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Albania, promoter of human rights

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Conflict hotspots which have gripped the world, such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Middle East and its fight against ISIS, are irrefutable evidence of the primary importance of human rights nowadays.

Albania, as a NATO member and EU candidate country, strongly supports the respect for human rights and their universality. Based on these achievements and after an intense diplomatic campaign on October 21, 2014, for the first time, Albania was elected member of the Human Rights Council, during the elections held at the UN General Assembly.

Albania's membership to the Human Rights Council is first and foremost a responsibility to the 193 UN member states, for the trust put in us to serve in this important body, as well as an impetus for the further democratization of our society.

In the United Nations system, human rights, along with the guarantee of peace, security and sustainable development, constitute three substantial pillars which are interrelated and reinforcing to each other.

The first effort of the international community with regard to the protection, respect and promotion of human rights was materialized with the establishment of the Commission on Human Rights in 1946.

But, in the context of an increasingly global world, there was a need for a more reliable body, with more ability to operate. Consequently, in June 2006, the Human Rights Council was established, with a more limited membership (47 countries) open only to countries with high standards for human rights. Since then, the Council has become a key body of the United Nations to address issues concerning human rights.

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Albania elected member of UN Human Rights Council

For the first time in its history, Albania was elected member of the UN Human Rights Council, during the elections held at the UNGA in New York on 21 October 2014.

During its three-year membership in the HRC, the Republic of Albania will be committed to the universalization and indivisibility of human rights and will work to strengthen them as well as the infrastructure of the UN system, including capacity building of the Council.

Albania will continue to fulfill all its obligations and commitments for the enhancement and implementation of the legal and institutional framework, as well as for the further advancement of national and international policies aiming at the protection of human rights.

Albania, which for half-century witnessed one of the most brutal regimes in terms of violations of human rights and a tormenting transition towards a democratic state-building, recognizes and appreciates the importance of respecting human rights. Our bitter experience motivates us today to unconditionally support every initiative and every country which contributes to and works for the advancement and improvement of human rights

My country has already a particularly rich experience in terms of promoting regional peace and security, human rights and economic development, in the internal and external dimension.

Thanks to its geographical position, rich cultural heritage and tolerant spirit, Albania has become a model and promoter of dialogue, respect and religious brotherhood. The visit of the Pope Francis in Tirana some days ago and the messages conveyed from him strengthened Albania's comparative advantage in relation to other countries in the region.

I am fully confident that membership in the Human Rights Council is another opportunity for Albania to demonstrate its capacities and improve the rate of implementation of national and international legislation regarding the protection, respect and promotion of human rights.

This membership is also an expression of our achievements in the field of freedom and democracy that almost a quarter-century ago, seemed impossible. This inspires us to firmly continue our Euro-Atlantic path towards building a democratic society, as the only alternative for Albania and the region.

European Commission presents **Progress Report** on Albania



The Head of the EU Delegation in Tirana, Ambassador Romana Vlahutin, presented the progress report of the European Commission on Albania to Minister Bushati.

Ambassador Vlahutin noted that the progress report on Albania confirms the positive progress of the reforms presented in the report of June. The Commission has highlighted the achievements, but also the challenges related to the political dialogue, public administration reform, and judicial reform, the fight against organized crime and corruption as well as human rights.

Minister Bushati appreciated the realistic assessment of the progress report and underlined that Albania has a unique chance to implement reforms with a cooperative and all-inclusive political spirit, which will pave the way for the start of accession negotiations.

“The recommendations of the European Commission fully comply with the willingness of the government to carry on with the judicial

reform, the establishment of the rule of law in economy, the fight against corruption in the judiciary system and public administration, the continuation of the fight against organized crime, the de-politicization of public administration and the protection of human rights. This progress report confirms that the constructive foreign policy in the region and our alignment with international partners in some significant and important challenges constitute a valuable asset for Albania”, said Minister Bushati.

The report reflects Albania's progress with regards to political criteria and comprehensive reforms while highlighting that political dialogue in the parliament remains vital for the sustainability of reforms. It also underlines that the reform in public administration has moved forward, while the Law on Civil Service is efficient.

Minister Bushati and Ambassador Vlahutin agreed that Albania needs to carry on with the judicial reform through a constructive cooperation of all stakeholders. There is a strong need for undertaking sustained efforts to strengthen the disciplinary system for judges, prosecutors and system officials, in order to increase courts' efficiency.

In conclusion, the parties focused on the assessment of the progress report which stresses that the implementation of the SAA and the harmonization of legislation in compliance with EU standards in a series of relevant areas will increase Albania's capacities to assume obligations of membership. They also agreed on the need to increase efforts in order to upgrade preparations for implementing the EU *acquis*

Ministers Bushati and Ahmetaj attend **Western Balkans** Ministerial meeting on good governance and interconnectivity



On 23 October 2014, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ditmir Bushati and Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Entrepreneurship Arben Ahmetaj attended the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Economy of the Western Balkan countries with the Vice President of the European Commission for Economic and Monetary Affairs, Jyrki Katainen and EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle.

The meeting was held in Belgrade, as part of the initiative to enhance cooperation within the Stabilization – Association Process and follows a meeting in New York, on 24 September 2014. The representative of the EU Italian Presidency and the Secretary General of the RCC were also present at the meeting.

The meeting focused on the cooperation of the countries of the region in the field of economic governance and infrastructure interconnectivity, as well as on the coordination between these countries through the preparation of national programs for economic reform.

Noting that this activity follows the Berlin Conference, Minister Ahmetaj stressed the need of EU financial assistance to enable the implementation of infrastructure projects, which are necessary for creating jobs and achieving economic growth. With regards to countries of the region, Minister Ahmetaj stressed that coordination of structural reforms and fiscal policy would result in sustained economic growth and alleviation of imbalances between countries in the region.

Foreign Minister of Kosovo Enver Hoxhaj described the meeting as historic, given that it is the first time that a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo visits Belgrade. After underlining the importance of all-inclusiveness in regional cooperation processes, he requested that the next meeting of the initiative take place in Pristina.

During the meeting, Minister Bushati underlined the importance of joint efforts to advance the agenda of the Conference of Berlin through tangible projects.

He welcomed the new approach of the European Commission on economic governance in the region, as well as the financial instruments that will be made available to countries of the region in the framework of the IPA funds and from other international financial institutions.

Minister Bushati reiterated Albania's commitment to further progress in structural reforms in the framework of the new regional and European efforts.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs inaugurates Centre of Excellence



and cultural diplomacy, pursuing Albania's main goal: European integration.

On the other hand, the Centre of Excellence will also serve as an enhanced policy planning unit pulling the best expertise from available Albanian or foreign experts, who are to provide in-depth analysis and strategic planning on relevant matters such as the opening of negotiations with the EU, regional cooperation, etc., thus transforming the Centre into a hub for experts and researchers who are willing to cooperate with the MFA.

As for the first element, the Centre of Excellence will identify, promote and implement projects related to different aspects of diplomacy, such as public, economic and cultural diplomacy.

The second element will be mainly focused on the creation of a coordinated structure which will identify and provide expertise on matters of special interest for Albania. All this work will also be accompanied by seminars, trainings, experts' meetings, etc.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs inaugurated this month the Centre of Excellence, a unit within the MFA that will mainly work on two well-entrenched and complementary dimensions.

On one hand the Centre will be a project based unit which will work on strengthening the MFA's capacities in public, economic

Albania to host Secretariat of the Western Balkan Fund

Minister Bushati attended the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group and Western Balkan countries, which was held in Bratislava. The meeting, organized by Slovakia under its rotating Presidency of the Visegrad Group, aimed at conveying the experience of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to Western Balkan countries in the field of European integration.

During the meeting, discussions focused on three topics: rule of law, good governance and transparency, and regional cooperation. In his speech, Minister Bushati highlighted the importance that Albania attaches to regional cooperation in foreign policy. He cited the contribution of the Albanian party to the Berlin Conference, as well as in the process following it, whose goal was to improve regional infrastructure, increase exchanges and strengthen the ties between nations. He noted that these are some of the priorities of the Albanian SEECF Presidency this year. He further stated that: "The reorganization of the new Commission that puts the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission in charge of the management and coordination of Foreign Policy and Enlargement, as well as the Enlargement Package 2014, have increased the focus on the enlargement as a geo-strategic political project".

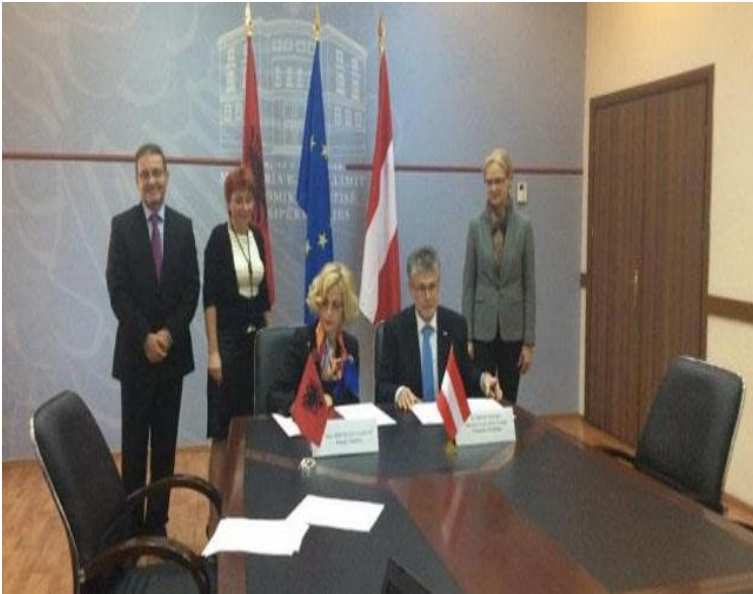


Moreover, they discussed the expectations of regional countries from the new European Commission, the situation in Ukraine and the crisis in Syria and Iraq, where participants shared the view that common challenges need to be jointly addressed.

At the end of the meeting, members of the Visegrad Group and Western Balkan countries welcomed the decision to establish the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Western Balkan Fund in Albania. This is the first time for a regional organization HQ to be established in Albania, proof of a growing contribution of our country to regional cooperation policies and good neighborliness.

Economic and Public Diplomacy

Sixth Session of the Albanian-Austrian Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation held in Tirana



prevailed.

Both parties reiterated the willingness and determination of their countries to address cooperation priorities, find feasible and efficient solutions for further development and intensify bilateral relations in various economic sectors.

The members of the two delegations discussed several issues of mutual interest with the aim of enhancing economic, trade, institutional and investment cooperation between the two countries and finding new ways to further strengthen bilateral relations.

Both parties discussed and defined perspectives for future cooperation in areas of mutual interest, exchanged information on the economic situation of their respective countries and assessed the current stage of bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

They agreed to enhance cooperation in order to support SME's policies and protect private property, financial cooperation, transport and infrastructure, ICT, energy and mining, agriculture, tourism, environment, professional education, social welfare, etc.

On 20-21 October 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Entrepreneurship, held the sixth Session of the Albanian-Austrian Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation.

The Sixth Session of the Joint Commission was characterized by a nice and friendly atmosphere, where mutual understanding

Albania present at **Open Doors Day** organized by Austrian MFA

Albania took part in the Open Doors Day, organized by the Austrian government, on the occasion of the National Day of Austria. Part of the activities organized in this framework was the opening of governmental institutions to the broad public.

This year, which marked the 20th anniversary of Austria's accession to EU, Albania was invited to be a special guest of the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and have a stand in the premises of the Austrian MFA.

The Embassy of Albania in Austria displayed, in the EU exhibition room of the Ministry, some materials and publications, aimed at better knowing the country. The Albanian stand was visited by numerous visitors, eager to learn more about Albanian politics, culture and tradition, the reforms our country is undertaking in its path towards EU integration, the state of bilateral relations between Albania and Austria, etc.



The Open Doors Day is an annual, traditional activity in Austria, held on the occasion of Austria's National Day, where many political, economic and cultural organizations open their doors, so that the public can get acquainted with their work.

Berlin based elementary school named after **Albanian who saved Jews** during WWII

Herzlich willkommen



A very special ceremony took place in Berlin on the occasion of naming a Berlin based elementary school after Albanian idealist, Refik Veseli, who bravely saved members of the Mandils, a Jewish family, throughout the Second World War.

The name of the school, chosen by the pupils themselves, stands for a whole program of harmonious coexistence of diversities within a democratic society. Albania, a country at the very heart of Europe, has shown to the world a totally different honour and civil code, that of BESA, one of the best examples to face today's challenges, such as intolerance and discrimination.

Gavra Mandil wrote the following words to Yad Vashem: "In those days, when danger and death were all around the world, the small brave Albanian people proved their greatness. Without any fuss and without asking anything in return, the Albanian people performed a fundamental duty of human beings by saving the lives of Jewish refugees".

Conference of Ambassadors of the **Western Balkans** held in Stuttgart

On 16 October 2014, the Conference of Ambassadors of the Western Balkans, an initiative of the Austrian Ambassador in Berlin, was held in Stuttgart, Germany.

Albania was represented by the Albanian Ambassador to Germany Artur Kuko and the General Director of the National Tourism Agency (NTA) Julinda Dhame.

The meeting reconfirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, in full compliance with the commitments undertaken during the Western Balkans Conference, held on 28 August 2014 in Berlin. The Ambassadors reaffirmed the engagement of their countries to advance the necessary reforms aiming not only at the enhancement of regional cooperation, but also at the progress towards EU integration, bearing in mind that Europe cannot advance without a stabilized, peaceful and well developed Western Balkan region.

During this activity a stand was set up by the NTA representatives where participants were offered wide information about the tourism industry and the development of the Albanian economy.

Ms. Dhame had various meetings with representatives of the German market tour operators, introducing them to Albanian tourism potentials.



65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of **Albania** and the People's Republic of **China**



Also on the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic Relations, the *Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries* (CPAFFC), held a reception on 10 October 2014, inviting diplomatic representatives from the seven European countries which first established Diplomatic relations with China (Albania; Bulgaria; Romania; Hungary; Check Republic; Slovakia and Poland).

Representatives from relevant Chinese ministries and representatives from some organizations and academic institutions also attended the reception.

On October 14th 2014, on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Albania and the People's Republic of China, a reception for former Chinese students, specialists and diplomats that have studied and worked in Albania was held in the Embassy of Albania in Beijing. Albanian students in Beijing as well as journalists from China Radio International were also invited to the reception.

Prior to the reception Ambassadors were received by Mr. Ji Bingxuan, Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Congress. Mr. Ji Bingxuan hailed the cooperation between these countries and the People's Republic of China during these 65 years of diplomatic relations.

They also discussed the great possibilities that exist for future cooperation and talked about strengthening and expanding cooperation in all areas of interest.

The date of the reception coincided with the 60th anniversary of the first group and the 50th anniversary of the biggest group of Chinese students going to Albania.

Albanian **Cultural Heritage Day** in Geneva



On 10 October 2014, in the framework of Cultural Heritage Day 2014, a concert of Albanian culture and heritage was organized in Geneva. This concert, organized under the auspices of the Albanian Embassy in Switzerland, hosted artists from the Albanian diaspora, who performed a rich program of songs, dances and different interpretations of Albanian plays and poetry, with the aim of highlighting the

best values of Albanian cultural heritage.

The event was attended by the Albanian Ambassador to Switzerland Ilir Gjoni, who in his remarks stressed, among other things, the importance of cultivating and protecting our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, translated into our unique language, music and traditions. The event was also attended by representatives of the Consulate of Kosovo in Geneva.

This concert was made possible thanks to the work and dedication of the Albanian community of Geneva, under the auspices and support of the Albanian Embassy in Bern.