

Why It Should be Regulated and Which System of Lobbying Regulation for Albania? _____

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Abstract

In these 28 years after the transformation of the system from the communist to the democratic one and toward the market economy, the democratization of Albania has faced various problems, which has often led to the loss of public trust in the political class and the political system in general. This loss of public trust, in large part of the cases, has come as a result of the public discovery of various corruption scandals, political clientelism, illicit influences or a political decision-making process that is often conceived as closed and monopoly of those who have been elected or appointed to leading positions. For this purpose, that of channelling and controlling the impacts that particular vested interests exerts on the decision-making process, a good part of countries in Europe in the last years, have begun to consider undertaking regulatory reforms for lobbying in their environments. The main objective of regulating lobbying activity in Albania on a legal basis would be precisely the handling/curbing of such informal relationships that exist at various levels between interest groups and decision-makers and which are often on corrupt and clientelistic grounds. This paper argues that the best system for regulating lobbying in Albania should be that of a statutory type, in which lobbyists on a legal basis be obliged to register in a publicly accessible register and to disclose data on critical aspects of their activity.

Key words: Lobbying, Lobbyists, Interest Groups, Clientelism, Statutory Regulation System Information Disclosure.

Introduction

Legal regulation of lobbying, though it can still be considered a relatively new practice in different countries of the world (mostly, it has the longest tradition in the US and Canada), it is increasingly attracting the attention of various governments and legislatures to undertake regulatory reforms in this area. This responsiveness has also come as a result of the discovery of various scandals of interest trafficking or the exertion of illicit influences with which various politicians have faced in their countries. In this sense, the lobbying referred to here as the interest groups' effort in influencing public decision-makers about specific issues from which they are affected, is a phenomenon that exists anyway in society, regardless of the different forms, means or degrees in which it appears. In a sense it can be said that the activity of lobbying or the influence in politics is as old as politics: it existed, exists and will always exist. In this paper, we will define lobbying as *"the act of individuals or groups, each with varying and specific interest, attempting to influence decisions taken at the political level"* (Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2010: p. 3). Lobbying includes all communications, information or arguments (to persuade) undertaken by a group or individual employed or not by an organization, whether or not receiving remuneration from it to public officials or public service employees regarding specific policies or legislative decision-making on a particular issue.

Twenty-eight years of Albania's experience in the pluralist democratic system and in that of the market economy have sufficiently differentiated the various structures and interests that exist in the Albanian society. These diverse structures and interest groups, which are becoming more and more active and well-placed, have legitimate interests and the right to influence policies and legislation in the respective fields whenever they are affected by them. (Sqapi & Gjuraj & Lami & Mile, 2018: p. 30). Among the various groups of interest and governance, there are links that tend to develop naturally. Lobbying should, therefore be regarded as a force for good and as an essential element of the democratic process (D.P.E.R. Ireland, 2012: p. 9).

But where lobbying activity is not recognized or regulated legally through regulatory frameworks, these links tend to be consumed away from the public eye, thus also causing phenomena such as interest trafficking, illicit influences, corruption of officials, clientelist relationships formed on mutual benefit basis to the detriment of the public interest. This is especially true of transitional societies (as is Albania) where such corrupt and clientelist relations of politicians and policymakers exist at different levels in each country. It has been argued that such clientelist relationships exists precisely because in periods of transition the political

and economic spheres are necessarily intertwined as economic decisions take on an increasingly political nature (Gadowska, 2006). In other words, in transition periods, especially from a former communist system (where the transition is not only in the political plan), economic interests and enrichment in such societies are due to the links developed with politics. For the most part, these links remain informal but are considerably developed, though far from the attention of the public. One of the main goals of a comprehensive framework to regulate lobbying on a legally compulsory basis would be precisely the handling/curbing of the problem of uncontrolled lobbying, or of the informal (or personal) links that exist at different levels between interest groups and decision-makers. By doing so, lobbying regulation can strengthen transparency, accountability and sheds light on the public on the particular interests behind the proposed policies.

Reasons for Lobbying Regulation

Among the main reasons given in the literature for lobbying regulation, is emphasized that: by regulating lobbying activity through registration and reporting requirements as well as the introduction of a professional code of conduct, the aim is to strengthen public confidence in politics and in the business of government, to increase the accountability of decision-makers and to subject public policy making, and those who seek to influence it, to greater openness, transparency and to the potential for appropriate independent scrutiny (D.P.E.R. Ireland, 2012: p. 5). The main contribution that regulation of lobbying activity can bring is the increase of transparency and accountability in the political process of drafting public policies. This need is even higher in countries like Albania, where interaction relations between interest groups and governance remain poorly developed and in the vast majority of them are informal. “Lobbying regulation is expected to serve a valuable function in promoting openness and transparency, supporting integrity and enhancing the efficiency and ethnicity of the public policy making and decision making processes. Regulation of lobbying renders politicians and government officials more accountable and in and of itself helps promote transparency” (D.P.E.R. Ireland, 2012: p. 10). Shedding light on relationships that exist between particular interests and politicians or public officials should be seen as a significant development in the function of good governance.

Likewise, another valuable function that would perform the regulation of lobbying activity in the country would also be to provide exuberant pieces of information that would come from all stakeholders, and that would make it more well-informed decision-making process. Lobbying provides decision-makers with valuable insights, information, policy perspectives, identification of and debate

regarding different policy options (D.P.E.R. Ireland, 2012: p. 9). This role would be far more effective if the lobbying activity would be regulated and the influence of interest groups in the society would be channelled towards the policy-making process. Given the complexity of the political process in undertaking effective public policies, which in itself involves not only the issue of proper formulation, but also the harmonization and finding a balance between competitive interests, as well as the issue of effective implementation when such (strong) interests are at stake, the need for complete and comprehensive information on the feasibility of these policies is vital. Different authors have pointed out this role of lobbying when they emphasize the functional need for additional information and perspectives and better prospects for implementation if concerned interests are involved in the policy stage; political need to “appease social unrests”... and communicate policies to the public (Cummings & Norgaard, 2003). In any case, the benefit that would come from comprehensive information from all parties and broader perspectives from various interest groups would be in favour of a better public decision-making.

Another reason for the legal regulation of lobbying activity is because it would make it possible the creation a level playing field for all the different interests that exist in society, giving all parties fair and equal access in public policy development. The inequality that exists in virtually every free and democratic market society between the various interest groups, either in the resources, capacities or different opportunities that they have, will largely be remedied by granting equal access to influence on the process of drafting public policies. Just as in the first principle of transparency and integrity in the OECD guidelines for lobbying is emphasized: “Allowing all stakeholders, from the private sector and the public at large, fair and equitable access to participate in the development of public policies is crucial to protect the integrity of decisions and to safeguard the public interest by counterbalancing vocal vested interests” (OECD, 2013: p.3). Creating a level playing field for all interest groups that would be made possible by legal regulation of the lobbying activity and by legitimating the influence that any group can exert in the political decision-making process would be one great help for countries like Albania where civil society, almost throughout the period from 1991 to today, continues to remain relatively weak and unorganized. In such an environment, certain interests (say, environmentalists) are even less likely to compete honestly and equally in the face of the most powerful interests, as well as the structural disadvantage of a weak civil society where they lack the mobilization traditions regarding specific causes (however fair they are). Matraszek, but also other neo-pluralist authors of interest groups have noted the disadvantage that some groups enjoy in the face of the most potent groups in capitalist societies: “those interests that are disorganized, weak or dispersed, such as foreign investors, private entrepreneurs, or consumers, remain disadvantaged in the decision-making

process, whether in parliament or in the administration” (Cited in McGrath, 2008: p. 20). Legal regulation of lobbying activity would make it possible for all parties/interests to have equal opportunities to influence public policy development, to have each their voices in this process, and to protect their policy perspectives even in the face of the most powerful interests that may exist in society.

Finally, regulating lobbying activity through a legally compulsory registration and by public disclosure in a lobbying register of some required information (not only by lobbyists but also by the “lobbied” persons, which in this case are public officials: ministers, MPs or officials at various levels of the Civil Service) would minimize the dangers of corruption. In the context of today’s Albanian society where corruption is a widespread phenomenon and where there is a “coffee” or favours culture, most of the interactions between specific interests (groups) and public officials tend to be mostly based on mutual obligations or benefits. This, in turn, has often taken the form of uncontrolled lobbying, thus giving rise to such negative phenomena as officials’ corruption, clientelism, the exercise of illicit/inappropriate influences, etc. Precisely, “unregulated lobbying can give rise to significant public concern about the role of vested interests in policy making and risk that privileged or excessive influence may result in sub-optimal public policy decisions which might be made to suit private agendas to the overall detriment of the community and society at large” (D.P.E.R. Ireland, 2012: p. 10). Legal regulation of lobbying would have as its primary focus precisely shedding light on the relationships/ties that exist between certain interests and public politicians/officials in the form of identification of players and disclosure of interests that seek to influence public decision-making. This, in turn, would only increase transparency in the political process and reduce the premise of corruption and illegal influence on officials.

Options on Different Types of Lobbying Regulatory Systems

There are different types of regulatory regimes in different countries for lobbying activity. In general terms, different regulatory systems of lobbying activities can be classified in two ways. The first way is to divide these systems into those of a *statutory* type, where lobbyists on a compulsory basis are enrolled and must report data of the activities they undertake; and *voluntary* ones where, although more minimum rules governing lobbying activity exist, it is left to lobbyists or different interest groups to register and report data to the register, thus supporting their self-regulation approach. Another way of classifying the different types of regulatory systems is by dividing them in: Lowly, medium and highly regulated systems. What differentiates these systems in different jurisdictions is the amount, frequency and

details of the information that lobbyists need to disclose and report about their activity in a publicly accessible register.

Likewise, if we could mention another approach which includes some countries (such as Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, etc.), which although not having specific legal rules regarding the behaviour of lobbyists and their activity, it can be said that they recognize lobbying activity as such. The approach in these countries is to regulate the behaviour of the *lobbied persons* (elected politicians and civil servants) and not that of lobbyists. In these countries there are well-defined codes of conduct and norms that guide the behaviour of politicians or officials in relationships/interactions with any interest group or lobbyist, by preventing them from receiving financial gains or any other reward from them, as well as obliging them to declare any possible conflicts of interest they may have in the exercise of their public functions.

In general, it can be said that countries in the function of their needs, characteristics, and goals have chosen different regulatory approaches of lobbying practices in their environments. The most important classification among the regulatory lobbying systems remains one of the statutory and voluntary legal frameworks, and whether they are small, medium or highly regulated systems.

Among the major countries that have statutory rules and regulations for lobbyists and their activities are the United States (since 1946) and Canada (since 1989). Following a tradition inaugurated by James Madison, the US has chosen not to limit the lobbying practice and, generally speaking, the interest groups activities, but to regulate them in order to assure more fairness, transparency, and responsibility (Mihut, 2008, pp. 1-2). Among the key features of the lobbying system in the US [at the federal level], according to the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA), are: the obligation for lobbyists to register with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House, and to make semi-annual reports on their activities; they have to report who their clients were, what house of the Congress or what agencies they lobbied, how much they were paid; the law restricts gifts to officials and obliges the departing members of the Senate to wait for two years before lobbying former colleagues (the former members of the House of Representatives must wait one year) (Mihut, 2008, p. 8). Likewise, another feature of the statutory regulatory approach to lobbying in the US and Canada is that they include broad and comprehensive definitions for the entire range of lobbying activities and lobbyists' categories, with emphasis on any communication that is undertaken with public officials for influencing public policy formulation or legislative decision-making on a particular matter. In Canada, there is also a Code of Ethics that lobbyists must strictly adhere to in dealing with officials who want to lobby.

Other features of regulatory systems include: clear rules for lobbyist' registration with details of their activity that should be publicly disclosed in an accessible

register; the names of clients for whom they are lobbying; details on the legislative / policy proposals of a draft law on which they are pressing; public officials who are lobbied; the existence of a state agency responsible for overseeing and controlling the entire regulatory system for lobbying and having administrative powers to undertake audits/investigations of possible violations and to ensure compliance with the rules in force etc. Further, what differentiates statutory lobbying systems into lowly, medium and highly regulated, is the amount, frequency and details of the information that lobbyists need to disclose and report about their activity. In lowly regulated systems, fewer details are required about lobbyists' activity; no data is needed on the financial costs of lobbies or their employers to be disclosed; targets of lobbyists may be only members of the legislature or their staff [i.e., only the legislative branch of government]; there is usually little implementing capacity by the agency overseeing the regulation system; there is no provision for any "cooling off period" in the legislation for MPs or public officials after leaving their duty¹. In medium regulated systems, the rules for lobbyists' registration are stronger [usually more data is required for their activity]; the definition of lobbyists also includes the executive branch of government; there is a cooling off period before legislators, having left office, can register as lobbyists. While in highly regulated systems, in addition to the above statutory requirements, more detailed reporting is required on financial expenses by both lobbyists and their clients; the details in the lobbying register should be continuously updated at regular intervals; and the state agency that monitors the regulation system has administrative powers to undertake audits/investigations and punish or exclude possible violators of the rules (Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2010: pp. 27-28). Table 1 summarizes the requirements for lobbying in different regulatory systems.

TABLE 1: The Different Regulatory Systems

	Lowly Regulated Systems	Medium Regulated Systems	Highly Regulated Systems
Registration regulations	Rules on individual registration, but few details required.	Rules on individual registration, more details required.	Rules on individual registration are extremely rigorous.
Targets of Lobbyists Defined	Only members of the legislature and staff.	Members of the legislature and staff; executive and staff; agency heads and public.	Members of the legislature and staff; executive and staff; agency heads and public.

¹ See for more on lowly regulated systems of lobbying in Raj Chari & John Hogan & Gary Murphy (2011), "Legal Framework for the Regulation of Lobbying in the Council of Europe Member States", p. 27.

Spending disclosure	No rules on individual spending disclosure, or employer spending disclosure.	Some regulations on individual spending disclosure; none on employer spending disclosure.	Tight regulations on individual spending disclosure, and employer spending disclosure.
Electronic filing	Weak on-line registration and paperwork required.	Robust system for on-line registration, no paperwork necessary.	Robust system for on-line registration, no paperwork necessary.
Public access	List of lobbyists available, but not detailed, or updated frequently.	List of lobbyists available, detailed, and updated frequently.	List of lobbyists and their spending disclosures available, detailed, and updated frequently.
Enforcement	Little enforcement capabilities invested in state agency.	In theory state agency possesses enforcement capabilities, though infrequently used.	State agency can, and does, conduct mandatory reviews/audits.
Revolving door provision	No cooling off period before former legislators can register as lobbyists.	There is a cooling off period before former legislators can register as lobbyists.	There is a cooling off period before former legislators can register as lobbyists.

Source: Raj Chari & John Hogan & Gary Murphy, 2011: pp. 28-29.

While in voluntary schemes of lobbying [or self-regulation] schemes, another approach is followed to regulate lobbyists' activity. Among the key institutions that have a non-compulsory registration system for lobbyists are the European Parliament and the European Commission. Given their particular specifics (especially the democratic deficit that characterizes them, as well as the more limited competences compared to those of a national state or government), these institutions [particularly the Commission] see the interest groups "with a much better eye" and are more open to them in the policy-making process. Consulting with "interested parties" or "civil society organisations" as the Commission prefers to describe such organisations is an important resource from a governance point of view (Institute of Public Administration: p. 11). In its lobbying approach, the EP has established a formal regulatory framework [Rules of Procedure adopted in 1996] based on a system of lobbying accreditation, where access permits to the European Parliament are granted to interest groups' representatives in exchange for their acceptance of a code of conduct and registration in a register of data such as the name of the lobbyists, their addresses, the name of the organization they are lobbying and their general interests. From this, it can be seen that the amount of information required to lobby in EP is small compared to those of regulatory systems

in other jurisdictions. It should also be noted that the formal regulatory framework for lobbying in the EP provides only the regulation of the lobbying activity that is carried out within the Parliament building [through the permits given to lobbyists] and not what happens outside it, doing that “several of the lobbyists actually active in the EP are not registered” (Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2011: p. 9). Similarly, another issue which highlighted in the case of lobbying regulation in the EP is “that while names of lobbyists are available to the public, other information stated on the registration form, such as the ‘nature of the lobbyists work’, the interests for which the lobbyist is acting, and which MEPs may have served as references for the lobbyists, is not available to the public (European Commission, 2006: p. 7).

The European Commission, on its part, has an even more open approach based on self-regulation of lobbying activity, and by setting [in 2008] only a voluntary registration system for interest representatives involved in lobbying. In this ‘voluntary database’ of interest representation, called CONECCS [Consultation, the European Commission and Civil Society], civil society organisation (including, for example, trade unions, business associations and NGOs) could sign up in order to provide ‘better information about (the Commission’s) consultative process” (Cited in Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2011: p. 11). Although the (minimum) rules on the information that lobbyists have to provide in the register exist, this remains entirely voluntary and is mainly done with the only incentive that they will receive alerts from the Commission regarding the consultations taking place in their areas of interest. In the case of the European Commission, the approach followed for the registration of lobbying activities is entirely voluntary, entrusting in the profession of lobbyists and thus encouraging their self-regulation model.

A Short Analysis of Lobbying Regulatory Systems and Which System Is Better For Albania

The approach followed by the European Commission to establish only a voluntary registration for various interest representatives or lobbyists in Brussels, as well as the incentive for the self-regulation of this sector, has its problems. As is generally the case with voluntary regulation systems, most of the lobbying activities in Brussels (or elsewhere, where there are voluntary regulation systems) occur without being registered and without serving the main goals that lobbying should play in the political system: increasing transparency, accountability, and giving to the public the opportunity (through disclosure of relevant information) for an independent scrutiny of lobbying activities of the various influences that are exercised in the decision-making process. In the case of the European Commission, the voluntary registration system, coupled with low incentives for lobbyists’ registration (mainly

that of receiving alerts regarding consultations in a given field) has made that only a few lobbyists signed up to the voluntary register monitored by the EU Transparency Register Secretariat. Approximately less than 7 per cent of all lobbyists (i.e. less than 1,000 lobbyists of the over 15,000 estimated) signed up to the voluntary registration system (Smyth, 2006). “In other words, lobby groups can attempt to influence the Commission at any time and any place, whether or not they are on the registry” (Cited in Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2011: p. 11).

The self-regulatory approach and voluntary public register for lobbyists who wish to lobby the European Commission reflects most the need of the latter for the consultation and dialogue with various interest groups (or civil society organizations, as the Commission prefers to call them) to narrow the democratic deficit that characterizes it by making the governance “more open”. However, given the various shortcomings that emerged from the operation of the self-regulatory and voluntary registration system of lobbyists (which in the most part undertake lobbying activities to the European Commission even without being registered in the public register), the Commission in turn has left open the possibility of introducing a statutory regulatory system and a compulsory registration for those who lobby at the European level. As in a statement the European Commission says: “In any event, after one year of operation, the Commission will evaluate the register, in particular regarding participation. If it proves to be unsatisfactory, compulsory registration and reporting will be considered”² to be established. On his side, the EP since 2008 “was already openly stating that it wished to have a mandatory register for all lobbyists that attempt to influence all institutions in the EU” (Cited in Chari & Hogan & Murphy, 2011: p. 14).

In the same line, many European countries that have adopted legal frameworks for regulating lobbying activities in their jurisdictions have done so by preferring statutory regulatory systems and mandatory registration for lobbyists. In several cases, statutory regulation has been introduced as a direct result of particular scandals in which lobbyists were found to be exercising undue or corrupt influence on public officials (McGrath, 2008: p. 23). Precisely because of the highly sensitive nature of lobbying in the eyes of public opinion, as well as the intent of controlling the exercise of influences by different interest groups, in many European countries statutory regulatory systems were preferred as the best and most efficient way to control and discipline lobbying activities in their environments. Self-regulatory or voluntary lobbying systems are not effective in including the range and the actual level of lobbying activity that occurs in their jurisdictions, making the lobbyists’ registration to be only at minimal levels, and thus not serving the general objectives which should have the legal regulation of lobbying activity, that are

² Taken from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-08-428_en.htm?locale=en Brussels, 23 June 2008. See also in Conor McGrath, (2008), “The Development and Regulation of Lobbying in the New Member States of the European Union”, p. 22.

those of increasing transparency, disclosure of information, accountability and the guarantee of integrity of public policymaking.

“Thus far, mandatory registers of lobbyists have proven to be more successful than voluntary registers in reflecting lobbying activities in a more comprehensive manner and bringing greater transparency to the system” (Ninua, 2012: p. 4). Voluntary or accreditation systems for lobbying (such as the aforementioned European Parliament, but also those in France and Germany) fail to control lobbying activities in the environments where they operate, even because they can never offer enough incentives to encourage lobbyists’ registration as well as due to their lack of legal force to force lobbyists to register and report on their activities. If we refer to a method of analysis (known as Hired Guns), undertaken by the Center for Public Integrity to measure the effectiveness of lobbying legislation in terms of transparency and accountability they promote, we see that the weaker results on a scale from 1 to 100 points, are precisely in the voluntary or in the accreditation systems of the European Parliament jurisdictions (15 points), Germany (17), France (20) and the European Commission (24)³. While a completely different picture occurs in the jurisdictions of countries where statutory lobbying systems and compulsory registration are in place (e.g. in the US at states and federal level, in Canada etc.), where the results are much higher. Their high results⁴ highlight the effectiveness of their legislation to promote public disclosure of lobbying activities, open access and transparency.

Based on previous experience of regulatory systems operating in other countries, the best international experience in this field, as well as the guiding principles developed by the OECD on transparency and lobbying integrity, in this paper it is argued that the regulatory lobbying system that must exist in Albania, should be of a *statutory* type. In such a system, lobbyists on a legal basis should be obliged to sign up in a register that will be publicly accessible; they have to disclose some information on the important aspects of their activities and must undertake they conform to the legal norms specified in the legislation (Sqapi & Gjuraj & Lami & Mile, 2018: p.32). Such a binding legal scheme for regulation and reporting of lobbying activities both by lobbyists who take them, but also by lobbied persons (politicians or public officials) who are subject to influences from different groups of interest would better serve the main goals and objectives that should be pursued by

³ See for more in Raj Chari & John Hogan & Gary Murphy (2011), “*Legal Framework for the Regulation of Lobbying in the Council of Europe Member States*”, pp. 23-26. “Hired Guns” is a method for analyzing the lobbying legislation based on a survey that contains a series of questions regarding lobby disclosure. Its main objective is to measure the effectiveness of lobbying legislation in terms of its transparency and accountability. The questions address eight key areas of disclosure for lobbying that has to do with: Definition of Lobbyist; Individual Registration; Individual Spending Disclosure; Employer Spending Disclosure; Electronic Filing; Public Access (to a registry of lobbyists); Enforcement; Revolving Door Provisions (with a particular focus on ‘cooling off periods’).

⁴ See countries’ jurisdictions scores in Raj Chari & John Hogan & Gary Murphy (2011), “*Legal Framework for the Regulation of Lobbying in the Council of Europe Member States*”, pp. 25-26.

the law on lobbying in Albania, namely: enhancing transparency in policy-making and decision-making, increasing accountability levels, creating opportunities for an opening and greater participation of the public and stakeholders in the process of drafting public policies; as well as ensuring the integrity and efficiency of public policymaking (Sqapi & Gjuraj & Lami & Mile, 2018: p. 32).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we could re-emphasize that the reasons for recognizing and regulating lobbying activity in Albania are primarily based on the need to increase and strengthen transparency in decision-making, accountability, and creation of opportunities for greater openness to public and interest groups engagement in the process of public policymaking. Democratic systems in many Western countries (but not only) are increasingly being under pressure to take into account the need to articulate interests from different groups within their societies and to channel them into the political system through practices that are consistent with openness, transparency and equal access. In this sense, legal regulation of lobbying activity in Albania is expected to be a valuable function in promoting openness and transparency in formulating and developing public policies, as well as in strengthening the efficiency of public policy-making and decision-making processes. Likewise, shedding light on relationships that exist between particular interests and politicians or public officials [through obliged legal requirements to publicly disclose information] should be seen as another valuable contribution that legal regulation of lobbying can bring in the function of good governance. This need for public disclosure is even higher in the context of transition countries such as Albania where patterns of social and political relationships that are based on clientelism and corruption are widespread, and the links between different interests and politicians take place more on an informal basis, taking the form of uncontrolled lobbying (Sqapi & Gjuraj & Lami & Mile, 2018: p. 38). The main aim of adopting a legal framework for lobbying activity Albania would be to discipline and control the links between various interest groups and politicians at different levels and to develop these links on formal, transparent grounds and in favour of the public interest and democratic governance.

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