



PC.DEL/945/08
6 November 2008

ENGLISH only

Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne

**Conseil permanent No. 738
06 novembre 2008**

**EU response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Albania, H.E. Mr. Lulzim Basha**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Mr. Lulzim Basha and thanks him for his address.

Mr. Chairman, as member of the Stabilisation and Association Process, Albania is a close partner of the European Union, and over the past year has moved further on its path towards the EU.

The successful implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the Interim Agreement is at present Albania's big challenge, as well as the completion of the dialogue on full visa liberalisation launched in March 2008. The recent progress report by the European Commission highlighted the achievements but stated at the same time very clearly the issues where Albania has to show increased efforts and determination in the months ahead. The Commission emphasized the rigorous but fair conditionality in the enlargement process. Each country of the region will advance on the way towards the EU according to its own merits. The EU notes that Albania has continued to progress on democracy and rule of law, maintained a positive role in regional stability and further developed its relations with neighbouring and other countries in the region. In contrast to previous years, we particularly

ue2008.fr

note the consensus that the main political parties in Albania have been developing on major issues, which, in turn, has had positive impact on reform processes.

While commending these encouraging steps, the EU reminds that democratic culture and the proper functioning of states institutions require further consolidation. The EU recalls the importance of outreach across the full political spectrum, contributions from the civil society, free media and respect for alternative opinions. We also stress the importance of continued progress in the areas of judicial, political and economic reform, strengthening rule of law and independence of the judiciary, promoting good governance, decentralisation, human rights protection, including of persons belonging to minorities and minority language education, gender issues, as well as developing local capacities. In this regard, we highly value the assistance provided by the OSCE Presence to the Albanian authorities and to civil society.

The fight against corruption, organized crime, money laundering and trafficking in human beings still requires strong determination and effective measures for a systematic approach and full implementation of the legal framework. These remain key areas for progress, as does the need to resolve outstanding property issues.

Holding free and fair elections is fundamental for democracy and is an essential requirement for closer relations with the EU. In this regard, we once again emphasize the importance of having the electoral infrastructure completed well in advance of the 2009 parliamentary elections, in line with the relevant recommendations by the OSCE/ODIHR.

The EU highly values the cooperation between the OSCE Presence in Albania and the host country, and reiterates that the Presence's current mandate remains a sound basis for work. We encourage the Albanian authorities to take

ue2008.fr

full advantage of the OSCE assistance in the ambitious process of reforms in the country.

The European Union has taken note of Albania's readiness to take over the OSCE Chairmanship in the year 2012. We welcome this sign of interest and Albania's determination to assume responsibility within 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 commitments, norms and values of the Organisation.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, we would like once again to thank H.E. Minister Lulzim Basha, and wish him and his country all the best.

La Turquie, la Croatie* et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine*, pays candidats ; la Bosnie – Herzégovine et le Monténégro, pays du processus de stabilisation et d'association et candidats potentiels ; l'Islande et la Norvège, pays de l'Association Européenne de libre-échange et membres de l'Espace économique européen ; ainsi que l'Ukraine, la République de Moldavie, l'Arménie et la Géorgie se rallient à cette déclaration.

*La Croatie et l'ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine continuent à participer au processus de stabilisation et d'association.

ue2008.fr