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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Council

pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure

by Toomas Hendrik Ilves

on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

on the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Albania

European Parliament resolution on the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Albania

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Albania, of the other part (COM(2006)0138),
 - having regard to the Commission's Progress Report on Albania in the context of the Stabilisation and Association Process of 9 November 2005 (SEC(2005)1421),
 - having regard to the Commission's Enlargement Strategy Paper of 9 November 2005 (COM(2005)0561) and to the European Parliament's resolution of 16 March 2006 on the Commission's 2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper,
 - having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on International Trade (A6-0000/2006),
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Albania fulfils the conditions to enter into the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Communities and their Member States,
- B. whereas the Stabilisation and Association Agreement will replace the 1992 Agreement on Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation,
- C. whereas the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania places relations between the European Union and Albania on a new contractual basis that provides new opportunities for Albania to promote the rule of law, to strengthen its democratic institutions, to contribute to its stability, which is of the utmost importance for the whole region, and to deepen cooperation with the European Union,
- D. whereas the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 reiterated its determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which will become an integral part of the EU once they meet the established criteria,
- E. whereas Albania is still facing serious challenges in tackling corruption and organised crime, achieving full implementation of adopted legislation, improving public administration and fighting trafficking in human beings and drugs,
- F. whereas the last parliamentary elections in Albania were criticised as being not wholly in line with OSCE/ODIHR commitments and other international standards for democratic elections,

1. Welcomes the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which will hold out the prospect of a close and far-reaching contractual relationship between the EU and Albania, instrumental for achieving political, economic and institutional stability in the country as well as in the whole region and for promoting the transformation of Albania into a pluralist democracy respecting the rule of law, with a functioning market economy;
2. Believes that progress in achieving the standards laid down in the Agreement should be monitored by means of concrete measurable benchmarks by the SAA Council and the relevant joint parliamentary committee;
3. Draws attention to the long-term benefits of the Agreement for both the Albanian people and the Union; notes that the major advantages of the Agreement lie in the achievement of the goal of a complete free trade area and the establishment of a clear legal commitment to cooperation in the areas of common concern, as well as the promotion of a more stable legal environment for investors;
4. Urges the EU and Albania to use the Agreement as a mutually beneficial opportunity; furthermore advises Albania to exploit the opportunity to find its own niche on the European market and develop competitiveness in targeted sectors;
5. Recommends that Albania focus more strongly on developing its economic potential, not least through the expansion of its infrastructure and the development of tourism; regrets the recent cuts in external action assistance as foreseen in the Financial Perspectives; calls on the Commission to earmark sufficient funds for the development of the country's infrastructure, in particular for the development of transport;
6. Confirms, in line with the conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003, its full support for Albania's European perspective and future integration into the European family; believes, however, that the Albanian commitment to European values and standards is first and foremost for its own benefit and should also be pursued as a goal in itself;
7. Notes the reforms Albania has undertaken in order to create a state based on principles of democracy, the rule of law, the free market economy and the protection of human rights and good governance; underlines, however, that Albania needs to expand these reforms and show more tangible results, in line with the provisions set out in the European Partnership, and establish a sustained record of successful implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in order to move to a further stage in European integration; is particularly concerned about the lack of substantial progress as regards full implementation of adopted laws; considers it vital to considerably strengthen administrative capacity, to reform the judiciary and strengthen its independence, to protect women's rights, to fight organised crime and to promote media freedom, while the media themselves should strive for transparency;
8. Notes that the government has committed itself to cracking down on organised crime, including the decision to ban the use of speedboats in order to combat trafficking in human beings and drug smuggling, but insists that Albania must demonstrate further substantial progress in combating all forms of organised crime, in particular trafficking in women and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation, exploitation at work or

compelling them to beg, as a prerequisite for intensified cooperation with the Union; calls on the Commission to continue and reinforce its support to the Albanian authorities in this regard;

9. Notes the efforts of the government in the fight against corruption and organised crime; observes that corruption is one of the main obstacles to the economic and social development of Albania and therefore expects the government's campaign to continue to show tangible results; is of the opinion that corruption has no political colour and should be fought irrespective of any political affiliation;
10. Encourages Albanian governmental bodies to empower civil society by providing it with wider opportunities to participate in the formulation of policy and in the monitoring of its implementation and effectiveness at all levels of government to improve the quality and credibility of reform, as well as to increase transparency and accountability;
11. Notes with respect the efforts undertaken by the Education Minister to reform the education sector but urges the government to guarantee equal education opportunities for children all over the country;
12. Stresses that there are still significant violations of human rights in Albania which should be addressed; urges the Albanian Government to implement the necessary reforms to give detainees access to defence in legal proceedings and to combat torture, brutality or inhuman or degrading treatment; calls on the government to carry out the relevant legislative reforms required for the full implementation of the 2003 Family Code, particularly as regards making domestic violence a criminal offence;
13. Reiterates its call on the Commission to help Albania to put an end to the persistence of the 'blood feud', which constitutes a failure of the rule of law and is fundamentally at odds with European values;
14. Notes that the current electoral system was used during the last parliamentary elections in 2005 to distort the principle of proportionality, also known as Dushk, and urges the Albanian Government and Parliament to further reform the system before the forthcoming local elections following the recommendations formulated by the OSCE/ODIHR, in particular as regards the accuracy of voter lists and of civil registers;
15. Calls on Albania to make further efforts to protect minority rights, including the rights of the Greek minority in Albania, and to complete and implement its minority-related legislation so that it supports the implementation of the relevant international conventions ratified by Albania; observes that further efforts are needed, in particular, as regards increasing the use of minority languages in citizens' dealings with the authorities and the display of traditional local names, improving access to the media for members of minority groups and extending minority language education; notes the shortage of accurate statistical information on national minorities;
16. Expresses its concern at the recent threats by the opposition to boycott the forthcoming local elections; calls, in this respect, on all parties to act in a responsible manner, making every effort to reach an agreement on delicate issues such as the law governing the media and the list of voters;

17. Welcomes the positive and constructive role that Albania has played in multilateral regional initiatives; underlines, however, the need to continue to promote regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations with regard to key issues affecting South East Europe, such as cross-border cooperation, free movement of persons, fighting organised crime and trafficking, establishing a free trade area capable of attracting foreign investment, sharing environmental resources and developing integrated trans-border networks;
18. Takes the view that, due to economic under-development, Albania should devote special attention to developing economic cooperation in the region, in particular with its direct neighbours; considers that Montenegrin independence, the negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, and the opening of negotiations on EU membership with FYROM in the near future should be seen as additional opportunities for economic cooperation and development in Albania and the region as a whole;
19. Takes the view that Albania has a particularly important role to play in the stabilisation of South East Europe with regard, in particular, to the final status of Kosovo; urges the Albanian Government and its leaders to continue to adopt a constructive approach in this respect;
20. Underlines the importance of the Union's assistance missions for capacity building and welcomes the results achieved by the police assistance mission (PAMECA), customs assistance mission (EU-CAFAO Albania) and the judicial assistance mission (EURALIUS); taking into account the extensiveness and complexity of the fight against organised crime in the Western Balkans, calls on the Commission to substantially increase and strengthen EU assistance in the police (PAMECA) and rule of law (EURALIUS) area; calls on the EU and Albania in this context to take advantage, by means of twinning and secondment programmes, of the extensive knowledge and experience gained by the 2004 accession states in reforming their societies and economies in the EU integration process, in particular as regards adopting and implementing the legislation on land and property restitution including for religious communities and strengthening the border guard and customs authorities;
21. Welcomes the conclusion of the readmission agreement with Albania in November 2005 and calls for a visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Albania within the framework of visa facilitation for all the countries of the Western Balkans in order to facilitate cross-border exchanges for the business community, social partners, academia and students as a first step; underlines, however, that the ultimate objective must be to facilitate travel for all citizens;
22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Albania.