



D-AL_PV(2023)0522_01

MINUTES

of the meeting of 22 May 2023, 14.00-15.30

Brussels

The meeting opened at 14.00 on Monday, 22 May 2023, with Theresa BIELOWSKI (Vice Chair) presiding.

1. Adoption of the draft Agenda

The draft agenda of the meeting was circulated by the Secretariat. It was adopted without changes.

2. Adoption of the Minutes of the Delegation meeting of 14 November 2022

The minutes of the Delegation meeting held on 14 November 2022 were distributed to the Members on Wednesday, 10 May. No comments were received, and the minutes were therefore adopted without changes.

3. Chair's announcements

The Chair informed the attendees that preparations for the upcoming 16th EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) meeting in Tirana on 19 July were underway, with the draft agenda to be distributed soon. She also noted that this delegation meeting serves as a forum for discussing significant events having taken place in Albania since the last SAPC meeting in December. Ms BIELOWSKI then invited Mr Sven SIMON to provide a short overview of the Election Observation Delegation's findings concerning Albania's local elections of 14 May.

4. Debriefing by Mr Sven SIMON, head of the EP Election Observation Delegation, on the 14 May local elections in Albania

MEP Sven Simon delivered an informative briefing on the Election Observation Mission's assessment of the Albanian local elections held on 14 May 2023. He emphasized that while it is not a regular practice for the European Parliament to observe local elections, the EP decided to do so nevertheless, underscoring the significance of Albania as a priority. The mission comprised four Members representing four distinct political groups, it was embedded into the OSCE ODIHR mission, leading to joint conclusions.

Mr SIMON firstly acknowledged the EP's longstanding history of supporting Albania on its path towards democratic progress. He noted that the observation mission coincided with the screening process that Albania initiated last year, further emphasizing the shared commitment to Albania's development.

Regarding the elections themselves, Mr SIMON stated that they were considered generally 'well-administered' and expressed content that opposition parties decided to participate, recognizing it as a positive step towards inclusive democratic practices. However, he raised some concerns regarding the electoral process. One observation was that local issues did not receive adequate attention during the political campaign, with national-level matters taking the spotlight.

Mr SIMON informed that the Election Observation Mission monitored the voting process on Election Day in three different towns, namely Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan. One significant challenge encountered was technological issues, which not only failed to assist but also resulted in delays throughout the process. Additionally, the presence of a considerable number of people outside voting premises raised concerns about potential intimidation and undue influence on voters.

Furthermore, Mr SIMON noted that the election results demonstrated a clear favour towards the ruling party, once again, suggesting a certain level of imbalance in the Albanian electoral landscape. The overall campaign was characterized by heavy polarization, contributing to a tense political atmosphere, he added.

Despite these challenges, Mr SIMON conveyed hope for positive change as a result of the newly elected mayors' efforts. The Election Observation Mission's assessment aimed to provide an impartial evaluation of the process, with the ultimate goal of supporting Albania in strengthening its democratic institutions and fostering inclusive and transparent electoral practices.

5. Exchange of views on the political and economic situation in the Republic of Albania, and its relations with the EU with:

- **H.E. Ms Suela JANINA**, Ambassador of the Republic of Albania to the EU;
- **Ms Michela MATUELLA**, Head of Unit for Albania, North Macedonia, and Acting Director for Western Balkans, DG NEAR, European Commission;
- **Ms Elsa FENET**, Head of Division 'Western Balkans', European External Action Service.

Ms BIELOWSKI expressed appreciation for Albania's full alignment with EU foreign policy amid Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. She added that the European Parliament assures Albania of ongoing strong support for its reform agenda. Welcoming the above-mentioned guest speakers, the Chair invited them to share their insights on Albania's current developments, the upcoming months, and the challenges ahead.

H.E. Ambassador Ms Suela JANINA took the floor, sharing a comprehensive overview of the recent developments in Albania. She emphasized the significance of the well-administered local elections, which saw the participation of 61 municipalities and were closely observed by a substantial number of international observers, including OSCE ODIHR and the embedded EP delegation. While

acknowledging the presence of some irregularities, the proactive step taken by the prosecutor's office in initiating proceedings on approximately 31 cases of political crimes showcased Albania's commitment to upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, she said.

Furthermore, Ambassador JANINA highlighted some other major events that have shaped Albania's recent political landscape. Notably, the country had the honour of hosting the EU Albania Summit in December 2022, marking a significant milestone as it was the first time the summit was held outside of the EU. This event underscored Albania's growing importance in the region and its increased engagement with the EU. Following the success of the summit, Albania is eagerly anticipating the upcoming Berlin Process Summit, scheduled to take place in Tirana in October 2023. This continued high-level engagement reflects the EU's recognition of Albania's progress and the increased accessibility of the EU in the Western Balkans. Ambassador JANINA additionally expressed enthusiasm for the Western Balkan countries advancing in their EU accession paths.

Turning to Albania's commitment to EU alignment, Ambassador JANINA emphasized the country's active engagement with the European Commission in the screening process. Albania is diligently working across three clusters to ensure progress and a smooth transition, she noted. Noteworthy achievements have already been made in the realm of justice reform, with the establishment of new justice institutions and the elimination of backlog in the constitutional court. She shared that these tangible advancements have yielded positive outcomes in the fight against corruption, a priority area for Albania. Likewise, significant progress has been made in combating organized crime, with notable attention given to anti-money laundering measures. Ambassador JANINA also highlighted Albania's dedication to implementing the recommendations set forth by international institutions.

In addition to the political landscape, Ambassador JANINA provided insights into Albania's economic situation. Despite facing multiple challenges, including a devastating earthquake in November 2019, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Albania's economy exhibited resilience, achieving a growth rate of 4.2%. While slightly lower than initial expectations, this growth is commendable, considering the adverse circumstances. She shared that the Albanian government has implemented a comprehensive social package to mitigate the impact of the energy crisis on affected citizens, demonstrating a commitment to supporting those in need.

With ongoing progress and steadfast dedication to overcoming challenges, Albania continues to chart a path towards further development and increased cooperation with the EU and the international community at large, the Ambassador concluded.

Ms Michela MATUELLA acknowledged that sufficient information had already been shared regarding the elections, as detailed by the Election Observation Mission and the previous speakers, Mr Sven SIMON and the Ambassador. She highlighted that the preliminary results align with previous recommendations, including those from the Venice Commission. Ms MATUELLA too emphasized the significant political polarization in Albanian politics, stressing its importance in the future accession process, which will require consensus across parties on key decisions.

Shifting focus to the screening process, Ms MATUELLA expressed satisfaction with its smooth progress. Two clusters, namely fundamentals and the internal market are nearly complete, while efforts are ongoing in the competitiveness cluster, she noted. The overall agenda remains on track, aligning with the timeline projected last year and aiming to meet the November 2023 target. Ms MATUELLA underlined the need for the reform agenda to continue progressing, offering words of encouragement. She highlighted the importance of effective communication and dialogue to ensure that citizens are well-informed about the intricacies of the technical screening process.

Ms MATUELLA then commended Albania for its steadfast orientation in foreign policy, noting that its partners recognise this commitment. She highlighted Albania's significant role in the region, citing the recent summit and the upcoming Berlin Process summit as illustrative examples.

Concluding, Ms MATUELLA briefly mentioned the financial assistance provided to Albania by the Commission, specifically acknowledging support in the areas of cybersecurity and the energy sector.

Ms Elsa FENET emphasized the significance of the European Parliament having the opportunity to observe the elections in Albania, recognizing the importance of transparent and democratic elections. Reflecting on Albania's historical context and the challenges posed by opposition non-participation, she highlighted the need for increased attention to local political issues. Ms FENET noted that the ruling party's substantial victory comes with greater responsibility, and she expressed expectations for a heightened drive and commitment to progressing steadily on the EU accession process.

Furthermore, Ms FENET commended Albania for consistently demonstrating its alignment with the values shared by the EU. She recognized Albania's unwavering support for these common values, particularly in terms of foreign policy orientation. Encouraging all political parties to work collaboratively, she emphasized the importance of collective efforts to advance Albania's progress in the EU accession process. Ms FENET conveyed the EU's desire to witness even more substantial advancements, continued dedication and cooperation from all stakeholders in the reform agenda.

Ms Theresa BIELOWSKI then inquired whether there is a potential threat of a decline in EU support within Albania, considering factors such as inflation, rising prices, and the ongoing energy crisis in the region. The Chair further sought insights into the public sentiment following the first Intergovernmental Conference and the commencement of the screening exercise last year. Additionally, she inquired about the methods employed to communicate information about the screening process to the citizens.

Ambassador Suela JANINA responded to the question, acknowledging that frustrations within the region and the perceived lack of action from the EU have impacted public sentiment. She emphasised, however, that the trend in Albania is different. The support for EU membership among the Albanian population is notably higher than in other countries in the region, and even possibly higher than within the EU itself, ranging from 94% to 97%. Ambassador JANINA expressed confidence that this level of support will persist and grow even stronger as Albania progresses in the EU accession process. She highlighted that despite some political polarization, there is a unified national objective when it comes to EU integration. The pursuit of European integration transcends political divisions, with a shared commitment among Albanians to make it happen, she added. Ambassador JANINA concluded by affirming that Albania will continue to be one of the most pro-EU countries in both the region and the continent.

Ms Elsa FENET also responded by emphasising that the EU continues to be perceived as a symbol of security, prosperity, and the rule of law in the Western Balkan countries. She acknowledged that this perception contributes to the support for EU membership within the population of the region, however, she cautioned against taking this support for granted, noting that maintaining and nurturing this support requires continuous efforts from both the EU and the Western Balkan countries. Ms. FENET underscored the importance of ongoing collaboration and mutual commitment to ensure that the support for EU integration in the Western Balkans continues and grows even stronger.

6. Any other business

No other business.

7. Date and place of the next meeting

The meeting closed at 15.59.

**ПРИСЪСТВЕН ЛИСТ/LISTA DE ASISTENCIA/PREZENČNÍ LISTINA/DELTAGERLISTE/
 ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/KATASTAΣΗ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ/RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
 LISTE DE PRÉSENCE/POPIS NAZOČNIH/ELENCO DI PRESENZA/APMEKLĒJUMU REĢISTRS/DALVIŲ SARAŠAS/
 JELENLÉTI ÍV/REĢISTRU TA' ATTENDENZA/PRESENTIELIJST/LISTA OBECNOŚCI/LISTA DE PRESENÇAS/
 LISTA DE PREZENTĀ/PREZENČNÁ LISTINA/SEZNAM NAVZOČIH/LÄSNÄOLOLISTA/NÄRVAROLISTA**

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Theresa Bielowski
Членове/Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/Bouλευτές/Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputati/Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Jäsenet/Ledamöter
Dominique Bilde, Ciarán Cuffe

209 (7)	
Lars Patrick Berg, Patricia Chagnon, Sven Simon	
216 (3)	
56 (8) (Точка от дневния ред/Punto del orden del día/Bod pořadu jednání (OJ)/Punkt på dagsordenen/Tagesordnungspunkt/Päiväkorra punkt/Σημείο της ημερήσιας 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 dziennego/Ponto OD/Punct de pe ordinea de zi/Bod programu schôdze/Točka UL/Esityslistan kohta/Punkt på föredragningslistan)	
Sven Simon, MEP	Item 4
H.E. Ms Suela Janina, Ambassador to the Mission of the Republic of Albania to the EU	Item 5
Ms Michela Matuella, Head of Unit for Albania, North Macedonia, and Acting Director for Western Balkans, DG NEAR, European Commission	Item 5
Ms Elsa Fenet, Head of Division 'Western Balkans', European External Action Service	Item 5

Наблюдатели/Observadores/Pozorovatel é/Observatér/Beobachter/Vaatlejad/Παρατηρητές/Observers/Observateurs/Promatrači/Osservatori/Nověrotáji/Stebétojai/Megfigyelők/Osservaturi/Waarnemers/Obserwatorzy/Observadores/Observatori/Pozorovatelia/Opazovalci/Tarkkailijat/Obsrvatörer

Ms Xhona Jupe, Albanian Mission to the EU

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/Pirmminku pakvietus/Az elnök meghívására/ Fuq stedina tāc-'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/Kommissionen/Kommission/Komisjon/Επιτροπή/Commission/Komisija/Commissione/Bizottság/Kummissjoni/Commissie/Komisja/Comissão/Comisie/Komisia/Komissió/Kommissionen (*)

Ms Michela Matuella

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 vanjski 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/Europaea Służba Działalń Zewnętrznych/Serviço Europeu para a Ação Externa/Serviciul european pentru acțiune externă/Europska služba pre vonkajšiu činnosť/Evropska služba za zunanje delovanje/Euroopan ulkosuhdehallinto/Europeiska avdelningen för yttre åtgärd (*)

Ms Elsa Fenet, Mr Damien Hert, 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 oħra/Andere instellingen en organen/Inne instytucje i organy/Outras instiuições e outros órgãos/Alte instituijii și 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/Cíti klátesošie/Kiti dalyviai/Más résztvevők/Partecipanti ohra/Andere aanwezigen/Inni uczestnicy/Outros participantes/Altı particanı/Iñi 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/Tajništva klubova zastupnika/Segreteria gruppi politici/Politisko grupu sekretariáts/Frakcijų sekretoriai/Képviselőcsoporthoz titkársága/Segretariat gruppi političi/Fractiesecretariaten/Sekretariat Grup Politycznych/Secretariado dos grupos políticos/Secretariate grupuri politice/Sekretariát politických skupín/Sekretariat političnih skupin/Poliittisten ryhmien sihteeristö/De politiska gruppemas sekretariat

PPE	Dominika Kaczkowska
S&D	Anna Ksiazczakova
Renew	Erik Methner
Verts/ALE	Gesa Storz, Ivan Hortal Sánchez
ID	
ECR	
The Left	
NI	

Кабинет на председателя/Gabinete del Presidente/Kancelář předsedy/Formandens Kabinet/Kabinett des Präsidenten/Presidendi kantslej/Γραφείο του Προέδρου/President's Office/Cabinet du Président/Ured predsjednika/Gabinetto del Presidente/Priekšsēdētāja kabinets/Pirmininko kabinetas/Elnöki hivatal/Kabinet 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/Generalsekretára kabinets/Generalinio sekretoriaus kabinetas/Főtitkári hivatal/Kabinet tas-Segretarju Ĝenerali/Kabinet van de secretaris-generaal/Gabinet Sekretarza Generalnego/Gabinete do Secretário-Geral/Cabinet Secretar General/Kancelária generálneho tajomníka/Urad generalného sekretárja/Pääsihteerin kabinetti/Generalsekretærerens kansli

Corentin Baudino

Генерална дирекция/Dirección General/Generální ředitelství/Generaldirektorat/Generaldirektion/Peadirektoraat/Γενική Διεύθυνση/
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DG SAFE	

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Sekretariat komisji/Secretariado da comissão/Secretariat comisie/Sekretariat odbora/Valiokunnan sihteeristö/Utskottsssekretariatet

Adam Isaacs, Igor Miskulin

Сътрудник/Asistente/Asistente/Assistent/Assistenz/Βοηθός/Assistant/Assistente/Palīgs/Padējējs/Asszisztens/Asystent/Pomočník/
Avustaja/Assisterenter

Rosa-Maria Licop Cabo, Anna Parfjonova

- * (P) = Председател/Presidente/Předseda/Formand/Vorsitzender/Esiemees/Πρόεδρος/Chairman/Président/Predsjednik/Prickšsēdētājs/
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Tjänstemän