



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

MEMO

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Key findings of the 2012 Progress Report on Albania

The Progress Report on Albania is part of the 2012 Enlargement Package adopted by the European Commission on 10 October. The European Commission concluded that Albania made good progress towards fulfilling the political criteria for membership of the EU, delivering a number of substantial reforms against the key priorities of the Commission's 2010 Opinion. In view of this, the European Commission recommends that Albania be granted EU candidate status, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform¹ and the revision of the parliamentary rules of procedures are revised. The Commission will also assess the further efforts of Albania in the fight against corruption and organised crime. In order to be able to move to the next stage and open accession negotiations, Albania will have in particular to demonstrate sustained implementation of commitments already undertaken and completion of the remaining key priorities which have not been met in full. The focus should be on the rule of law and fundamental rights. Sustainable political dialogue will remain essential for a successful reform process. The conduct of the 2013 parliamentary elections will be a crucial test in this regard and a pre-condition for any recommendation to open negotiations.

Political criteria

Albania has made good progress towards fulfilling the Copenhagen political criteria for membership of the EU. The coordination of work related to integration into the EU has further improved, leading to the revision of the national Action plan to address the EU's key priorities. This process was transparent and participatory, including discussions with opposition in the parliamentary committee for European integration. Political dialogue between parties substantially improved allowing Albania to meet four of the key priorities, namely those concerning the proper functioning of parliament, the adoption of pending laws requiring reinforced majority, the appointment of the Ombudsman and the hearing and voting processes for key institutions and the modification of the legislative framework for elections.

Albania is well on its way towards meeting the two key priorities regarding public administration reform and improving the treatment of detainees. Progress was made against the remaining key priorities, including some significant steps such as the adoption of the law on administrative courts, the increase of seizures of criminal assets, the adoption of a comprehensive strategy on property reform and strengthened sanctions for domestic violence. The adoption of constitutional amendments limiting the immunity of high officials and judges marked an important step in the fight against corruption.

¹ This concerns the adoption of pending amendments to the Laws on the High Court and on Civil Service.

Albania continues to play a constructive role in maintaining regional stability and fostering good neighbourly relations with other Western Balkan and EU countries.

However, additional and sustained efforts will be necessary to fully comply with the Copenhagen political criteria. As regards democracy and rule of law, it is essential to build on recent progress and ensure sustainability of the political dialogue and joint reform efforts. Concrete measures to strengthen the accountability, independence and efficiency of the judiciary are necessary. The track record of investigations, prosecution and convictions in corruption cases at all levels needs to be strengthened. Fight against organised crime needs to be further upgraded. Particular attention needs to be paid to consistent implementation of the property rights strategy. Implementation of legislative and policy tools in the field of human rights, in particular regarding Roma, needs further improvement.

Economic criteria

The Albanian economy continued to maintain macroeconomic stability. Albania has made further progress towards becoming a functioning market economy. It should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided structural reforms are stepped up and deepened, including by reinforcing the legal system and strengthening physical and human capital.

Domestic demand contributed most to GDP growth of 3,1% in 2011, yet economic activity has stalled in the first quarter of 2012 amid weather related power disruptions. Inflation has remained stable thanks to Albania's sound monetary policy. However, the Albanian economy remained vulnerable due to a high current account deficit and the fiscal deficit increased in 2011. Shortcomings affecting the rule of law and the protection of property rights hinder enforceability of contracts and have negative impacts on investments and the business climate. Concerns remain over the high and increasing level of non-performing loans in the banking system. The informal sector and weak tax collection remain a challenge.

EU Legislation

Albania has made moderate progress in improving its ability to assume the obligations of membership by approximating its legislation and standards to the EU, in particular in the areas of competition, taxation, statistics, justice, freedom and security, education and culture, and customs union.

However, increased efforts are needed as progress has been limited in other areas such as freedom of movement for workers, public procurement, intellectual property law, agriculture and rural development, food safety, energy, and environment and climate change. Sustained efforts are needed to strengthen administrative capacity for the implementation and enforcement of legislation.

EU - ALBANIA KEY DATES

1999: The EU proposes the new Stabilisation and Association Process for five countries of South-Eastern Europe

June 2000: The European Council states that all the Stabilisation and Association countries are potential candidates for EU membership

June 2003: Thessaloniki Summit; the EU perspective for the Western Balkans is confirmed

June 2006: The Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU is signed

April 2009: The SAA enters into force. Albania presents its application for membership of the EU

November 2010: The Commission issues its Opinion on Albania's application for EU membership, including a set of 12 key priorities to be fulfilled in view of opening of accession negotiations

December 2010: Visa-free travel to Schengen area for citizens of Albania

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm