

## **Albania should strive to fulfil its European vocation**

**Albania is firmly committed to its European future.** Yours is a country full of potential which has worked hard to make progress, but where further efforts are required to continue building on your achievements.

**On Monday the European Union showed its openness to the citizens of Albania.** The waiving of visa obligations for short term travel to Schengen countries will have a very real impact. It makes it simpler and less costly for Albanian citizens to travel to and experience the European Union, allowing you to see first hand the benefits that the EU has brought to citizens from Member States both new and old.

**I share your satisfaction at a job well done. There are other achievements to be commended.** Initiatives for the strengthening of the rule of law and the fight against discrimination have been taken. The country is also making a valuable contribution to regional cooperation and stability.

As someone who experienced the enlargement process I know that, no matter how proud you are of what has been achieved, **there is no time to rest: there is always another, larger challenge ahead.** For Albania the objective is to build on the work achieved and deal with the difficult steps that remain on the path to the European Union.

**First and foremost, the ongoing political stalemate needs to be resolved** as it impedes the proper functioning of the democratic institutions thereby delaying reforms which are essential to the accession process. It is vital for the parliament to function as a chamber for effective law-making, based on constructive debate, a chamber where every voice can be heard and where every party should participate fully.

**Beyond this, I see other crucial challenges which, if they are met, will greatly benefit Albanian citizens:** the rule of law needs to be strengthened, corruption and organised crime effectively combated; human rights must be fully respected and property rights protected by law. I have seen the progress made in adopting laws but this is only a first step. The next challenge is for Albania to demonstrate its capacity to implement legislation and to consistently apply European standards and practices.

**The Commission's Opinion on your country's application for EU membership shows the path towards fulfilling your ambitions.** I very much hope that this opportunity will be taken up by everyone. The Commission, on its side, will continue to provide assistance to help the country progress steadily and achieve its objectives.

**Political leaders on all sides have a historic opportunity to bring Albania into the European Union,** fulfilling a widely held aspiration.

**Stefan Füle,**

Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

*This article is published on the occasion of the publication on 9 November by the European Commission of its 2010 Enlargement Package, including the Opinion on Albania.*