



D-AL_PV(2022)0207

MINUTES

of the meeting of 7 February 2022, 13.00-14.30

semi remote

room SPAAK 3C50

The meeting opened at 13.00 on Monday, 7 February 2022, with Manolis Kefalogiannis (Chair) presiding.

Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted without objections.

Adoption of the minutes of the Delegation meeting of 15 February 2021

The minutes were adopted without objections.

Exchange of views on the political, economic and pandemic situation in the Republic of Albania, and its relations with the European Union

Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS, D-AL Chair (EPP, Greece) opened the meeting and in his introductory statement recalled Albania's clear strategic orientation and commitment to EU integration, as acknowledged by the EP resolution of 25 March 2021, and called for the prompt opening of accession talks with Albania without further delay. He recalled the positive assessment of the Commission's report of October 2021 on the judicial reform carried out in Albania and stressed the need to closely observe and analyse the reforms and their implementation, notably in the fight against corruption and organized crime, protection of fundamental rights, especially in the context of minority properties. He reiterated the EP's support for Albania on its EU path and for the country's EU-related reform agenda.

H.E. Ambassador Suela JANINA reiterated Albania's unchanged commitment to EU integration and regretted that the European Council has not approved yet the first

Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) with Albania, despite the country's positive reform record, especially in the area of justice, fight against organized crime and corruption, and sustainable public administration reforms. Ms JANINA briefly informed the audience about the latest developments in the country, mentioning the general elections held in April 2021, which led to the new composition of Parliament and government. She recalled ODIHR positive assessment of the elections and informed about Parliament's commitment to implement fully all suggested recommendations with the plan of establishing a cross-party Commission by the end of February 2022.

Ms JANINA informed about the justice system reform and the full functioning of the newly established institutions such as the High Judicial Council, the High Prosecutorial Council and the High Justice Inspectorate, which led to an overall improvement in transparency, accountability, professionalism and efficiency in the justice system. She added that the vetting system continued to deliver tangible results to the degree that 61% of vetting proceedings have resulted in dismissals or voluntary resignations. Out of 805 assesses, investigations have started for 767 judges and prosecutors. She informed that the Parliament would soon discuss the extension of the vetting practice. The Constitutional Court for the time had still two vacant positions, and the procedure of appointing the missing members was ongoing. Ms JANINA stressed that fight against corruption and organized crime remained a priority for Albania. She reminded that the Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) started its functions in December 2019 and delivered on a considerable number of cases connected also to high rank officials in the judiciary and politicians. She added that training of investigators had also started. She underlined that, in 2021, more than 21 criminal groups have been dismantled by the Albanian police in cooperation with its international partners, and that Albania is the only country outside the EU to work with all EU justice and Home Affairs agencies. When it comes to money laundering, Albania committed to implement the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) action plan.

In terms of human rights and fundamentals, especially freedom of expression, Ms JANINA underlined Parliament's decision to put aside the decision to amend the media law in line with Venice Commission's recommendation. She also informed that the Government embarked on a property law reform. In the field of human rights, a number of bylaws were in the process of being approved to accompany the framework law on protection of minorities.

Regarding the economic situation, Ms JANINA informed that in 2021 the growth was around 8.6%, while the forecasts for 2022 predicted a growth of 4.1% - figures confirmed by international agencies who also recognized Albania's strong economic recovery during the pandemic. The Ambassador also expressed her gratitude for the EU's economic support during the pandemic. Ms JANINA informed the delegation that the government decided to proclaim the Vjosa river a protected area, which led to the enlargement of the total protected areas of Albania to 21% of the entire national territory.

Ms JANINA underlined that Albania remained committed to regional cooperation in the area of security, but also in matters of economic cooperation, through fora such as the Open Balkan Initiative. With regard to the CSDP, she confirmed Albania's full alignment with all EU decisions and declarations, and informed that since January 2022 Albania had been granted a non-permanent place in the Security Council of the UN. When asked by Chair KEFALOGLIANNIS about the cross-party consensus in the country, she assured that there is full consensus on the EU orientation of Albania, supported by the vast majority of the population (94%).

In conclusion, Ms JANINA expressed her gratitude for the incessant support from the EP and the EU Delegation to Albania and expressed hope that the first IGC would take place soon, preferably during the French presidency of the European Council.

Ms Michela MATUELLA, Acting Director Western Balkans, DG NEAR, European Commission, opened her statement with a brief overview on the political landscape of Albania. She informed that since the 2021 elections, the opposition had taken their seats in the Parliament, as well as the opportunity to chair some important committees, as a consequence of the electoral reform of 2020 in accordance with the previously achieved cross-party political agreement.

Ms MATUELLA reiterated that Albania had met all the conditions to open the negotiation talks with the EU. She emphasized that the unprecedented judicial reform led to substantial results, together with the reforms aimed at improving the rule of law. She commended the impressive results of the vetting body and called for its further extension, as recommended also by the Venice Commission. She stressed the importance of the constitutional amendments that had to be confirmed in the Parliament and called on all parties to vote in favour and confirm the reforms achieved so far.

Ms MATUELLA underlined that the EU must preserve its credibility in the Western Balkans and warned that the public opinion in the region had started reflecting the loss of hope in the EU because of these delays. She reported the Commissions clear stance to move forward the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, as the enlargement is a merit-based process and all the conditions had been met. Ms MATUELLA reminded of the Commission's support for Albania and the region during the pandemic, and commended Albania's clear commitment to reform, noting that the reform process needed to continue, especially in areas of media freedom, minority-related issues, property registration, and fight against corruption, organized crime and money laundering.

Ms MATUELLA invited the Albanian authorities to announce their readiness to open the accession negotiations, by taking also full advantage of all the economic and investment opportunities provided by the instruments the Commission has deployed, such as the IPA III instrument. In conclusion she invited Albania to maintain a convincing case to the EU member states by continuing reforms, so that, when negotiations would open, the country would be already at an advanced stage and the delay would be neutralized.

Ms Elsa FENET, Head of Unit, Western Balkans, EEAS, underlined that the planned delegation visit to Albania was an extremely important signal to the country and the region and she stressed the importance for the EU to continue showing tangible results and commitment and show to ordinary people that EU accession is a reality. She informed that the EU continued to encourage the government to accelerate the administrative preparations, continued to help the government structures to reform, and continued to encourage political dialogue. She warned that the opposition was approaching the March local elections in a divisive manner and that the EU needed to encourage both the government and the opposition to maintain a one-country approach to EU accession. Ms FENET noted that Albania's 100% CSDP alignment fully reflected the country's commitment to EU integration, and continued to underline the importance of Albania's membership in the UN Security Council.

In terms of regional cooperation, Ms FENET welcomed Albania's continuous and constructive

engagement in the region. She underlined the importance of inclusive regional initiatives, such as the Open Balkan Initiative, but also stressed the equal importance of the Regional Common Market, agreed on the political level by all the countries in the region.

Commenting on the media environment, Ms FENET said that Albania, just like the rest of the region, was not immune to information manipulation, and warned about manipulation of print and online media at the expense of public interest. She reminded about the joint commitment expressed at the Brdo Summit between the EU and Western Balkan leaders to continue to communicate the benefits of the EU integration for the region to their citizens.

Thomas WAITZ (Greens/EFA, Austria) commended Albania's decision to make the Vjosa river a protected area and thanked the Ambassador, PM Rama and all those involved in that particular case. He acknowledged the ambitious juridical reforms carried out by the authorities and pointed out that Albania should continue to take advantage of the different tools and instruments granted by the EU while waiting for the negotiation talks to begin.

Ciarán CUFFE (Greens/EFA, Ireland) complimented Albania for all the progress it had made, and for meeting the accession requirements. He asked Ambassador JANINA whether there were plans for upgrading the Vjosa river from a natural park to a national park, to which she replied that new strategies to enhance the protection of Albania's nature, boost tourism and enable sustainable development of local communities were underway.

Isabel SANTOS (S&D, Portugal; standing rapporteur for Albania) regretted the delay in the opening of the accession negotiations with Albania. She stressed that an agreement between Bulgaria and North Macedonia was needed in order to start the accession talks with both countries. She acknowledged the positive reforms done in Albania and warned about the decreasing level of EU support in Albania and the region. In conclusion, she expressed hope that the first IGC with Albania would be approved soon.

Any other business

No other issues were raised during the meeting.

Date and place of the next meeting

The Chair announced that the 14th meeting of the EU-Albania SAPC will take place on 23 - 24 February 2022, in Tirana.

The meeting closed at 14.30.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
 ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATAΣΤΑΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
 LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REĢISTRĀ/DALVIU SĀRAŠAS/
 JELENLÉTI ÍV/REGISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŚCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/
 LISTA DE PREZENTĀ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/NÄRVAROLISTA**

Биоро/Mesa/Předsednictvo/Formandskabet/Vorstand/Juhatus/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Predsjedništvo/Ufficio di presidenza/Prezidijs/Biuras/Elnökség/Prezydium/Birou/Predsedníctvo/Predsedstvo/Puheenjohtajisto/Presidet (*)
Manolis Kefalogiannis (P)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Bouλευτές/Members/Députés/Zastupníci/Deputati/Deputāti/Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Ciarán Cuffe, Thomas Waitz

209 (7)	
Isabel Santos	
216 (3)	
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordenen/Tagesordnungspunkt/Päevakorra punkt/Σημείο της ημερίσμας διάταξης/Agenda item/Point OJ/Točka dnevnog reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarkēs punktas/Napirendi pont/Punt Aģenda/Agendapunt/Punkt porządku dzennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schôdze/Točka UL/Eesityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)	2
H.E. Suela Janina, Ambassador of Albania to the European Union	2

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatiejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/
Osservatori/Novērotāji/Stebētojai/Megfigyelők/Osservaturi/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/
Opazovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer

По покана на председателя/Por invitación del presidente/Na pozvání předsedy/Efter indbydelse fra formanden/Auf Einladung des
Vorsitzenden/Esimene kutsel/Με πρόσκληση του Προέδρου/At the invitation of the Chair/Sur l'invitation du président/ Na poziv
predsjednika/Su invito del presidente/Pēc priekšsēdētāja uzaicinājuma/Pirmininkui pakvietus/Az elnök meghívására/ Fuq stedina
tač-'Chairman'/Op uitnodiging van de voorzitter/Na zaproszenie Przewodniczącego/A convite do Presidente/La invitación președintelui/
Na pozvanie predsedu/Na povabilo predsednika/Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/På ordförandens inbjudan

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nōukogu/Συμβούλιο/Council/Conseil/Vijeće/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/
Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (*)

Комисия/Comisión/Komise/Komissionen/Kommission/Komisjon/Επιτροπή/Commission/Komisija/Commissione/Bizottság/
Kummissjoni/Commissie/Komisja/Comissão/Comisie/Komisia/Komissio/Kommissionen (*)

Michela Matuella , Vincenzo Greco

Европейска служба за външна дейност/Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior/Evropská služba pro vnitřní činnost/
EU-Udenrigstjenesten/Europäischer Auswärtiger Dienst/Euroopa väliseenistus/Ευρωπαϊκή Υπηρεσία Εξωτερικής Δράσης/European
External Action service/Service européen pour l'action extérieure/Europska služba za vanjsko djelovanje/Servizio europeo per l'azione
esterna/Eiropas Ārējās darbības dienests/Europos išorės veiksmų tarnyba/Európai Külügyi Szolgálat/Servizz Ewropew ghall-Azzjoni
Esterna/Europese dienst voor extern optreden/Europaeačka Služba Działalń Zewnętrznych/Serviço Europeu para a Ação Externa/
Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/Európska služba pre vonkajšiu činnosť/Europska služba za zunanje delovanje/Euroopan
ulkosuhdehallinto/Europeiska avdelningen för yttrre åtgärd (*)

Elsa Fenet

Други институции и органи/Otras instituciones y organismos/Ostatní orgány a instituce/Andre institutioner og organer/Andere
Organe und Einrichtungen/Muud institutsioonid ja organid/Λοιπά θεσμικά όργανα και οργανισμοί/Other institutions and bodies/Autres
institutions et organes/Druge institucije i tijela/Altre istituzioni e altri organi/Citas iestādes un struktūras/Kitos institucijos ir įstaigos/
Más intézmények és szervek/Istituzzjonijiet u korpi oħra/Andere instellingen en organen/Inne instytucje i organy/Outras instituições
e outros órgãos/Alte instituições si organe/Iné inštitúcie a orgány/Muut toimielimet ja elimet/Andra institutioner och organ

Други участници/Otros participantes/Ostatní účastníci/Endvidere deltog/Andere Teilnehmer/Muud osalejad/Επίσης παρόντες/Other participants/Autres participants/Drugi sudionici/Altri partecipanti/Citi klátesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Parteicipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Altı participantı/Iní účastníci/Drugi udeleženci/Muut osallistujat/Övriga deltagare

Секретариат на политическите групи/Secretaría de los Grupos políticos/Sekretariát politických skupin/Gruppernes sekretariat/Sekretariat der Fraktionen/Fraktsioonide sekretariaat/Γραμματεία των Πολιτικών Ομάδων/Secretariats of political groups/Secrétaire des groupes politiques/Tajništvo klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariāts/Frakcijų sekretoriai/Képviselőcsoportok titkársága/Segretariat gruppi političi/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secretariado dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupín/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristöt/De politiska gruppernas sekretariat

PPE	
S&D	
Renew	Paul Ivan
ID	
Verts/ALE	Gesa Storz
ECR	Antonia Dimitrova
The Left	
NI	

Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantslelei/Γραφείο του Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsjednika/Gabinetto del Presidente/Priekšsēdētāja kabinets/Pirmininko kabinetas/Elnöki hivatal/Kabinett tal-President/Kabinet van de Voorzitter/Gabinet Przewodniczącego/Gabinete do Presidente/Cabinet Președinte/Kancelária predsedu/Urad predsednika/Puhemiehen kabinetti/Talmannens kansli

Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretærens Kabinet/Kabinett des Generalsekretärs/Peasekretäribüro/Γραφείο του Γενικού Γραμματέα/Secretary-General's Office/Cabinet du Secrétaire général/Ured glavnog tajnika/Gabinetto del Segretario generale/Generalsekretära kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinett tas-Segretarju Ĝeneral/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalného sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekretærarens kansli

Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peadirektoraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/ Directorate-General/Direction générale/Glavna uprava/Direzione generale/Generaldirektorāts/Generalinis direktoratas/Főigazgatóság/ Direttorato Generali/Directoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditeľstvo/Generalni direktorat/Pääsasto/Generaldirektorat	
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DG EXPO	
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Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Õigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/ Service juridique/Pravna služba/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisés tarryba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/ Wydział prawny/Serviço Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právny servis/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättsjänsten	
Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariát výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschusssekretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Γραμματεία της επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétaireat de la commission/Tajništvo odbora/Segreteria della commissione/ Komitejas sekretariäts/Komiteo sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Segretarjat tal-kumitat/Commissiesecretariaat/ Sekretariat komisji/Secretariado da comissão/Secretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottsssekretariatet	
Igor Miskulin	
Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistenz/Boŋθóć/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padējējas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočník/ Avustaja/Assistenter	
Vesselina Veleva	

- * (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/
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Tjänsteman