

DRAFT SUMMARY OF MEETING MINUTES
INVESTMENT COUNCIL (IC)
MEETING XXXVI

***“On the Digitalisation of Local Public Services for Businesses and
Access to the EU Single Market”***

Tirana, 4 December 2025, 15h00 – 16h40

The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Economy and Innovation, Ms Delina Ibrahimaj, also Chair of the Investment Council (IC). The meeting was attended by 15 IC members and 30 observers, including representatives of domestic and foreign business associations as well as state institutions in Albania.

I. Opening of the Meeting by Ms Delina Ibrahimaj, Minister of Economy and Innovation and Chair of the IC

In her opening remarks, Minister Ibrahimaj welcomed everyone and expressed her appreciation for returning to her role as Chair of the Investment Council. She noted that next year will be especially challenging because of the large number of laws that need to be adopted as part of the EU integration process—over 400 legal acts directly affecting the economy and the requirements businesses must meet.

The Minister emphasised that while this presents challenges, it also creates important opportunities for the economy and the business community. She highlighted the role of the Investment Council's surveys and analyses in identifying issues and suggesting necessary actions to address them.

Referring to the Secretariat's latest business climate survey, which would be presented later in the meeting, she suggested holding a more detailed discussion in January 2026. The goal would be to assign tasks and plan concrete actions to help businesses prepare for upcoming processes and make the most of existing opportunities.

She also thanked the Minister of State for Local Governance, Mr Ervin Demo, for his presence, in view of the first agenda item concerning the digitalisation of local-level services and coordination with central government.

II. Priorities and Challenges of Local-Level Digitalisation

Minister Ervin Demo highlighted the importance of roundtables that bring together business interests and public policies, particularly at the local level, emphasising the key role of municipalities in territorial development and in leveraging local economic potential. He referred to the findings of the Secretariat's survey, which, in his view, clearly reflect the current challenges faced by municipalities. While digitalisation of local services is essential, the process faces obstacles such as territorial fragmentation, limited capacities, and the need for standardised procedures.

The Minister stressed that digitalisation must be accompanied by process re-engineering to make procedures more transparent, simpler, and efficient. He noted that the central government should cover the costs of investments—from technical infrastructure to training and cybersecurity—while municipalities should focus on building capacity and effectively managing processes.

He mentioned the reforms planned for 2026, including the territorial reform, which should be supported by data-driven analyses and ensure municipalities have real capacity for economic development. He also highlighted the importance of digitalising internal financial management in municipalities, in line with the performance grant scheme supported by international partners.

Minister Demo emphasised that digitalisation is crucial for transparency and anti-corruption efforts and that the process will involve continuous consultation with the business community. He proposed that once the new model is more consolidated, it should be presented to the Investment Council for feedback and suggestions. In conclusion, he noted that 2026 will be a particularly challenging year for public institutions, businesses, and citizens, as legislative and reform initiatives are expected to have a direct impact on all stakeholders.

III. Presentation by the Secretariat on the Analysis of Local Service Digitalisation

Ms Diana Leka (Angoni), IC Secretariat, presented the key findings and recommendations of the Secretariat's analysis on the digitalisation of administrative services at the local level. The topic, selected by Council members, identifies gaps between central and local levels in delivering digital services.

The analysis shows that digitalisation of local services remains uneven and limited compared to the central level. While businesses generally value the process, they expressed concerns about the functioning of municipal systems, lack of information, and low administrative capacities. Digital service delivery remains fragmented, with some progress observed in the Municipality of Tirana. The e-Permits platform is viewed positively, though there is uncertainty regarding maintenance and the division of responsibilities within municipalities.

Businesses stressed the need for the digitalisation of complaints and fiscal services as a priority, while communication and involvement in decision-making remain weak. Consultations also revealed challenges related to real estate management and the lack of updated local-level data.

Key recommendations include: harmonising policies between central and local levels; gradually digitalising services while strengthening municipal capacities; creating performance indicators; and ensuring more structured engagement of business stakeholders in consultation processes.

IV. Summary of Key Discussions

Mr Grant Van Cleve, AmCham, welcomed the constructive dialogue and the respectful relationships with institutions, but emphasised that the Chamber still experiences a lack of structured consultation on legislative and regulatory initiatives. He noted that, despite the contributions of AmCham committees through analyses and proposals, consultation periods are often very short, institutional responses are missing, and a significant portion of recommendations are not considered, creating a sense that listening remains a challenge. Regarding local governance issues, he expressed hope that the government would strengthen formal consultation mechanisms beyond informal meetings and discussions, emphasising his point in a positive spirit and with the belief that strong relationships can facilitate real improvements.

Mr Agim Rrapaj, KASH, raised concerns from the agricultural sector regarding digitalisation, highlighting that the practical management of 1.8 million parcels is currently unfeasible. This has resulted in delays in the disbursement of funds from national schemes. He noted that this challenge becomes even more urgent in the context of European Union fund allocations, which are area-based and require parcel-level digitalisation. Mr Rrapaj requested support from both ministers to

develop a digitalisation strategy, suggesting the creation of a long-term plan as well as a short-term strategy for 2027–2030, aimed at improving the management and disbursement of funds.

Minister Delina Ibrahimaj emphasised the importance of consulting on laws and economic initiatives within the framework of EU integration processes. She noted that the laws adopted in this context are direct translations and transpositions of EU directives. Since these laws are reviewed and approved by the responsible structures in Brussels, there is very limited room for modifications based on public consultation comments. The Minister highlighted the need to harmonise the consultation process across different councils, including the National Economic Council, the Investment Council, and other existing advisory bodies, while increasing the involvement of civil society in economic matters. The Minister also highlighted the importance of clear communication on how laws impact the business community and the role of consultations in determining the most effective ways to implement reforms and economic development programs. She proposed that these issues be included in the Investment Council's 2026 agenda, underlining the need for a structured consultation plan to ensure continuous collaboration between the government, businesses, and civil society, as well as better coordination in addressing challenges and building effective economic policies.

Regarding the digitalisation of agricultural land, the Minister announced that a nationwide agricultural census will be conducted next year to measure and document all farmland in the country. The last census was carried out over ten years ago. This new census will serve as the basis for registering land parcels and preparing for the disbursement of European Union funds via Eurostat once Albania becomes an EU member state. She emphasised that this process will provide an accurate picture of the country's farmland, improve land management, and allow maximum use of the collected data for development and financing purposes, including alignment with EU requirements and standards.

Minister Ervin Demo emphasised the importance of the agricultural land registry and its connection to municipal needs, particularly for calculating property taxes, which are a key source of local government revenue. He announced that starting in January 2026, municipalities will be able to use the data recorded in the cadastre to calculate property taxes based on square meters and other parameters, following a Swedish model for building the database. Currently, the database is 70% populated, and it is expected that by 2030, it will also include agricultural land, improving municipal financial management and contributing to increased local revenues.

Mr Zak Topuzi, Albanian Tourism Association, highlighted the importance of involving the tourism and agrotourism sectors in the digitalisation process. He mentioned the challenges investors face in obtaining the necessary certificates and permits and suggested the creation of a “digital investor file,” consolidating all documents and requirements for an investment project to provide investors with a clear and comprehensive overview. Mr Topuzi also emphasised the need for better interconnection between institutions to avoid submitting the same documents to multiple agencies, saving time and administrative resources.

Mr Nikolin Jaka, Tirana Chamber of Commerce, commended the work of the Investment Council in coordinating with business chambers and associations and in identifying issues that affect the business environment. He underlined the importance of digitalisation and effective communication between local government and entrepreneurs, noting that digital services must be practical, efficient, and capable of delivering clear benefits for both businesses and citizens, including through cost–benefit analysis. Mr Jaka pointed out that, despite progress made, many services remain only partially implemented, and procedures often require entrepreneurs to restart

processes from the beginning. He stressed the need for continuous training and stronger accountability of the staff managing these systems, to ensure that digital services function reliably and meet users' needs.

He also raised several issues regarding local taxes, mentioning the temporary tax on educational infrastructure and the social housing tax, which are often misinterpreted or applied non-transparently, creating concerns for businesses and citizens. Mr Jaka highlighted the importance of local development policies and the role of mayors in identifying the economic potential of their municipalities, including opportunities in tourism and agro-processing. He concluded by emphasising that reform and digitalisation processes must generate positive and measurable impact, linking this to the integrity and performance of entrepreneurs and to their cooperation with the government in building a competitive economy

Minister Delina Ibrahimaj focused her remarks on the digitalisation of services for businesses, noting that although other topics—such as local tax levels—were raised, the main theme of the discussion remained the improvement of public service delivery through digital transformation. She recalled the process launched two years ago, together with NAIS, to identify and eliminate unnecessary documents, for which input was sought from the relevant sectors. The Minister pointed out that cooperation with the business community and direct feedback have so far been limited, with many suggestions coming primarily from ministry staff rather than from businesses themselves. She emphasised that the core objective of the reform is to make processes easier for businesses and to reduce administrative burdens.

She referred to the specific case of the Cadastre, explaining that property title sheets—frequently required by various institutions for service delivery—cannot be automatically updated. This is because the service is provided autonomously and against payment by the Cadastre, meaning that any request to obtain a refreshed title sheet for a given period (e.g., the last three months) must be initiated by the property owner and accompanied by the corresponding fee. Institutional systems are not fully interconnected, making it impossible for one institution to automatically retrieve the most up-to-date version from another.

The Minister stressed the need for a structured digitalisation process and stronger interoperability between institutions to ensure more efficient use of data, eliminate physical submissions, and reduce duplicate documentation. She also expressed readiness to launch a new consultation process for any additional documents currently required, establishing a case-by-case feedback channel for identifying and resolving such issues. This mechanism would enable businesses to report unnecessary bureaucracy, while allowing institutions to adjust procedures in a consistent and harmonised manner, ultimately making services more accessible and efficient for users.

Ms Vasilika Vjero, Tirana Municipality, informed that the education infrastructure tax will be abolished, and starting in 2026, it will no longer be a burden for taxpayers, whether businesses or households. This tax previously represented revenue of approximately 1 billion lek, which will no longer be available in the Tirana Municipality budget following its removal.

She also addressed the social housing tax, which is set at 3% for developers constructing over 2,000 square meters and can be calculated either based on the construction area or the monetary value of the investment. Over the years, this tax has generated approximately 3.5 billion lek, increasing on average by 600 million lek per year, and is used exclusively to fund social housing programs for vulnerable groups.

Ms Vjero announced that on 18 December 2025, the Tirana Municipal Council will approve the municipality's budget for 2026 and the medium term, following public hearings with the community, businesses, and other interest groups. These discussions will provide detailed information on the municipality's funding, revenues, and expenditures, as well as how resources are allocated across functions and programs.

She also highlighted the need to improve local procedures for collecting taxes and fees, noting that although local administrations follow central legislation, processes should be enhanced to increase efficiency and ensure better alignment with central government practices.

III. Presentation by the Secretariat on the Investment Climate Survey and EU Integration

Ms Diana Leka (Angoni), IC Secretariat reported that the Secretariat's survey on the relationship between businesses, the tax administration, and the EU integration process shows gradual improvements, particularly in professionalism, clarity of reporting, and the reliability of digital data. However, informality, tax evasion, and corruption remain major challenges. Businesses report a lack of information on reforms and EU integration, although expectations remain positive regarding increased efficiency and legal certainty. Digitalisation is seen as a key tool for transparency and efficiency, while business consultation and involvement are still limited, highlighting the need for integrated platforms and clear communication channels to simplify services and reduce bureaucracy.

Mr Nikolin Jaka, Tirana Chamber of Commerce, highlighted two major challenges facing businesses in Albania. *First*, the justice system is extremely slow, with cases from first-instance courts to higher courts taking five to seven years, making access to justice practically unattainable for businesses that operate with annual financial cycles. He suggested increasing the number of judges and implementing judicial reforms to improve efficiency. *Second*, he noted the lack of awareness among businesses—especially small enterprises—regarding standards, performance, and competitiveness, emphasising that most do not fully understand what EU market integration entails. Mr Jaka proposed that the Ministry of Economy and the European Delegation engage experts to support chambers of commerce and business associations, helping businesses understand challenges and meet standards to enhance performance and competitiveness in a European economy. He also stressed that the limited financial and human capacities of chambers and business associations restrict their ability to effectively advocate for and educate businesses.

Mr Zak Topuzi, Albanian Tourism Association, stated that one of the main challenges for the tourism sector is aligning with EU standards and integrating into the European Single Market. He highlighted the lack of standards in hotels, guesthouses, and other services, including star certification. To meet these standards, he noted, businesses need to make significant investments; for example, improving fire safety requires investment in alarm and automatic extinguishing systems, evacuation routes, as well as other infrastructure elements, including equipment, furnishings, sanitary facilities, and electrical installations, to ensure compliance with EU standards and enhance the quality of tourist services. Mr Topuzi suggested the need for grants and soft loans to support the industry in adapting to European requirements, citing examples from Greece and other countries as successful models. He also inquired about the measures the government has planned to support this essential process for the development of the tourism sector.

Ms. Ritva Heikkinen, EU Delegation, expressed appreciation for the discussion forum, highlighting the importance of dialogue on European Union integration. She raised several key points:

- Every law sent to Brussels should be part of an internal consultation process, including a domestic review and adequate preparation time for examination by Brussels. Implementing regulations are particularly important and should be discussed and consulted on, as the main law may seem complete, but its practical application depends on the details of these regulations. Consultation with businesses should continue throughout the implementation process.
- A problem that was also identified here is the lack of information available to businesses regarding reforms and EU integration, including the green transition and preparation for Single Market standards. Preparing businesses takes years, and they cannot rely solely on knowing the accession date. It requires ongoing information about laws and regulations, understanding the EU standards and procedures, and compliance with legal and technical requirements to remain competitive.
- The donor community and the EU Delegation play a crucial role in supporting this process through structured programs, including training, continuous information provision, and consultations with businesses on the implementation of laws and regulations, aiming to ensure that Albanian businesses are ready for the EU market.
- Businesses are insufficiently informed about the national reform agenda and legal priorities, which can negatively affect their confidence and readiness to benefit from integration. Any institution benefiting from the reform agenda should have an active communication plan to support businesses and ensure effective implementation of laws and regulations.
- Consultations should be continuous and inclusive, covering small and large businesses, various sectors, and different levels of governance, to ensure that every law, standard, or procedure is clear, accessible, and enforceable. Cooperation with Brussels is necessary to ensure that the review of laws and regulations aligns with EU expectations and standards, avoiding delays or misinterpretations.

Minister Delina Ibrahimaj, thanked for the comment and clarified that, regarding laws related to the EU integration process, every draft law and legal act—whether for the Reform and Growth Agenda or for meeting the closing criteria of chapters—undergoes an internal consultation process before being sent to the EU. This process already exists and is actively implemented. She emphasised that most of these laws are not created from scratch but are direct transpositions of EU directives, which limits the room for modifications or interventions.

However, the Minister fully supported the need for consultation on secondary legislation (as an active process and part of the Ministry's work plan), which defines the practical implementation of the law. This issue has been discussed several times in this Council. Today, the government addressed the initiation of the consultation process for one of the most important secondary acts—for example, the regulation on foreign direct investment (FDI) screening—which is scheduled to be adopted within this year.

Regarding the needs of the business community, the Minister emphasised that for the past two years she has insisted on the necessity of a dedicated program to prepare businesses for EU integration. This preparation includes continuous information, technical assistance, access to financing, and guidance on the instruments the EU provides to support enterprises. Cooperation with the EBRD has enabled the development of a training program for both consultants and businesses on European funds within the framework of the Single Market Program.

A dedicated program for this process has already been approved by the Government's Strategic Committee and is currently available in Albanian. With support from GIZ, an analysis is underway to assess the readiness of the business community and understand its current position relative to the EU economic framework. The report is expected to be completed by the end of December 2025, and the final design of the program will be ready in the first quarter of 2026. This process is intended to be fully inclusive, ensuring that each stakeholder is engaged with clear responsibilities, so that businesses are well-prepared to operate in the EU market.

The program aims to achieve concrete results, including:

- Informing 100% of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the majority of micro-enterprises;
- Certifying and accrediting around 200 consultants and experts, organised by economic sector;
- Conducting approximately 500 workshops and training sessions with sectoral and regional approaches;
- Promoting success stories;
- Accrediting, according to EU standards, around 50% of medium and large enterprises during the project period;
- Addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers for businesses, based on needs assessments.

The Minister emphasised that, although the program has been drafted and approved by the Strategic Committee, it still requires financing. Ongoing discussions have taken place with the EU Delegation and other donors, including support through SASPAC. Once the readiness analysis is completed and the first draft of interventions is prepared, roundtables and meetings with all stakeholders will be organised to define how to mobilise the necessary resources for program implementation. This process is crucial not only for providing information but also for ensuring the real success of the Albanian economy in the European market.

As noted in today's discussions, demand from various sectors is very high, underlining the urgency of this process.

Ms Ekaterina Solovova, EBRD, noted that although work to prepare businesses for the EU Single Market has already begun, it needs to be significantly scaled up. She underlined that one of EBRD's strategic objectives in Albania is to enhance the readiness of the private sector for the EU internal market. This process requires not only institutional support but also initiative from businesses themselves, which must remain curious, proactive, and willing to invest in order to stay competitive in a highly competitive market. Ms Solovova highlighted that several financial instruments are already available—developed by EBRD jointly with the EU and other donors—providing blended finance for investments in innovation and other areas essential for meeting EU standards. These instruments can be accessed through six local partner banks. She added that, beyond financing, the EBRD also offers technical assistance and expressed readiness to deepen cooperation once the analysis at the Ministry of Economy is finalised and priority areas for intervention are clearly identified.

Minister Delina Ibrahimaj, also briefed participants on the initiative to establish a development bank, aimed at addressing the urgent need of the private sector for significant and flexible financing. The goal is to enable businesses to undertake investments required for alignment with EU standards, automation, modernisation, and innovation. For this reason, a dedicated institution

is needed that can absorb available European-level financial instruments—including guarantees and other mechanisms—and channel them effectively to the private sector.

She also addressed the heavy administrative workload in the judicial system, emphasising that current capacities cannot meet the pace needed for timely resolutions. According to the Minister, the most effective solution is to strengthen mediation mechanisms and build capacity for resolving disputes outside the courts. She highlighted the existence of innovative tools, including AI-based solutions, that could support this process, and noted that the development of such a platform is being considered to ease pressure on the judicial system and improve efficiency in dispute resolution.

Mr Denald-George Tafani, HBAA welcomed Minister Ibrahimaj's return as Chair of this forum and emphasised the importance of the Investment Council as a unique platform that brings together actors from politics, diplomacy, business, and public institutions. He highlighted the Secretariat's contribution, which is reflected in the tangible outcomes of the Council's discussions.

He addressed the challenges mentioned by previous speakers, particularly the situation in the judicial system, where around 200,000 cases are handled by only 300 judges, causing unavoidable delays in decision-making.

Regarding the business climate and digitalisation, he stressed that the main challenge is not technology itself, but the distribution of accurate information among institutions—information that must be accessible to all, including municipalities, which need comprehensive data on the business environment and foreign investment attraction.

Speaking on behalf of the Hellenic Business Association, he noted that foreign business associations exist only when foreign businesses are active, highlighting their role in promoting Albania and its potential. However, he pointed out that the entry of large corporations has become more complex, as many operate through investment funds that, according to their statutes, cannot invest in countries with low credit ratings from international agencies such as Standard & Poor's and Moody's. This limitation affects not only direct foreign investment but also the possibility for these funds to participate in Albanian companies, even when those companies are financially sound and have high potential.

He concluded by emphasising that many European companies view Albania as a gateway to the entire region. Therefore, the government—and particularly the Ministry of Finance—needs to work closely with these rating agencies to improve the country's evaluation, enabling the attraction of strategic funds and investments.

Minister Delina Ibrahimaj stated that improving the government's credit rating from international agencies such as Standard & Poor's and Moody's is a long-term process that cannot be achieved through a single action plan. Progress depends on continuous advancements across multiple areas, where the government is already taking measures. Nevertheless, she emphasised that despite the time required, Albania has made significant progress in recent years.

Ms Diana Leka (Angoni), IC Secretariat thanked the chambers and AIDA for their cooperation in the survey process and for the suggestions submitted so far. She also called for continued collaboration in preparing the Investment Council's agenda for 2026. She highlighted three priority areas for consultation: exports, the export plan, and collaboration with the ecosystem to promote sustainable, standards-based investments. Ms Leka emphasised that work on these

issues is ongoing and requested that chambers that have not yet submitted their suggestions do so as soon as possible, before the Secretariat forwards the topics for voting.

Closing of the Meeting

At the conclusion of the discussions, Minister Ibrahimaj thanked all participants for their contributions and for highlighting the importance of the issues addressed. She emphasised that, in collaboration with the Investment Council Secretariat, the work agenda for the Council for the coming year will be prepared. The main priority will be to support and prepare businesses for Albania's EU accession process. The Minister then formally declared the meeting closed.

List of Participation

Government Representatives

1. Ms Delina Ibrahimaj, Chair of the Investment Council / Minister of Economy and Innovation
2. Ms Natasha Ahmetaj, Deputy Governor, Bank of Albania
3. Ms Laura Plaku, CEO, AIDA

Business Representatives

1. Mr Nikolin Jaka, Chair, Tirana Chamber of Commerce and Industry
2. Ms Ines Muçostepa, Chair, Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry
3. Mr Diego Pisa, Board Member, Foreign Investors Association (FIAA)
4. Ms Antonela Hako, Chair, Women's Economic Chamber (WECA)
5. Mr Grant Van Cleve, President, AmCham Albania
6. Mr Spiro Brumbulli, Secretary General, Albanian Bankers' Association (delegated by Mr Bledar Shella, Chair of the Supervisory Board)
7. Mr Denald George-Tafani, President, Hellenic Business Association in Albania
8. Ms Linda Shomo, CEO, EasyPay (*ad-hoc*)
9. Mr Avenir Kika, Board Member, Builders' Association (*ad-hoc*)

International Partners

1. Ms Ritva Heikkinen, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation
2. Ms Ekaterina Solovova, Head of EBRD Resident Office in Albania
3. Mr Massimiliano Paolucci, Country Manager, World Bank Albania
4. Ms Laura Qorlaze, Representative, IFC

Absentees:

1. Mr Ardian Lekaj, President, Albanian Diaspora Business Chamber
2. Mr Davide Rogai, President, Confindustria Albania
3. Mr Nicholas A. Rana, President, ICC Albania
4. Mr Valer Pinderi, President, Albanian E-Commerce Association (AECA)

Observers:

1. Mr Enkelejd Musabelliu, Deputy Minister of Economy and Innovation
2. Mr Endrit Yzeiraj, Deputy Minister of Finance
3. Ms Vasilika Vjero, Deputy Mayor, Tirana Municipality
4. Mr Philipp Arnold, Deputy Head of Mission, Swiss Embassy
5. Ms Doriane Toro, Head of Sector, Ministry of Finance
6. Ms Berla Hura, Specialist, Ministry of Finance
7. Ms Nevila Repishti, Director of e-Albania, AKSHI
8. Mr Alban Zusi, President, Exporters' Association
9. Mr Agim Rrapaj, President, KASH
10. Mr Bardhyl Baltëza, Board Member, Union of Albanian Producers / CEO, Edipack shpk
11. Ms Helga Zogolli, Representative, BiznesAlbania
12. Mr Julian Saraçi, President, Free Professionals Alliance
13. Mr Zak Topuzi, Vice President, Albanian Tourism Association

14. Ms Helisabeta Caco, Executive Director, Hellenic Business Association in Albania
15. Mr Reinaldo Pipiria, President, Real Estate Association (NAREA)
16. Ms Endrita Xhaferaj, Principal Counsellor, EBRD
17. Ms Ledia Muço, Adviser, EU Delegation
18. Ms Marjeta Xhabrahimi (Kodra), Head of Office, Advantage Austria
19. Ms Silvana Meko, Expert, “Local Finance” Project
20. Mr Artur Papajani, Expert
21. Ms Borana Kalemi, Project Manager, Swisscontact
22. Mr Erald Buzi, Business Consultant, GIZ