

**ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE
STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION COUNCIL
BETWEEN ALBANIA AND THE EU**

Brussels, 1 March 2021

Joint Press Statement

The Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council) between Albania and the European Union held its eleventh meeting on 1 March 2021 in Brussels.

The SA Council acknowledged the exceptional challenges Albania has had to cope with due to the devastating earthquake in 2019, amplified by the unique challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the SA Council recalled the unprecedented support the EU has offered to Albania and the wider region, with €1.15 billion of donor support mobilised by the EU for earthquake recovery and with the EU's support for mitigating the consequences of the pandemic. The latter includes health and economic support totalling €3.3 billion for the region so far, including for Albania €4 million for urgent medical supplies, over €46 million for socio-economic support and a €180 million macro-financial assistance loan. In addition, the Economic and Investment Plan launched for the region sets out a substantial investment package of up to €9 billion and guarantees aiming to mobilise up to €20 billion to support economic recovery.

The SA Council welcomed the historic decision by the Council of the European Union in March 2020 to open accession negotiations with Albania. The SA Council positively noted the European Commission's 2020 Albania Report, which assessed that Albania increased its efforts and delivered further tangible and sustainable results in the key areas identified in the Council Conclusions.

The SA Council looked forward to holding the first intergovernmental conference (IGC) as soon as possible after the approval of the Negotiating Framework, and in line with the conditions for holding the first IGC as set out in the Council conclusions of 25 March 2020.

The SA Council took note of and reviewed progress in reform areas including the rule of law and the judiciary, respect for fundamental rights, public administration, economic policy, education and employment, connectivity, and the green agenda. The SA Council commended Albania's determination in the pursuit of its EU reform agenda. Particular emphasis was given to the process of re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors ("vetting process") as well as to the Constitutional Court and the High Court, both of which have resumed functioning. The SA Council took positive note that Albania's new specialised bodies to fight anti-corruption and organised crime have started to operate. Progress in implementing the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) action plan on fight against money laundering was also discussed. The SA Council stressed the importance of continuing the reform efforts, particularly with respect to the appointments of judges and investigators as well as the continued processing of pending cases and of further strengthening the track record of law enforcement.

The SA Council took note of progress made in the practical preparations for the forthcoming elections. In this regard, the SA Council agreed on the need for further follow-up on all the aspects covered by the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, as well as Venice Commission recommendations as regards future elections. Constructive and inclusive dialogue between political parties and cooperation in Albania's parliament will be essential for further progress on reforms and for the overall sustainability of the engagement in the EU integration process.

The SA Council noted that the transitional period of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement ended on 31 March 2019 and that since 1 April 2019, Albania is thus fully associated with the EU.

The SA Council also highlighted Albania's continuous 100% alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, acknowledging that this sends a strong signal of Albania's strategic orientation and commitment to its goal of EU membership and serves as a positive example for the entire region.

The meeting was chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Mr Josep Borrell. The Albanian delegation was led by the Prime Minister of Albania, Mr. Edi Rama. The Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Mr Olivier Várhelyi, represented the European Commission.