

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on Albania

1. On the occasion of the visit of the President of the Council of the European Union to Albania, Mr Hans van Mierlo expressed great concern at the situation in the country and its possible implications for the region. While recognising the need to restore law and order and deploring the violence that has occurred, the EU expects maximum self-restraint from all sides and urges that further violence be avoided. The EU calls firmly upon the Albanian authorities and all other parties to respect human rights, including minority rights, and fundamental freedoms consistent with Albania's international obligations. A state of public emergency should not be used to subvert these rights nor the democratic order and the EU expects it to be lifted as soon as possible. The Albanian authorities are expected to maintain freedom of expression and freedom of information and to stop harassment of the foreign and national media. The opposition also has responsibilities. We support the recommendation of the Council of Europe that the opposition should, out of respect for democratic principles, take up its seats and participate in the work of Parliament.
2. The EU urges the Albanian authorities to ensure the security of foreign citizens in Albania and to cooperate with EU Member States responsible for their well being.
3. The EU calls upon Albanian political forces to engage in dialogue, to work together in a responsible manner to solve the present crisis as soon as possible and to establish a government which enjoys broad support. The EU recognises the need for political and social stability if democratic processes are to be assured. It condemns all attempts by threat or use of arms to undermine stability or seize power and calls on all political forces in Albania also to condemn and seek to prevent such activity. At the same time the EU believes that a parallel process to promote national reconciliation is necessary, leading to a perspective of fresh parliamentary elections and a new constitution.

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4. The EU welcomes the decision of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to send a personal representative to Albania and urges Albania, as a member of the OSCE, to fully cooperate with his mission. It is the EU's conviction that the OSCE has an essential role to play to achieve peaceful reconciliation in Albania. The EU stands ready to support the OSCE in this endeavour.

In this context, the Union welcomes the steps taken by the Council of Europe and asks the OSCE and the Council of Europe to work closely together in order to re-inforce democracy in Albania.

5. The EU welcomes the planned IMF/World Bank mission and urges the Albanian government to reach agreement on ways of ending the present crisis, controlling the investment schemes and restoring economic well-being on the basis of an agreed IMF-programme.
 6. The EU, recalling the Council's conclusions of 24 February, confirms its readiness to continue its current assistance to Albania within the PHARE programme including specific measures aiming at alleviating the present situation in Albania. In addition, the EU is of course ready to provide humanitarian aid should this become necessary. The EU is however concerned that the implementation of the existing trade and co-operation relationship with Albania is suffering and that the PHARE programme is also negatively affected under the present circumstances. Once political and economic conditions are right, the EU is ready to consider the strengthening of relations with Albania within the context of its regional approach and with a view to promoting stability in the region.
 7. The EU has always given strong support to the creation of a democratic Albania. It continues to support that goal. But this requires acceptance by Albania of the principles and practices of democracy.
 8. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated country Cyprus, and the EFTA countries members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.
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