# From Legal Approximation to Practical Impact: The Role of ISO Standards in Albania's Public Administration and Economy

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***Abstract***

*This article analyzes the institutional development and practical impact of standardization in Albania, focusing on the functioning of quality infrastructure institutions, the implementation of ISO standards in public administration and the private sector, as well as their effects on institutional and economic performance. The aim is to assess how standardization affects the improvement of governance, transparency and competitiveness, in line with European and international practices, but beyond the legal dimension of approximation. The study is based on the analysis of strategic documents and institutional reports (DPS, PTB, UNIDO, ISO) and includes comparative assessments with countries in the region. The results show that Albania has achieved a stable level of alignment between national and European standards, supported by the gradual strengthening of the General Directorate of Standardization (GDS) and the national quality system. This study assesses the practical impact of standardization, highlighting the benefits, limitations and the ongoing process of institutional consolidation in Albania. Although implementation remains uneven across sectors, trends indicate increasing awareness and participation, particularly among enterprises seeking access to European Union markets. Finally, the article emphasizes that the sustainable development of the standardization system requires a transition from legal approximation towards a functional model of institutionalization, which links standardization with improving the quality of governance, strengthening capacities, and the economic integration of Albania.*

***Keywords:*** *standardization; ISO; public institutions; quality infrastructure; institutional development*

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## 1. Introduction

Standardization constitutes a fundamental element of institutional development and economic competitiveness, directly affecting the quality of governance, product safety and market functioning. In a transition economy like Albania's, international and European standards serve not only as a technical instrument for approximation with the European Union, but also as a means for the gradual improvement of public administration and increasing the credibility of the private sector in international markets.

In the last decade, the standardization process in Albania has moved from formal legal approximation to a phase of institutional and operational consolidation. The adoption of Law No. 36/2017 "On Standardization" and the active participation in international and European standardization organizations (ISO- *International Organization for Standardization* , CEN- *European Committee for Standardization* and CENELEC- *European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization* ) have created the basis for strengthening the national quality infrastructure and increasing institutional interoperability, although practical implementation and cooperation between stakeholders remain under development. The General Directorate of Standardization (DGS), established in 2008, has now assumed the role of the coordinating center of the national standardization system, cooperating with the Albanian Accreditation Agency,

metrological institutions and conformity assessment bodies.

The implementation of ISO standards in public administration has contributed to the improvement of internal processes and performance measurement, while in the private sector it has promoted increased efficiency and access to markets, especially in export-oriented enterprises. However, the dissemination of standards and their integration into managerial practices and public policies remain partial, reflecting the structural and resource constraints of the system. In this context, standardization is gradually gaining a more visible role as an instrument of institutional and economic development policies, in line with the objectives of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and the ISO 2030 strategy of the International Organization for Standardization, for institutional accountability and quality improvement.

This article aims to analyze the institutional development and practical impact of standardization in Albania, through four main dimensions: 1-legal and institutional evolution; 2-implementation and impact of ISO standards in public administration and economy (this practice has spread in Europe after 2000, because the standards were initially drafted for the industrial sector ); 3-institutional, economic and sustainability dimensions; 4-further challenges and perspectives of the standardization system. The aim is to assess to what extent standardization is moving from a technical process to an instrument of governance and institutional development, highlighting current achievements, existing limitations and opportunities for long-term improvement.

In this context, the article complements the study "Harmonization of ISO standards with EU law: The case of Albania" (2025), shifting the focus from the legal and normative dimension of approximation towards the analysis of the practical, institutional and economic impact of standardization in Albania.

## 2. Institutional Evolution and Legal Framework of Standardization in Albania

The standardization system in Albania is part of the national quality infrastructure and represents one of the main pillars of institutional development and technical approximation with the European Union. It is supported by a legal and institutional framework that ensures the gradual participation of stakeholders, compliance with international standards and the inclusion of Albania in European and global technical networks.

At the political and institutional level, standards are seen as mechanisms for increasing security and transparency, as well as for improving quality in public administration and the private sector. They are also used as functional tools for technical approximation with the European Union and for supporting the sustainable development objectives (European Commission, 2022b, pp. 4, 6–7). Documents from development agencies and international organizations highlight that ISO standards are an important basis for public administration, as they contribute to structuring internal procedures, measuring institutional performance and increasing transparency. The implementation of standards such as ISO 9001 for quality management has shown a positive impact on consolidating administrative practices and gradually improving the quality of public services, contributing to strengthening citizens' trust in institutions (UNDP Albania, 2024, p. 11).

In the private sector, ISO standards play a role in increasing the reliability of products and services, improving risk management and strengthening competitiveness in international markets. ISO reports show that certified companies report sustainable benefits, both in terms of financial and image and management (ISO, 2022b, p. 5). In Albania, the implementation of standards has focused mainly on companies operating in the export, construction and technology sectors, which report moderate efficiency gains and easier access to European markets (Ceko, 2022, p. 3).

In legal terms, the Albanian standardization system has been developed to bring domestic structures closer to international and European practices, within the framework of the integration process. This development was concretized with the adoption of Law No. 9870, dated 4.2.2008, which established the General Directorate of Standardization (DGSD) as the body responsible for the development and representation of Albania in international and European standardization organizations. The institutional evolution of the system has gone hand in hand with membership in ISO, CEN and CENELEC and with involvement in technical cooperation mechanisms. In this context, we also have the Vienna Agreement which has had a guiding role, facilitating the joint development of international and European standards and avoiding overlaps between ISO and CEN. . This allows a common standard to be adopted simultaneously as ISO and EN (European Norm), reducing the burden on industry and national administrations.

The cooperation between the General Directorate of Standardization and CEN/CENELEC has been formalized through institutional agreements, which have strengthened Albania's participation in the European standardization system (DPS, 2023c, p. 2).

Subsequently, Law No. 36/2017, dated 30.03.2017, "On Standardization", strengthened the legal basis of the national system, establishing transparency, stakeholder involvement and alignment with international standards as guiding principles. This law defines the fundamental principles of the standardization system in Albania: voluntariness in

the use of standards, transparency, stakeholder involvement, adoption by technical consensus and harmonization with international and European standards through identical approval or adoption (Law No. 36/2017, Article 4).

Public institutions are obliged to include relevant standards in the technical sub-legal acts they implement in their areas of responsibility, when this is deemed necessary for the protection of the public interest, safety, health or the environment (Law No. 36/2017, Article 16). In this way, standardization acquires a functional role in public administration, helping to measure performance and improve institutional quality.

The General Directorate of Standardization is responsible for maintaining a register of adopted standards and for withdrawing any national standard that conflicts with an adopted international or European standard (DPS, 2020, p. 17). This register is published in the Standards Bulletin and serves as a tool for monitoring the process of technical and institutional harmonization (DPS, 2023b, p. 2). Its implementation is carried out through the "adopt and harmonize" procedure, in accordance with ISO/IEC Guide 21:2018 (a guide that sets out the procedures for the adoption of international standards at national level). and with international practices of technical approximation (CEN-CENELEC, 2024a). UNDP estimates that standardization contributes to institutional modernization and the improvement of public administration practices (UNDP Albania, 2024, p. 10). This approach is complemented by the findings of UNIDO and ISO, which highlight that standards strengthen comparability and institutional performance (UNIDO & ISO, 2022, pp. 6–7).

The General Directorate of Standardization (DGS) represents the Albanian state in international and European standardization organizations and ensures Albania's technical and institutional coordination with the global standardization network. Its activities include the drafting of standards, cooperation with accreditation bodies and the development of quality infrastructure (DGS, 2020, p. 5). The importance of these functions is reflected in the National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2022–2030, which provides for the strengthening of quality infrastructure and directly links the DGS's activity to the objectives of competitiveness and European integration (Council of Ministers, 2023, article 3).

In operational terms, this directorate is active in educating and raising awareness of standards users through training and publications, as well as in institutional transparency through the Albanian Standards Bulletin and the online standards register (General Directorate of Standardization, 2023, p. 2). To ensure coordinated functioning, it cooperates with the Albanian Accreditation Agency (ASHN), which accredits certification bodies and testing laboratories. This cooperation ensures conformity with the ISO/IEC 17021-1 and ISO/IEC 17025 standards, which define the requirements for the competence and functioning of certification bodies and laboratories (ASHN, 2023, p. 4–6).

At the national level, the implementation of ISO standards is supported by an infrastructure that includes testing laboratories, metrological verification units and accredited certification bodies. These structures are part of the quality infrastructure that supports standardization, accreditation and conformity assessment. INetQI (International Network on Quality Infrastructure) is a global network created in 2018, which brings together organizations such as ISO, IEC, ILAC, IAF, UNIDO and PTB, with the aim of international coordination of standardization, accreditation, metrology and conformity assessment, in support of Sustainable Development Goals No. 9. In accordance with the practices of INetQI, the construction of this integrated system is considered essential for the safety of products and the reliability of services (PTB, 2023, p. 8). In the Albanian context, since 2000, UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) has been operating. With its projects, it has gradually contributed to increasing capacities for conformity assessment and to aligning with international quality practices (UNIDO, 2022, p. 11).

In this way, the Albanian standardization system is gradually evolving towards a more functional and integrated structure, where institutional cooperation and technical approximation with the EU remain key processes for its long-term strengthening and for the consolidation of the quality infrastructure in the country.

## 3. Implementation and Impact of ISO Standards in Public Administration and the Albanian Economy

The application of ISO standards in the Albanian public administration is not limited to a technical initiative to increase the quality of services, but is used as an operational framework to strengthen institutional efficiency and transparency. ISO standards provide a structured framework for optimizing organizational processes, enabling institutions to assess performance, improve resource management and align practices with European Union requirements. This compliance can contribute to reducing administrative costs and increasing public trust in state institutions.

In practice, the application of the ISO 9001 standard in several Albanian government institutions (such as the General Directorate of Taxes-2014, the Ministry of Interior-2016 and some municipalities) has produced reported improvements in the quality of services, including the reduction of waiting times, the unification of procedures and the consolidation of mechanisms for performance assessment. The certification process has helped to increase efficiency

through the optimization of human and operational resources, while also contributing to the gradual formation of an institutional culture based on transparency and accountability. Analyses conducted in the Albanian public administration and in countries in the region show that the application of international ISO standards is often associated with improved internal communication, reduced administrative disputes and increased citizen satisfaction (Basholli & Basholli, 2017, pp. 3–5). Also, the practice of public institutions in the Western Balkan countries has shown that the integration of ISO standards can help prepare the administration for the challenges posed by the European integration process, as well as its inclusion in international quality assessment programs (PTB, 2023, pp. 8–9).

Other empirical studies confirm that standardization can improve institutional performance and raise staff awareness of the importance of clear objectives and measurement of results (Mehmeti, 2022, pp. 2–4). This impact is not limited to the private sector, but also extends to public administration, enabling more careful use of resources and transparency in the management of state funds (Gjonaj, 2023, pp. 2–4).

ISO standards create synergies with administrative reforms and the sustainable development agenda. They are used as operational instruments to link administrative practices to sustainable development objectives, serving as concrete tools for operationalizing governance reforms. For example, the PAS 53002:2024 standard, developed in collaboration between ISO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provides practical guidance for organizations (public and private) on how to include and measure their contribution to achieving the 17 SDGs, promoting the transition from formal compliance to sustainable performance improvement (ISO & UNDP, 2024, pp. 5–6). The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) refer to the 17 goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which serve as a global framework for measuring the contribution of organizations in the economic, social and environmental fields.

A 2023 report by the International Organization for Standardization "on the economic benefits of standards" shows that organizations that implement them have recorded a measurable increase in productivity and financial efficiency of up to 5%, as a result of optimizing resources and improving performance. This result was achieved through the implementation of the new methodology, ISO 2.0, tested during 2021–2023 in 30 different countries, including several countries in the Balkans. (ISO, 2023b, pp. 11–13). This method analyzes the link between standards and national productivity. These findings are consistent with the United Nations' reports on sustainable development, which emphasize that the integration of international standards in public institutions can act as a catalyst for inter-institutional cooperation, digitalization and the creation of modern, transparent and accountable administration (United Nations, 2025, pp. 3–5).

Despite the benefits, the effective implementation of ISO international standards in Albania faces systemic challenges, stemming from structural constraints, lack of resources and consolidated institutional management practices. These challenges appear in both the public and private sectors, and are closely related to insufficient human capacity, limited technical infrastructure, and inconsistencies between the standards and the institutional decision-making culture. The concrete implementation in Albania has been characterized by fragmented implementation and partial inter-institutional coherence.

In public administration, one of the biggest obstacles is the dependence on external expertise for the design and maintenance of certified management systems. Institutions sometimes pursue certification as a formality to meet requirements from international partners, without a sustainable approach to continuous improvement. As a result, some certified systems are not regularly maintained after the first audits, which calls into question the sustainability of the impact (Gjonaj, 2023, pp. 2–4).

In the private sector, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises, difficulties are related to implementation costs, limited access to professional training, and the implementation of technical requirements of more complex standards such as ISO 14001 and ISO 45001. Studies on the Albanian context show that many businesses view certification as an upfront cost without an immediate return on investment (Basholli & Basholli, 2017, pp. 3–5).

A significant part of the challenges is related to human capacity. One of the most persistent obstacles is the lack of a stable base of qualified capacities. Both public institutions and private entities face difficulties in providing staff with knowledge of ISO standards and their integration into management systems. In the absence of measures to strengthen internal capacities, many organizations turn to external consultancy, a practice that creates dependency and does not guarantee long-term absorption of knowledge (Gjonaj, 2023, pp. 2–4). In public administration, this challenge is aggravated by the lack of clear policies for building professional capacities; reforms are not accompanied by substantial development of personnel knowledge, reducing the implementation of ISO systems to formal documentation. Studies on the implementation of ISO 14001 show that the lack of local expertise has been one of the main reasons for the failure to institutionalize environmental systems effectively; the involvement of external consultants has often resulted in superficial certifications (Basholli & Basholli, 2017, p. 4). According to the International Organization for Standardization's 2023

report, the lack of local expertise constitutes a structural obstacle to the long-term benefits of ISO certification. Consequently, in the absence of capacity-building measures, a cycle of certifications without real performance improvements is at risk (ISO, 2023b, p. 6).

Another critical dimension is the technical infrastructure. A significant part of the standards (environment, food safety, industry, technical verification) imposes the need for accredited laboratories, calibration centers and advanced testing systems. Currently, Albania faces a deficit of these structures, especially outside the capital, making it difficult to follow the procedures without additional costs for transportation or consultancy (Basholli & Basholli, 2017, p. 5). Cooperation agreements between DPS and European structures such as CEN/CENELEC emphasize that approximation to the EU system requires not only the adoption of standards, but also the creation of internationally recognized technical infrastructure (Directorate General for Standardization, 2023c). According to ISO analyses, insufficient laboratory infrastructure makes certification more expensive and technologically questionable (ISO, 2021, p. 9); The 2023 report highlights that the lack of laboratories hinders the conversion of standards from document to practice (ISO, 2023b, p. 11). In this context, strengthening the technical infrastructure is a strategic necessity also for the EU membership criteria: accredited regional laboratories, modern equipment and qualified human resources are required.

Another critical obstacle is the perception of standards as an external bureaucratic mechanism, especially in institutions with no experience in quality management. This leads to a "ceremonial conformity", where formal compliance is not necessarily accompanied by substantial changes in functioning (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, pp. 66–70). In the Albanian context, quality standards are often implemented formally, to meet audit requirements, while their real impact on improving services remains limited (Ceko, 2022, p. 6). Although some documented experiences show that, in some cases, certification has increased credibility in the international market and improved competitive position, especially in sectors such as agro-processing and tourism (Zoga & Pano, 2016, pp. 107–115).

UNDP Albania has prepared a document for 2023–2024 that analyzes the implementation of good governance and quality management reforms in Albanian public institutions. This report notes that in some institutions, ISO standards are treated as a reporting/financing instrument, not as a management and self-assessment tool, creating a risk of reducing standardization to a technique without transformative impact (UNDP Albania, 2024, p. 6). To address this, sustained commitment of managers, continuous training, quality units at all levels, and integration of ISO standards into planning and monitoring cycles are required.

In the context of a regional comparison, Albania's progress is assessed through the models of countries such as Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Data from the International Organization for Standardization show that Albania currently lags behind its neighbors in the number of certifications: at the end of 2023, for ISO 9001 Croatia 1,270, North Macedonia 301, Montenegro 152, while Albania 125; for ISO 14001, Croatia 328, North Macedonia 56, Montenegro 24 and Albania 19. This contrast reflects not only the size of the markets, but also differences in capacities, support mechanisms and awareness (ISO, 2023a, pp. 8–10). Essentially, the role of public policies and quality infrastructure appears crucial for the dissemination of standards.

The experience of Croatia illustrates the integration of standardization into state development policies and the process of accession to the European Union. A consolidated cooperation has been established between public institutions, chambers of commerce and the private sector, making standardization part of the national quality policy and inter-institutional coordination (PTB, 2023, p. 17). ISO certifications in Croatia are mainly focused on public administration and strategic sectors of the economy, reflecting the use of standards as a management and institutional development instrument (ISO, 2023a, pp. 8–10).

In Montenegro, the government has adopted a proactive approach at central and local level , considering standardization as part of economic development and European integration policies. This approach has been concretized through national action plans and coordination mechanisms between public institutions, chambers of commerce and the private sector. With the support of international partners such as PTB, UNIDO and the European Union , the technical framework of the quality infrastructure , which includes standardization, accreditation and metrology, has been strengthened, increasing the coherence and effectiveness of the national quality system (PTB, 2023, p. 22).

In North Macedonia, certification is promoted at the local level through financial and technical support for training and implementation; larger municipalities have been certified with ISO 9001 as part of reforms for the quality of public services (Gjonaj, 2023, pp. 3–4). These initiatives are also supported by regional quality infrastructure initiatives, such as SEE QI, and aim to strengthen local capacities for the implementation of international standards and improve local governance (PTB, 2023, pp. 23–24).

All three countries have used EU and donor programs for quality oversight, training auditors, and incorporating ISO criteria into procurement and support schemes (PTB, 2023, pp. 20–24). What remains in common is political will and

inter-institutional coordination.

For Albania, the key lesson is to move from an optional technical approach to a strategic policy integrated with reforms. Statistical data reflect barriers in infrastructure and training, which hinder the spread of certifications (ISO, 2023a, p. 11). A concrete option is to include ISO standards as clear criteria for benefiting from IPA III (2021-2027) and twinning programmes, linking certification to institutional capacity and the achievement of priority reforms (European Commission, 2024, p. 44). This approach is supported by the IPA III legal framework, which sets out the strengthening of institutions and approximation with EU standards as the main objectives of the programme (European Union, 2021, Article 3). Regional experience suggests that integrating standards into national strategies and public procurement can improve quality and increase citizens' trust. For this reason, strengthening the capacities of the DPS and broader state-private-civil society cooperation are required (Gjonaj, 2023, p. 4). International support must be coordinated and institutionalized, to create a sustainable base of competencies and to avoid fragmentation of projects.

In conclusion, the real impact of standards increases when they are treated as management and continuous improvement tools, not just as certification instruments; this requires coherent public policies, internal capacities and technical infrastructure to turn the standard from a document into practice.

## 4. Institutional and Economic Dimensions of Standardization in Albania

Institutional development and the socio-economic impact of standardization constitute two interrelated dimensions of the same process: strengthening quality institutions creates the basis for a more competitive and sustainable economy, while the dissemination of standards in different sectors further strengthens the credibility and efficiency of the institutions themselves.

The standardization process in Albania is gradually being consolidated as an element of institutional and economic development, reflecting the ongoing efforts for technical approximation to the European quality system. The increased capacities of the General Directorate of Standardization and its cooperation with international organizations have created a functional basis for the dissemination and implementation of standards. At the end of 2023, the national fund of standards included about 17,500 Albanian standards, of which about 98% are reported to be harmonized with the European collection of CEN and CENELEC, while during 2023 alone, 1,106 new standards were adopted (DPS, 2023, pp. 14–22).

These developments signal the transition from the formal transposition phase to a functional model, where standardization is treated as part of public development and competitiveness policies. The joint documents of DPS and AKPA for the period 2024 orient the institutions towards a process that is more open to business and more integrated with market demands (DPS & AKPA, 2024, pp. 7–10). Cooperation between the institutions that make up the quality infrastructure has advanced, creating a more coherent mechanism for the provision of standardization and accreditation services. This orientation is consistent with the objectives of European integration and supports institutional stability in this area (European Commission, 2024, pp. 62–63).

In economic terms, the impact of standardization is manifested through increased productivity, improved production efficiency and the creation of a more reliable environment for trade. Standards reduce technical uncertainties and improve the quality of products, facilitating their circulation in European markets (UNIDO, 2023, pp. 11–15). They contribute to the reduction of non-tariff barriers and create conditions for wider participation of domestic operators in international supply chains.

The increase in the number of enterprises certified according to management standards serves as a practical indicator of this impact. At the end of 2023, around 420 ISO 9001 certifications, 95 ISO 14001 certifications and around 70 ISO 45001 certifications were reported active in Albania, with an upward trend compared to the previous year (DPS, 2023, pp. 18–20). Small and medium-sized enterprises are among the main beneficiaries of standardization. The implementation of international standards can increase their productivity and credibility in the market, creating opportunities for partnerships and increased exports (OECD, 2023, pp. 41–45). Awareness of the role of standards has been expanded as a result of trainings and campaigns included in the DPS action plan for the period 2024–2025 (DPS, 2024, pp. 5–6). This orientation towards interaction with business has fostered a clearer institutional culture, where standardization is envisaged as part of the country's overall economic strategy.

At the regional level, Albania has recorded a steady increase in the adoption of European standards. During the period 2020–2023, an increase of around 40% is reported in the number of standards transposed by CEN and CENELEC, which indicates a continuous approximation of the national system to EU requirements (PTB, 2022, pp. 27–29). This progress is related to the consolidation of cooperation between quality institutions and the improvement of the

management of technical processes within the DPS.

Standards also contribute to improving the social and environmental dimensions of development. They are closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015, pp. 3–5). In this context, ISO international standards function as technical instruments for the practical implementation of the SDGs. For example, ISO 9001 is linked to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), ISO 14001 to SDG 13 (climate action), ISO 50001 to SDG 7 (clean and affordable energy), while ISO 26000 supports SDG 16 (strong institutions and social responsibility) (ISO, 2018, pp. 2–4). Through these standards, the principles of sustainable development are translated into manageable practices by businesses and institutions.

The link between ISO and the SDGs is institutionalized in the overall strategy of the International Organization for Standardization. The document "ISO Strategy 2030 – Standards are at the heart of sustainable development" emphasizes the role of standards as a tool for fostering innovation, protecting the environment and improving social life, orienting standardization activities towards achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda (ISO, 2021, pp. 2–5). In this perspective, the relationship between ISO standards and sustainability objectives is two-way: standards contribute to meeting the objectives, while the SDGs guide the development of new standards that address economic, social and environmental challenges. For Albania, this link has become more visible in recent years through the policies of the DPS and quality infrastructure institutions, which position standardization as part of the national sustainable development agenda (DPS & AKPA, 2024, pp. 9–10).

According to an independent international assessment published by *the Sustainable Development Solutions Network* (SDSN) and *Cambridge University Press* in 2025, Albania ranks 45th out of 167 countries, with an above-average score for the Eastern European region, with 75.2 out of 100 on the SDG Index. This report assesses the progress of these countries towards the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and serves as a benchmark for the institutional performance and economic sustainability of the country. This assessment reflects gradual institutional improvements and better alignment of national policies with global sustainability objectives (Sachs et al., 2025, pp. 240–241).

In addition to international assessments, Albania's progress towards the sustainable development goals is periodically monitored by INSTAT, in cooperation with UNDP and Eurostat. According to the report "Sustainable Development Goals – Albania 2022", labor force participation reached 68.9%, renewable energy accounts for 41.4% of final consumption, while the waste recycling rate has increased to 18.8% (INSTAT, 2023, pp. 41–61). These indicators suggest a gradual economic and environmental improvement in line with the principles of ISO standards and the directions of the 2030 Agenda.

Institutional development has also been enhanced through broader stakeholder participation in standardization processes. Improved cooperation between public institutions, businesses and universities is moving the system towards a more open and inclusive platform. The development of digital tools for public consultation and participation in the drafting of standards is expected to increase transparency and strengthen the role of standardization as an instrument of institutional reform (UNIDO & ISO, 2024, pp. 2–4). This initiative is in line with the practices of European Union countries.

In conclusion, standardization in Albania is consolidating as a measurable tool of institutional and economic development. The increase in the number of adopted standards, the high percentage of harmonization with the European collection and the gradual expansion of management system certifications are indicators of progress. This process supports the development of quality policies, the strengthening of institutions and the deepening of integration with the European standardization system (European Commission, 2024, p. 63).

## 5. Challenges and Prospects for the Standardization System in Albania

The legal and institutional framework for standardization in Albania has marked significant improvements, especially after the adoption of Law No. 36/2017 "On Standardization in the Republic of Albania", which sets out the basic principles for the development, adoption and use of national standards in line with international and European practices. However, analysis of practical implementation and assessments by international institutions show that the system continues to face fragmentation and gaps in its institutional and legal functioning (European Commission, 2024a, pp. 42–44).

The main challenges relate to the lack of binding mechanisms for implementation, insufficient inter-institutional coordination, limited technical and human capacities, and fragmentation of oversight instruments. The integration of ISO standards into the Albanian legal framework remains at a general level, without clear definitions of responsibilities and monitoring. Law no. 36/2017 does not detail the division of competences between the General Directorate of Standardization (DGS), relevant authorities and certification bodies, which makes practical implementation difficult, both

in the public and private sectors.

Another challenge is the lack of a unified system for monitoring and measuring progress. Currently, there is no consistent structure for internal auditing of ISO standards in public administration, while indicators for measuring performance are often not standardized (ISO, 2021, p. 7). European Commission reports note that Albania has not yet set up a comprehensive mechanism for systematic monitoring and reporting of compliance with standards (European Commission, 2023, p. 43). These organizational gaps limit transparency and institutional efficiency, making it difficult to assess the impact of standardization in a comparable manner.

In practice, economic operators face similar obstacles. The lack of consolidated quality management systems, the lack of documented procedures and standardized criteria for supplier selection constitute a difficulty in meeting the requirements of ISO standards, especially those related to ISO 9001 (Zoga & Pano, 2016, pp. 107–115). This reflects a low level of awareness of the role of standards as a development tool and not just as a formality for certification.

Transposition of international and European standards represents a persistent challenge. Although Albania signed the "Cooperation Agreement" with CEN in 2017, the harmonisation process is not fully reflected in the secondary legislation and practical guidelines of the DPS (Directorate General for Standardisation, 2023c, Article 2.3). Implementation remains partial and not always in line with the guidelines of ISO Guide 21, which defines the standard adoption formats and the procedures for translation and publication (ISO, 2022d, pp. 6–9). This inconsistency reduces the effectiveness of Albania's participation in the European standardisation system and slows down the process of technical harmonisation necessary for integration into the internal market (European Commission, 2022b, p. 10).

The analysis of Law No. 36/2017 shows that, although the functions of the national standardization system are defined, a detailed framework for the transposition and systematic use of ISO standards in the public administration and the private sector is lacking (Council of Ministers, 2017, Articles 4 and 12). Sub-legal acts such as the "General Rules for Standards" remain general and do not fully address the manner of dynamic harmonization in rapidly developing areas, such as digital transformation or green energy (Council of Ministers, 2020, p. 3). International ISO practices underline the importance of procedural flexibility and continuous updating to ensure compatibility with global developments (ISO, 2022c, pp. 5–6).

From a governance perspective, the challenges are more institutional than technical. They relate to limited awareness of the role of standards, coordination between institutions, and the lack of clear mechanisms for measuring their impact. Strategic documents do not define unified indicators to measure the impact of ISO standards on institutional performance (Council of Ministers, 2022, pp. 9–10). International experience shows that establishing a standardized monitoring framework by areas of action is essential for assessing results (ISO, 2023c, p. 7). Without integrated auditing and periodic reporting, the implementation of standards risks remaining a formal process, with limited impact on improving quality and transparency.

In this context, the development perspective of the standardization system in Albania is closely linked to the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework, as well as the gradual increase of technical and human capacities. The experience of other developing countries shows that long-term investment in training, technology and inter-institutional cooperation directly affects the effective functioning of the national standardization system (ISO, 2021, p. 5). Also, involvement in regional programs such as the SEE QI Fund (a regional cooperation platform for strengthening quality infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries) is seen as a positive direction for strengthening institutional competencies and for progress in harmonization with the European quality system (PTB, 2023, p. 14).

In the future, the development of electronic tools and integrated platforms for managing ISO standards is presented as part of the natural evolution of the system, contributing to increased transparency, accessibility and institutional coordination. The European Strategy for Standardization (2022) emphasizes the role of digital tools for harmonization (European Commission, 2022b, p. 7), while the IWA 48:2024 document emphasizes the benefits of integrated approaches at all stages of the standardization process (ISO, 2024, pp. 2–4). The experience of Croatia and Serbia shows that the development of such systems helps to increase the efficiency and reliability of national quality structures (PTB, 2023, p. 12).

The current challenges of standardization in Albania reflect a phase of institutional transition, where further development requires consolidation of the legal and technical basis, as well as strengthening awareness of the role of standards in competitiveness and good governance. The outlook remains positive, but depends on the ability to move from a formal approach towards a more integrated and contemporary model, which treats standardization as a tool for sustainable development and an instrument of institutional improvement.

In the context of the new policies of the European Union, the perspective of the development of the standardization system in Albania should be understood in relation to the European Strategy for Standardization 2022–2030, which

emphasizes the role of standards in supporting innovation, sustainability and industrial competitiveness (European Commission, 2022b, pp. 6–8). This strategy foresees that candidate countries should approximate not only the technical framework, but also horizontal policies related to the green transition and industrial transformation, as part of the Industrial Plan of the Green Deal (European Commission, 2024, pp. 62–63). In this sense, Albania continues to strengthen the role of standardization as a strategic component of national development policies, linking it to the objectives of clean energy, innovation and institutional efficiency. This evolutionary perspective aims at the full integration of the country into the European quality system and the deepening of cooperation in EU support programs, strengthening the role of DPS as a connecting node between local institutions and international standardization networks (PTB, 2023, p. 12).

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis shows that standardization in Albania is gradually moving from a formal process of approximation towards a more functional mechanism that supports institutional and economic development. The legal framework has been consolidated, while cooperation between quality infrastructure institutions – especially the role of the General Directorate of Standardization (GDS) – has created a more coherent basis for building a more coordinated and transparent system. The approximation of national standards with European ones and the gradual increase in the number of ISO certifications indicate a steady progress in technical and institutional integration.

However, challenges remain related to the lack of unified monitoring mechanisms, still limited technical and human capacities, and the formal certification culture. These obstacles continue to limit the long-term impact of standards as an improvement tool and make it difficult to measure the real contribution to the economy and governance.

In the future, strengthening the standardization system requires a transition from documentary compliance to a more integrated and comprehensive model, combining the digitalization of processes, continuous training and enhanced cooperation between public institutions, business and international partners. The connection of standardization with sustainable development objectives and the green transition positions it as a strategic component of Albania's development policies and European integration process.

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