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MINUTES

of the meeting of 1 December 2022, 16.00-18.15,

and 2 December 2022, 09.00-12.30

Brussels

The meeting opened at 14:00 on Thursday, 1 December 2022, with Manolis Kefalogiannis (Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the Agenda

The draft agenda was adopted without comments.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 14th meeting of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee held in Tirana on 23 and 24 February 2022

The draft minutes of the 14th meeting were adopted and distributed to both the EU and Albanian delegations.

3. Opening remarks by Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS and Mr Taulant BALLA, Co-Chairs of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, and exchange of views with:

Mr Martin KOŠATKA, Junior Deputy Minister and Southern and Southeastern Europe Department Director, on behalf of the Czech Presidency-in-Office of the Council;

Ms Michela MATUELLA, Head of Unit for Albania, DG NEAR, European Commission;

Ms Elsa FENET, Head of the Western Balkans Division at the European External Action Service;

Ms Isabel SANTOS, European Parliament's standing Rapporteur on Albania.

In his opening remarks, **Mr Taulant BALLA** (SP, Albanian Parliament), Co-Chair of the EU-

Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, noted that the meeting takes place at an important time for Albania. He referred to the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 6 December in Tirana; the first of its kind to be held outside the European Union and in the Western Balkans. He commended the Lisbon Treaty, deeming it an instrument which has brought about more democracy and transparency in Europe. Further, he added that the upcoming summit made a perfect opportunity for the EU to show and further solidify its support for the Western Balkans. Mr BALLA then thanked the EP for their voice and appeal on accelerating the EU accession process for the Western Balkan countries. Additionally, Mr BALLA referred to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia having been granted candidate status, developments which he deemed as positive for Europe.

Mr Martin KOŠATKA noted that the SAPC meeting takes place at a time that is marked by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine - a war that has significant impact in the entire Western Balkans. He followed by saying that the Czech Council Presidency is pleased with Albania's full alignment on foreign, security and defence policies, especially with regard to the imposed sanctions against the Russian federation. Mr KOŠATKA added that the Council remains focused on the enlargement package - one of its priorities; and referred to the upcoming summit in Tirana on 6 December. He also stated that this summit is particularly symbolic for the entire region, especially for Albania's own progress towards European accession.

Additionally, Mr KOŠATKA emphasised that the future of the Western Balkans is in the EU and that the Presidency is committed to bringing this process forward, as well as to making it more dynamic. He welcomed the progress marked by Albania on the screening process and the country's agenda for advancing further on the rule of law, specifically through the implementation of the justice reform. Moreover, Mr KOŠATKA called for consolidation of property rights and urged Albania to implement the bylaws on the protection of its minority communities. He also called for tangible progress on the freedom of expression and media freedom. With regard to migration, he stressed that more efforts are needed from Albanian authorities on the number of unfounded migrant applications, as well as on the alignment on visa policy.

Ms Michela MATUELLA highlighted that the present SAPC meeting comes at a good time for discussing Albania's achievements and future challenges on its EU accession journey. She noted that there is a new geopolitical context in Europe now, and that the Western Balkans and Albania constitute strategic priorities for the Union. Ms MATUELLA reminded that the first Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) was held four months earlier, on 14 July; a development which marks a new phase in the EU - Albania relations. The launch of the screening process has been successful thus far, she noted, having opened in September 2022 and having advanced impressively in the meantime. Ms MATUELLA noted that Albania has shown preparation and determination, and that accelerating on reforms will continue to be essential throughout the entire accession process. She also underlined the role of civil society and the people during this process. Concluding, she stressed that this is the right moment to push reforms further and keep the good momentum, and that Albania's full policy alignment with the EU clearly displays the country's commitment to core European values.

Ms Elsa FENET welcomed the guests from the Albanian Parliament, coming to Brussels at a good moment to relaunch the EU-Albania relations. She also highlighted that a new phase in the EU-Albania has started with holding the first IGC in July. At this time, she stressed, the role of the Albanian Parliament remains crucial in advancing reforms in the country. She made

reference to the 2022 Commission report, which showed that Albania has indeed marked significant progress in the last year.

Ms FENET too underlined that Albania's full policy alignment is not just a bureaucratic process, but rather a real display of sharing the same European values. She then referred to Albania's seat in the Security Council; a development which reflects the strong UN-Albania partnership; at a time when it is extremely important to be able to have a voice on the Security Council, she added.

Furthermore, Ms FENET mentioned the cyberattacks, acknowledging that Albania's full foreign policy alignment is coming at a cost. Nonetheless, she reassured that the EU would continue to be by Albania's side and that cyber-experts have already been deployed in Western Balkan countries that are exposed to attacks from Russia (and other countries). Ms FENET concluded by saying that EU HRVP Mr Josep BORRELL looks forward to continuing this dialogue with Albania, and that they welcome the upcoming summit in Tirana, finding it a clear sign of fruitful cooperation between Albania and the EU.

Ms Isabel SANTOS welcomed Albania's progress on the accession process, however said that there remains a lot of work to do. She was pleased to see the country moving forward with the clear objective of reaching the final goal (EU accession) in a sustainable way. The Rapporteur stressed that 'many things must happen before accession', and that these would be issues of critical importance for the lives of Albanian citizens. She concluded by saying that during her last visit to Tirana, she was happy to see the good work being done on the ground.

Contributions on the floor:

Ms Jorida TABAKU (DP, Albanian Parliament) argued that the screening process has been seen/discussed as not a 'national' one, and was interested in the speakers' opinions on this issue. Secondly, Ms TABAKU inquired regarding the issuance of 'golden passports', the fight against corruption in the country, and commended the upcoming summit, deeming it one of the most important meetings taking place in the region. On this special occasion, she said, Albania will turn into the centre of discussion on European issues, and that she hopes this will also be used to push for progress on reforms.

Mr Taulant BALLA (SP, Albanian Parliament) mentioned that there is an agreement within the Council that Kosovo will be granted a visa-free regime soon. He thanked Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN for the Commission's solidarity towards Albania after the 26 November 2019 earthquake and for other Commission-funded projects in recent years.

Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU (DP, Albanian Parliament) stressed that the current Kosovo-Serbia situation is very concerning. He inquired regarding the EU's position towards the latest UN proposal on the situation.

Mr Martin KOŠATKA said that he was happy with the cooperation with the EEAS and the EC regarding Kosovo's visa-free regime.

Ms Michela MATUELLA spoke further on the screening process. She noted that this process should undoubtedly involve all stakeholders and that this has been communicated to Albanian authorities as well. The screening process is a technical process, but it is also an instrument that

brings citizens closer to knowing how it is to live in the EU, she noted. Ms MATUELLA acknowledged that there would be many difficult reforms going forward and that this is why cross-party consensus would be beneficial and is encouraged in all countries in the accession process.

On the issue of fiscal amnesty, Ms MATUELLA said that the Commission is engaging on a serious dialogue with the Albanian government. Expertise has been mobilised, and they are looking at specific aspects of legislation, she noted.

On the issue of golden passports, Ms MATUELLA said that the Commission has clearly advised Albania against such initiatives.

On the Investment package, Ms MATUELLA said that the package covers the entire region (1bn EUR package; 0.5bn will go into addressing the crisis; 0.5bn EUR will go into investment). As part of this package, Albania will receive 80m EUR, at the time of the meeting in the process of finalising, with disbursement envisaged for the following month. This support package aims to support households and small business faced with the crisis. Ms MATUELLA also mentioned that green energy and sustainable transition are elements that are encompassed in another package, to be adopted through different instruments the following week.

Concluding, she reiterated that the July decision was a historic one for Albania and that the Commission wants to help Albania become a Member State as soon as possible.

Ms Elsa FENET said that Albania is viewed positively for standing in support of Ukraine and taking measures in that regard, such as the full foreign policy alignment. With regard to organised crime, Ms FENET said that there is an opportunity for Albania to be serious on its fight towards organised crime - as there is nothing holding the country back. As for the situation in Kosovo, Ms FENET deemed it 'unacceptable', and one that has turned into a significant security risk for the country.

Ms Isabel SANTOS said that the EP has a common approach (with the Commission) towards the fiscal amnesty. She stated that risks need to be avoided and that, as heard from the Commission, there are experts working on the issue.

Mr Enkelejd ALIBEAJ (DP, Albanian Parliament) brought to the attention of the attendees the issue of the Durrës Port project. He explained that from the opposition's point of view, this process was not transparent, nor did it go through a standard procedure. According to the opposition, he said, this was in clear breach of competition laws and it is concerning as it can pave the way for uncontrolled penetration of dirty money into Albania.

4. Adoption of Recommendations

Amendments tabled by the DP were adopted. The text, as amended, was adopted.

Mr Gazmend BARDHI (DP, Albanian Parliament) underlined the paramount importance of media freedom, including from the vantage point of the rule of law. He further highlighted the significance of transparency of the government's actions in this respect.

5. Good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation

Ms Jorida TABAKU (DP, Albanian Parliament) argued that Albania's integration into Europe and its strategic role within the Union are of utmost importance. She emphasized the need to actively involve Kosovo in regional activities, as neglecting the country's participation would not serve the best interests of the region. Ms TABAKU stressed the criticality of aligning EU foreign policy, pointing out that the Albanian opposition in Parliament has proposed a resolution that has not yet fully embraced the implemented sanctions. She urged the Albanian government to seize the opportunity presented by the EU summit and make every effort to maximize its benefits. Additionally, she expressed appreciation for the European Commission's involvement in the Pristina-Serbia dialogue and expressed hope that there would be no further postponements, urging support for Kosovo's accession process. Finally, Ms TABAKU called on the EP to send a clear and positive message, highlighting the importance of avoiding the isolation of any country in the heart of Europe.

Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU (DP, Albanian Parliament) emphasized the significance of regional cooperation as the foundation for creating peace and prosperity throughout the region. He acknowledged that the region is currently going through a period of uncertainty. The aggression displayed by Russia towards Ukraine has resulted in significant changes in the dynamics of the region, with its disruptive influence growing, particularly in Bosnia. Mr ÇOLLAKU also highlighted the political crisis in Montenegro and the language disputes emerging in North Macedonia, which are causing concern. He pointed out that Serbia is playing a "double game" by maintaining ties with both Russia and the EU. This tolerance has allowed Serbia to strengthen its position through tight relationships with Russia and China, he added. However, this has led to long-term conflict in Kosovo, as Serbia repeatedly threatens war whenever Kosovo rejects its proposals. Mr ÇOLLAKU stressed that the more Serbia is tolerated, the more aggressive it becomes in the region. He emphasized that Serbia's alliance with Russia poses a clear threat to the whole Balkans. Therefore, he expressed full support for the Berlin Process as a pathway to EU membership and emphasized the importance of avoiding the emergence of another Yugoslavia. Mr ÇOLLAKU raised concerns about the delay in the EU enlargement process, which he believes benefits those who seek to divide the region. Recognizing that EU accession is a matter of security, he called for an accelerated pathway towards achieving this goal.

Mr Saimir KORRESHI, (DP, Albanian Parliament) stressed the significance of regional cooperation in fostering stability, which in turn leads to development. He highlighted the practical advantages of such cooperation, including the improvement of infrastructure, the promotion of sustainable energy practices, the protection of the environment, and the fight against corruption and organized crime. Mr KORRESHI emphasized that these objectives can only be achieved through joint efforts at a regional level. He stressed that regional cooperation is the sole solution for securing a peaceful and prosperous future for the region. Moreover, he underscored the importance of regional stability for the Union, as long as there are unresolved issues within the region that is part of their continent, the EU will face challenges in effectively adapting to the current global landscape.

Mr Taulant BALLA (SP, Albanian Parliament) spoke about the transformative power of cooperation, enabling the region to overcome its past and integrate civil society effectively. He highlighted Albania's steadfast support for regional cooperation and expressed support for Kosovo's NATO membership. Mr BALLA underscored that the core agenda of the Berlin

Process revolves around connectivity, encompassing both the human activities and the political dimension within the region. He expressed satisfaction with the accomplishments of the Berlin Process, particularly noting the acquisition of the chairmanship. Mr BALLA emphasized that the initiative on the 6th of December is an integral part of the Berlin Process, highlighting the ongoing commitment to foster collaboration and progress within the region.

6. Fundamental rights, including minority rights

Ms Orjola PAMPURI (DP, Albanian Parliament) addressed several critical issues regarding fundamental rights and social welfare. She highlighted the findings of the previous Commission report, which emphasized the need for the country to adopt laws and make progress on self-identification and the use of minority languages. Ms PAMPURI expressed concern that no further advancements were made in these areas. She pointed out that the Commission has called for reforms to address the needs of marginalized groups within the country.

Ms PAMPURI also criticized the Albanian government for its failure to take sufficient measures to support individuals living below the poverty line or struggling to meet the minimum living threshold. She emphasized that the invasion of Ukraine by Russia had a severe impact on the country, resulting in many citizens living in dire poverty. Lastly, Ms PAMPURI underlined the pressing need for concrete actions and reforms to address fundamental rights and improve the living conditions of marginalized populations in Albania.

Ms Enselmvera ZAKE (SP, Albanian Parliament) highlighted the efforts made by Albanian institutions to uphold human rights. She emphasized that several significant achievements have been accomplished in this regard. Ms ZAKE specifically addressed children's rights and mentioned the implementation of measures to actively involve them in society through registration and digitalization processes. Furthermore, she highlighted the solid framework established for the inclusion of the Romani community, ensuring equal access to services in accordance with EU recommendations. Ms ZAKE also pointed out that Albania has adopted a more favourable budget for gender equality and has plans to implement state funding at both national and local levels. Despite the progress achieved in these areas, she acknowledged that further work is required to ensure full compliance with international standards. She emphasized the clear commitment of Albanian institutions towards implementing these measures and noted that efforts are being accelerated to meet the necessary goals. Through her statements, Ms ZAKE underscored the ongoing dedication to safeguarding human rights and promoting inclusive policies in Albania.

Mr Enkelejd ALIBEAJ (DP, Albanian Parliament) expressed concerns regarding the right to a fair vote and its impact on other citizens' rights. He criticized the Central Electoral Commission, stating that their actions have not effectively addressed the issue. Mr ALIBEAJ also highlighted the abuse of state resources during election campaigns, which ultimately benefits the ruling government. He raised concerns about the systematic practice of buying votes. Furthermore, he revealed that personal data of over 900,000 citizens has been made public, exposing their political preferences. If this information falls into the hands of the ruling party, it poses a threat to the functioning of democracy, he argued. Mr ALIBEAJ pointed out the lack of tangible results in addressing these issues and highlighted problems with the population figures in Albania. He specifically referred to the April 2021 elections, where many citizens were prevented from exercising their right to vote. He emphasized the need for an

effective election reform and the inclusion of the right for citizens abroad to participate in elections. Through these statements, Mr ALIBEAJ expressed his concerns about the infringement on citizens' voting rights and called for necessary reforms to ensure a fair and democratic electoral process in Albania.

Ms Anila DENAJ (SP, Albanian Parliament) highlighted the presence of nine national minorities in Albania. She highlighted the importance of respecting and preserving the cultural identity of these minorities. Ms DENAJ underscored that national minorities have the opportunity to learn about their culture in their own language.

Mr Gazmend BARDHI (DP, Albanian Parliament) raised concerns regarding property rights in Albania. He expressed dissatisfaction with the process, highlighting its lack of transparency. He referred to the European Commission's observation of continuous disruptions in this area. Mr BARDHI emphasized the need for an official and transparent property registration system. He argued that the existing legal uncertainty surrounding property rights creates numerous challenges for civil society, foreign investors, and businesses. Additionally, he pointed out that minorities face significant issues with property rights. Concluding, Mr BARDHI emphasized the importance of establishing a fair and transparent property registration system to address the issues related to property rights in Albania.

7. Economy, energy and environment

Ms Jorida TABAKU (DP, Albanian Parliament) addressed the significant changes faced by Albania, particularly highlighting the impact of Russia on the Western Balkans. She pointed out that as countries get closer to EU accession, more people tend to leave, which is a major challenge for Albania. Ms TABAKU mentioned that the Albanian diaspora is the third largest in the world. She stressed that the key to retaining Albanians in the country lies in a strong economy, with social mobility and a free market playing crucial roles.

Ms TABAKU then identified several factors contributing to the emigration of people from Albania. One of them is the lack of a market economy that hampers vibrant business development, with many aspects remaining informal. She highlighted the need to reduce debt and emphasized the importance of shifting from short-term plans to long-term strategies to foster growth. Ms TABAKU also pointed out that Albanians have the lowest average salary in the region and stressed the necessity of embracing free market values. Furthermore, she noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need to diversify the supply chain, indicating the importance of implementing such measures. Concluding, Ms TABAKU advocated for long-term strategies, market reforms, and economic diversification to address the challenges associated with emigration and foster sustainable economic growth in Albania.

Ms Anila DENAJ (SP, Albanian Parliament) addressed several key points concerning the economic situation in Albania. She highlighted the improvements in energy and transport infrastructure, but also stressed the need for further investments in human capital. Ms DENAJ expressed gratitude to the EU for its support during the pandemic. She mentioned that Albania had submitted its economic program to the Commission, showcasing the country's resilience and achieving 6% real GDP growth despite the challenging circumstances. However, she noted that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine was negatively impacting Albania's economy. Ms DENAJ pointed out that the high GDP growth has helped lower the debt, and Albania is

committed to fiscal consolidation year after year. She added that the country has made improvements in three recommendations and is viewed as compliant in 36 areas, with four areas in the process of becoming compliant.

Additionally, Ms DENAJ acknowledged that although there has been an increase in labour force participation in the past year, it still remains below the figures from 2019. Ms DENAJ highlighted both the achievements and challenges in Albania's economic landscape, emphasizing the need for continued efforts and investments in key areas, in order to drive sustainable growth and address economic impacts caused by external factors, such as the war in Ukraine.

Mr Arbi AGALLIU (DP, Albanian Parliament) raised several important points regarding the economic situation in Albania. He underlined the impact of Russia's war of aggression, which has led to increased prices and adversely affected market development in the country. Mr AGALLIU explained that there is continued dependence on cash transactions, despite efforts towards digitalization. He acknowledged, however, that there has been some progress in the digitalization of the economy. He then emphasized the need for investment in human capital and research spending to address the high levels of informality in Albania.

Mr AGALLIU expressed concern about the relatively low level of regional integration. He emphasized the urgent need for sustainable institutions and effective enforcement in Albania. He reiterated the challenges posed by external factors, the importance of embracing digitalization, promoting formalization, and strengthening institutions to foster sustainable economic growth and regional integration in Albania.

Mr Arben PËLLUMBI (SP, Albanian Parliament) underlined the adoption of the efficient energy plan that is aimed to reduce the final energy consumption by 9%. He further mentioned the joint project of Albania and North Macedonia that aims to increase the security of supply and regional integration, explaining that the implementation of the project has not started yet and has been affected by rising metal prices due to the war in Ukraine and inflation. He further elaborated on decarbonisation, and on the draft law promoting renewable sources. Mr PËLLUMBI referred to that fact that the production of electricity occupies 40% of the domestic economy. He underlined that in terms of environmental policy, Albania seeks to align with the EU and that in this respect the alignment with the *acquis* has been completed. He pointed out that the Parliament has adopted legislation banning plastic waste bags with thickness under 70 microns. Mr PËLLUMBI stressed the importance of the establishment of the Vjosa river valley National Park.

Friday 2 December 2022, 09.00 to 12.30

The meeting opened at 09:05 on Friday, 2 December 2022, with **Mr Taulant BALLA**, Chair of the Albanian Parliament Delegation and Co-Chair of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, presiding.

8. Rule of law, fight against organized crime and corruption

Mr Fatmir XHAFAJ, (SP, Albanian Parliament) emphasized the significance of two pivotal matters: the initiation of accession negotiations and the release of the new country report by the

European Commission. He regarded the findings of the report as fair, highlighting that modern Albania possesses a constitutional framework that aligns the justice system with the highest European standards. Mr XHAFAJ urged his colleagues to consider two distinct stages of the reform process: the first stage being the establishment and structuring of new institutions within the justice system, and the second stage involving the enhancement of efficiency and functionality, ultimately leading to the system's consolidation.

In Mr XHAFAJ'S perspective, the primary challenge lies within the implementation process itself, as it strives to fulfil the expectations of citizens in terms of reform. Additionally, he recognized the arduous task of shifting the mindset of individuals within the system. He expressed the opinion that EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, need to revise their approach towards the EU-Albania relationship. He noted that the new country report places more emphasis on the accountability and transparency of legislative and executive powers, rather than holding the justice system institutions accountable for their own actions.

Furthermore, Mr XHAFAJ noted the necessity for EU financing to adapt to and support the evolving developments and challenges within the justice system. He called for proper technical assistance, highlighting concerns that the division of the EURALIUS mission, originally established to support the reform, into multiple EU-funded projects, lacks an integrated approach and efficient coordination.

In conclusion, Mr XHAFAJ acknowledged that there is still a substantial amount of work to be done in order to consolidate the rule of law. He emphasized that this effort is not only aimed at attaining EU membership but also to meet the expectations of Albanian citizens in terms of delivering justice effectively.

Mr Enkelejd ALIBEAJ (DP, Albanian Parliament) drew the attention of the Members to three significant aspects related to the fight against organized crime and corruption: political will, future structural efforts, and the allocation of necessary resources and skills. He highlighted the achievements of the Specialized Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK), which had made important decisions against high-ranking state officials, including the former Minister of Interior and the former Prosecutor-General. Mr ALIBEAJ referred to statements by the Head of SPAK, Arben KRAJA, and the Chief Prosecutor of Rome, Francesco LO VOI, who noted that criminal groups had become increasingly aggressive, extending their activities beyond Albanian borders.

In addressing the issue of corruption, Mr ALIBEAJ informed the Members about three significant government initiatives that posed risks related to money laundering, national security, tax evasion, terrorist financing, and corruption and infiltration by organized crime. These initiatives were deemed incompatible with the EU acquis. Firstly, he discussed the issue of "golden passports" or the investors' citizenship scheme, which the last country report advised Albania to refrain from. Secondly, he raised concerns about the fiscal amnesty, which could potentially undermine progress in combating corruption. Lastly, he highlighted the Durrës Port Project, which he believed concealed opportunities for money laundering.

By bringing attention to these matters, Mr ALIBEAJ sought to emphasize the importance of addressing these risks and ensuring alignment with EU standards and regulations in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

Mr Toni GOGU, (SP, Albanian Parliament) touched upon the ongoing comprehensive justice reform in Albania, which was recognised in the country report. He highlighted that Albania had entered the second phase of the strategic framework with four policy goals: functioning of the justice system, transparency, efficiency and access to justice, modern criminal justice system, and effective coordination and management in all justice institutions.

Mr GOGU shared several indicators that demonstrated Albania's progress in the areas of rule of law and justice reform. Firstly, he mentioned that the Constitutional Court (CC) was almost fully functional, with eight out of nine members participating in trials. He also provided statistics regarding the workload of the CC, stating that in 2022, there were 231 cases filed, with 36 cases from the backlog. Out of these cases, 30 had final decisions, and 146 were recognized as inadmissible.

Furthermore, Mr GOGU highlighted that there were 15 members out of the required 19 at the High Court, with its full functionality depending on other processes such as vetting and efficient professional evaluation by the High Judicial Council. He noted that all chambers of the High Court had rendered 3052 decisions, with 2890 being final and 162 being intermediary.

In terms of the judicial map, Mr GOGU mentioned that Albania was transitioning from 22 courts to 13 courts in May 2023, from six administrative courts to two administrative courts in July 2023, and from six courts of appeal to one court of appeal in February 2023.

Mr GOGU stressed the continuation of the vetting process and the ongoing activities of the SPAK. He concluded by underlining the solid progress made in the fight against organized crime, which was achieved through strong and fruitful cooperation with all EU Member States.

Mr Gazmend BARDHI (DP, Albanian Parliament) stated that the justice reform remained an absolute priority for Albania. While acknowledging some achievements, he expressed his belief that the results of the reform were still falling short of expectations. Mr BARDHI noted that the vetting bodies, whose mandate had been extended, were handling a reduced number of cases. He emphasized the need for human resources in the system, as many judges and prosecutors had been dismissed during the reform, but stressed that the quality of those admitted should not be compromised.

Regarding the Constitutional Court, Mr BARDHI agreed that it had become functional, but expressed concern that, after six years of the reform, it remained incomplete. He contested the claim that there were eight members, as stated by the previous speaker, arguing that there were, in fact, seven members. He also raised concerns about the President continuing to hold office beyond his mandate. Similar concerns were raised about the High Court, which, in Mr BARDHI's view, was still not fully staffed after six years of the reform. He expressed worry about the lack of transparency in appointments to these two courts, highlighting that transparency was one of the main issues addressed by the justice reform.

Lastly, Mr BARDHI stressed the need for stronger enforcement in the fight against organized crime and corruption. He concluded with an appeal to keep the justice system free from political interference, particularly regarding the appointment of a new Head of SPAK in that month.

9. Civil society and media

Ms Zheni GJERGJI, (DP, Albanian Parliament) highlighted the limited progress made by the country in the field of civil society organizations. She pointed out that Albania was previously required to implement guidelines aimed at creating a favourable environment for civil society. She stated, however, that new requirements were presented to the government, indicating that the implementation of the new law on the registration of non-profit organizations, approved in June 2022, had not yet commenced.

Ms GJERGJI further expressed concern that the essential role of civil society in contributing to parliamentary committees' sessions had been neglected for years. On behalf of her parliamentary group, she called on the governing majority of the Socialist Party to demonstrate political will in adopting a more proactive role for civil society, in line with EU recommendations and the current context of accession negotiations.

Mr Lavdrim KRASHI, (SP, Albanian Parliament) reminded his fellow Members about the draft law on amendments concerning audio-visual media services, which was approved by the Albanian Parliament in December 2019, although not signed by the President of Albania. He highlighted that in January 2020, the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe sought the opinion of the Venice Commission on this draft law. The Venice Commission provided several recommendations, including the need to ensure international standards in de-anonymization on the internet and to establish more robust procedures and safeguards in the complaints' procedure.

Additionally, he mentioned that the Venice Commission encouraged the Albanian authorities to support the establishment of an independent self-regulatory body that would effectively address issues related to malicious or irresponsible media behaviour on the internet, involving all relevant stakeholders from the media community. Mr KRASHI expressed his disappointment at the lack of progress in both adopting the draft law and setting up the self-regulatory body. However, he remained hopeful that the Parliament would take action on this matter in the near future. Mr KRASHI also noted that while initially, the media community opposed the draft law, there have been no further initiatives from their side to make progress on this issue.

Mr Gazmend BARDHI (DP, Albanian Parliament) highlighted the lack of progress in the field of freedom of speech in the media, as stated in the recent country report. The report emphasized the need for Albania to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against intimidation, attacks, and threats targeting the media, including those occurring within political discourse. Mr BARDHI drew the attention of the Members to two particular concerns: the Labour Law, which despite the government's promise to refrain from its adoption, remains on the Parliament's agenda, and the Media and Information Agency, which operates under the Prime Minister's office and has resulted in the centralization of information in the country.

Mr BARDHI additionally pointed out that Albania has fallen 20 places in the Index of 'Reporters Without Borders', indicating a steep decline in media freedom. He considered the intimidation and fear-inducing language originating from the Prime Minister's office as unacceptable, particularly in the context of the accession negotiations. He also mentioned a case where a TV station was unlawfully closed (confirmed through arbitration) and another TV outlet that constantly faces threats due to its editorial agenda.

Mr Taulant BALLA (SP, Albanian Parliament) addressed some of the key concerns raised. He reminded the Members that the law on audio-visual media services had been removed from the Parliament's agenda and this decision had been communicated to the plenary. Regarding the sequestration of a TV station, he argued that it was based on a decision by SPAK and not by the government. Mr BALLA, speaking about violence and intimidation against journalists, called upon all his colleagues to express solidarity with journalists who face such threats.

Moving on, Mr BALLA explained the primary objectives of the Media and Information Agency, which include coordinating the exchange of information between institutions and providing media and the public with information about the work of public institutions, aiming to enhance transparency. He emphasized that the agency's purpose was not to centralize information flow or hinder the work of journalists in any way. In conclusion, Mr BALLA stated that one of the main challenges faced by free speech and the media is combating disinformation, highlighting its importance in the current context.

10. Any other business

No other issues were raised.

11. Date and place of the next SAPC meeting

The 16th EU-Albania SAPC meeting will take place in the first half of 2023.

**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 REĢISTRS/DALYVIŲ SĄRAŠAS/
JELENLĒTI ĪV/REĢISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŠCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/
LISTĂ DE PREZENȚĂ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/NÄRVAROLISTA**

Бюро/Mesa/Předsednictvo/Formandskabet/Vorstand/Juhatus/Προεδρείο/Bureau/Predsjedništvo/Ufficio di presidenza/Prezidijs/ Biuras/Elnökség/Prezidium/Birou/Předsednictvo/Predsedstvo/Puheenjohtajisto/Presidiet (*)
EP: Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS (co-chair) Members of the Albanian Delegation to the EU-Albania SAPC: Mr Taulant BALLA (co-chair); Ms. Jorida TABAKU (co-Vice Chair)
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Βουλευτές/Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputāti/Na riai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputați/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
EP: Ms Dominique BILDE, Mr Andrey SLABAKOV Members of the Albanian Delegation to the EU-Albania SAPC: Mr Fatmir XHAFAJ, Mr Pandeli MAJKO, Mr Toni GOGU, Ms Enslemvera ZAKE, Mr Arben PËLLUMBI, Ms Anila DENAJ, Mr Gazmend BARDHI, Ms Enkelejd ALIBEAJ, Mr Saimir KORRESHI, Ms Orjola PAMPURI, Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU, Ms Zheni GJERGJI
Заместници/Suplentes/Náhradníci/Stedfortrædere/Stellvertreter/Asendusliikmed/Αναπληρωτές/Substitutes/Suppléants/Zamjenici/ Supplenti/Aizstājēji/Pavaduojuantysnariai/Póttagok/Sostituti/Plaatsvervangers/Zastępcy/Membros suplentes/Supleanți/Náhradníci/ Namestniki/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter
EP: Mr Vlad GHEORGHE Parliament of Albania: Mr. Arbër AGALLIU, Mr Lavdrim KRASHI

209 (7)
EP: Ms 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 ημερήσιας διάταξης/Agenda item/Point OJ/Τοčka dnevnoĝ reda/Punto all'ordine del giorno/Darba kārtības punkts/Darbotvarkēs punktā/Napirendi pont/Punt Agenda/Agendapunt/Punkt porządku dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schôdze/Τοčka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)
Mr Martin Košatka, Junior Deputy Minister and Southern and South-eastern Europe Department Director (Czech Presidency-in-Office of the Council); Ms Michela Matuella, acting Director, Directorate Western Balkans, DG NEAR (EC); Ms Elsa Fenet, Head of Division, Western Balkans, European External Action Service (EEAS); Ms Isabel Santos, European Parliament's standing Rapporteur on Albania.
Item 3

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatelé/Observatører/Beobachter/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Novērotāji/Stebėtojai/Megfigyelők/Osservatori/Waarnemers/Observatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/Opazovalci/Tarkkailijat/Observatörer
Mr Knut Fleckenstein, Adviser to the Cabinet of the Speaker of Albanian Parliament; Ms Odeta BERBERI, Advisor to SP Political Group. Secretariat of Albanian Delegation: Ms Migena KEÇI; Mr Genci GOLI; Ms Klaudia BEQARI

По покана на председателя/ Por invitación del presidente/ Na pozvání předsedy/ Efter indbydelse fra formanden/ Auf Einladung des Vorsitzenden/ Εσίμεηη 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 invitația președintelui/ Na pozwanie predsedu/ Na povabilo predsednika/ Puheenjohtajan kutsusta/ På ordförandens inbjudan

Съвет/Consejo/Rada/Rådet/Rat/Nöukogu/ Συμβούλιο/ Council/Conseil/Vijeće/Consiglio/Padome/Taryba/Tanács/Kunsill/Raad/ Conselho/Consiliu/Svet/Neuvosto/Rådet (*)
Mr Corentin Baudino
Комисия/Comisión/Komise/Kommissionen/Kommission/Komisjon/ Επιτροπή/Commission/Komisija/Commissione/Bizottság/ Kummissjoni/Commissie/Komisja/Comissão/Comisie/Komisja/Komissio/Kommissionen (*)
Ms Michela Matuella, acting Director, Directorate Western Balkans, DG NEAR (EC) Mr Sergio Caliva, DG NEAR (EC)
Европейска служба за външна дейност/ Servicio Europeo de Acción Exterior/ Evropská služba pro vnější činnost/ EU-Udenrigstjenesten/ Europäischer Auswärtiger Dienst/ Euroopa välis teenistus/ Ευρωπαϊκή Υπηρεσία Εξωτερικής Δράσης/ European External Action service/ Service européen pour l'action extérieure/ Evropska služba za vanjsko djelovanje/ Servizio europeo per l'azione esterna/ Eiropas Ārējās darbības dienests/ Europos išorės veiksmų tarnyba/ Európai Külügyi Szolgálat/ Servizz Ewropew għall- Azzjoni Esterna/ Europese dienst voor extern optreden/ Europejska Służba Działañ Zewnętrznych/ Serviço Europeu para a Acção Externa/ Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/ Európska služba pre vonkajšiu činnost/ Evropska služba za zunanje delovanje/ Euroopan ulkosuhdehallinto/ Europeiska avdelningen för yttre åtgärd (*)
Ms Elsa Fenet, Head of Division for Western Balkans (EEAS) Ms Lena Björkholm Ms Alba Cako-Müller
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 ohra/ Andere instellingen en organen/ Inne instytucje i organy/ Outras instituições e outros órgãos/ Alte instituții și organe/ Iné inštitúcie a orgány/ Muut toimeilimet ja elimet/ Andra institutioner och organ

Други учасници/Otros participantes/Ostatní účastníci/Endvidere deltog/Andere Teilnehmer/Muud osalejad/Επίσης παρόντες/Other participants/Autres participants/Drugi sudionici/Altri partecipanti/Citi klātesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Partecipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Alți participanți/Ini účastníci/Drugi udeleženci/Muut osallistujat/Övriga deltagare
Mr Martin KOŠATKA, Junior Deputy Minister and Southern and South-eastern Europe Department Director (Czech Presidency-in-Office of the Council);

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/Secrétariat des groupes politiques/Tajništva klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariāts/Frakciju sekretoriai/Képviseletcsoportok titkársága/Sekretarjat gruppi politici/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secr. dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupin/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristö/De politiska gruppernas sekretariat	
PPE	Ms Anna Ksiądzakova
S&D	
Renew	
Verts/ALE	
ID	
ECR	Ms Antonia Dimitrova
The Left	
NI	

Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantselei/Γραφείο του Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsednika/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
Ms Tatiana Mrazikova
Кабинет на генералния секретар/Gabinete del Secretario General/Kancelář generálního tajemníka/Generalsekretærens Kabinet/Kabinett des Generalsekretärs/Peasekretäri büroo/Γραφείο Γενικού του 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 Ġenerali/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalnega sekretarja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekreterarens kansli
Mr Corentin Baudino

Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peadirektoraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/ Directorate-General/Direction générale/Glavna uprava/Direzione generale/Ģenerāldirektorāts/Generalinis direktoratas/Főigazgatóság/ Direttorat Ġenerali/Direktoraten-generaal/Dyrekcja Generalna/Direcção-Geral/Direcții Generale/Generálne riaditeľstvo/Generalni direktorat/Pääosasto/Generaldirektorat	
DG PRES DG IPOL DG EXPO DG EPRS DG COMM DG PAPA DG PERS DG INLO DG TRAD DG LINC DG FINS DG ITEC DG SAFE	
Правна служба/Servicio Jurídico/Právní služba/Juridisk Tjeneste/Juristischer Dienst/Öigusteenistus/Νομική Υπηρεσία/Legal Service/ Service juridique/Pravna služba/Servizio giuridico/Juridiskais dienests/Teisės tarnyba/Jogi szolgálat/Servizz legali/Juridische Dienst/ Wydział prawny/Serviço Jurídico/Serviciu Juridic/Právný servis/Oikeudellinen yksikkö/Rättstjänsten	
Секретариат на комисията/Secretaría de la comisión/Sekretariat výboru/Udvalgssekretariatet/Ausschusseksretariat/Komisjoni sekretariaat/Γραμματεία της επιτροπής/Committee secretariat/Secrétariat de la commission/Tajništvo odbora/Segreteria della commissione/ Komitejas sekretariāts/Komiteto sekretoriatas/A bizottság titkársága/Sekretarjat tal- kumitat/Commissiesecretariaat/Sekretariat komisji/ Secretariado da comissão/Sekretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottssekretariatet	
Mr Igor Miskulin, Mr Adam Isaacs	
Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistent/Assistent/Assistenz/Βοηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Pāļīgs/Padējējas/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočnik/ Avustaja/Assistenten	
Ms Rosa-Maria Licop Cabo	

- * (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esimees/Πρόεδρος/Chair/Président/Predsjednik/Priekšsēdētājs/
Pirmininkas/Elnök/Chairman/Voorzitter/Przewodniczący/Preşedinte/Predseda/Predsednik/Puheenjohtaja/Ordförande
- (VP) = Заместник-председател/Vicepresidente/Místopředseda/Næstformand/Stellvertretender Vorsitzender/Aseesimees/Αντιπρόεδρος/
Vice-Chair/Potpredsjednik/Vice-Président/Potpredsjednik/Priekšsēdētāja vietnieks/Pirmininko pavaduotojas/Alelnök/ Viči
'Chairman'/Ondervoorzitter/Wiceprzewodniczący/Vice-Presidente/Vicepreşedinte/Podpredseda/Podpredsednik/
Varapuheenjohtaja/Vice ordförande
- (M) = Член/Miembro/Člen/Medlem/Mitglied/Parlamendiliige/Βουλευτής/Member/Membre/Član/Membro/Deputāts/Narys/Képviselő/
Membru/Lid/Członek/Membro/Membru/Člen/Poslanec/Jäsen/Ledamot
- (F) = Длъжностно лице/Funcionario/Úředník/Tjenestemand/Beamter/Ametnik/Υπάλληλος/Official/Fonctionnaire/Dužnosnik/
Funzionario/Ierēdnis/Pareigūnas/Tisztviselő/Ufficial/Ambtenaar/Urzędnik/Funcionário/Funcționar/Úradník/Uradnik/Virkamies/
Tjänsteman