

2021 Report on Albania

Albania has been an EU candidate country since June 2014. The Council decided on 25 March 2020 to open accession negotiations, after the country had made some progress towards meeting the political criteria and the five key priorities that need to be fulfilled to become an EU Member State; the European Council endorsed this decision the following day. However, negotiations have not yet started, and Albania is advancing towards EU membership at a very slow pace. The main obstacles remain flaws in the functioning of its judiciary, in the fight against corruption, and in safeguarding media freedoms and minority rights. Parliament's position on the European Commission's 2021 annual report on Albania is scheduled for a plenary vote in May.

Background

Albania, a country with a [population](#) of 2.8 million, was identified as a potential [candidate](#) for EU membership as early as the EU–Western Balkans summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003. According to the Commission's 2021 Albania [report](#), the country 'has continued to show its commitment to EU-oriented reforms and delivered tangible and sustainable results'. A recent [poll](#) found that as many as 97 % of Albanians are in favour of EU accession. On 25 March 2020, the EU [opened](#) accession talks with Albania, and the country took part in the EU–Western Balkans summit on 6 May 2020. However, [democratic backsliding](#) has been evident: the 2017 elections were marked by allegations of vote-buying, and led to bursts of anti-government protests throughout 2018 and 2019. EU accession was at the forefront of the electoral debate in the run-up to the 25 April 2021 [elections](#); the ruling socialist party, led by the prime minister, Edi Rama, [won](#) a tight victory ensuring political continuity.

The EU is the largest provider of [financial assistance](#) to Albania. Following the coronavirus outbreak in 2020, the Commission provided the region – on top of existing assistance – with over €3.3 billion worth of EU financial support, [mobilised](#) jointly with the European Investment Bank. Albania also received €180 million in the form of [macro-financial assistance](#) offered to enlargement and neighbourhood partners in the context of the pandemic. In 2020, the Commission approved a comprehensive [economic and investment plan](#) for the western Balkans, with a €9 billion budget to spur long-term recovery, accelerate the green and digital transitions, and foster regional cooperation and convergence with the EU.

European Parliament position

On 20 April 2022, Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted the [report](#) drafted by Isabel Santos (S&D, Portugal). The report recalls that 'Albania's final EU accession depends on lasting, in-depth and irreversible reforms across fundamental areas, starting with the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions'. It welcomes all efforts made to reduce polarisation prior to the 2021 general elections, which brought the opposition parties back into the political process in the Albanian parliament, and stresses the joint responsibility of the country's political forces to strengthen constructive political dialogue and cooperation. Moreover, the report emphasises the Albanian authorities' obligation to continue eliminating corruption and criminal activities from all domains of public life, including public procurement procedures and political party financing. Furthermore, it notes that Albania has fallen 27 places since 2016 on Transparency International's (2021) [Global Corruption Barometer](#) – which surveys public opinion on corruption. Parliament is expected to vote on the report during the May II plenary session. On 26 April 2022, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola [said](#) that the EU must 'think of ways to accelerate the enlargement process in the Western Balkans', because 'stability in the immediate neighbourhood is vital for the EU's own stability'.

Own-initiative report: [2021/2244\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Isabel Santos (S&D, Portugal).

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Author: Branislav Stanicek, Members' Research Service
PE 729.418 – May 2022



This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2022

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact) <http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)