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DRAFT REPORT

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission Reports on Albania
(2025/2017(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Andreas Schieder

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the 2023 and 2024 Commission Reports on Albania
(2025/2017(INI))

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 part¹,
- having regard to Albania's application for EU membership, submitted on 24 April 2009,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans³,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans' (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled '2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy' (COM(2023)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'Albania 2023 Report' (SWD(2023)0690),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled 'New growth plan for the Western Balkans' (COM(2023)0691),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews (COM(2024)0146),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 24 July 2024 entitled '2024 Rule of Law Report' (COM(2024)0800), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled '2024 Rule of Law Report – Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Albania' (SWD(2024)0828),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 October 2024 entitled '2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy' (COM(2024)0690), accompanied by the Commission staff working document entitled 'Albania 2024 Report'

¹ OJ L 107, 28.4.2009, p. 166, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2009/332/oj.

² OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529/oj>.

³ OJ L, 2024/1449, 24.5.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj>.

(SWD(2024)0690),

- having regard to the Reform Agenda of Albania submitted under the EU’s Reform and Growth Facility, as approved by the Commission on 23 October 2024,
 - having regard to the final report of 29 September 2023 by the Election Observation Mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on Albania’s local elections of 14 May 2023,
 - having regard to the Joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR of 11 December 2020 on the amendments to the Albanian constitution of 30 July 2020 and the amendments to Albania’s electoral code of 5 October 2020,
 - having regard to the declarations of the EU-Western Balkans summits held in Brussels on 13 December 2023 and 18 December 2024,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on Albania,
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas enlargement is the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, democracy, stability and security throughout the continent;
- B. whereas enlargement is a merit-based process based on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights;
- C. whereas Albania has been an EU candidate country since 2014, began accession negotiations in July 2022 and successfully completed the screening process in November 2023;
- D. whereas Albania opened negotiations on ‘Cluster 1: Fundamentals’ on 15 October 2024 and on ‘Cluster 6: External Relations’ on 17 December 2024;
- E. whereas Albania is a reliable foreign policy partner and is fully aligned with the EU’s common foreign and security policy;
1. Welcomes Albania’s unwavering commitment to EU integration, reflecting consensus among political parties and overwhelming support among citizens, and commends its consistent full alignment with the EU’s common foreign and security policy and promotion of the rules-based international order;
 2. Welcomes Albania’s ambition of closing accession negotiations by the end of 2027 and the swift progress made in recent years, notably the opening of two clusters of negotiating chapters in 2024;

3. Notes that the pace of EU accession is determined by the candidate country's progress on aligning with the EU *acquis*, its track record on implementing it and the due functioning of all the country's institutions, and is grounded in the rule of law, good governance and fundamental rights; urges Albania to accelerate reforms to strengthen the rule of law, counter corruption and organised crime, and ensure the protection of fundamental rights, including freedom of expression;
4. Welcomes the EU's new Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, which will provide EUR 922 million in grants and loans to Albania when it meets the conditions set out in its ambitious Reform Agenda;
5. Takes note of Albania's adoption of the National Plan for European Integration 2024-2026; calls for greater efforts to increase transparency and engage in public communication on EU integration;

Democratic institutions, media and civil society

6. Insists on the importance of constructive political debate and orderly parliamentary conduct as key aspects of democratic governance; reaffirms the joint responsibility of Albania's political forces to strengthen constructive and inclusive political dialogue and overcome ongoing political polarisation in the country; emphasises the need for more effective parliamentary oversight, improved functioning of institutions and meaningful participation of civil society;
7. Takes note of the July 2024 amendments to Albania's electoral code, which enable out-of-country voting by the Albanian diaspora and introduce partially open candidate lists; insists on the need to address and implement the outstanding recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission;
8. Notes with concern that media independence and pluralism continue to be affected by high market concentration, the overlap of business and political interests, lack of transparency of funding and ownership, intimidation and precarious working conditions for journalists;
9. Recalls that any revision of media laws should be in line with the Venice Commission recommendations and should take place in a transparent and inclusive manner; notes that there has been no progress in aligning the legislative framework with the EU *acquis* and EU standards, including the European Media Freedom Act⁴; recalls the need to strengthen investigative journalism, fact-checking and media literacy in order to tackle hate speech, disinformation and fake news;
10. Recalls the responsibility of national and local authorities to improve transparency, accountability and inclusiveness by conducting meaningful and regular public stakeholder consultations; notes with concern that the Albanian Parliament's implementation of the legal framework for public consultations remains predominantly

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU (European Media Freedom Act) (OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj>).

formal;

Fundamental rights

11. Notes that Albania's legal framework for gender-based violence is not yet fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention; expresses serious concern that violence against women remains a pressing issue, with the number of femicides remaining high; urges the enhancement of support services for victims, particularly healthcare, shelter funding, free legal aid, and victim reintegration and rehabilitation;
12. Expresses concern about persistent shortcomings, such as non-alignment or partial alignment with the EU *acquis*, regarding persons with disabilities and gender equality;
13. Welcomes the adoption of the law on personal data protection, aimed at full alignment with the EU *acquis*, but expresses serious concern about the handling of personal data and weaknesses in IT systems; calls on the Albanian authorities to strengthen safeguards against data breaches;

Rule of law

14. Welcomes the progress Albania has achieved in the implementation of the justice reforms, including on the vetting process, completed at first instance; expresses concern, however, about continued political interference and pressure on the judicial system;
15. Underscores the key work of Albania's Special Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Structure (SPAK) in building up a track record of investigating, prosecuting and convicting in high-level corruption cases; cautions against undermining the work of independent institutions such as SPAK;
16. Notes the challenges concerning the quality and efficiency of the justice system, including the high number of judicial vacancies, insufficient court staff, the quality of initial and continuous judicial training, the consistency of case-law and the lack of a modern integrated case management system; notes that budget allocations are insufficient, particularly for the court component;
17. Welcomes the adoption of national legislation to align with the EU *acquis* on anti-money laundering; notes the need to establish a strong asset recovery office and to improve vetting, investigating, prosecuting and convicting high-level corruption cases, including through the seizure and final confiscation of criminal assets;
18. Calls on Albania to continue aligning its legal framework with the EU *acquis* on the fight against organised crime; notes the appointment of additional prosecutors to the Special Prosecution Office as well as the establishment of a financial investigation unit; commends Albania's participation in joint operations and cooperation under the European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats (EMPACT) and with INTERPOL in fighting organised crime;

Socio-economic reforms

19. Welcomes Albania's engagement in implementing the EU's Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, encompassing EU single market integration, regional economic integration, fundamental reforms and increased financial support;
20. Encourages the Albanian authorities to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion by improving access to social and healthcare services, especially for disadvantaged populations; calls for the implementation of Albania's National Social Protection Strategy 2024-2030 and National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030;
21. Welcomes the fact that Albania joined the Single Euro Payments Area in November 2024, which reduces costs for citizens and businesses and will contribute to Albania's further integration into the single market;

Environment, energy and transport, sustainable tourism

22. Stresses that more efforts are needed for Albania to align with the EU *acquis* on the environment; calls for its alignment with the EU's Environmental Impact Assessment⁵ and Strategic Environmental Assessment⁶ directives;
23. Recalls that substantial efforts are needed for Albania to achieve the goals relating to climate protection, energy efficiency, diversification and greening of energy supply and transport, air and water quality and waste management;
24. Firmly believes that environmental protection and sustainable tourism development must go hand in hand; welcomes the establishment of the Vjosa Wild River National Park and calls for sufficient resources to be allocated to its protection;

Regional cooperation and foreign policy

25. Welcomes the Security and Defence Partnership between the EU and Albania, adopted on 19 November 2024, which establishes a platform for enhanced dialogue and cooperation on security and defence issues and represents a significant step forward;
26. Welcomes the Albanian Government's continued efforts in promoting good neighbourly relations;

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27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, to the Council, to the Commission, to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and to the President,

⁵ Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (OJ L 26, 28.1.2012, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/92/oj>).

⁶ Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (OJ L 197, 21.7.2001, p. 30, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2001/42/oj>).

Government and Parliament of the Republic of Albania.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This is the first report in this legislature on the progress of Albania as a candidate country to the EU. Due to the fact that 2024 was an EU election year, this resolution encompasses Parliament's response to the Commission's enlargement reports of both 2023 and 2024.

The report evaluates the state of play and latest developments with regard to Albania's progress in joining the EU.

Following the successful screening process, Albania started negotiations on the 'Fundamentals' cluster in October 2024 and on the external relations cluster in December 2024.

This report assesses Albania's progress regarding its democratic institutions, media freedom, involvement of civil society, fundamental rights, rule of law, socio-economic reforms, environment, regional cooperation and foreign policy.

Despite some progress, Albania still faces a number of challenges such as overcoming internal political polarisation, strengthening the rule of law and consolidating anti-corruption reforms.

ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT

Pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure, the rapporteur declares that he received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the draft report, prior to the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), European Commission
European External Action Service
Delegation of the European Union to Albania

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.