

## **EU-Albania**

### **12<sup>th</sup> Stabilisation and Association Committee**

**Brussels, 15 February 2022**

The 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Stabilisation and Association (SA) Committee between Albania and the European Union took place on 15 February 2022. The meeting was chaired by Ms Michela Matuella, Acting Director for the Western Balkans at the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission, along with H.E. Mr Zef Mazi, Chief Negotiator for EU Integration of Albania and Ms Adea Pirdeni, Deputy Minister of Justice of Albania. H.E. Mr. Luigi Soreca, Ambassador, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Albania also addressed the meeting.

The Commission welcomed the progress Albania achieved over the year. Albania continues to meet all conditions prior to the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference of accession negotiations. The Commission encouraged Albania to keep up the reform momentum, and underlined that for preparedness to accession negotiations the country needs to improve coordination, enhance resources and communication devoted to EU integration. The Commission commended that the parliamentary elections in April 2021 were generally well-organised and enquired about ongoing proceedings to address the outstanding issues, including through plans for further electoral reform. Regarding public administration reform the Commission took note of Albania's vision for 2030 and highlighted the importance of developing new sector strategies for 2023 and beyond. The important role of civil society in EU oriented reforms was highlighted. The Commission highlighted the good overall progress made in implementing the justice system reform noting the need to keep up progress. The Commission welcomed the approval of the extension of the vetting bodies mandate. The Commission welcomed some progress in fighting organised crime and corruption and the tangible results achieved, through an increased cooperation with EU Member States, Europol and Eurojust. The Commission stressed the importance of further intensifying the fight against money laundering and all actions against the proceeds of crime and reminded the high-level political commitment to implement the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) action plan. Albania should continue building the track record of final convictions in the cases of organised crime, corruption, trafficking and money-laundering.

The Commission commended the strong cooperation with the EU on asylum and migration management. The Commission stressed further efforts needed in particular to decrease unfounded asylum applications by Albanian nationals to EU Member States. Albania's visa policy still remains to be fully aligned with EU acquis.

On fundamental rights, the Commission welcomed the adoption of nine by-laws related to the protection of national minorities and recalled that further progress is needed. The SA Committee also discussed the consolidation of property rights, personal data protection, social protection of

Roma and Egyptians communities, and gender equality. The Commission stressed the need to resume progress on freedom of expression and media freedom.

The SA Committee welcomed Albania's engagement in regional cooperation and valued that Albania has continued dialogue to ensure good neighbourly relations, which remain essential. The Commission welcomed Albania's continued active participation in Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations, and commended the country's continued 100% alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Regarding the economy, the Commission noted that the economic and fiscal situation has recovered in Albania after it was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Albania is encouraged to conform to its organic budget law, and to finalise the adoption of its Medium-Term Revenue Strategy. EU approximation in the areas of public procurement and state aid control was discussed. The SA Committee reviewed the new education strategy and funding, the digital agenda, the youth guarantee scheme as well as dialogue between social partners. It welcomed the signature of the agreement on Albania's full association with the new Horizon Europe research programme. Industrial, customs and taxation policy were discussed, including the VAT exemption thresholds. On agriculture, Commission stressed the need to strengthen institutional capacity for IPARD and noted progress on the agriculture registries, which should continue. Discussion also covered regional and cohesion policies, climate change, connectivity, energy strategy and energy transition, as well as environment including protected areas, water and waste management.

The Commission recalled that IPA III places emphasis on strategic planning, on preparedness and on project maturity. The Commission noted with respect to the recent setting up of a new donor coordination agency (SASPAC) and the need for further clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities and interactions with other actors.