



## Honouring of obligations and commitments by Albania

Tirana, 5 December 2013

My colleague, Mr Grigore Petrenco, and I visited Tirana this week in our role of co-rapporteurs for the Monitoring Procedure of the Council of Europe. During the three days we were here we had high level meetings with, among others, the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the leader of the main opposition party, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister responsible for local government, the High Council of Justice, the National Chief of the Police, the Deputy Speaker of the parliament as well as representatives of the civil society, local government and the international community.

This is the third visit we have made this year as co-rapporteurs; the first was in April, the second in the run up to the elections and now our 3<sup>rd</sup> visit in a totally new political environment following the change of government. From our impression of this new political environment, we believe that there are major opportunities for the country to address the challenges needed to honour Albania's outstanding Council of Europe accession commitments. In this respect, we noted the clear goodwill in society towards the incoming government. We very much hope that the ruling majority will seize this special opportunity to ensure a constructive engagement between government and opposition to honour the accession commitments and membership obligations Albania voluntarily subscribed to when it became a member of the Council of Europe in 1995.

Our visit took place against the background of the impending consideration in Brussels of Albania's candidate status to the European Union. In that context, it is important to distinguish that from the role of the Council of Europe and its Assembly. The decision on granting EU candidate status is made by the Council of Ministers of the European Union, although we fully expect that our views will be of influence on this decision. However our primary role is to assess the progress made by the country in honouring its accession commitments and obligations and to examine how we can work together to ensure that Albania can fully meet all international standards in relation to democracy, the rule of law and respect for Human Rights.

Almost all those whom we have met raised the issue of corruption. Transparency International has produced worrying figures with regard to the perception of the Albanian people about the level of corruption in the civil service, police and judiciary. During our visit, senior figures from these sectors confirmed that corruption is not just a matter of perception. We note with interest that the incoming government has made the fight against corruption one of its main priorities. In this respect, we are keen to see that clear action is taken that enhances the independence of the judiciary and protects judges from political influence.

Albania has passed many laws and strategies to address issues regarding its obligations on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, but many of those we met claim that implementation remains an issue of concern. It is the concrete result that ultimately will weigh most heavily in our assessments.

We will be reporting our first impressions to our colleagues on the Monitoring Committee next week in Paris, at a meeting where we will also have the opportunity to exchange views on these issues, and others with Enlargement Commissioner Stephan Füle.