

15th EU-ALBANIA STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in accordance with Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure and Article 122 of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement, addresses the following Recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council and to the institutions of Albania and of the European Union:

1. Strongly welcomes the long overdue approval of the Negotiating Framework by the Council on 18 July, which marked the start of the accession negotiation process with Albania, and the holding of the first Intergovernmental Conference on 19 July; stresses that this marks the beginning of a new phase in the accession process for Albania and welcomes the implementation of the unanimous decision taken by the European Council in March 2020 to open accession negotiations;
2. Welcomes the start of the screening as the first step in the accession negotiation process; stresses that the screening is not only a technical exercise, as it addresses matters and concerns which are close to the daily life of citizens; stresses, in this regard, the importance of strengthening the transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of the process; highlights the role of the Kuvendi in ensuring broad outreach to citizens in this regard; encourages the EU to continue to accelerate the pace of the accession negotiation process for Albania, based on fair and rigorous conditionality and the merit-based principle; points to the importance of respect for this principle to ensure equal treatment in the accession process;
3. Reiterates its firm belief that the EU integration process possesses significant transformative power and should deliver on the goals of democratic consolidation, institutional integrity, long-term growth and socio-economic cohesion, which should be at the forefront of all EU Member States' decisions, to prevent further negative influence by third parties jeopardising the European concept and EU's credibility; underlines, in that respect, that the start of the accession negotiations sends an important

signal for the Western Balkans and beyond, confirming that they represent a geopolitical priority for the EU; expresses its strong belief that the EU is not complete without the Western Balkans;

4. Takes note of the first European Political Community Summit in Prague; welcomes all fora that promote European unity, cooperation and dialogue; underlines, nevertheless, that such concepts cannot replace the clear EU accession perspective;
5. Encourages Albania to continue its constructive role in developing and cultivating regional cooperation and its active role in regional initiatives, underlining the importance of their inclusiveness; applauds, in particular, the three agreements signed under the Berlin Process by the leaders of all six Western Balkan countries on 3 November, that will facilitate citizens' free movement throughout the region and the mutual recognition of the professional qualifications of doctors, dentists and architects; welcomes the removal of roaming charges between the six Western Balkan states; urges, in this respect, all relevant parties to negotiate a plan that would lead to the eventual elimination of roaming charges between Albania and all EU Members;
6. Commends Albania's full alignment with all relevant EU decisions and declarations in regards to EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy; praises Albania for its rapid alignment with the EU sanctions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and for the strong solidarity it expressed with Ukraine, which positions Albania as a reliable partner, deeply anchored in the European and transatlantic alliance; applauds the country's commitment to solidarity and multilateralism, including through its 2022-2023 membership on the UN Security Council;
7. Expresses its concern over the fact that Western Balkan countries face particularly significant levels of foreign interference and disinformation campaigns, and are victims of cyber-attacks; calls, in this respect, on the EU and its Members States to provide Albania, as well as their other Western Balkan allies, with necessary assistance;
8. Underlines the joint responsibility of Albania's political forces to strengthen constructive political interparty and intraparty dialogue and cooperation, enable the effective functioning of the country's democratic institutions and continue to improve

governance, transparency and pluralism, including by fostering the active participation of civil society; recalls, in that respect, the importance of a consensual approach to the electoral reform, in line with the OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations and in due time before the next general election, to strengthen Albania's democratic parliamentary culture;

9. Welcomes Albania's efforts in ensuring equal opportunities and calls for further improvements in the enforcement of gender equality and women's rights, property rights, including minority property rights, data protection, rights of people with disabilities and minority rights in the fields of education, languages, self-identification and the protection of cultural heritage; commends that on the protection of national minorities, one additional piece of implementing legislation was adopted while acknowledges that the adoption of the implementing legislation on the most sensitive issues is still pending; looks forward to the smooth conduct of the long-delayed Population Census in 2023 in full transparency and in line with international standards, so that all national minorities can be counted accurately, without fear of intimidation; calls on the authorities to ensure equal treatment for LGBTI+ and Roma minorities and tackle discrimination; underlines the importance of measures that alleviate the risk of poverty and social exclusion by improving access to social, education and healthcare services, especially for disadvantaged populations such as Roma and Egyptian communities, minority groups, people with disabilities and the poor; commends Albania for the peaceful coexistence of religious communities;
10. Underlines that the rule of law and judicial reforms are the backbone of a democratic transformation and ensure legal certainty, transparency, access to justice and non-discrimination; commends the steady progress made in implementing the comprehensive justice reform, underpinned by the strengthened legislative framework and the unprecedented vetting process, which have continued to deliver tangible results; welcomes the cross-party support facilitating the Kuvendi's decision to extend the vetting bodies' mandate until 31 December 2024 and urges all stakeholders to accelerate the completion of the vetting process; underscores the paramount importance of further advancing and consolidating the capacity of the judicial system to enable an irreversible shift towards accountable, independent and functional judicial and governance institutions; stresses the need to ensure adequate financial, technical and

human resources of judicial and law enforcement institutions, and calls upon the EU to continue assisting Albania in this respect;

11. Urges Albanian authorities to continue eliminating corruption and criminal activities, in particular at high level, from all domains of public life, including from public procurement procedures and political party financing; welcomes the work of the Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK), including its Courts, in tackling corruption and organised crime; stresses the necessity to counter the production and trafficking of drugs; notes with concern that Albania has fallen 27 places on the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index since 2016;
12. Strongly believes that freedom of expression and of the media represent key pillars of democracy and that journalists must be protected from political pressure; notes with concern, in that respect, that Albania has dropped eight places on the Reporters Without Borders "World Press Index" since 2018; urges Albania to sustain and intensify efforts to ensure the guaranteed exercise of freedom of expression, and media freedom, independence and pluralism, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission; calls particularly for enhanced transparency of media ownership, funding and public advertising; calls for ensuring that journalists can conduct their vital work free from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), threats and physical attacks;
13. Applauds the work and contribution of Albania's vibrant civil society to the ongoing development of democracy in the country; underscores the importance of empowering the youth and highlights the symbolism of the designation of Tirana as the 2022 European Youth Capital;
14. Highlights EU funding of sustainable post-earthquake and post-pandemic recovery and supports the ongoing efforts towards Albania's democratic, green and digital transformation; encourages the Albanian authorities to maximise the full benefit of the EU financial assistance, including through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, and to pursue their endeavours in strengthening administrative capacity at all levels of government;

highlights that any investment must be in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement and EU decarbonisation targets;

15. Urges the Albanian authorities to advance on implementing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which mirrors European Green Deal priorities and the Brdo Declaration, adopted at the 2021 EU-Western Balkans summit; encourages Albanian authorities to step up measures on biodiversity, water, air, climate protection and regional waste management; looks forward to the announced establishment of the Vjosa River National Park, covering the entire river, including its free-flowing tributaries;
16. Welcomes Albania's long-standing proven commitment to hosting refugees; recalls the need to ensure due asylum process; calls for the EU to boost its support for humanitarian assistance and migration management in the region; welcomes Albania's decision on the temporary hosting of Afghan and Ukrainian citizens seeking refuge after leaving their countries.