Wednesday 12 March

The meeting opened at 15.00 on 12 March 2014 with Mr Eduard KUKAN, Co-chair of the European Union - Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (EU-Albania SAPC) in the chair. The Co-chairman welcomed members of both delegations and distinguished guests.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda.
   The meeting started with the opposition of the Albanian Parliament claiming that they had not received the text of the draft recommendations before the start of the SAPC meeting. After consulting the secretariat, Co-Chair KUKAN informed the meeting that the text was sent to the secretariat of the Albanian Parliament on 6 March after the agreement of the two Co-Chairs on the text.
   Regarding the agenda, after a short debate, it was decided not to discuss item 5 of the agenda - “Why Albania needs territorial and administrative reform”.
   The agenda was approved with point 5 removed from it.

2. Adoption of minutes from the previous meeting.
   The minutes of the 6th meeting of the EU-Albania SAPC, which was held in Tirana on 28-29 October 2013, were adopted without changes.

3. State of play of EU-Albania relations; exchange of views with representatives of the Albanian Government and of the European Commission
   Co-Chairman KUKAN gave the floor to Mr Jean - Eric PAQUET, Director for Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo (DG Enlargement), who spoke on behalf of the European Commission. Mr PAQUET gave a positive assessment of the progress achieved by Albania in 2013 concerning the 5 priority areas defined in Albania's accession road map - namely public administration reform, judicial reform, anticorruption measures, fight against organised crime, and capacity building of law enforcement. He expressed, however, concerns that increasing confrontation and a worsening political climate in Albania could hamper the necessary reforms. Regarding the judiciary reforms, Mr PAQUET welcomed Albania's engagement with the Venice Commission and the European Commission, but stressed that the track record needed to be further consolidated. As for the restructuring of public administration, he underlined that transparency and clarity of the applicable legislation were necessary.
Mr Gentian ELEZI, Vice-Minister for European Integration, on behalf of the Albanian Government, confirmed and explained in detail the progress made in all the priority areas. He presented the roadmap of implementation of the 5 priorities and stressed that this roadmap was prepared in close cooperation with other actors - not only state institutions, but also the civil society.

Mr Andrej PLENKOVIĆ, MEP contributed to these statements by expressing support to the efforts of Albania to enter the European Union and stressed that although the current context regarding enlargement was less enthusiastic than several years ago, the EU doors were open and Albania should keep working on the fulfilment of the membership criteria.

4. Follow-up of recommendations of the 6th EU-Albania SAPC

The debate opened on the relations of the governing party with the opposition, with the participants acknowledging that the normal transition of power and consensus reached at the beginning of legislature on certain necessary reforms had been lost and calling for consensus at least with regard to the integration of Albania into the EU. Some also mentioned that the ruling coalition needed more time to be able to deal with all the problems and achieve progress in more areas.

Regarding judiciary reforms, it was widely accepted that a focused reform was necessary; fight against corruption needed to be strengthened (recently adopted law, according to which the corruption would be dealt by the courts of serious crimes, was mentioned in this context); views expressed on the allegedly worsening criminal situation and the situation of the independent institutions widely differed.

Mr BOŞTINARU pointed out that the reasons for not granting candidate status by the Council in December were purely domestic, while significant progress had been achieved by Albania, and questioned the reasons for denying this progress, when the European Commission and other institutions clearly recognized and welcomed it.

Participating in the debate: Mr Fatmir MEDIU (MP), Mr Aldo BUMÇI (MP), Mr Fatmir XHAFAJ (MP), Mr Victor BOŞTINARU (MEP), Ms Doris PACK (MEP), Mr Nikola VULJANIĆ (MEP), Ms Majlinda BREGU (MP), Mr Eduart HALIMI (MP), Mr Jelko KACIN (MEP), Ms Vasilika HYSI (MP), Mr Genc POLLO (MP), Mr Ben BLUSHI (MP).

5. Progress in implementing of the new Civil Service Law 2013

The importance of a professional and independent civil service for a proper functioning of any country, especially of a country in the process of the European integration, was underlined. The adoption of the law in May 2013 was welcomed by the EU, as it showed true commitment of all parties and opened the way for a merit based and transparent public administration, which can't be used as a political tool by either side.

Some participants had been concerned about the delay in the implementation of the new Civil Service Law, dismissals of civil servants, and relations of the government with independent institutions. On the other hand, other members argued that all delays had been respected and the by-laws necessary for the implementation of the Civil Service Law were well in the pipeline.

Participating in the debate: Mr Eduard HALIMI (MP), Ms Vasilika HYSI (MP), Mrs Kejdi MEHMETAJ (MP), Mr Eduard KUKAN (MEP).
Thursday 13 March

The meeting opened at 09.15 with Mr Taulant BALLA, Co-chair of the European Union - Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (EU-Albania SAPC) in the chair.

6. Fight against organised crime, human trafficking and corruption

Ms FAJON stressed that Albania's reputation had significantly improved following the successful transfer of power after the last legislative elections. She acknowledged progress made in the fight against organised crime and corruption, but noted that significant gaps remained and strong political support was necessary in order to close them.

Representatives of the opposition in the Albanian Parliament warned that dismissals of police officers weakened the fight against organised crime and claimed that the criminal situation had worsened in the present legislature. These claims were denied by the governing coalition, which mentioned recent actions and laws implemented in fighting organised crime, human trafficking and corruption (i.e., recent law that qualified corruption a heavy crime and included the provision of confiscation of illegally acquired assets). Both sides were called not to protect their party members when they are prosecuted for corruption.

The subsequent debate concentrated on alleged vote buying in Koca and political influence over the judiciary and justice in the January 21st cases, which has not been settled yet.

Participating in the debate: Ms Majlinda BREGU (MP), Ms Tanja FAJON (MEP), Mr Gert BOGDANI (MP), Mr Nikola VULJANIĆ (MEP), Mr Taulant BALLA (MP), Mr Ben BLUSHI (MP), Mr Genc POLLO (MP), Mr Aldo BUMČI (MP), Mr Eduart HALIMI (MP), Mr Anastas ANGJELI (MP).

7. Economic situation

Concerns over the negative economic trends in 2013 were voiced.

Ms CORNELISSEN welcomed the plans to introduce the process of the European semester of economic governance and expressed hopes that the Albanian Parliament would be actively involved in this process.

Mr BLUSHI spoke of territorial reform as a necessity from the economic point of view by underlining that territorial reform would help to rationalise the management, improve the administration, soften the economic polarization and improve the balance of development in the country.

Participating in the debate: Ms Jorida TABAKU (MP), Mr Anastas ANGJELI (MP), Ms Marije CORNELISSEN (MEP), Mr Eduart SHALSI (MP), Mr Ben BLUSHI (MP).

8. Bilateral relations and regional cooperation

Albania's positive role in the region was widely welcomed by the participants, including its developments in relations with Kosovo and the potential and responsibility to prevent ethnic tensions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Participating in the debate: Mr Aldo BUMČI (MP), Mr Marije CORNELISSEN (MEP).

9. Adoption of recommendations

The adoption of the joint declaration was delayed by the opposition in the Albanian Parliament informing that they had not received the draft text before the start of the SAPC
meeting (in reality the draft was sent to the secretariat of the Albanian parliament on 6 March after the agreement of the two Co-Chairs), therefore additional time to consider amendments was needed. The Co-Chair Mr Balla announced that the meeting would exceptionally continue after lunch (no recording and no interpretation could be provided), when Albanian opposition's proposal of the amended text was presented to all the members. Following intense negotiations, however, a compromise on the full text was not reached.

At the end of the meeting it was agreed that the Albanian members would discuss the controversial points of the recommendations on the following Tuesday in the European Affairs Committee of the Albanian Parliament with the aim to find a common denominator. The result of this discussion would be transmitted to the Chair of the European Parliament delegation to be added to the paragraphs of the recommendations which had been agreed at the meeting.

10. Date and place of the next SAPC meeting

The secretariats of both parliaments will be in consultation on the next meeting after the European Parliament elections and the constitution of the new delegations.
List of Members from the Albanian Parliament

Members

Mr. Taulant Balla, Président  PS
Mr. Aldo Bumçi, Vice-président  PD
Ms Vasilika Hysi  PS
Mr. Eduart Shalsi  PS
Mr. Ben Blushi  PS
Mr. Fatmir Xhafaj  PS
Mr. Anastas Angjeli  PS
Ms Majlinda Bregu  PD
Mr. Eduart Halimi  PD
Mr. Gert Bogdani  PD
Mr. Genc Pollo  PD
Mr. Fatmir Mediu  PD

Substitutes

Ms Kejdi Mehmetaj  LSI
Ms Jorida Tabaku  PD

PS= Parti socialiste
PD = Parti démocratique
LSI = Mouvement socialiste pour l'intégration

Albanian Government

Mr Gentian ELEZI, Vice-Minister for European Integration, on behalf of the Albanian Government
List of Members from the European Parliament

Members

Mr Eduard KUKAN Chair, EPP, Slovakia
Mr Jelko KACIN 1st Vice-chair, ALDE, Slovenia
Mr Tonino PICULA 2nd Vice-Chair, S-D, Croatia
Mr Nikola VULJANIC Rapporteur, GUE/MGL, Croatia
Ms Doris PACK EPP, Germany
Mr Andrej PLENKOVIC EPP, Croatia
Mr Victor BOSTINARU S-D, Romania
Ms Kinga GONCZ S-D, Hungary
Mr Stanimir ILCHEV ALDE, Bulgaria
Ms Marije CORNELISSEN Verts/ALE, the Netherlands

Substitutes

Ms Dubravka SUICA PPE, Croatia
Ms Tanja FAJON S-D, Slovenia

European Commission

Mr Jean - Eric PAQUET, Director for Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo (DG Enlargement)