Albania: 2018 country report

In November 2018, the European Parliament is due to debate a resolution on the European Commission's 2018 enlargement report on Albania. The latest report notes that Albania has made progress on its five key priorities; however, corruption and political instability remain pervasive, meaning the country cannot move beyond the early stages of accession preparation.

Background

Albania first applied for EU membership in 2009 and became a candidate country in 2014, after the European Commission's 2013 report identified five key areas for reform: the judiciary, public administration, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and protection of human rights (see table below). The 2018 report notes that steady progress has been achieved since the previous report in 2016. Accession talks have not yet begun; the Council is considering opening them in June 2019, depending on the state of the reform process. Although Albania has made headway, key areas of concern remain. The government has ordered online news portals to register with tax authorities, and threatened to close some of them, in a restrictive approach to independent media. Albania has since agreed to cooperate with the OSCE on future media regulation. Organised crime remains a serious problem, as shown by the arrest of former Socialist Party MPs and staff over alleged corruption and links with human and drug trafficking. During the most recent meeting of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) on 15 October 2018, the EU called for an end to political stalling and the launch of electoral and judicial reforms.

Albania 2018 report, main areas: (European Commission)

	Progress	Level of preparation
Organised crime	Some	Some
Fight Against Corruption	Good	Some
Public Administration	Some	Moderate
Economic Criteria	Some	Moderate
Freedom of Expression	Good	Moderate
Judiciary	Good	Good

2018 European Commission report

The 2018 report notes that Albania has continued to implement the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and to work on the five key priorities. Concerning public administration reform, there has been consistent application of civil service legislation, and improved efficiency and transparency as well as merit-based procedures. Institutional coordination, reviewing and monitoring of policy need to be further improved. The report acknowledges progress on judicial reforms, such as the vetting of judges and prosecutors in order to ban criminal offenders from public office, and the creation of new, independent judicial institutions; these reforms still need to be fully implemented. Corruption and organised crime remain major obstacles to EU accession. Implementation of ratified international conventions (such as on the protection of whistle-blowers) remains uneven. There is a solid track record of proactive investigations and prosecutions; however, the number of final convictions, including those involving high officials, is stills low. Since the country has ratified most international human rights conventions, the legal framework for human rights protection is now broadly in line with European standards. Important steps have been taken to strengthen children's and minority rights; however, legislation on prisons, domestic violence and gender equality needs improvement. Institutional mechanisms remain weak; efforts are needed to implement existing commitments.

European Parliament position

In its motion for a resolution on the 2018 report, the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) welcomes Albania's continued progress on EU-related reforms, in particular of the judiciary. AFET commends the country's strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks as well as progress made in the fight against organised crime. To sustain the momentum of reforms, it calls on the Council to open accession talks without delay.

Own-Initiative report: 2018/2147(INI); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Knut Fleckenstein, S&D, Germany

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