

Crunch time for consensus and reforms

If I were to name one thing that many EU politicians would envy their counterparts in Albania, that would certainly be the unshakable support for integration into the EU among Albanian citizens. For years now this support across the Albanian society has consistently exceeded 80%, a record that would be difficult to beat! This clearly shows that people in Albania know what they want. They want Albania to advance decisively towards EU membership. They want their politicians to reach a political consensus that will make this goal achievable. They want reforms to bring Albania closer to EU standards and, by doing so, to improve the quality of their life. They simply want their European dream to come true.

We have all seen that it can work. Reforms have accelerated since last November, when the landmark agreement between the ruling majority and opposition put an end to a long-lasting political stalemate. The dialogue between the two sides of the political scene has resulted in joint work on key reforms, including on crucial electoral and parliamentary reforms. The recent adoption of the law limiting the immunities of parliamentarians and judges has strengthened the legal framework for fighting corruption, sending a signal to all Albanians that nobody is above the law. The strong support from both the ruling majority and opposition for this law is an encouraging sign: we have seen that when Albania's political forces work together, they can achieve significant results. This is an achievement that the EU recognises. It also means that candidate status for Albania is well within reach, bringing the European dream one step closer.

Of course your journey does not end here. The results achieved so far need to be consolidated through continued reform efforts and consistent implementation. Most importantly, committed dialogue and cooperation between the two sides of the political spectrum must become a permanent feature of Albania's political landscape. This will allow reforms to continue in priority areas. If I choose just three I would highlight the need to complete public administration reform, to strengthen the judiciary, and to make fight against corruption and organised crime more effective.

Albania has managed to prove that political divisions, however deep, can be transcended if an overarching national objective and a common vision unites people and political elites. This sends a strong signal to the whole Western Balkans region, where Albania has already played a constructive role in regional cooperation. This needs to continue. Albania has all it takes to be an EU success story, as long as it unleashes its full potential. This is what I wish for Albania and its citizens, as we celebrate the country's independence 100th anniversary.

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