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THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S INFLUENCE ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN ALBANIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Within the contemporary global economy, each nation embraces its unique economic systems, which in turn indirectly impact other countries and their respective economic landscapes. The circular economy emerges as a transformative paradigm, seeking to establish a sustainable model by revolutionizing production and consumption practices. This paradigm underscores the rigorous allocation, repurposing, restoration, renovation, and recycling of materials, thereby elongating product life spans, optimizing functionality, and curbing waste generation. The World Economic Forum characterizes the circular economy as an industrial framework intrinsically designed to be restorative and regenerative in nature. Operating on an almost closed-loop system, the circular economy significantly reduces waste by continuously cycling materials back into the economy. This approach bolsters environmental sustainability, enhances economic resilience, and fosters innovation, effectively counteracting the inefficiencies inherent in the linear economy. Albania, with its advantageous geographical positioning and abundant natural resources, possesses substantial potential for successfully implementing the circular economy model. This paper provides a comprehensive review of various literatures on the circular economy, highlighting key sectors in Albania and exploring their potential for development. By emulating the practices of various successful global economies, Albania can make significant strides towards European Union membership. This holistic strategy guarantees the preservation

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of value in products, components, and materials for the longest feasible duration, fostering a sustainable and regenerative industrial framework that harmonizes ecological preservation with economic advancement.

Keywords: Circular economy, private sectors, recycling, taxes, supply chain, economic resilience, resource efficiency

INTRODUCTION

The circular economy epitomizes a transformative paradigm within the realms of production and consumption, characterized by the meticulous redistribution, reuse, repair, refurbishment, and recycling of materials to their maximum potential. This methodology significantly extends product lifecycles, thereby optimizing utility and minimizing waste. The World Economic Forum delineates the circular economy as an "*industrial paradigm meticulously engineered to embody restorative and regenerative principles by design*," positioning it in direct contrast to the conventional linear economic construct, which is predicated upon the unsustainable cycle of "extract, manufacture, consume, and dispose."The European Parliament emphasizes that the circular economy functions within an almost closed-loop system, in which products and their materials are highly valued and perpetually cycled back into the economy. This pragmatic approach significantly reduces waste generation. Materials retained through recycling processes can be repurposed repeatedly, ensuring sustained utility and added value. As a result, the circular economy helps maintain the value of products, parts, and materials for as long as possible (Schröder, 2019). Through various activities, every manufactured product can find renewed purpose within the system, continuously contributing to the economy. This integrative methodology not only cultivates environmental stewardship but also fortifies economic adaptability and drives groundbreaking innovation (Erdiaw-Kwasie, 2023). By relentlessly reimagining material utility and prolonging product lifespans, the circular economy addresses the shortcomings of the linear paradigm, championing a regenerative and enduring industrial model. Fiscal policies are pivotal in advancing the circular economy, extending beyond green public procurement and advanced disposal fees under Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks. These policies frequently encompass taxes and subsidies on marketed products. The prosperity experienced today stems largely from the Industrial Revolution's monumental changes in the 18th and early 19th centuries, which propelled economic growth and technological advancements. Nevertheless, this advancement gave rise to the linear economy, defined by the "extract, manufacture, and discard" model. This model, marked by short-term foresight, has precipitated extensive environmental and social repercussions. Mass

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consumption, relentless fossil fuel combustion, urban proliferation, and automobile ownership collectively threaten the natural world and degrade the quality of life. The linear economy prioritizes immediate economic gain over sustainable development, depleting natural resources, increasing pollution, and exacerbating climate change. These adverse effects manifest in biodiversity decline, ecosystem degradation, and social inequalities. As these challenges become more pronounced, transitioning towards sustainable economic models becomes imperative. The circular economy, prioritizing resource optimization and minimizing waste, presents a compelling and sustainable alternative. By adopting sustainable practices and fostering innovation, we can mitigate the linear economy's impacts, working towards a more resilient and equitable future. The ongoing implementation of circular principles lays the foundation for a sustainable global economy (Decker, O. S., 2023).

Comprehending the Concept of the Circular Economy

The circular economy embodies a revolutionary framework for production and consumption, distinguished by the strategic allocation, repurposing, restoration, renovation, and comprehensive recycling of materials and products to maximize their potential and utility.This approach significantly extends the lifecycle of products, thereby maximizing their utility and minimizing waste. The World Economic Forum delineates the circular economy as "*an industrial paradigm meticulously engineered to embody restorative and regenerative objectives in both its intent and structural design*." The European Parliament underlines that a circular economy operates on an almost closed-loop system, in which products and their constituent materials are highly valued and continuously cycled back into the economy. This practical implementation translates into the significant reduction of waste generation. When products reach the end of their lifecycle, their materials are, whenever feasible, retained within the economic system through processes of recycling. These materials can be repurposed repeatedly, thereby generating additional value and ensuring their sustained utility. The circular economy thereby guarantees the prolonged preservation of value inherent in products, components, and materials, ensuring their utility is maximized over time (Arruda, 2021). Through various circular economic activities, every product manufactured can find a renewed purpose elsewhere within the system, perpetually contributing to the economy. This comprehensive methodology not only advances environmental sustainability but also reinforces economic resilience and stimulates innovation. Through the relentless rethinking of material utilization and the prolongation of product longevity, the circular economy materializes as a robust paradigm that rectifies the shortcomings of the linear model, advocating for a restorative and perpetual industrial ecosystem (Kapanen, 2024).

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The importance of the circular economy

The affluence we enjoy in the present can be predominantly ascribed to the transformative upheavals instigated catalyzed by the transformative upheavals of the Industrial Revolution spanning the 18th and early 19th centuries (Pink, 2025).This revolution ushered in an unprecedented enhancement of our standard of living, catalyzing economic growth and technological advancements. Nevertheless, this advancement has been achieved at a considerable price: the creation of what is presently recognized as the linear economy (Lee, T. S., & Bee, S. T., 2024). In essence, our current economic model operates under the "take, make, and dispose" paradigm. This involves the extraction of natural resources, the manufacturing of products, and the subsequent disposal of waste in landfills or other waste management systems. This linear business model, characterized by short-term foresight and a limited consideration of long-term consequences, has precipitated extensive environmental and social repercussions. The pervasive culture of mass consumption, the relentless burning of fossil fuels, the proliferation of densely populated urban environments, and the escalating ownership of automobiles collectively pose significant threats to the natural world. This model not only exacerbates environmental degradation but also erodes the quality of life for individuals and communities. By perpetuating methods that prioritize short-term economic profit over long-term sustainability, the linear economy has exacerbated the exhaustion of natural resources, the escalation of pollution, and the acceleration of climate change (Campana, 2017). The adverse effects of this model are evident in the decline of biodiversity, the degradation of ecosystems, and the exacerbation of social inequalities. As we confront these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need to transition towards more sustainable economic models. The circular economy, which emphasizes the maximization of resource efficiency, the reduction of waste, and the continuous reutilization of materials, offers a robust alternative to the conventional linear paradigm (Abbasi, 2024). By adopting sustainable practices and fostering innovation, we can mitigate the ecological and societal repercussions of the linear economy, while striving for a more robust and just future.

The Vital Role of the Private Sector in Advancing the Circular Economy

The private sector assumes a crucial function in spearheading the transition to a circular economy, acting as a primary catalyst for innovation, resource efficiency, and the adoption of sustainable business practices (Zorpas, A. A., 2024). Companies possess a unique capability to design products that are not only durable but also repairable and recyclable, thereby fostering a closed-loop system that significantly reduces waste and optimizes resource utilization. By making significant investments in eco-friendly technologies, creating sustainable supply chains,

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and embracing innovative business models like product-as-a-service, the private sector not only reduces environmental harm but also unlocks fresh economic prospects. Furthermore, businesses are instrumental in influencing consumer behavior by providing circular solutions and fostering awareness of sustainable consumption habits (Issa, L., & El-Fadel, M., 2025). By forging collaborations with governments, non-governmental organizations , and other industries, the private sector contributes to the creation of a robust ecosystem conducive to a circular economy, thereby ensuring long-term economic resilience and environmental sustainability. A recent investigation in Colombia reveals that businesses are progressively embracing the assimilation and operationalization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their sustainability reports and strategic frameworks (Pineda-Escobar, 2019). The private sector undeniably bears a significant responsibility in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), acting as a central catalyst for advancement through its operational endeavors (Hope, 2024). The SDGs strongly urge businesses to mitigate or eliminate their adverse effects on both humanity and the environment, while amplifying their positive contributions. For example, mitigating atmospheric contamination through the enactment of SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) is intricately interwoven with the objectives of SDG 13 (Climate Action).Axon and James (2018) underscored the pivotal role of the chemical industry in delivering scientific and technological innovations to address global challenges, including pollution mitigation. Stahel (2013) contended that the private sector's contribution to a sustainable society is manifested through the core tenets of the circular economy (Abdulkarim, R., 2021). Millar et al. (2019) posited that prevailing economic growth trajectories may obstruct the widespread adoption of the circular economy as a sustainable development strategy (Tudor, 2020). Nonetheless, the true promise of the circular economy resides in its ability to unite businesses and policymakers in a collaborative pursuit of sustainability (Korhonen et al., 2018). By concentrating on these goals, the private sector can gain a competitive advantage by aligning with the SDGs through the judicious utilization of energy and resources (Bocken et al., 2014). Living standards can be significantly elevated through the integration of sustainability practices, such as waste reduction, natural resource preservation, energy optimization, the creation of safer and more efficient workplaces, cleaner production techniques, and the provision of eco-conscious products, alongside enhancements in societal health and safety (Ardakani & Soltanmohammadi, 2019).

Challenges in Establishing a Circular Economy

Despite global initiatives and the urgent need to shift from linear to circular economies, industry professionals and the private sector encounter formidable obstacles in adopting and

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implementing this paradigm. Drawing from our literature review, workshops, and survey results, we have identified the following primary challenges faced by enterprises:

- *Incentives within the Supply Chain:* Many industries grapple with the absence of sustainable material alternatives within the supply chain that can be recovered for remanufacturing and reincorporation into new products. Moreover, products derived from linear production processes often come at a lower cost in the short term. Without compelling incentives, such as tax incentives or subsidies for manufacturers to opt for more sustainable materials, production expenses may rise, rendering these environmentally friendly products less appealing to consumers (Arruda, 2021).
- *Lack of Technical Expertise in SMEs***:** A significant barrier to adopting circular practices is the scarcity of specialized knowledge and technical expertise needed to transition from linear to circular product lifecycles. The circular economy extends far beyond recycling; it involves redefining business strategies, incorporating circular inputs, designing products with longevity in mind, and establishing circular material flows. Businesses require a broad spectrum of innovations to embed circularity into their operations. Proficiency in sustainable practices It is imperative to ascertain that an enterprise's commercial operations model aligns with the core tenets of the circular economy.
- *Taxes, Subsidies, and Government Support:* Financial incentives, subsidies, and the externalized costs favoring linear production models present substantial challenges to the economic viability of circular approaches. Furthermore, inadequate regulatory frameworks significantly impede the shift from linear business models. According to a report by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), despite existing waste management and recycling regulations, there is a lack of policy coherence, and current measures have had minimal effect in advancing the circular economy (United Nations Environment Program, 2019).
- *Societal Barriers Related to Consumer Behaviour and Perception:* Public acceptance is pivotal in shaping market dynamics and influencing companies to adopt circular business models. However, consumer lack of awareness regarding the environmental impact of products and industrial practices obstructs this transition. When consumers fail to perceive the value of reused products, they are less inclined to support the shift toward circularity. Additionally, environmentally sustainable products often come with higher upfront costs, including investments in design, research, specialized knowledge, materials, and infrastructure. Price remains a dominant factor in purchasing decisions, but the lower cost of products in linear systems does not account for the long-term environmental costs (Pheifer, 2017).

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Global Fiscal Strategies for Promoting Circular Economy

Fiscal policies are employed to advance products and services associated with the circular economy .These measures extend beyond green public procurement and advanced disposal fees under Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks. They frequently encompass taxes and subsidies (including tax credits and deductions) on marketed products. For instance, taxes are levied on items using primary or non-recyclable materials, particularly plastics, such as single-use plastics, non-reusable plastic packaging, and products containing virgin plastics exceeding a specified threshold. In the United Kingdom, manufacturers and importers of plastic packaging incorporating less than 30% recycled content are mandated to incur an ancillary excise of £200 per metric ton, enforced as of 1 April 2022. Denmark and Sweden impose taxes on certain soft Polyvinyl Chloride products and certain chemicals used as flame retardants in electronic goods, respectively .Analogous policies are also implemented in Finland, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Subsidies are instrumental in promoting products made from recycled and bio-based materials as well as remanufacturing. In Italy, tax credits are accessible for the acquisition of products composed of recycled plastics, packaging containing recycled materials (such as recycled paper, plastics, or aluminum), and biodegradable packaging. In China, subsidy programs support the purchase of remanufactured vehicles product promotion, subsidies incentivize circular economy-related projects (Tarlan Ahmadov, 2022). These include corporate tax deductions, accelerated depreciation, tax credits, and reduced or exempt Value Added Tax (VAT) to encourage eco-innovation and circular business models, such as repair activities. Such policies are extensively enacted across a diverse array of nations, encompassing the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Ahmadov, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This inquiry employs a qualitative literature review methodology to rigorously analyze the implementation and merits of the circular economy paradigm within the Albanian framework. The primary aim is to synthesize existing knowledge and insights from an array of scholarly sources, thus offering a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The data is gathered through an exhaustive review of academic articles, reports, and publications from esteemed sources such as the World Economic Forum, OECD, and other international bodies. These sources are instrumental in providing invaluable information on the principles, practices, and outcomes associated with the circular economy across various global contexts. Literature is meticulously selected based on its relevance, credibility, and depth of analysis concerning the

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circular economy. Priority is given to sources that specifically address Albania's economic systems and those of analogous nations. Additionally, publications featuring case studies, empirical data, and theoretical frameworks related to the circular economy are included to ensure a robust analysis. The gathered literature is methodically scrutinized to discern pivotal themes, emerging trends, and valuable insights concerning the influence of the circular economy on Albania. The analysis zeroes in on understanding how the circular economy fosters sustainable development, resource efficiency, and economic resilience. A comparative analysis with successful global economies is conducted to extract applicable lessons for the Albanian context. The findings from the literature review are synthesized into a cohesive narrative, highlighting the advantages and strategic measures for enhancing the circular economy in Albania. This synthesis seeks to provide actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, guiding the effective adoption and integration of circular economy practices.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In Albania, the circular economy remains nascent, yet specific sectors have exhibited significant progress, driven by an increasing commitment to sustainability, alongside governmental, civil society, and international investment support.

Agriculture and Agribusiness

Policies at both central and local levels have identified agriculture and tourism as key priorities for Albania's sustainable and long-term socio-economic development. For instance, current legislation recognizes agriculture and tourism as two of the five most critical sectors for attracting strategic domestic and international investments. Rural economies are predominantly agricultural, often characterized by conventional practices, limited multifunctionality, and small land holdings. Agricultural production is primarily conducted by small and family farms, with 85% classified as small-scale operations. Agrotourism in Albania is governed by Law No. 93/2015 "On Tourism," specifically outlined in point 2, article 4, and further detailed in the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 22, dated January 12, 2018, not amended. These legal frameworks define agrotourism as a hosting activity conducted on a farm or other agricultural setup aimed at attracting visitors and often involving them in agricultural or ancillary activities within that environment. Agrotourism promotes sustainable tourism in rural areas by preserving the environment, maintaining traditions, and promoting local products. According to the Council of Ministers No. 22, "agritourism" is a specialized form of rural tourism focused on utilizing local tourism resources. It aims to develop alternative tourism models, enhance agricultural and livestock production, foster rural development, and create new markets for agricultural and

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livestock products. From a legal perspective, agritourism is mainly considered a subcategory of rural tourism rather than a direct form of multifunctional agriculture (*National Strategy of Agritourism Development in Albania*)[1] .In practice, there is no clear distinction between agritourism and certified agritourism. Agritourism can range from simple village restaurants to fully certified operations. Certified agritourism establishments undergo a certification process that grants them a simplified tax regime (reduced VAT at 6%, profit tax at 5%, and exemption from the infrastructure impact tax for investments).

Objective criteria for certified agritourism establishments include:

I. **Company size criteria**:

a. Farms with at least one hectare of land for crop cultivation.

b. Livestock farms with a minimum of 10 cattle, 100 sheep/goats, or 200 birds.

c. Agricultural units processing agricultural, livestock, or aquaculture products, meeting criteria from point 6 and letters "a" and "b".

II. **Farm structure criteria**:

a. Accommodation facilities with 6 to 30 rooms.

b. Food and beverage services meet the following criteria: i. At least 30% of products must be farm-produced. ii. At least 40% of products must be locally sourced within the municipality. iii. A maximum of 30% of products can be sourced from outside the area. c. Experience in agricultural production.

An aspiring agritourism establishment must meet all these conditions to achieve official certification, including offering food and beverages, accommodation, and recreational activities. Interviews indicate that these requirements have posed challenges to the significant growth of certified agritourism establishments. The tourism sector, a crucial component of Albania's economy, is progressively embracing sustainable practices. Ecotourism and sustainable destination development projects emphasize the conservation of natural resources, waste reduction, and community engagement, consistent with circular economy principles. In the agricultural sector, Albania is exploring circular approaches such as organic farming, composting, and the efficient use of water and resources. These practices not only mitigate environmental impact but also add value to agricultural products and enhance food security.

Solar panels

To address the escalating demand for energy while minimizing environmental impact, adopting renewable energy sources, replenished by natural ecosystems, is a viable alternative.

[1] *National Strategy of Agritourism Development in Albania*

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The research conducted by Mariola Kapidani and Eni Numani on the economic feasibility of solar panels for household use in Albania highlights that such investments yield substantial financial returns. The analysis reveals a favorable net present value (NPV) and an internal rate of return (IRR) of 8.86%, surpassing the capital expenditure requirements. The payback period is calculated to be 18.65 years .Nevertheless, to expedite the adoption of solar energy, Albania must streamline permitting procedures, harmonize legislation, support private sector financing, and enhance education and training (E., & Kemausuor, F. (2024). Strengthening cooperation among stakeholders and raising public awareness through campaigns is crucial for advancing the adoption of green energy. Albania has achieved substantial progress in incorporating photovoltaic (PV) systems, with a multitude of solar power plants established nationwide. These systems have played a pivotal role in enhancing the country's renewable energy capacity. Although solar energy is predominantly harnessed for Domestic Hot Water (DHW) purposes, it also holds potential for applications in space heating (Qamili, A., & Kapia, S., 2024). Additionally, solar energy holds potential for various domestic uses, including agricultural applications such as irrigation or greenhouse lighting. Many leading countries in PV installation have also extensively leveraged this technology within the construction sector.

Electric transport in Albania

Albania’s energy infrastructure is presently centered solely on generating electricity from renewable sources, deliberately forgoing the use of carbon-based or fossil fuels, despite the country’s vast coal and fuel reserves. OSHE, a fully state-owned company, stands as the leading electricity producer in Albania, predominantly generating power from hydropower sources, with a smaller portion derived from solar power plants. Road transport serves as the primary mode for the movement of goods and passengers, significantly contributing to fuel consumption relative to other sectors. The rising number of electric vehicles (EVs) necessitates increased electricity consumption for battery charging, thereby affecting the balance of the energy system more prominently. As an EU candidate country, Albania is striving to align its legislation with EU standards. Thus, it is crucial to adapt regulations for electric vehicles and investigate their potential as the primary mode of future transportation. Considering the substantial electricity required for EV operation, alternative methods to reduce consumption, such as promoting bicycle use, should be explored. Albania is strategically poised to accomplish its goal of emerging as a significant provider of electricity sourced from renewable energy by 2030. Despite the global energy crisis and surging electricity prices, Albania has managed to sustain stable energy prices due to its domestic production and minimal imports, which will not influence prices. Although the current number of EVs is modest, they represent a significant

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step towards mitigating issues arising from fuel use. The growth in EV numbers should be accompanied by strategic planning for electricity sources. According to (Cacaj, 2023) the analysis reveals that replacing internal combustion engine vehicles with electric automobiles would require substantial energy for charging, amounting to approximately 60% of the total energy produced in 2020.

CONCLUSIONS

The circular economy in Albania remains in a nascent stage; however, certain sectors have exhibited notable progress, driven by an increasing dedication to sustainability. This momentum is further amplified by governmental initiatives, active civil society participation, and foreign investments. Key industries, such as agriculture, agribusiness, solar energy, and electric transportation, have made substantial strides towards achieving sustainable development objectives. The integration of renewable energy sources, particularly solar power, represents a promising strategy for mitigating Albania's rising energy demand while simultaneously minimizing its environmental footprint. The nation's emphasis on renewable energy—predominantly hydropower and solar energy—ensures both stable electricity production and price consistency. Agriculture, predominantly characterized by small-scale, family-operated farms, remains a cornerstone of rural economies, while tourism, notably agrotourism, is progressively recognized as a vehicle for fostering sustainable practices, safeguarding cultural heritage, and stimulating local economies. The proliferation of electric vehicles is poised to escalate electricity consumption, necessitating comprehensive and strategic planning. Albania's economic development is closely linked to its natural and environmental resources, which are increasingly under strain. Although progress has been made in the areas of renewable energy and energy efficiency, the country's environmental policies remain insufficiently developed. While CO2 emissions have declined from 1980 to 2021, with a governmental target of a 12% reduction, significant challenges persist, particularly regarding pollution and inadequate water treatment. Prioritizing investments in environmental management and sustainable economic development is imperative, leveraging Albania's comparative advantages for long-term growth (Prendi, 2023). As Albania endeavors to align with EU regulations and aspires to emerge as a leading renewable energy provider by 2030, it must recalibrate its regulatory framework for electric vehicles and explore supplementary measures to manage energy consumption, including the promotion of cycling and other energy-efficient alternatives. Prospective research endeavors could undertake a more granular examination of sector-specific challenges and opportunities, encompassing the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies within agribusiness, the upscaling potential of renewable energy infrastructures, and the multifaceted socio-economic ramifications of agrotourism.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Simplify certification processes and provide incentives for small-scale and family-owned farms to adopt sustainable practices. Encourage the adoption of organic farming, composting, and efficient water usage to mitigate environmental impacts and enhance food security.
- Foster new markets for agricultural products through robust policy support and targeted investments in rural areas. Streamline permitting procedures and harmonize legislation to accelerate the adoption of solar energy systems.
- Offer educational and training programs to bolster capacity in the renewable energy sector and support financing from private entities.
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders and elevate public awareness of the benefits of solar energy through comprehensive campaigns.
- Adapt national legislation to align with EU standards, thereby promoting the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) as the primary mode of transportation.
- Encourage the use of bicycles and other alternative methods to reduce electricity consumption.
- Ensure stable energy prices through domestic production and minimal reliance on imports to support the transition to electric transport.

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