

Albania and the neighbouring region: action plan. High Level Group on asylum and migration

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PURPOSE : to present an action plan on Albania, and the neighbouring region with particular reference to Kosovo. **CONTENT** : This action plan is drafted by a High Level Working group on Asylum and Immigration in the Council. It offers a comprehensive picture of the political and economic situation in Albania and the neighbouring regions, including measures and actions taken by other international organisations such as the UNHCR, and outlines ongoing and possible future actions. Albania is a country of both origin and transit for migration flows directed towards European countries. During the first half of 1999, Albania was shaken by the most serious refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, but the effect of the Kosovo crisis on the general situation in Albania has been positive, both in political and economic terms. Since 1990, Albania has experienced massive migration. Since 1992, Albanians have left the country mainly for economic reasons. It remains the poorest country in Europe. Emigration is perceived as the only immediate response to the country's economic needs and social instability. Albanians leave their homes due to lack of security and violation of human rights. The country remains marked by a serious lack of public order and security, and there is widespread crime, arms trafficking and corruption. In 1999, the government started to elaborate, in cooperation with WEU/MAPE, a strategic plan for the development of the police. There is EU/Council of Europe support for the strengthening of the judiciary. Insecurity is one of the factors responsible for a very low level of foreign direct investment. Macro-economic stabilization remains vulnerable in the light of the refugee problem and the lack of public order. Immigration flows from and through Albania are likely to continue. With regard to Kosovo, there must be not only protection for returnees, but also the creation of a secure environment for all the people, bridging the humanitarian aid to reconstruction phase with the aim of achieving self-reliance, reconstruction of infrastructure, job creation and reactivation of economic activity. The plan outlines several measures required by the Community/Union ranging from the field of foreign policy to development and economic cooperation and justice and home affairs. Some are already being taken, such as the Joint Actions specifically devoted to Albania, and should be continued. Others are new and have financial implications, such as charging ECMM with monitoring migration flows in cooperation with international organisations active in this field.