

German Presidency of the Council of the European Union

656th (Special) Meeting of the Permanent Council

08 March 2007

Statement of the European Union in Response to the
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E. Besnik Mustafaj

The European Union warmly welcomes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, H.E. Mr. Besnik Mustafaj, to this special meeting of the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive address.

Mr. Chairman, as member of the Stabilisation and Association Process, Albania is a close partner of the European Union. EU-Albania relations advanced with the signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in June 2006. The EU is pleased to note that Albania has undertaken determined steps to accelerate the pace of domestic reforms, in line with the European Partnership. Progress has been achieved in the fields of democracy, rule of law, fight against organized crime and combating trafficking in human beings as well as in alignment of its legislation and policies with European Standards. Special attention is given to the fight against corruption.

While commending these encouraging steps, the EU stresses the importance of further determined action and continued progress in the areas of judicial, political and economic reform, the full respect for independent democratic institutions, rights of persons belonging to national minorities, as well as the freedom of the media. Constructive cooperation between government and opposition is crucial for further progress, such as electoral reform.

Holding free and fair elections is fundamental for democracy and is an essential requirement for closer relations with the EU. The EU once again urges the Albanian authorities and political parties to address without delay the shortcomings identified in ODIHR's statement of preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the local elections held 18 February, and make full use of the expertise and assistance offered by ODIHR to that end, in particular to address the recommendations of the Election Observation Mission. We also call on all political parties to exercise their constitutional tasks with due responsibility in the election by Parliament of a new president this summer.

Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations form an essential part of the process of Albania's movement towards the European Union. The EU is pleased to note that Albania has continued to play an active and constructive role in the region. It has further developed its relations with neighbouring and other countries in the region, notably maintaining a constructive position on Kosovo.

The EU highly values the improved cooperation between the OSCE Presence in Albania and the host country and looks forward to its continuation towards fulfilment of the Presence's mandate. In this context, the European Union reiterates that the Presence's current mandate remains a sound basis for its work in Albania.

The European Union has taken note of the Albanian readiness to take over the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2012. We welcome this sign of interest and further involvement in the OSCE. We reiterate our position that the Chairmanship of the OSCE is open to all participating States and that any Chair must exemplify the standards and values of the Organisation.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, we would like once again to thank H.E. Minister Besnik Mustafaj for addressing the Permanent Council today, and wish him and his country all the best.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

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