



EUROPEAN UNION

**Special Permanent Council Nr 883
Vienna, 14 October 2011**

EU statement in response to the address by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, H.E. Mr Edmond Haxhinasto

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Mr Edmond Haxhinasto, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, in the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address.

We share the Minister's remarks on supporting the efforts of the CiO to further advance our common vision of a "security community", laid down at the Astana Summit, and reiterate our commitment to the OSCE comprehensive concept of security. The EU is looking forward to relevant results in Vilnius to this effect.

The EU joins the Minister in welcoming the efforts of the OSCE to provide assistance to our Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation, at their request, and reiterates its full support to building democratic, peaceful and prosperous societies in the Mediterranean region.

Mr Chairperson,

The EU recalls the status of Albania as member of the Stabilisation and Association Process and encourages further progress of the country on its path towards the EU. Moreover, the EU re-confirms its strong commitment to the stability, security and the European perspective of the region.

Although Albania has made some efforts to launch EU-related reforms, overall progress, related to the stability of institutions, guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, remains limited. Considerable further efforts are needed. The responsibility to comply with the accession requirements lies entirely with the authorities and political forces of Albania.

Turning to latest developments in Albania, the EU encourages a constructive political dialogue that would allow the proper functioning of key democratic institutions, notably the Parliament. The return of the opposition to Parliament could be assessed as an important step forward, but further efforts are needed to overcome the political impasse.

In this context, the EU reiterates its readiness to support, alongside the OSCE Presence in Albania, any activity aimed at identifying common ground for stabilising the political climate in Albania.

Against the background of the latest Progress Report by the European Commission and noting the limited achievements in the reform process, the EU considers that a co-ordinated focus of all political parties on Albania's European integration efforts is essential. It should address, in particular, the implementation of the twelve key priorities identified in the 2010 Opinion on Albania's EU membership application.

In this context, the EU encourages the Albanian authorities to continue focusing their efforts in areas such as judicial and civil service reform, the fight against organised crime, including cross-border crime, trafficking in human beings, anti-corruption and promotion of respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The EU also hopes that issues regarding property compensation, restitution and legalisation will be finally resolved. We note with appreciation the role played by OSCE Presence in Albania in these fields and encourage Albania to profit from the expertise of the Presence.

The EU underlines that advancing the EU reform agenda and implementing an electoral reform in line with the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on the June 2009 Parliamentary elections and May 2011 local elections are the two key tasks of the Albanian political forces. We welcome the readiness of the Albanian authorities to move ahead with the electoral reform and to co-operate with ODIHR. We strongly urge all political parties in Albania, in collaboration with the civil society, and with the support of the ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, to engage in a comprehensive electoral reform, including addressing the deficiencies in the electoral code, which constitutes a matter of urgency in view of the next general elections.

The EU reiterates its calls on the relevant Albanian authorities to spare no effort in conducting a credible and transparent investigation and due judicial procedures in relation to the tragic occurrences of 21 January 2011.

It is important that the ongoing population and housing census should comply with international standards, including the principle of free self-identification of respondents. Establishing updated statistical data is important for the development of appropriate minority policies. In the perspective of the possible elaboration of a Framework Law on minorities in 2012, the results of the census should reflect the number of all categories of minorities in Albania.

Mr Chairperson,

The EU underlines the paramount importance of promoting regional stability and fostering regional co-operation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans. We note the role played by Albania in this respect. The EU also reiterates its commitment to the European perspective of the region as a whole.

We take note of Albania's aim to strengthen its engagement in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination and its intention to host the 2013 high-level Conference on Tolerance and Non-discrimination. Such a Conference could be a good opportunity to share the best practices, which will be identified during the

Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (May 2012- November 2012).

We also note the willingness of Albania to assume the Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE in the years to come. We reiterate our position that in principle the Chairmanship of the OSCE is open to all participating States and that any Chair must exemplify the commitments, norms, values and lofty goals of the Organisation.

Mr Chairperson,

In conclusion, we would like once again to thank H.E. Mr. Edmond Haxhinasto, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, and wish him and his country all the best.

The candidate countries CROATIA*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ICELAND**, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, the European Free Trade Association country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

**Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and the European Economic Area.