

EUROPEAN UNION-ALBANIA STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (SAPC)

16th Meeting

19 July 2023

Tirana

RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) held its sixteenth meeting on 19 July 2023, in Tirana, co-chaired by **Mr Toni GOGU** on behalf of the Albanian Parliament Delegation and **Mr Manolis KEFALOGIANNIS** on behalf of the European Parliament Delegation.

It exchanged views with:

- **Ms. Olta XHAÇKA**, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Albania;
- **H.E. Mr Álvaro RENEDO ZALBA**, Ambassador of Spain to Albania, on behalf of the Spanish Presidency-in-office of the Council;
- **H.E. Ms Christiane HOHMANN**, Ambassador of the EU to Albania, on behalf of the European Commission and the European External Action Service;
- **Ms Isabel SANTOS**, European Parliament's standing Rapporteur on Albania

The members of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee addressed the following subjects:

- Rule of law, fight against organized crime and corruption;
- Media freedoms;
- Youth and measures to address emigration;
- Environmental policies;
- Good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

The Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in accordance with Rule 3 of its Rules of Procedure and Article 122 of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement, addresses the following Recommendations to the Stabilisation and Association Council and to the institutions of Albania and of the European Union:

1. Welcomes the European Parliament Resolution of 12 July 2023 concerning the 2022 Report on Albania;
2. Strongly welcomes Albania's commitment to EU integration, reflecting the consensus among political parties and overwhelming support among citizens; welcomes the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Tirana, the first-ever to take place in one of the countries of the region, and its Declaration of 6 December 2022;
3. Welcomes the start of the screening process; encourages, in this regard, Albania to safeguard democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights; urges decision-makers to work jointly towards meeting the membership criteria by 2030; stresses the need to strengthen the transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of the accession process, including its parliamentary dimension; encourages, in this respect, efforts to strongly involve civil society on a regular basis and inform citizens of the accession process and benefits of joining the EU; urges the government to include all political forces and turn this into a national priority;
4. Welcomes the enhanced role of the Parliament of Albania in the process of European integration, through the adoption of the new legal framework that gives the Parliament of Albania and the Commission for European Affairs a key added role in the process of European integration, and by expanding the exercise of parliamentary control over comprehensive to the government; stresses that such enhanced role of Parliament in the accession negotiation process should enable and further encourage a more comprehensive and proactive participation and involvement of the opposition; stresses that the government should be more accountable and transparent, starting from the first phase of the opening of negotiations;
5. Calls on the Albanian authorities to focus on modernising the fiscal system and tax administration, including asset declaration and compliance, strengthening anti-money laundering controls and establishing an asset recovery office;
6. Commends Albania's progress and commitment to completing the implementation of its comprehensive justice reform, which will strengthen the independence, transparency, efficiency, accountability of and public trust in the Albanian justice system; encourages the country to intensify steps aimed at finalising the re-evaluation (vetting) process of judges and prosecutors, and at mitigating its side effects, namely

by filling in vacancies, reducing the backlog of court cases and improving the efficiency of its courts under the new judicial map, while ensuring universal access to justice through crosscutting measures and taking into consideration the socioeconomic conditions of vulnerable groups;

7. Reiterates that Albanian authorities on citizenship should refrain from developing an investors citizenship scheme ("golden passports") as it would pose risks as regards security, money laundering, tax evasion, terrorist financing, corruption and infiltration by organized crime, and would be incompatible with the EU acquis;
8. Recalls that the rule of law and institutional integrity are the backbone of democratic transformation, societal resilience, socioeconomic cohesion and the prerequisite for good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation;
9. Commends Albania's full alignment with EU's foreign and security policy, including the clear-cut response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; expresses deep concern that not all Western Balkan Countries have aligned with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy; praises Albania for hosting Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war;
10. Welcomes Albania's overall contribution to regional cooperation and stability in the Western Balkans;
11. Praises Albania's work during its mandate in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), namely its efforts on areas such as accountability and justice for human-rights abuses across the world, on the peace and security agenda, and combatting sexual violence in conflict; welcomes particularly its efforts in the context of the war in Ukraine through introducing UNSC Resolution 2623;
12. Encourages Albania to continue its engagement in developing and cultivating regional cooperation and regional initiatives, underlining the importance of their inclusiveness;
13. Condemns malign foreign interference and hybrid attacks, including disinformation, espionage, incitement to all forms of radicalisation and cyberattacks against Albanian citizens and critical infrastructure; invites the authorities to prevent data leaks by considerably strengthening cybersecurity and calls on the EU and its Members States to provide Albania with necessary assistance in this respect;
14. Underlines the importance of efforts to improve the functioning of the rule of law and the judiciary, and tackle corruption and organised crime, including the production and trafficking of drugs; welcomes, in this respect, the results delivered by the strengthened Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) and calls for

progress on the ongoing cases, including those at a high level; stresses the need to tackle the culture of impunity;

15. Stresses the importance of upholding fundamental rights and the rights of minorities, and notably those of ethnic minorities; recalls the constitutional principles of the separation of powers, and checks and balances that are of crucial importance for the rule of law; expresses concern over recurrent instances of abuse of the measure of detention before the start of criminal proceedings, as referred to in the 2022 Report on Albania and the respective European Parliament document while underlining the importance of the presumption of innocence and expressing concern over the prohibition to take office; urges the Albanian Parliament and the relevant public authorities to take immediate legislative measures to limit the abuse of the indiscriminate use of personal security measures in the criminal process, while respecting the principle of proportionality;
16. Calls on Albania to foster a suitable environment to conduct the population census; stresses it should be carried out in a manner that ensures that all national minorities are counted without fear of intimidation;
17. Recognizes the efforts made by Albania to strengthen women's rights and calls for continued efforts to achieve equality at all levels and to eliminate domestic violence against women;
18. Expresses concerns over the backsliding on media and freedom of expression in Albania, in line with the European Commission Albania Report 2022, which highlights the unethical pressure to media and journalist editorial line from the government, political parties, businesses and criminal groups in inappropriate and non-transparent ways; calls for ensuring media freedom, including by creating an enabling environment for independent media and improving the labour and social rights of journalists;
19. Applauds the work and contribution of Albania's vibrant civil society to the ongoing development of democracy in the country; underscores the importance of empowering the youth and fostering opportunities for the younger Albanian generations, including to tackle youth unemployment and to reverse the brain drain among young people; highlights the symbolism of the designation of Tirana as the 2023 European City of Sport;
20. Urges the Albanian authorities to advance on implementing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which mirrors European Green Deal priorities and the Brdo Declaration, adopted at the 2021 EU-Western Balkans summit; encourages Albanian authorities to step up measures on biodiversity, water, air, climate protection and regional waste management; welcomes the announced establishment of the Vjosa

River National Park, covering the entire river, including its free-flowing tributaries; calls on the Albanian authorities to halt projects that risk violating national and international biodiversity protection norms;

21. Reiterates that the government must take additional measures and concrete actions to prevent the recurrence of breach of data events as happened in the past during the last general elections of April 2021; calls on Albanian authorities to take measures in aligning the national legislation with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) with no further delays;
22. Regrets the fact that the main political parties have failed to reach an agreement on electoral reform; calls on the Albanian authorities to urgently implement the outstanding changes to the electoral and party financing framework well ahead of the 2025 parliamentary elections, in line with the Venice Commission and the recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR report such as investigation and prosecution of cases of vote-buying, the right to a free and secret choice, ensuring the security of citizens' personal data, the misuse of administrative resources, and in due time before the next general election, to strengthen Albania's democratic parliamentary culture;
23. Welcomes the latest prosecution of high officials and encourages Albanian authorities to continue enhanced efforts in the fight against corruption; expresses concerns that corruption is practiced in all state levels, urging the authorities to enable more adequacy and accuracy in monitoring the impact of anti-corruption structures on preventing public sector corruption; expresses concerns over the registration and digitalization of cadastral data regarding property rights, which continues at a slow pace and remains prone to corruption; urges the government to adopt subsequently, with no delays, the action plan to address corruption and other irregularities;
24. Reiterates that specific legislation brought in Parliament should follow due process in line with the highest general public expectations and should not cater to particular interests.