Basic information

2016/2312(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
2016 Commission report on Albania **Subject** 8.20.01 Candidate countries **Geographical area** Albania	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AFET Foreign Affairs	FLECKENSTEIN Knut (S&D)	27/10/2016
	Shadow rapporteur KUKAN Eduard (PPE) KYUCHYUK Ilhan (ALDE) MESZERICS Tamás (Verts /ALE) CASTALDO Fabio Massimo (EFDD)	

Council of the European Union

Council configuration	Meetings	Date
General Affairs	3511	2016-12-13

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
13/12/2016	Debate in Council		
19/01/2017	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
31/01/2017	Vote in committee		
03/02/2017	Committee report tabled for plenary	A8-0023/2017	Summary
14/02/2017	Debate in Parliament		
15/02/2017	Decision by Parliament	T8-0036/2017	Summary
15/02/2017	Results of vote in Parliament		

15/02/2017	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2016/2312(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Annual report
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/8/08486

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE594.191	25/11/2016	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE595.408	11/01/2017	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A8-0023/2017	03/02/2017	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T8-0036/2017	15/02/2017	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2017)358	31/08/2017	

2016 Commission report on Albania

2016/2312(INI) - 03/02/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Knut FLECKENSTEIN (S&D, DE) on the Commission's report of 2016 on Albania.

Members recalled that Albania has made progress towards accession to the European Union. They welcomed **Albania's continuous progress on EU-related reforms**, in particular the adoption of constitutional amendments paving the way for a deep and comprehensive judicial reform.

Towards the accession of Albania to the EU: Members fully supported Albania's accession to the EU, and called for the accession negotiations to be opened as soon as there is credible and sustainable progress in the implementation of comprehensive judicial reform. They expected Albania to consolidate the progress achieved and to maintain the pace of progress on implementation of all key priorities.

Whilst recalling the main priorities for Albania regarding the strengthening of reforms leading to EU accession (particularly in constitutional affairs and the institutional reform of the judiciary) Members welcomed **the new justice reform strategy for 2017-2020**, as well as the increased budgetary means for implementation.

They called for further electoral reforms and called on Albania's political parties to respect both the spirit and the letter of the law on the exclusion of criminal offenders from public office.

Overall, Members noted the efforts towards a more citizen-friendly public administration and wanted to see further improvements regarding recruitment and promotion procedures on the basis of merit and performance.

Fight against corruption: Members stressed the need for a more adequate legal framework for conflicts of interest, the regulation of lobbying and better interinstitutional cooperation, especially between police and prosecution services. They felt that a stricter framework was necessary for the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking.

Members remained concerned that corruption remains high and prevalent in many areas and continues to pose a serious problem, eroding people's trust in public institutions. They were also concerned that key anti-corruption institutions continue to be subject to political interference and have limited administrative capacities.

Further measures are also necessary to fight against arms trafficking.

Respecting the rights of minorities and asylum seekers: Members urged the competent authorities to continue improving the climate of inclusion and tolerance for all minorities in the country. They underlined the need to improve access to employment and all public and social services, education, health, social housing and legal aid for **Roma and Egyptians**.

Members encouraged Albania to improve further its legal framework for refugees. They called for a further strengthening of cooperation between the EU and Albania in order to protect refugees' rights in line with international standards and EU fundamental values. In this regard, they expressed concern at the recent rise in cases of **human trafficking**, notably unaccompanied minors, women and girls. Members were also concerned about discrimination against and lack of appropriate measures for the protection of women and girls belonging to disadvantaged and marginalised groups, as well as LGBTI people.

Media independence: the report reiterated the critical importance of professional and independent private and public service media. It called for measures to raise the professional and ethical standards of and prevalence of regular work contracts for journalists, to enhance the transparency of government advertising in the media, and to ensure the independence, impartiality and accountability of the regulatory authority and the public broadcaster.

Economic performance: Members urged improved enforcement of contracts and better tax collection, and implementation of the judicial reforms in order to improve the business environment. Further efforts are needed to fight the informal economy.

The report highlighted the fact that the environmental impact of hydropower plants is often not properly assessed. Members advised the government to consider the establishment of a Vjosa National Park and to abandon plans for new hydropower plants along the Vjosa river and its tributaries. Overall, more measures are required for further alignment with EU legislation in the field of energy.

Albanian asylum seekers: the report noted that the number of asylum applications lodged by Albanians in EU Member States that have been deemed unfounded has **increased again**. It urged the government to take immediate and determined action to address this phenomenon.

Neighbourhood relations: lastly, Members underlined the importance of ensuring good neighbourly relations, which remain essential as an integral part of the enlargement process. They welcomed Albania's constructive and proactive role in promoting regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations with other enlargement countries and neighbouring EU Member States. In this regard, they commended both Albania and Serbia on their continued commitment to improving bilateral relations. However, they noted the recent frictions in relations between **Albania and Greece**, and recommended that both sides abstain from actions or statements that could have a negative impact on relations.

2016 Commission report on Albania

2016/2312(INI) - 15/02/2017 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 546 votes to 85 with 62 abstentions, a resolution on the Commission's report of 2016 on Albania.

Parliament recalled that Albania has made progress towards accession to the European Union. It welcomed **Albania's continuous progress on EU-related reforms**, in particular the adoption of constitutional amendments paving the way for a deep and comprehensive judicial reform.

Towards the accession of Albania to the EU: Parliament welcomed the Commission's recommendation for opening accession negotiations with Albania; fully supports Albania's accession to the EU and called for the accession negotiations to be opened as soon as there is credible and sustainable progress in the implementation of comprehensive judicial reform and the fight against organised crime and corruption, in order to keep the reform momentum. It stated that Albania should consolidate the progress achieved and maintain the pace of progress on implementation of all key priorities.

Whilst recalling the main priorities for Albania regarding the strengthening of reforms leading to EU accession (particularly in constitutional affairs and the institutional reform of the judiciary), Parliament welcomed **the new justice reform strategy for 2017-2020**, as well as the increased budgetary means for implementation.

It called for further electoral reforms and called on Albania's political parties to respect both the spirit and the letter of the law on the exclusion of criminal offenders from public office.

Overall, Members noted the efforts towards a more citizen-friendly public administration and wanted to see further improvements regarding recruitment and promotion procedures on the basis of merit and performance.

Fight against corruption: Parliament stressed the need for a more adequate legal framework for conflicts of interest, the regulation of lobbying and better interinstitutional cooperation, especially between police and prosecution services. It felt that a stricter framework was necessary for the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking.

Parliament remained concerned that corruption remains high and prevalent in many areas and continues to pose a serious problem, eroding people's trust in public institutions. It was also concerned that key anti-corruption institutions continue to be subject to political interference and have limited administrative capacities.

Further measures are also necessary to fight against arms trafficking.

Respect for minorities: Parliament recalled, among the key priorities, the need to reinforce the protection of human rights, minority rights and anti-discrimination policies.

It urged the competent authorities to continue improving the climate of inclusion and tolerance for all minorities in the country in line with European minority protection standards, including by enhancing the role of the State Committee on Minorities. It called on Albania to adopt the **framework law on the protection of minorities** and to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

It underlined the need to improve living conditions for **Roma, Egyptians** and other ethnic minorities. Members called for concrete actions such as the civic registration (birth certificates and IDs) of Roma and Egyptians and for continued efforts in improving their access to employment and all public and social services, education, health, social housing and legal aid. Despite improvements, the inclusion of Roma children in the education system remains the lowest in the region.

The resolution recommended that the rights of **people with Bulgarian ethnicity** in the Prespa, Golo Brdo and Gora regions be enshrined in law and ensured in practice. It encouraged the Albanian government to continue its cooperation with LGBTI civil society organisations.

Asylum and migration: Parliament encouraged Albania to improve further its legal framework for refugees. It called for a further strengthening of cooperation between the EU and Albania in order to protect refugees' rights in line with international standards and EU fundamental values. In this regard, Parliament expressed concern at the recent rise in cases of human trafficking, notably unaccompanied minors, women and girls.

Media independence: Parliament reiterated the critical importance of professional and independent private and public service media. It called for measures to raise the professional and ethical standards of and prevalence of regular work contracts for journalists, to enhance the transparency of government advertising in the media, and to ensure the independence, impartiality and accountability of the regulatory authority and the public broadcaster.

Economic performance: Parliament urged improved enforcement of contracts and better tax collection, and implementation of the judicial reforms in order to improve the business environment. Further efforts are needed to fight the informal economy.

Respect for the environment: Parliament noted with concern the limited nature of the administrative capacities for enforcement of environmental law, as well as the poor waste management and water management. It underlined the need to improve the quality of environmental impact assessments, as well as to guarantee public participation and consultation of civil society in relevant projects. Parliament also expressed concern about the fact that, according to the Commission, 44 of 71 hydropower plant projects are under construction in protected areas.

Members highlighted that the **environmental impact of hydropower plants is often not properly assessed** to ensure compliance with international standards and relevant EU nature legislation. They advised the government to consider the establishment of a Vjosa National Park along the whole length of the river and to **abandon plans for new hydropower plants along the Vjosa river and its tributaries.**

Parliament urged further alignment with EU legislation in the field of energy, particularly on the adoption of a national energy strategy, in order to increase energy independence and efficiency.

Albanian asylum seekers: Parliament noted that the number of asylum applications lodged by Albanians in EU Member States that have been deemed unfounded has increased again. It urged the government to take immediate and determined action to address this phenomenon.

Neighbourhood relations: lastly, Parliament underlined the importance of ensuring good neighbourly relations, which remain essential as an integral part of the enlargement process. It welcomed Albania's constructive and proactive role in promoting regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations with other enlargement countries and neighbouring EU Member States.

In this regard, they commended both Albania and Serbia on their continued commitment to improving bilateral relations and welcomed the decision by the Albanian authorities to align the country's foreign policy with Council Decision (CFSP) 2016/1671, renewing the restrictive EU measures against Russia.

However, Parliament noted the recent frictions in relations between **Albania and Greece**, and recommended that both sides abstain from actions or statements that could have a negative impact on relations.