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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on statements by the Council and Commission
pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure
on the European integration process of Albania

Nikolaos Chountis
on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

European Parliament resolution on the European integration process of Albania

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions issued following the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 concerning the Western Balkans' joining the European Union,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication entitled "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010"(COM(2009)0533) and the accompanying 2009 Progress Report on Albania (SEC(2009)1337) of 14 October 2009,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2008/210/EC of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Albania¹,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between Albania and the EU of 18 May 2009,
 - having regard to Council Decision 2007/821/EC of 8 November 2007 on the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of Albania on the facilitation of the issuance of visas²,
 - having regard to the recommendations of the 16th EU-Albania Inter-Parliamentary Meeting of 19-20 March 2009,
 - having regard to its decision to increase the frequency of the political dialogue with Albania at the parliamentary level to reflect the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement,
 - having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. Whereas the renewed consensus on enlargement, as expressed in the conclusions of the European Council of 14/15 December 2006, reaffirms that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union,
- B. Whereas the prospect of EU integration is an impetus to several reforms in the Western Balkans region and should play a constructive role towards increasing the region's peace and stability,
- C. Whereas the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania entered into force on 1 April 2009; whereas the country applied for membership of the European Union on 28 April 2009 and the Commission is preparing its opinion in merit,

¹ OJ L 80, 19.3.2008, p. 1

² OJ L 334, 19.12.2007, p. 84

- D. Whereas each country's progress towards the European Union depends on its efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and the Association Process,
1. Confirms, in line with the conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003, its full support for Albania's European perspective and future in the EU;
 2. Acknowledges progress in the reform process achieved by Albania but underlines the need for further substantial efforts, necessary both for consolidating democracy and the rule of law and for the sustainable development of the country;
 3. Deplores the political and institutional crisis which followed the parliamentary elections of June 2009 in Albania and considers that parliamentary dialogue is necessary for the democratic functioning of state institutions, as well as to advance key reforms; welcomes therefore the fact that all the Members of Parliament took the oath of office and calls on all political parties to be engaged in full and uninterrupted parliamentary activity;
 4. Welcomes improvements made in the legal and administrative framework of the election process and notes that, according to the OSCE/ODIHR assessment, the parliamentary elections of June 2009 met most international standards; draws attention, however, to a number of identified shortcomings, in particular concerning the transparency of the process, pressure and intimidation of voters, voter registration and monitoring of vote counting, issues which still need to be addressed, and calls on all political parties to pursue a constructive political dialogue with a view to eliminating these problems, in favor of political plurality, ahead of future elections, including the local elections of 2011; moreover, underlines the urgent need for swift and effective prosecution of the perpetrators of irregularities;
 5. Underlines the urgent need for the establishment of a cross-party consensus on economic, political and social reforms in order to improve the well-being of Albanian citizens and to allow the country to progress on its way to European Union membership;
 6. Welcomes the significant progress made in the preparations for visa liberalisation, and expects the Commission to present the new proposal as soon as possible and at the latest in May; recalls the joint statement by the European Parliament and the Council in which the two institutions committed themselves to examining this proposal as a matter of urgency,
 7. Recalls that the protection of human rights and personal data should always be respected and not be "put aside" arbitrarily and calls on all the authorities to legislate and act under that rule;
 8. Considers that reform of the judicial system is a major prerequisite for Albania's EU integration process; underlines the overwhelming importance of a transparent, impartial and efficient judiciary, independent of government control and other pressures, for the rule of law; notes progress made in the field, but underlines that reforms are still at an early stage of implementation; calls for the urgent adoption of a comprehensive long-term

strategy in this field, including a roadmap for the adoption of the necessary legislation and measures for its implementation; moreover, stresses that sufficient funding needs to be provided to the judiciary so that it can work effectively throughout the country;

9. Welcomes the fact that the implementation of the lustration law was suspended by the Constitutional Court and that the law is currently under review; asks for wider consultation and consensus, especially with the Venice Commission, should a new draft law be prepared, and stresses the importance of safeguarding the independence of constitutional institutions;
10. Welcomes the measures undertaken to fight corruption, both in the legal framework and in its implementation; notes however that corruption is still a prevailing problem in the country and that further vigorous steps need to be taken to reverse the situation of impunity; underlines the need to pursue the implementation of the latest GRECO recommendations as well as the need for effective law enforcement bodies and prosecution to this end; is of the opinion that strategic documents should be made public to allow for monitoring of the progress achieved in their implementation; furthermore, calls for full transparency of political party financing;
11. Calls for further steps to implement the strategy for public administration reform and to ensure full enforcement of the civil service law, including an adequate human resources management system; draw attention to the risks of politicising the administration by non-transparent recruitment procedures and to the practice of hiring of temporary staff outside the scope of the law and calls on the authorities to put an end to these practices and put in place a system based on merit;
12. Underlines the crucial importance of professional, independent and diverse media as a cornerstone of democracy; urges the authorities to make every effort to adopt and implement the legal framework in line with European standards and to ensure their freedom from political - including that of the executive - and any other interference; calls for steps to be taken to ensure the transparency of media ownership and funding; deplors the absence of established working rights for journalists, a fact that undermines the ability to work objectively and independently, and calls on the authorities to take adequate steps to overcome this situation;
13. Calls for active efforts to fight organised crime, including money laundering, trafficking in drugs and human beings; calls for the establishment of a legal framework to address and prevent aspects of organised crime, and underlines the importance of effective investigation, prosecution and punishment of offenders; welcomes the decision to establish an inter-institutional committee for measures against organised crime and trafficking, chaired by the Prime Minister;
14. Underlines the importance it attaches to civil society organisations and recognises the government's efforts to consult them on draft laws and reforms undertaken; calls for further steps to formalise and increase participation of civil society in the formulation of policy and in the monitoring of its implementation and effectiveness at all levels;
15. Acknowledges that although basic trade union rights are recognised in the Constitution,

union activities are frequently blocked, and restrictions on striking in the civil service and public utilities are too broad by international standards; deplores the recent acquisition by the Government of the trade unions' assets and expresses its concern about the absence of a response from the Albanian authorities to the ILO Committee on this issue; asks the Albanian government to fully respect the trade unions' rights and to take all the necessary legal steps to ensure that participation in the trade unions is the right of all workers, both in the public and the private sectors;

16. Welcomes the measures taken to increase the participation of women in political life; considers however, that the State Committee on Equal Opportunities remains weak and the Gender Equality Act largely unimplemented; considers, for that reason, that further action is needed to facilitate the inclusion of women in the labour market and their participation in the decision-making process;
17. Is seriously concerned about widespread domestic violence and trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation and forced labour; welcomes the legal reforms of recent years on the protection of victims of domestic violence and trafficking; recognises, however, that these are not adequate and that further steps should be taken; calls for the full implementation of the existing legislation protecting women and children against all forms of violence and for the adoption and implementation of a full system for their protection and rehabilitation, including obligatory and efficient registration of all children and newborns, full provision of free legal, social and psychological aid to the victims, awareness-raising campaigns in society, adequate training of law enforcement agencies and the creation of a network of shelters (which should be of sufficient quantity and quality and capable of covering the different needs of victims of domestic violence and trafficking); calls on the Commission to reinforce its support for the Albanian authorities in this regard;
18. Acknowledges progress made in the protection of minorities; notes, however, that discrimination continues to be a problem in the country and more efforts are needed to combat it; to this end, commends the recent adoption of the anti-discrimination law and calls for its swift and effective implementation; welcomes in particular the establishment of an independent commissioner for protection against discrimination, with responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of the law and investigating complaints; moreover, stresses the urgent need for accurate and reliable statistical data, necessary for the effective implementation of anti-discrimination measures, and, to this end, draws attention to the importance of the national census planned for 2011;
19. Calls for further efforts to improve the situation of the Roma, who continue to face difficult living conditions and to suffer discrimination in access to education, social protection, health care, employment and adequate housing; to this end, welcomes the government's Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion but notes that local authorities and communities should have a key role in the implementation of the Action Plan and that they should be provided with an adequate budget to do this; recommends that the Albanian authorities set out clearly how they plan to implement the Action Plan and that they publish regular reports on progress made;
20. Welcomes progress made in the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, including in the

prison system; calls for improvements in living conditions in prisons to bring them up to standards commensurate with human dignity;

21. Acknowledges Albania's good relations with its neighbours as a vital contribution to regional stability and welcomes the country's active participation in regional initiatives such as the South-East European Cooperation Process, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Energy Community and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA);
22. Notes that the economic situation of Albania is characterized by low economic growth, huge informal economy, which leads to very low tax revenues, and an unregulated labor-market, which promotes job insecurity and substantially undermines workers' rights;
23. Is of the opinion that Albania should choose the appropriate economic policies that will ensure sustainable economic growth, environmental protection, and job creation;
24. Bearing in mind that an important part of the country's economy is based on remittances from emigrants living in neighbouring countries, underlines the need for continuous work on public policies and investments to upgrade the infrastructure in fields crucial to sustainable economic development and social cohesion, inter alia in education, health, justice, transport and agriculture; underlines that particular attention should be paid to ensuring the security of energy supply and diversification of energy sources, including renewable energy sources, while at the same time improving energy efficiency;
25. Calls for further progress in environmental protection, both in the urban areas and the countryside, and for the strengthening of regional cooperation in this field; to this end, welcomes the agreement on the protection and sustainable development of Prespa Park signed by Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Greece as well as the European Commission.
26. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the government and parliament of Albania.