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on the 2021 Commission Report on Albania
(2021/2244(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Isabel Santos

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2021 Commission Report on Albania
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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Albania, of the other part¹,
- having regard to Albania's application for membership of the European Union submitted on 24 April 2009,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)²,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 19-20 June 2003 and the Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 26-27 June 2014, which included a decision to grant the status of candidate country for EU membership to Albania,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 17-18 October 2019,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019, 25 March 2020 and 14 December 2021 on the enlargement and stabilisation and association process,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans' (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled 'Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery' (COM(2020)0315),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 24 July 2020 entitled '2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking' (COM(2020)0608),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 October 2020 entitled 'An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans' (COM(2020)0641),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 April 2021 on the EU strategy

¹ OJ C 52, 11.2.2016, p. 7.

² OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1.

to tackle organised crime 2021-2025 (COM(2021)0170),

- having regard to the Commission communication of 19 October 2021 entitled ‘2021 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2021)0664), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Albania 2021 Report’ (SWD(2021)0289),
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism,
- having regard to the final report of 26 July 2021 by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Election Observation Mission on the Republic of Albania’s parliamentary elections of 25 April 2021,
- having regard to the Venice Commission’s opinion of 14 December 2021 on the extension of the term of office of the transitional bodies in charge of the re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors,
- having regard to the Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR of 11 December 2020 on the amendments of 30 July 2020 to the Albanian Constitution and of 5 October 2020 to the Electoral Code,
- having regard to all other opinions of the Venice Commission on Albania,
- having regard to the EU-Western Balkans summit, held in Brdo pri Kranju on 6 October 2021, and its declaration,
- having regard to the 8th Berlin Process Summit of 5 July 2021,
- having regard to the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs held in Brdo pri Kranju on 1-3 December 2021 and its Joint Press Statement,
- having regard to the final declaration of the 8th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum dated 1 October 2021,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania³,
- having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 25 November 2020 on strengthening media freedom: the protection of journalists in Europe, hate speech, disinformation and the role of

³ OJ C 202, 28.5.2021, p. 86.

⁴ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 129.

platforms⁵,

- having regard to its resolution of 15 December 2021 on cooperation on the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of ... March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Albania,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0000/2022),
- A. whereas European integration represents the aspirations of Albanian citizens towards democracy and prosperity and serves as a powerful catalyst for reforms;
- B. whereas the prospect of Albania's merit-based membership is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests;
- C. whereas Albania has been a candidate country since 2014 and the Commission submitted a draft negotiating framework for Albania on 1 July 2020;
- D. whereas the EU must provide a clear pathway for countries seeking to join the EU;
- E. whereas Albania should continue to press forward with the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, including the protection of persons belonging to minorities;
- F. whereas Albania has fulfilled all the conditions for the scheduling of the first Intergovernmental Conference and is advancing in its accession process;
1. Reiterates its clear support for Albania's democratic transformation, underpinned by its strategic orientation and unwavering commitment to European integration;
 2. Recalls the need to uphold the pace and credibility of European integration by promptly opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, as continuously recommended by the Commission, given that both countries have fulfilled the conditions and deliver sustained results across fundamental areas;
 3. Recognises the transformative nature of the accession negotiations to be conducted under the revised enlargement methodology;
 4. Underscores that the pace of EU accession is determined by the progress on the due functioning of all institutions and is grounded in the rule of law, good governance and fundamental rights; urges Albania to sustain and intensify efforts to reinforce the functioning of the judiciary, strengthen the rule of law, counter corruption and

⁵ OJ C 425, 20.10.2021, p. 28.

⁶ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0506.

organised crime, and ensure media freedom;

Democratic institutions, media and civil society

5. Reaffirms the joint responsibility of Albania's political forces to strengthen constructive political dialogue and cooperation, enabling an effective functioning of the country's democratic institutions by continuing to improve governance, transparency and pluralism and by enabling the participation of civil society;
6. Welcomes all efforts to reduce polarisation ahead of the 2021 general elections, which brought the opposition parties back into the political process;
7. Recalls the need to keep addressing the remaining electoral shortcomings by further improving the accessibility and integrity of elections, including through digitalisation, data protection, equitable access to media and revised rules on political party financing;
8. Expresses concern over the enduring inflammatory rhetoric, which fuels the culture of intimidation, smear campaigns, violence and rioting;
9. Encourages the government to accelerate administrative preparations for the upcoming accession negotiations; stresses the importance of having in place coherent government structures to effectively coordinate EU integration matters; underlines the need to improve intra-service coordination, evaluation and monitoring of EU-related reforms, to advance decentralisation, country-wide modernisation and depoliticisation of the civil service and to enable conditions to conduct the upcoming population census;
10. Recalls the responsibility of national and local authorities to improve transparency, accountability and inclusiveness by conducting anticipatory, meaningful and regular public stakeholder consultations;
11. Reiterates the need to foster the culture of accountability, non-partisan access to public information and scrutiny of public institutions, in particular through an enabling fiscal and security environment and cooperation with the media and the civil society;
12. Notes the need for further progress on freedom of expression, media independence and pluralism; requests authorities to take decisive action against the marginalisation of and intimidation against independent media outlets and reporters; repeats its calls to improve the working conditions of journalists and to adopt regulations enhancing transparency around media ownership, funding and public advertising;
13. Recalls that any revision of media laws should be in line with the Venice Commission recommendations and should take place in a transparent and inclusive manner;
14. Recalls the need to strengthen investigative journalism, fact-checking and media literacy as means to tackle hate speech, disinformation and fake news; stresses the need to ensure an impartial regulatory functioning of the Audiovisual Media Authority;
15. Underlines that the newly established Media and Information Agency should increase transparency and decentralisation and in no way inhibit journalists' equal access to information from government sources;

Fundamental rights

16. Urges the relevant bodies to systematically and proactively prevent and prosecute all instances of hate speech, hate crimes and intimidation;
17. Welcomes advances in ensuring equal opportunities and calls for further improvements in the enforcement of gender equality, property rights, data protection, rights of people with disabilities and minority rights;
18. Expresses serious concern about the massive leaks of personal data; calls on the Albanian authorities to enhance prevention, ensure accountability for data misuse and speed up alignment with EU personal data protection rules;
19. Acknowledges the progress achieved in implementing the Istanbul Convention and calls on authorities to step up the prevention and responses to gender-based violence and femicide, to enhance support to survivors and to advance the prosecution of cases of harassment, domestic violence and violence against children;
20. Recalls the need to ensure the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and notes the importance of addressing allegations of police misconduct and disproportionate use of force;
21. Welcomes Albania's long-standing proven commitment to hosting refugees; recalls the authorities' obligation to ensure due asylum process and to address the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants;

Rule of law

22. Emphasises the obligation of Albanian authorities to continue eliminating corruption and criminal activities in all domains of public life, including in public procurement procedures and political party financing;
23. Commends the steady progress in implementing a comprehensive justice reform, underpinned by the unprecedented vetting process, followed by a restored functionality of relevant courts;
24. Recalls the paramount importance of further advancing and consolidating an irreversible shift towards accountable, independent and functional judicial institutions;
25. Welcomes the work of the Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) and the SPAK Courts in tackling corruption and organised crime;
26. Urges all sides to ensure the completion of the vetting process;
27. Welcomes the adoption of 10 laws aiming to further strengthen the efficiency of the judicial system and underlines the importance of additional measures such as the implementation of the judicial map, a new integrated case management system and a strengthened legal education system;
28. Underlines the importance of taking decisive action against money laundering by ensuring a consistent track record of proactive investigation, prosecution and final

convictions for high-level corruption and confiscation of criminal assets;

29. Welcomes the ongoing efforts that should lead to systemic improvements in tackling the trafficking of humans, firearms and goods, along with cybercrime, violent crime, extremism and terrorist threats; commends the ongoing bilateral and international cooperation on dismantling transnational crime networks, including with the EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies;

Socioeconomic reforms

30. Highlights EU funding of sustainable post-earthquake and post-pandemic recovery and supports the ongoing efforts towards Albania's democratic, green and digital transformation; underlines the need to step up EU funding for the rule of law, sustainable green growth, biodiversity, innovation, competitiveness, property rights and reversal of the demographic decline;
31. Underlines the importance of empowering the youth and welcomes the designation of Tirana as the 2022 European Youth Capital;
32. Encourages the Albanian authorities to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion by improving access to social and healthcare services, especially for disadvantaged populations;
33. Recalls the conditionality of the EU funding under the IPA III and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans;

Environment, energy and transport

34. Strongly urges authorities to step up measures on biodiversity, water, air, climate protection and regional waste management;
35. Recalls that substantial efforts are needed to enforce the goals relating to efficiency, security, diversification and greening of the energy supply and transport;

Foreign policy and security

36. Commends the fact that Albania remains a reliable and committed external policy partner, fully aligning to the EU's foreign, security and defence policy, and actively contributing to EU crisis-management missions and operations;
37. Applauds the country's commitment to solidarity and multilateralism, including through its membership of the UN Security Council in 2022-2023;
38. Welcomes the Albanian Government's continued steps promoting good neighbourly relations and inclusive regional integration by developing a Regional Economic Area;

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39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European

Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Albania.

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