

EUROPEAN UNION - ALBANIA
STABILISATION and ASSOCIATION
PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (SAPC)

14th meeting
23-24 February 2022
Tirana

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its 14th meeting on 23-24 February 2022 in Tirana, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Taulant Balla for the Assembly of Albania delegation and Mr Manolis Kefalogiannis for the European Parliament delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- H.E. Mr Luigi SORECA, Head of the EU Delegation to Albania, on behalf of the European Commission and the European External Action Service, on behalf of the European Commission, and
- H.E. Mrs Olta XHAÇKA, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Albania.

The members of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee addressed the following subjects:

- The state of relations between the EU and Albania;
- Progress in rule of law, including judiciary reform, and the fight against organised crime, trafficking and corruption;
- Fundamental rights, including minority rights, and media freedoms;
- Political dialogue and electoral reform;
- Health, including the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Energy, transition to a green economy and environmental issues
- Regional cooperation.

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. Underlines the importance of advancing a credible EU accession perspective as a key factor to preserve both the support of the public and the dedication to the ongoing implementation of comprehensive and transformative reforms; recalls the support that the European Parliament has given to Albania's European path, *inter alia* in its latest resolution of 25 March 2021, in which it expresses its support for convening the first Intergovernmental Conference without further delay; recalls the European Commission report of 19 October 2021, which reiterates that Albania has continued to meet all other conditions and has made further, considerable, steady progress in addressing the other priorities highlighted by the Council; notes with concern that the Council has not yet set the date for the first Intergovernmental Conference; therefore, calls upon the EU Member States ~~on merit base performance to fully endorse the Commission's report and~~ to agree to adopt the negotiating framework, and to set the date for the first Intergovernmental Conference ~~without further delay~~, and, in line with the Council Decision of 25 March 2020, as endorsed by the European Council, to open the accession negotiations with Albania;
2. Highlights that European integration represents the aspirations of generations of Albanian citizens towards democracy and prosperity and that the prospect of merit-based EU membership contributes to the Union's own political stability, security and economic growth; reaffirms the importance of European values and reforms in countering the foreign direct and proxy interference and disinformation attempting to destabilise the region; welcomes the high level of support for EU integration among Albanian citizens, as well as among the political parties; welcomes Albania's continued active participation in Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations and commends Albania's full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy;
3. ~~Acknowledges that despite the challenges posed by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, Albania has continued to show its commitment to EU-oriented reforms and delivery of tangible and sustainable results;~~ Recognises the transformative nature of the accession negotiations to be conducted under the revised enlargement methodology; highlights the need for close and effective partnership on emergency response between the EU and Albania commending the EU's health and socio-economic support for Albania;
4. Commends the progress of Albania's ~~comprehensive~~ judicial reform, which represents a key step towards a free and independent judicial system and a solid base for the fight against corruption and organized crime; welcomes the start of the exercise of functions of the Constitutional Court, the High Court and the Specialised Structure for Anticorruption and Organised Crime (SPAK), and the tangible results of the temporary re-evaluation of all judges and prosecutors (*vetting process*); commends the thorough work carried out by the vetting institutions and the cooperation with the International Monitoring Operation (IMO) and the Public Commissioner; welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Independent

Qualification Commission (IQC), which is essential for the consistency and integrity of the process, as confirmed by the opinion of the Venice Commission on the matter; encourages Albania to sustain and ~~where necessary~~ further intensify the efforts to restore the integrity of the judiciary, to strengthen the rule of law and to combat corruption and organized crime; stresses the necessity, welcomes Albania's ongoing commitment to counter the production and trafficking of drugs; Raises concerns on the high level corruption stressed in the TI report and encourages justice to combat corruption wherever it appears regardless of the political, institutional or social status of those involved in corrupt acts.

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5. Welcomes the progress that Albania has made in protecting human and fundamental rights; encourages further efforts to protect fundamental rights, including minority rights, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; welcomes the adoption of the secondary legislation related to the 2017 Framework Law on the protection of national minorities and urges Albania to swiftly adopt and implement the remaining by-laws, notably on self-identification and use of minority languages, in line with European standards and with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders; and congratulates Albania on its significant role in accepting Afghan refugees, saving them from oppression and threat to their lives;
6. Welcomes Albania's engagement in regional cooperation, values that Albania has continued dialogue to ensure good neighbourly relations and underlines the importance of inclusiveness of regional initiatives; reiterates that good neighbourly relations and regional stability are essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association and the enlargement processes; takes positive note of the ongoing efforts to implement a comprehensive land sector reform and to consolidate property rights and calls on the authorities to continue to pursue such efforts, in a transparent manner by holding consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including by addressing cases of falsification of documents, and swiftly advancing the process for registration and compensation;
7. Recognises the crucial contribution of civil society and media in the ongoing development of democracy in Albania; acknowledges the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and media freedoms; nevertheless expresses concern and urges Albania to sustain and intensify efforts to ensure media freedom; encourages further progress on the exercise of freedom of expression, media independence and pluralism, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission; calls for enhanced transparency of media ownership, funding and public advertising;
8. Encourages constructive political dialogue and sustainable cross-party collaboration between political parties in Albania in all policy areas, particularly directed at working on electoral reform in line with the OSCE/ODHIR recommendations and at addressing the remaining electoral shortcomings by prohibiting the misuse of administrative and financial resources, pressure on civil servants, vote-buying practices, the leak of sensitive personal data of 900,000 Albanian citizens that made voters vulnerable to pressure improving the accessibility and integrity of elections, including through digitalisation, data protection, equitable access to media and revised rules on political party financing, in line with European best practices and the recommendations of the Venice Commission; welcomes the continuing progress on gender equality and commends the enhanced participation of women in national politics;

9. Underlines that the EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Albania; recalls the EU's support for Albania's sustainable post-earthquake recovery as at the International Donors' Conference "Together for Albania" on 17 February 2020, when the EU and international donors pledged EUR 1.15 billion for reconstruction after the earthquake of 26 November 2019 in Albania; pledges EU's continued support to Albania in that respect and EUR 1.35 billion in EU pre-accession funds during the period 2007-2020, including EUR 115 million in EU grants for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Albania after the 2019 earthquake; highlights the EU's support for Albania's post-pandemic recovery as well as the EUR 180 million support in Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) disbursed to Albania; underlines the importance of strengthening inter-institutional cooperation on the response to the pandemic in order to enable swift and efficient measures during this crisis and of sharing recent solutions for inter-institutional cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU;
10. Welcomes the implementation of the Commission's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and underlines that investment must contribute to the objectives of the Paris Agreement and to EU decarbonisation targets; urges the Albanian authorities to strive to implement the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which mirrors European Green Deal priorities and the Brdo Declaration, which was adopted at the EU-Western Balkans summit in Brdo pri Kranju on 6 October 2021; highlights the importance of measures on biodiversity, water, air and climate, and regional waste management.

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