



4.6.2018

DRAFT REPORT

on the 2018 Commission Report on Albania
(2018/0000(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Knut Fleckenstein

CONTENTS

Page

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION 3

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2018 Commission Report on Albania (2018/0000(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement,
 - having regard to the European Council decision of 26-27 June 2014 to grant the status of candidate country for EU membership to Albania,
 - having regard to the European Council decision of 28-29 June 2018,
 - having regard to the declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and its ‘Sofia Priority Agenda’,
 - having regard to the 9th meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between Albania and the EU on 15 November 2017,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 6 February 2018 entitled ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’ (COM(2018)0065),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 17 April 2018 entitled ‘2018 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2018)0450), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled ‘Albania 2018 Report’ (SWD(2018)0151),
 - having regard to the recommendations adopted at the 12th meeting of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), held in Tirana on 12-13 February 2018,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Albania,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A8-0000/2018),
- A. whereas Albania has continued to make steady progress towards meeting the political criteria and the five key priorities for the opening of accession negotiations;
- B. whereas the Commission has recommended the opening of accession negotiations with Albania given the good progress achieved in the fulfilment of the five key priorities; whereas accession negotiations will allow closer EU scrutiny and are a powerful catalyst for implementing further reforms;
- C. whereas constructive dialogue between political forces on reforms is essential for making further progress in the EU accession process;
- D. whereas there is wide public support for Albania’s accession to the EU;

- E. whereas regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential for Albania's progress on its path towards EU accession;
1. Welcomes Albania's intensified efforts in this regard, leading to steady progress on EU-related reforms, especially on the comprehensive justice reform; urges Albania to consolidate the reforms achieved and to continue preparing for EU membership obligations across all chapters;
 2. Fully supports the Commission's recommendation that accession negotiations be opened in recognition of the reform efforts made by Albania; calls on the Council to open accession talks without delay in order to sustain the reform momentum; considers that the opening of negotiations would provide further incentives for the reform process and enhance its scrutiny;
 3. Calls on the Commission to apply the reinforced approach for negotiating Chapter 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and Chapter 24 (justice, freedom and security);
 4. Recalls the need to strengthen the Albanian Parliament's oversight capacities, including in the EU accession process; welcomes the Albanian Parliament's Code of Conduct that will enhance the integrity and transparency of, and public trust in, the institution; underlines the central role of the Committee on EU Integration and the responsibility of the National Council for European Integration as a forum for consultation on accession preparations;
 5. Calls for action addressing the outstanding recommendations of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) as regards electoral reform with a view to increasing public trust in the electoral process; welcomes the work by the Ad-hoc Committee on Electoral Reform of the Albanian Parliament related to election administration, campaign finance, voter registration, vote buying, the use of new voting technologies and out-of-country voting, and urges it to reach consensus on, and adoption of, the necessary reforms in due time before the 2019 local elections;
 6. Welcomes Albania's revised law on political party financing; reiterates its calls on the country's political parties to fulfil their obligation to ensure the exclusion of criminal offenders from public office at all branches and levels of government;
 7. Reiterates that constructive political dialogue, willingness to compromise and the maintenance of unwavering commitment to the implementation and consolidation of the reforms across all five key priorities are essential to the effort to advance the EU accession process;
 8. Underlines the fact that judiciary reform is a major demand by Albania's citizens and a prerequisite for re-establishing trust in the rule of law, public institutions and political representatives; reiterates that the credibility and effectiveness of the overall reform process, especially the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the implementation of property rights, depend on the success of the vetting process and the continued and determined implementation of the judicial reform;
 9. Welcomes the progress made in justice reform aimed at increasing the independence,

accountability, professionalism and efficiency of judicial institutions; regrets that the administration of justice continues to be slow and inefficient; calls on the Albanian authorities to speed up the vetting process, without compromising on quality or fairness; takes note of first dismissals and voluntary resignations of candidates prior to their hearings;

10. Urges the Albanian authorities to complete the establishment of the new judicial bodies; underlines the need to back effective functioning of these institutions by means of adequate human resources and funding;
11. Welcomes the continued progress made towards establishing a more citizen-friendly, transparent, professional and de-politicised public administration, including at local level; notes as well the progress made with regard to territorial reform and the establishment of the Consultative Council to improve coordination between central and local governments; welcomes the setting up of local EU Desks and EU co-ordinators;
12. Calls for further strengthening of the administrative capacity of institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation of accession-related reforms, for the transposition of EU legislation into national law and for preparations to be made for the conduct of EU accession negotiations;
13. Commends the significant improvements made in the legal and institutional framework with a view to preventing and eradicating corruption in public institutions; calls for additional efforts to reduce the corruption affecting the daily life of Albania's citizens;
14. Welcomes the recent updates to the country's anti-corruption legislation; stresses the need to complete the establishment of the National Bureau of Investigation, the Special Tribunal and the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organised Crime; calls for further improvement of the inter-institutional cooperation and exchange of information between police and prosecution; welcomes the re-evaluation of the law enforcement personnel under the police vetting law;
15. Calls for increased attention to be given to political and public-private corruption, and stresses that a convincing track record can only be attained through proactive investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in corruption cases at all levels, including high-level cases;
16. Welcomes the progress made in the fight against organised crime, including the substantial progress made in seizures of illicit drugs and the reduction of cannabis cultivation; notes Albania's intensified international police cooperation – leading to effective operations against criminal networks – including in joint working groups with Member States;
17. Urges the Albanian authorities to take decisive action to dismantle criminal networks engaged in human, firearms and drug trafficking, and to increase the number not only of investigations and prosecutions, but also of final convictions;
18. Reiterates its call on the Albanian authorities to effectively ensure the enforcement of property rights, while at the same time taking into account property registration, restitution and compensation; urges the Albanian authorities to adequately inform

citizens about their rights and possibilities for enforcement of their claims; underlines the importance of an effective property rights regime for guaranteeing the rule of law and an attractive business environment;

19. Welcomes the additional steps taken to reinforce the protection of human rights, minority rights and anti-discrimination policies; insists that measures be taken to further improve the education, employment rates and living conditions for Roma, Egyptians and other ethnic minorities;
20. Commends the climate of tolerance and cooperation among the country's religious communities; calls on the Albanian authorities to effectively combat hate speech and the exclusion and discrimination of minorities, including LGBTI persons;
21. Calls on the Albanian authorities to enhance cooperation with civil society organisations, ensuring effective public participation and consultation throughout the decision-making process, including at local level;
22. Regrets the delays encountered in setting-up the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in Tirana; urges the authorities to support the activities of the RYCO in a flexible way that allows a maximum number of young people to benefit from its work;
23. Reiterates the critical importance of professional and independent private and public service media; notes the partial progress made in increasing the independence of the country's audio-visual media authority and public broadcaster; calls for measures to improve the financial transparency of state advertising in the media; calls as well for measures to strengthen the protection of the labour and social rights of journalists; welcomes the setting-up of the Albanian Media Council, and underlines its role in establishing ethical and professional standards for the media;
24. Urges the Albanian authorities to address the large informal economy; stresses that corruption, rule-of-law deficiencies and cumbersome regulatory procedures continue to deter investment;
25. Stresses the need to ensure positive convergence in social standards during the accession process; welcomes the adoption of the Sofia Priority Agenda, in particular its focus on socio-economic development and a focus on youth;
26. Fears possible negative impacts on employment and social policy-making following the dismantling of Albania's Labour Ministry as a result of governmental restructuring; encourages the Albanian authorities to foster cooperation with trade unions; calls on them to take effective measures to address the high unemployment rate, especially among young people, and to further improve the quality of education;
27. Welcomes Albania's commitment to implement the Connectivity Agenda in the framework of the Berlin Process; supports the proposal to reduce roaming fees in the Western Balkans;
28. Expresses concern over economic activity that has led to environmental damage in protected areas, such as the hydropower plants along the Vjosa river; urges the authorities to step up environmental impact assessments and public consultations on

such projects;

29. Expresses concern that Albania remains the Western Balkan country from which are made the highest number of illegal entries and stays, and unfounded asylum claims, in Member States;
30. Commends Albania's success in stemming the outflow of foreign fighters; welcomes the regional cooperation that has been achieved in countering potential terrorist threats; calls for further measures to disrupt financial flows aimed at financing terrorism and to address online radicalisation;
31. Welcomes Albania's participation in the Berlin Process, the Western Balkans Six initiative and other regional initiatives, and its contribution to strengthening the profile of the Regional Cooperation Council; welcomes Albania's proactive role in promoting regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations with other enlargement countries and with neighbouring Member States;
32. Commends Albania on its continued full alignment with all EU positions and declarations made in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy; calls on Albania to align itself with the EU common position on the integrity of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to renounce its bilateral immunity agreement with the United States;
33. Urges the Albanian authorities to make the most effective use of EU funds in all regions of the country; calls on the Commission to ensure strict conditionality of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds and to assess, as part of its country reports, the effectiveness of IPA support for Albania, especially on the key priorities and relevant projects;
34. Takes note of the constructive atmosphere at the 12th meeting of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), held in Tirana on 12-13 February 2018; notes the improved cooperation achieved between majority and opposition representatives in the SAPC; underlines the importance of continued cross-party collaboration on the reform path towards EU accession;
35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Parliament of Albania.