

## **Eighth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between Albania and the EU**

The Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council) between Albania and the European Union held its eighth meeting on 8 September 2016.

The SA Council noted that the Commission report 2015 on Albania concluded that the country made further progress towards meeting the political criteria for membership and, overall, steady progress continued in the five key priorities for the opening of accession negotiations.

The SA Council noted the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 15 December 2015, which recognised Albania's continued commitment on the reform agenda. On that occasion, the Council underlined that judicial reform remained key to further forward movement on Albania's EU accession process and could also be transformative for other reforms.

The SA Council confirmed that Albania maintained an overall sustained pace in the implementation of public administration reform measures. The EU welcomed the unanimous adoption in July of a set of constitutional amendments for a thorough and comprehensive reform of the justice system. The SA Council took note of the recent adoption of the law on the vetting of judges and prosecutors, which represents an important step forward for the implementation of the justice reform. It is essential to proceed with a swift implementation of the reform. The EU also welcomed that Albania took further steps in the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as on human rights matters.

The SA Council welcomed the continued active participation of Albania in regional initiatives and structures in South Eastern Europe and its good neighbourly relations and constructive regional stance. The EU acknowledged Albania's role in the region as a pro-active and constructive partner, and underlined the importance of Albania's commitment to a positive engagement in the region, including through the conclusion of bilateral conventions, and to further promoting regional cooperation. The EU reiterated that good neighbourly relations and regional stability are essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association process.

The SA Council welcomed the full alignment of Albania to Council decisions and in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama. The EU delegation was led by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini. The Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement negotiations, Johannes Hahn, represented the European Commission. The Albanian delegation included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ditmir Bushati, the Minister for European Integration, Klajda Gjoshaj, and the Chair of the European Integration Committee of the Albanian Parliament, Majlinda Bregu, as representative of the opposition.