the context of European integration have been necessary and have brought partial improvements in legal and organizational aspects, they have not yet succeeded in ensuring a sustainable and profound reduction of corruption within police structures.

One of the main obstacles identified remains the persistent political influence over the State Police, which undermines institutional independence, professionalism, and the impartial enforcement of the law. This phenomenon renders the reform process fragile and often exposed to interventions beyond the legal framework, thereby limiting the real effectiveness of anti-corruption policies. As a result, weaknesses in the rule of law have created opportunities for the strengthening of organized crime and, at certain periods, have jeopardized the authority and normal functioning of public security institutions.

In conclusion, the fight against corruption within the State Police requires a comprehensive and long-term approach that goes beyond punitive measures and encompasses deep institutional reforms, the improvement of police education and training, the strengthening of accountability mechanisms, and the assurance of genuine institutional autonomy. Only the development of a professional, depoliticized police force oriented toward serving citizens can contribute to the consolidation of the rule of law and the sustainable alignment of Albania with European standards.

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