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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: Update on the Republic of Albania

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Delegations will find attached an update on the Republic of Albania, submitted by the Commission<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This document has been transmitted to the Council in English only.

## Update on the Republic of Albania

### 1. Introduction

On 25 March 2020<sup>2</sup>, the Council decided – and European leaders endorsed this decision on 26 March 2020<sup>3</sup> – to open accession negotiations with Albania and tasked the Commission to report on a number of issues to be addressed by Albania prior to the first Inter-governmental Conference. The Council specifically highlighted a set of deliverables that are expected prior to the first Inter-Governmental Conference:

- To adopt the electoral reform fully in accordance with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) recommendations, ensuring transparent financing of political parties and electoral campaigns,
- To ensure the continued implementation of the judicial reform, including ensuring the functioning of the Constitutional Court and the High Court, taking into account relevant international expertise including applicable opinions of the Venice Commission,
- Finalise the establishment of the anti-corruption and organised crime specialised structures;
- To further strengthen the fight against corruption and organised crime, including through cooperation with EU Member States and through the action plan to address the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations.

The Council also underlined that tackling the phenomenon of unfounded asylum applications and ensuring repatriations and amending the media law in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission remain important priorities. The Council invited the Commission to ‘provide a report on these issues, including progress regarding the track record, when presenting the negotiating framework’.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7002-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2020/03/26/>

On 1 July 2020, the Commission submitted to the Council a proposal for the negotiating framework with Albania, which integrates and further develops the enhanced approach to the accession process. The Commission also reported on further implementation of reforms in Albania, with a focus on progress and compliance the above areas.

In October 2020, the Commission adopted the enlargement package and assessed that Albania had made decisive progress and was close to meeting the conditions set by the Council in view of the first Inter-Governmental Conference<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, the Commission assessed that the condition related to the functioning of the Constitutional court was close to being met, while all other conditions were met.

This update follows up on the Council Conclusions of March 2020, building on the findings and assessment of the Commission's enlargement communication of October 2020 and the accompanying annual report on Albania<sup>5</sup>.

## **2. Political Context**

Despite the difficulties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the efforts necessary to launch the post-earthquake reconstruction process, the authorities maintained their strong focus on reforms, as well as their commitment to advance on the EU path, based on a level of popular support for EU accession that, albeit decreasing, remains the highest in the region.

The intense political polarisation eased in early 2020, when the ruling majority and the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition agreed to take forward the electoral reform, and as the country had to resort to emergency measures to tackle the pandemic. Albania furthermore continued to maintain a 100% alignment rate with EU foreign policy.

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<sup>4</sup> COM(2020)660final of 6.10.2020

<sup>5</sup> SWD(2020)354final of 6.10.2020

On 25 April 2021, Albania held its parliamentary elections.

Regarding the practical preparations and conduct of the 25 April elections, the Albanian authorities further followed up on all key aspects covered by the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations<sup>6</sup>.

According to the preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission, the parliamentary elections were generally well organised by the election administration. Stakeholders had sufficient confidence to participate in the elections and a reformed Central Election Commission (CEC) oversaw the election process in an organised and transparent manner.

A notable aspect of the new election administrative involved the use of new technologies. The e-voting/e-counting pilot project in Tirana did not encounter any significant hurdle. A least one electronic device for voter identification was deployed at relatively short notice in each of the 5,199 polling stations. Staff were recruited and trained for the purpose. Less than 150 polling stations had to rely nearly exclusively on paper-based voters' lists out of the 5,199 polling stations. The use of fingerprints from elderly persons proved the most significant hurdle for the use of the devices.

According to OSCE/ODIHR, there remained concerns related to the misuse of State resources or functions by the ruling party and other public figures. It furthermore called for any alleged irregularities to be brought swiftly to the attention of the Central Election Commission and other competent authorities, and cases to be duly investigated, including vote buying. Some 33 cases have been filed with the Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Structure (SPAK).

The final participation stood at 46.3% (46.77% in 2017) with the highest participation in Tirana with 53.2%. The Socialist Party received 48.7% of the votes (74 seats), the Democratic Party-Alliance for Change 39.4% (59 seats), the Socialist Movement for Integration 6.8% (4 seats), and the Social Democratic Party 2.3% (3 seats), according to official preliminary results.

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<sup>6</sup>OSCE/ODIHR specified on 26/04/2021 that the areas in which recommendations remained outstanding included: suffrage rights of people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities; criminal liability for defamation; use of party campaign materials in the news; and equal rights of party and citizen observers.

### **3. Implementation of conditions prior to the first Inter-Governmental Conference as per March 2020 Council conclusions**

With reference to the adoption of **electoral reform**, the ruling majority and representatives of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition conducted dialogue in a cross-party platform, the “Political Council”. On 5 June 2020, wide cross-party consensus in the Political Council led to a breakthrough agreement to gradually introduce a depoliticised electoral administration and an electoral process with higher integrity and transparency standards, in line with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The agreement introduces gradual depoliticisation of the election administration, electronic identification of voters where technically viable, ensures more transparency and increased independence of poll workers, and improves the oversight of disputes through the inclusion of vetted judges in the Electoral College. The amendments to the electoral code were adopted by the Parliament on 23 July 2020, in accordance with the 5 June 2020 agreement. In December, technical amendments to various laws were adopted in line with earlier amendments to the Electoral Code.

In addition, the Parliament adopted on 30 July some amendments to the Constitution concerning the electoral system. These amendments, that are unrelated to the implementation of the OSCE/ODHIR recommendations, required further amendments to the electoral code which were discussed among parties in the Political Council, but without reaching a consensus before the Parliament voted on them on 5 October. In this respect, the joint Opinion of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR on 11 December 2020<sup>7</sup> concluded that there was no ground to challenge the validity of these further amendments.

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<sup>7</sup> CDL-AD(2020)036

**Campaign and political party financing**, was regulated in the 23 July amendments to the electoral code, which also address political party and electoral campaign financing, in accordance with ODIHR recommendations. The resulting provisions of the Electoral Code notably address the regulation of state funding to parties participating in elections and electoral campaigns, the handling of donations and loans, the prohibition of the use of public resources to support electoral subjects and on funding through non-public funds. The rules also address reporting and disclosure procedures, the auditing of campaign funds and expenses, and sanctions. On 16 November, the Parliament has also adopted amendments to the Law on Political Parties, to bring it in line with the Electoral Code amendments.

A broader reform on political party financing, which is not part of the OSCE/ODIHR's recommendations on electoral reform, is expected to be carried out after the elections.

Elections were held on 25 April implementing the new electoral framework, which is in accordance with the recommendations of OSCE/ODIHR (see above).

Albania continued to ensure the continued **implementation of justice reform and the vetting process**, which advanced steadily, producing further tangible results, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the aegis of the European Commission, the International Monitoring Operation has continued to oversee the process. To date, of the total 804 magistrates that have to undergo vetting, investigations have been formally initiated by the vetting institutions regarding 723 assessees. Of these, vetting institutions have completed 375 vetting cases at first instance, including all priority dossiers. Of the 375 decisions, 253 vetting decisions are final. Overall, 61% of the vetting dossiers processed so far have resulted in dismissals or voluntary resignations by the assessee. The breakdown of first instance decisions is as follows: 148 dismissals, mostly for issues relating to unjustified assets; 145 confirmations in office; 81 decisions on termination of the vetting proceedings; 1 decision to suspend the assessee, with an obligation to attend training.

As regards the **functioning of the Constitutional Court**, an important milestone was reached at the end of 2020, with the appointment of three new judges to the Constitutional Court. With seven judges in office, the Constitutional Court has regained its necessary quorum of minimum six members to hold plenary sessions, thus being fully functional and *meeting the related condition for the first IGC*. The remaining appointments to the Constitutional Court are expected to proceed as soon as half of the High Court judges will have been appointed. Since December 2020, the Constitutional Court has adopted 18 decisions following plenary sessions, out of which seven applications of non-constitutionality were accepted and 11 applications were rejected.

The **High Court** has regained its functionality in March 2020. Progress also continued on appointments, with the promotion by the High Judicial Council of four new judges to the High Court on 19 March 2021. With seven judges in office, the High Court disposes of the necessary quora to perform its jurisdictional functions, including by ruling on recourses against the decisions of Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Specialised Courts and on unification of case law. Selection procedures are well advanced regarding three additional High Court positions. The High Court has delivered 2693 decisions since it regained its functionality from March 2020 until March 2021. During the first quarter of 2021, the High Court has delivered 647 final decisions, out of which: 145 adopted by the administrative college, 241 by the civil college and 261 by the criminal college. In July 2020, the High Court adopted guidelines for the reduction of backlog and increase of efficiency for the High Court. Among the key measures are the recruitment of new administrative and legal research staff, improvement of working methods and increase of communication and transparency.

On 23 March 2021, the Assembly adopted amendments to ten laws aimed to further strengthen the efficiency of the justice system and facilitate a better functioning of the courts. In particular, the legislative amendments provide for specific measures to facilitate the backlog reduction, speed up judicial proceedings, strengthen the capacity of the new specialised bodies in the area of anti-corruption and organised crime to focus on high level corruption and serious crime, and amend the quorum provisions for High Court appointments of Constitutional Court members, in consistency with the guidance of the Venice Commission<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> CDL-AD(2020)010

The **new specialised bodies in the area of anti-corruption and organised crime**, including the Special Prosecution Office (SPO), within the Special Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Structure (SPAK), have been established and started to operate. 14 Special Prosecutors are in place, of which one on a temporary mandate. An Albanian Liaison Prosecutor to the Eurojust headquarters in The Hague assumed duties in January 2021. The SPO has taken over some financial investigations under the anti-mafia law and conducted verifications on asset seizures. In July 2020, the first Director of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) was appointed by the High Prosecutorial Council and started performing her functions. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, further concrete steps were taken in the recruitment of investigators. To date 28 investigators have been recruited and appointed following robust selection procedure and inception training. Vacancies for the recruitment of an additional 32 investigators were published in April 2021. On 23 March 2021, the Assembly adopted amendments to the SPAK law, which extend its jurisdiction to all terrorism offences, reinforce its focus on high-level corruption and introduce targeted career development measures.

Notable further progress was made in the **fight against organised crime**. Albania continued to implement the January 2020 package of temporary preventive measures to enhance the capacity to counter criminal organisations (Operation Power of Law). The measures include targeting assets through seizure and confiscation, limiting the movements of suspected criminals, and restricting their economic activities. In 2020, within the activities of “Operation Power of Law”, 181 police operations were conducted (increase by 376% compared to 2019) with 802 perpetrators of whom 630 arrested/detained, 82 wanted and 85 prosecuted at large; 35 criminal groups dismantled (increase of 46% compared to 2019), 125 members arrested and almost €15 million worth of assets and bank accounts were seized. Since its establishment in December 2019, the SPO has taken over a total of 215 criminal proceedings from the Serious Crimes Prosecution office (167 are still under investigation, 48 have been concluded) . In 2020, the SPO initiated 200 new criminal proceedings (42 for organised crime and 158 for corruption). In 2020, 39 criminal procedures for corruption and 16 procedures for organised crime have been sent to trial. The SPO has also taken over financial investigations under the anti-mafia law and conducted verifications on asset seizures.



Albania has taken further steps to strengthen international police cooperation. The Europol Liaison Office to Albania -the first such Liaison Office in the region- continues to contribute positively to the strengthening of cooperation between Albania and EU Member States' police forces in the fight against organised crime, including drug trafficking, enhancing the police's capacity to assess the main organised crime threats, and increasing the number and quality of exchanges involving Albania through Europol's secure communications channel SIENA. Albania has also intensified its involvement in the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), the flagship EU instrument for cooperation to fight organised and serious international crime. In 2020, Albania participated in 37 EMPACT operational actions, out of 249 in total, and in 2021 it is participating in 62 actions and leading one of them, out of 234 in total. Albania is the first non-EU country become an action leader for one operational action in the field of property crime – showing will to participate and work on crime types that are present in the country.

During 2020, **495 police operations** were conducted, of which 119 were carried out in cooperation with international partners or foreign law enforcement bodies, like INTERPOL, EUROPOL, Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre, US Drug Enforcement Administration, Italian INTERFORZE, and the German Federal Criminal Police. The overall number of police operations increased by 37% in comparison with 361 police operations conducted in 2019 and included:

- 233 police operations against narcotics, of which 95 in cooperation with international partners.
- 143 police operations against illegal trafficking, of which 21 operations in cooperation with international partners.
- 72 police operations against economic-financial crimes, of which 3 operations in collaboration with international partners.
- 41 police operations in the field of crimes against person and property.
- 6 police operations against cybercrime.

The following are some of the most important police operations during 2020 and 2021:

- In January 2020, 1.18 tons of cocaine originating from the Caribbean and destined for Europe and northwest Africa were seized in Greece. Albanian law enforcement actively participated in the operation.
- In June 2020, through the Operation Kulmi a major Albanian-Italian drug trafficking group was dismantled with Eurojust involvement: 37 persons were arrested, €40 million worth of drugs and €4 million worth of properties seized.
- In July 2020, Operation Riviera led by Italian law enforcement agencies in cooperation with the Albanian State Police (ASP) dismantled a criminal organisation aimed at drug trafficking between Italy and Albania.
- In July 2020 Operation Magma coordinated by the Italian law enforcement agencies aimed at fighting the *'ndrangheta* further strengthened the cooperation between Italian law enforcement and ASP . Two prominent wanted Albanian persons were arrested and extradited to Italy.
- In September 2020 in the major Operation Los Blancos, led by the Italian Prosecution Office of Florence and targeting a group of Ecuadorian, Colombian and Albanian drug traffickers in several European states, the Albanian law enforcement agencies played a crucial role.
- In February 2021, the ASP participated in an operation coordinated by the Italian police against an Italian-Albanian organised criminal group involved in drug trafficking and arrested a citizen as part of Italian Police's 'Miracolo II' operation.
- In April 2021, 49 kg and then 143 kg of cocaine were seized in the port of Durres from containers coming from Ecuador .

The **track record on organised crime** continued to improve in 2020 with 22 new cases referred to prosecution. There were 15 indictments for organised crime all for structured criminal group (Art. 333(a) of the Criminal Code) in 2020 (as compared with 13 in 2019). There were 5 convictions with 13 persons convicted at appeal level in 2020, compared to one in 2019.

As regards serious crimes, in 2020 there is steady increase of the track record with 2,785 new cases referred to prosecution compared to 2,323 in 2019: 66 cases on trafficking in human beings, 417 cases on money laundering and 2086 cases on drugs production compared 1,805 cases in 2019, (25 on trafficking in human beings, 232 on money laundering and 1,548 respectively). on drugs production). Of the total referrals for serious crimes, 577 cases resulted in indictments in 2020 and 507 in 2019. As for final convictions, there were 188 in 2020 (in addition to 185 convictions at first instance) and 308 in 2019. Narcotics-related cases accounted for 81% of the total in 2020 and 68% in 2019, followed by money laundering, trafficking in vehicles, money counterfeiting and forgery, and trafficking in human beings. In October 2020, the Second Instance Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime Court (2<sup>nd</sup> Instance SPAK Court) upheld the first-instance court ruling sentencing the head of a transnational drug-trafficking gang to 15 years in prison (reduced to 10 years through abbreviated proceedings) for establishing a structured criminal group, trafficking narcotics, failing to declare assets and laundering money.

Notable further progress was made in the **fight against corruption**, where the Albanian authorities had already strengthened operational, coordination and monitoring capacities. **As regards the overall track record**, progress was noted as a follow up to the vetting of magistrates. Asset investigations are underway in all cases. In 2020, the overall number of referrals of corruption cases by the police to the prosecution was 1649 and 1377 of other referrals to the prosecution. 268 cases were registered by SPAK. The number of corruption cases sent to court was 413, including 53 by the SPO. 270 persons (mid and high ranking officials) were convicted at first-instance and 87 at appeal and final level. 73 cases were opened against high-level officials. 11 indictments were issued, involving 20 persons. One defendant involved in high-level corruption was convicted. Investigations have so far not resulted in a substantial number of final convictions of high-ranking state officials. There were 12 cases on asset declarations by high-level state officials referred by the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest (HIDAACI) to the prosecution. There was no final conviction.

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** placed Albania in the list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring in February 2020 and elaborated an action plan containing actions to initially be implemented by October 2021 in order for Albania to be removed from that list. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Albania – as other jurisdictions under increased monitoring – has been granted some additional time, so that the last Action Plan items are now due in February 2022. Albania has made a high-level political commitment to implement the FATF action plan, covering inter alia the identification of money-laundering risks, mutual legal assistance, the establishment of effective mechanisms to detect and prevent criminals from owning or controlling non-financial entities, the availability and timely access to accurate and basic beneficial ownership information, prosecution and confiscation measures. The implementation of the measures identified in the FATF action plan is so far progressing on schedule despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020 a memorandum of cooperation was signed among the General Prosecutor Office, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Finance and Economy “On increasing the effectiveness of investigations related to money laundering, terrorist financing, financial crimes, seizure and confiscation of criminal assets”. In July 2020, a law on establishing a beneficial ownership register was adopted and in January 2021 a law on establishing a centralised bank account register was adopted. Both registers are being fed with data and are expected to become operational shortly. Albania has initiated the process of preparing amendments to the Anti Money Laundering Law and has committed to fully align it with the acquis by October 2021, with the support of the Commission.

#### **4. Developments related to other priorities**

The 25 March 2020 Council Conclusions highlighted that tackling the phenomenon of unfounded asylum applications and ensuring repatriations and amending the media law in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission remain **important priorities**.

As regards **asylum applications** to EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries, the Albanian authorities, in addition to information campaigns, thorough border checks, awareness-raising on rights and obligations under the visa-free regime and identifying and addressing the underlying reasons, continued to improve the dialogue and cooperation with the countries most affected. They have deployed three police liaison officers to the EU and a liaison officer from the EU works in Tirana to help with exit checks. The number of Albanian citizens lodging asylum applications in EU member states decreased sharply by 66% in 2020 compared to 2019, from 20,415 to 6,935 applications. While the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to this decrease, the overall reduction in the global number of asylum applications in the EU has been much smaller, at 33%. Since a marked peak of applications in 2017 in the Member State most affected by Albanian asylum seekers, Albania's efforts have resulted in a 75% decrease, from 12,130 applications in 2017 to 3,005 in 2020<sup>9</sup>. The 'recognition rate'<sup>10</sup> in 2020 was around 4.4% compared with 5.3% in 2019. Operations to return Albanian nationals whose applications are rejected are proceeding smoothly.

The amendments to the **media law**, aiming to regulate online media and some aspects of defamation, were reviewed by the Venice Commission in its Opinion issued on 19 June 2020<sup>11</sup>. Representatives from the ruling majority publicly committed to ensure that any new legislation related to the media would be in line with the Venice Commission Opinion and international standards of freedom of expression and media and would be submitted to thorough consultation with media organisations. The Government has indicated that they have reconsidered the adoption of the draft amendments to the Media Law and the Assembly has not reverted to the issue.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Eurostat

<sup>10</sup> Recognition rate refers here to the proportion of successful applications, i.e. of first instance decisions granting refugee and subsidiary protection status, on all first instance decisions issued; source: EASO

<sup>11</sup> CDL-AD(2020)013

According to the March 2020 Council Conclusions, **the negotiating framework** to be adopted by the Council has to reflect that Albania has successfully addressed:

- the initiation of criminal procedures against judges and prosecutors accused of criminal conduct during the vetting process,
- initiation of proceedings against those accused of vote buying,
- a sound track record regarding fight against corruption and organised crime at all levels, including initiation of proceedings and completion of first proceedings against high ranking public officials and politicians,
- tangible progress regarding reform of public administration,
- implementation of the reform of the electoral law as well as a final decision on the lawfulness of the local elections of 30 June 2019,
- further progress in the adoption of the remaining implementing legislation related to the 2017 framework law on the protection of national minorities, the adoption of the law on the population census in accordance with the Council of Europe recommendations,
- and the advancement of the process of registration of properties.

While these are not conditions for the holding of the 1<sup>st</sup> inter-governmental conference of the accession negotiations, a broad update is provided below on the above issues.

Important progress has been noted in relation to the **initiation of criminal proceedings against judges and prosecutors accused of criminal conduct during the vetting process**. To date, 23 subjects have been submitted to prosecution, including 10 former judges of the High Court and Constitutional Court, dismissed following vetting procedures. Out of 23 cases, 21 investigations are still ongoing, one investigation was dismissed, one resulted in a conviction. Ten additional subjects have been referred by the SPO to the competent prosecutors' offices for evaluation.

Offences linked to **vote-buying** are considered under articles 328 (active corruption in elections) and 328/b (passive corruption in elections) of the Criminal Code. A total of 27 corruption crime cases were filed in relation to the 2017 general elections and three for the 2019 local elections.

In addition, 51 criminal proceedings were filed for electoral offences committed in 2017. These led to sending seven cases to trial following which four defendants were found guilty. The remaining 44 criminal proceeding did not lead to prosecution or trial. 23 criminal proceedings were filed for electoral offences in 2019. These led to sending two cases to trial, following which four defendants were found guilty of falsification of election material and election results, and punished by imprisonment (3 to 7 years). The remaining 19 criminal proceeding did not lead to prosecution or trial.

Investigations were concluded in a case of electoral fraud involving 19 election commissioners and 2 voters held responsible for multiple voting on behalf of Albanian voters residing abroad. The offenders are expected to stand trial.

Charges against four suspects were dropped in another election fraud case due to the statute of limitations and the level of charges against four low ranking officials. On the same case, the Dibra prosecution office charged four other officials, of low rank, with abuse of office and intimidation of voters.

Efforts have also continued in relation to **public administration reform**, an area in which Albania has already implemented successful measures for a number of years. Recent progress in 2020 in this area has been noted in particular with the consolidation of achievements related to: increased transparency in human resources management through piloting automation of payroll through the human resource management information system; improved supervision on civil service reform implementation in line ministries; development of a merit-based salary policy for civil service and other public employees and performance appraisal manuals as well as improvements on the implementation of civil service procedures at central level; strengthened evidence-based policy making through increased use and quality of regulatory impact assessments in primary legislation and adoption of guidelines of public consultation and first result-based monitoring on usage of public consultation; development of the draft regulatory package on policy planning and a roadmap for its implementation in order to better link policy and budgets; increased implementation of legislation aligned with the EU *acquis* along the National Plan for European Integration; increased digitalisation of services for citizens.

As regards a **final decision on the lawfulness of the local elections of 30 June 2019**, the issue was reviewed by the Constitutional Court. The panel did not rule on the admissibility of the case. Due to its sensitivity and complexity, it deferred the matter to the college of all Constitutional Court judges.

As regards the adoption of **the remaining implementing legislation related to the 2017 framework law on the protection of national minorities**, an additional by-law on minority education was adopted on 31 December 2020, which brought the number of adopted by-laws to eight. **The Population Census Law was adopted on 26 November 2020 in line with international standards**. The census questionnaire has been finalised in cooperation with the EU and made available for public consultations. Following the adoption of law 20/2020 on the finalisation of transitional ownership processes in March 2020, four by-laws have been adopted and **first registration of properties started in May 2020** and is still ongoing, inter alia, in eight cadastral zones in the south within the municipality of Himara.

## Conclusions

Overall, and despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, Albania has continued to show its commitment and delivered tangible and sustainable results in the key areas identified in the Council Conclusions of March 2020. In October 2020, the Commission adopted the enlargement package and assessed that the condition related to the functioning of the Constitutional court was close to being met, while all the other conditions to be fulfilled prior to the holding of the first Inter-Governmental Conference of accession negotiations were met<sup>12</sup>. The Constitutional Court has regained functionality in December 2020. Meanwhile, Albania has continued to meet all conditions and has made further considerable, steady progress in addressing the other priorities highlighted by the Council.

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<sup>12</sup> COM(2020)660final of 6.10.2020