Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to express concern about the state of democracy and the rule of law in the Republic of Albania, a NATO ally and candidate for European Union membership.[1] The United States has invested heavily in Albania's justice reforms and has a strong interest in their success. Recent events suggest that progress is fragile and, in key areas, at risk of reversal. We urge you to use the Department's visa restriction authority under Section 7031(c) against Albanian officials complicit in significant corruption.

Independent assessments send mixed signals. Freedom House rates Albania "Partly Free," with a score of 69 out of 100 in 2026.[2] Observers found the May 2025 parliamentary elections "competitive and professionally conducted."[3] Yet Albania scored just 39 out of 100 on Transparency International's 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index.[4] The V-Dem Institute's 2026 Democracy Report now classifies Albania as an electoral autocracy.[5]

Corruption remains the central obstacle. Albania's Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), built with U.S. and European support, has shown real independence. The European Commission has credited its work, while noting that other institutions lag behind.[6] Officials have also pressured SPAK and the High Justice Inspector, the body that oversees judges and prosecutors.[7]

SPAK's cases now reach the top of government. It has charged Belinda Balluku, who served as Deputy Prime Minister, with interfering in public procurement for road construction.[8] In December 2025, prosecutors asked parliament to lift her immunity so she could be arrested. Prime Minister Edi Rama called the request unconstitutional, and parliament has not allowed the arrest to proceed. [9] Rama denies all allegations of corruption against him.[10] SPAK is also investigating the former head of Albania's State Intelligence Service, Vlora Hyseni, for allegedly misusing her access to information to help a criminal suspect.[11]

Public frustration has spilled into the streets. The charges against Balluku helped spark mass protests in Tirana in January 2026, demanding Rama's resignation and early elections.[12] By summer, protests against a luxury resort near a protected natural area had grown into a broader movement known as the "Flamingo Revolution."[13]

The crisis has also put pressure on the press. Albania's media is shaped by concentrated ownership, opaque funding, and owners with political ties.[14] On July 30, 2026, ten press freedom organizations warned of obstruction, threats, and attacks against journalists covering the protests.

They cited 15 threats and attacks in June and July alone, and questioned the use of water cannons and tear gas against demonstrators.[15]

Albania's anti-corruption institutions cannot succeed when political leaders shield the officials they investigate. We therefore urge you to use the Department's authority under Section 7031(c) of the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act. Specifically, we ask the Department to publicly designate Albanian officials, and where appropriate their immediate family members, for whom it has credible information of involvement in significant corruption.

This review should include officials charged by SPAK and those who have used their positions to obstruct its investigations. Applying this tool consistently, regardless of party, would advance the Department's counter-kleptocracy efforts. It would also show that the United States stands with Albanians demanding accountability.

We also ask that you respond to the following questions by November 5:

1. Will the Department commit to reviewing Albanian officials for designation under Section 7031(c), and on what timeline? Will it also consider Global Magnitsky sanctions where the evidence supports them?

2. What assistance is the Department providing to SPAK, the High Justice Inspector, and Albania's broader justice reform? How will it protect these bodies from political pressure?

3. Has the Department raised with the Albanian government parliament's failure to act on SPAK's request to arrest Ms. Balluku? What was the response?

4. How is the Embassy in Tirana engaging Albanian authorities on the policing of protests and the safety of journalists? Does the Department support independent investigations of the incidents documented this summer?

We also request a briefing for our staff on these issues. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to support Albania's democratic institutions.

Sincerely,

Rep. Joe Wilson
Co-Chairman
U.S. Helsinki Commission

Rep. Keith Self
Chairman
Europe Subcommittee

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2. Freedom House, "Albania," *Freedom in the World 2026*, https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2026.
3. European Commission, *Albania 2025 Report*.
4. Transparency International, "Albania," *Corruption Perceptions Index 2025*, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025/index/alb.
5. V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2026* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2026), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf.
6. European Commission, *Albania 2025 Report*; European Commission, *2026 Rule of Law Report* (Brussels: European Commission, 2026), https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2026-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en.
7. European Commission, *Albania 2025 Report*.
8. CIVICUS Lens, "Albania: 'Corruption Is a Serious Problem but No Political Force Commands Enough Public Trust to Unite Demands,'" interview with Gresa Hasa, February 13, 2026, https://lens.civicus.org/interview/albania-corruption-is-a-serious-problem-but-no-political-force-commands-enough-public-trust-to-unite-demands/.
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10. "Edi Rama Rejects Corruption Allegations, Says He Never Used Power for Personal Gain," *Albanian Daily News*, September 27, 2026, https://albaniandailynews.com/news/edi-rama-rejects-corruption-allegations-says-he-never-used-power-for-personal-gain.
11. "Albania: As Corruption Cases Multiply, Experts Question Whether the Anti-Corruption Drive Is Addressing the Causes or Just the Symptoms," *Deutsche Welle*, https://www.dw.com/en/albania-as-corruption-cases-multiply-experts-question-whether-the-anti-corruption-drive-is-addressing-the-causes-or-just-the-symptoms/a-79473031.
12. CIVICUS Lens, "Albania: 'Corruption Is a Serious Problem.'"
13. European Federation of Journalists et al., "Albania: Cumulative Pressure on Media Freedom and Civic Space Demands Urgent Action," July 30, 2026, https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2026/07/30/albania-cumulative-pressure-on-media-freedom-and-civic-space-demands-urgent-action/.
14. European Commission, *Albania 2025 Report*; European Commission, *2026 Rule of Law Report*.
15. European Federation of Journalists et al., "Albania: Cumulative Pressure on Media Freedom."