



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 14 September 2004
12417/04 (Presse 265)
P 104/04

Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on Albania

Albania's rapprochement to Euro-Atlantic structures depends primarily on the country's reform progress. As has been stated on previous occasions, the European Union fully supports this ambitious objective, and continues to give Albania considerable concrete assistance to realise the necessary reforms.

Therefore, it is of great concern to note that insufficient progress is being made in reform implementation, and particularly in areas that are vital for Albania's future and its successful integration: the pace of reform in Albania in general and electoral reform, and the fight against organised crime and corruption in particular. Other areas of concern remain the rule of law and the respect of human rights and minorities, in particular in the fields of education, property and access to media.

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B - 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 285 6319 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 285 8026
press.office@consilium.eu.int <http://ue.eu.int/Newsroom>

12417/04 (Presse 265)

1
EN

As the recent helicopter incident in Lazarat on August 18th has shown, the fight against organised crime and corruption is a crucial area where substantial progress needs to be made if integration is to be sustained. Recent events have shown that drug trafficking and trafficking and smuggling in human beings remain issues of serious concern. As has been said repeatedly, Albania needs to prove that it can enforce the rule of law in a fair and equitable manner, throughout its territory; that its state structures are free from the influence of criminal elements; and that crime is effectively tackled, for the benefit of the citizens of Albania and other countries who suffer the consequences of this dreadful problem. The current situation shows that progress towards Europe is still not sufficient. Moreover, it is a matter of grave concern that some politicians have used this issue as a means to further narrow political interests.

The general elections due to be held in 2005 must prove Albania's readiness to make further progress along the path of Euro-Atlantic integration. The European Union expects that the forthcoming general elections will fully comply with international standards and be conducted in a transparent manner in the whole of Albania.

Several recommendations have been submitted by the OSCE, ODIHR and the Council of Europe (Venice Commission) in the past months. With the full support of the European Union, the OSCE Presence in Albania has worked hard with political actors to try to secure agreement on a package, which could put these recommendations into effect. The European Union is disturbed to note that this work is not processing at an adequate pace. The lists of voters are a major concern. A considerable amount of complex preparatory work needs to be done in improving the lists, which will take months. The European Union expects all political actors to use the first weeks of this parliamentary session to co-operate in achieving this objective. All Albanian politicians have a shared responsibility to properly prepare and conduct these elections. Failure on this crucial issue would be a serious setback for the development of the relationship between Albania and the European Union.

This declaration is one of a number of similar messages that have been conveyed to Albanian political leaders over the past few months. A prompt and constructive reaction is needed. Albania's rapprochement to the European Union asks for a full commitment by all Albanian political forces. Should the lack of a general and shared political will continue to hamper a real reform process, the conclusion of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement could only be further delayed.

The Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia* and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.