**EU-Albania 12th Subcommittee on Innovation, Information Society, and Social Policy**

The 12th Subcommittee meeting on topics related to Education, Research and Innovation, Information Society, and Social Policy between the EU and Albania was held on 28 January, by video conference. Representatives from the European Commission (Commission) discussed with relevant Albanian authorities the most recent developments in these areas. The meeting was co-chaired for the EU by Mr. Alberto Cammarata, Deputy Head of Unit for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission, and for Albania by Mr. Ilir Bejtja, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Energy.

The Commission took note of the efforts done by Albanian authorities to overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market as well as the education and cultural sectors, in particular with regard to the most vulnerable groups. It was acknowledged that digital technologies had an important role supporting the economy and mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

The Commission recognised the efforts made by Albania during 2020 in the field of employment and labour market and welcomed the progress in filling vacancies in the National Agency for Employment and Skills and the completion of restructuring of Regional Employment Directorates and the Regional Directorates of Vocational Training. The importance of sufficient human resources for employment and vocational training policies was underlined. The Commission encouraged the authorities to strengthen cooperation across ministries and governmental bodies for the drafting and adoption of the Albanian Smart Specializations Strategy. The Commission recalled that technical discussions with Albania on participating in the EU’s new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (Horizon Europe) are ongoing. The Commission recognised Albania’s leadership in the region in the field of broadband. The Commission commended Albania for adoption of the National Cyber Security strategy and underlined the need of completing the implementation of the digital switchover. The Commission welcomed the good results of Albania’s participation in the Erasmus+ programme and encouraged the authorities to officially apply to become Programme Country during the next financing period. The Commission also stressed the need of finalising and adopting the 2020 – 2024 Strategy on Education as well as adopting the bylaws implementing the Law on Youth.