

2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Albania

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Andreas SCHIEDER (S&D, AT) on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Albania.

The report welcomed **Albania's unwavering commitment** to EU integration, which is the subject of consensus among all political parties, both majority and opposition, and of overwhelming support from citizens, and commended its full and consistent alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and its defence of the rules-based international order.

Members welcomed Albania's ambition to **conclude accession negotiations by the end of 2027** and the rapid progress made in recent years, including the opening of two sets of negotiating chapters in 2024. Albania is called upon to **accelerate reforms** aimed at strengthening the rule of law and growing the economy, fighting corruption and organised crime, curbing human trafficking, protecting fundamental rights and advancing freedom of expression, freedom of information and media pluralism and independence.

Democratic institutions, media and civil society

The report affirmed the shared responsibility of Albanian political forces to strengthen constructive and inclusive political dialogue and overcome the marked political polarisation currently characterising the country. It also recognised the growing threat of malign foreign influence and hybrid interference in Albania's democratic institutions. It welcomed Albania's blocking of Russian disinformation domains, but emphasised the need for a coordinated EU-Albania disinformation response mechanism.

Deploping the deterioration in the situation of free media and independent journalists in recent years, Members called on the Albanian authorities to **ensure transparency in media ownership** and to implement a zero-tolerance policy towards the intimidation of journalists. The authorities must adopt a legal framework that effectively protects journalists, human rights defenders, environmental activists, and other stakeholders in the face of the worrying increase in SLAPP lawsuits. Members encouraged the Albanian government to strengthen the role of civil society, particularly women's rights organisations, in the EU accession process.

Fundamental rights

The report found that Albania's legal framework for **combating gender-based violence** is not yet fully compliant with the Istanbul Convention. Violence against women remains a pressing problem, with the number of femicides remaining high. Members called for the strengthening of victim support services, particularly healthcare, funding for shelters, free legal aid, and the reintegration and rehabilitation of victims. It called for stricter enforcement of protection measures and improved judicial responsiveness in cases of gender-based violence, as well as a strong commitment to protecting the rights of LGBTI+ persons.

The Albanian authorities are called upon to **fully respect and protect human rights, including minority rights**, to strengthen institutional mechanisms to prevent discrimination and ensure genuine political participation of all communities, to protect and promote the cultural heritage, languages and traditions of its national minorities and to strengthen institutional mechanisms to prevent discrimination.

Rule of law

Concerned about the persistence of political interference in the judiciary and the pressure exerted on it, the Members called for urgent measures to **ensure the independence of the judiciary** and the integrity of institutions. The report highlighted that Albania ranks 80th in Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index, which highlights the need for significant progress in **combating high-level corruption**.

The report called on Albania to continue aligning its legal framework, notably its criminal code, with the EU acquis in the fight against organised crime and trafficking in drugs and firearms, as well as in the fight against cybercrime, extremism and terrorist threats. It called on Albania to strengthen the fight against trafficking in human beings and stressed the need to counter the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Members encouraged the European External Action Service and the Commission to continue strengthening Albania's resilience to hybrid threats in the areas of cybersecurity, information manipulation and the protection of critical infrastructure.

Socio-economic reforms

The report welcomed Albania's commitment to implementing the EU's growth plan for the Western Balkans, which encompasses EU single market integration, regional economic integration, fundamental reforms, and increased financial support. It welcomed Albania's reform agenda on the business environment, human capital, digitalisation, energy and green transition, fundamental rights, and the rule of law.

Members encouraged the Albanian authorities to **reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion** by improving access to education and housing, as well as to social and healthcare services. They welcomed Albania's accession to the Single Euro Payments Area in November 2024 and commended the improvement in Albania's fiscal performance.

Lastly, the report stressed that Albania needs to redouble its efforts to align with the EU **environmental** acquis, recalling that Albania needs to make considerable efforts to achieve the objectives relating to climate protection, energy efficiency, diversification and greening of energy supply and transport.