



Albania and the European Union:

you look after your neighbours

Throughout history Albania has been portrayed as a mysterious land of rugged beauty and strange happenings. Albania is the Illyria where the characters of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' were shipwrecked; the country that invited the great English sporting legend and intellectual CB Fry to become King in 1903 (he refused, saying 'I am not rich enough'). In 1809, the British poet Lord Byron travelled to the Albanian town of Tepelene to meet the Ali Pasha (he was impressed). Others with Albanian connections include the Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta (née Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopje, in 1910, of Albanian parents) and John Belushi actor and one of the 'Blues Brothers', son of an Albanian restaurateur who moved to the USA in 1934.

In the third quarter of the 20th century, under dictator Enver Hoxha, Albania also adopted the most extreme form of isolationist communism outside of North Korea and the Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge. Yet it is a European neighbour, just to the north of Greece and a mere 40 kilometres across the Adriatic from Italy.

What happens in Albania therefore has direct implications for the European Union (EU); and the EU, for both honourable human reasons and from enlightened self-interest is therefore keen to encourage stability and prosperity in Albania — and the other countries of south-eastern Europe. So, the EU is by far the biggest single donor to the western Balkans; the Community assistance amounts to around EUR 1 billion since the early 1990s to Albania alone. The EU's aim, in short, is to bring to the region the peace, stability, prosperity and freedom that the EU and the countries that belong to it — its Member States — have established over the last 50 years.



Carl Cordonnier

A country facing challenges ...

Just 13 years ago, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in the world. Brave, early efforts to introduce democracy and to build a market economy suffered from a serious nationwide financial crisis (caused by the collapse of 'pyramid' schemes) in 1997 and then, in 1999, Albania took the worst of the burden of the refugee problem caused by the Kosovo crisis.

Since then, Albania has made good progress in many important areas, reforming government finances and modernising the trade regime (Albania became a member of the World Trade Organisation in 2000) and tackling seriously the question of privatising small and large commercial organisations.



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Despite these achievements, a lot remains to be done. In particular, Albania needs to experience greater political stability and to consolidate democracy, so the country can tackle its greatest problems. These include:

- the need to secure full respect of human and minority rights;
- the fight against fraud, corruption, organised crime and trafficking;
- better functioning police and legal systems;
- improved financial and tax administration, so business can grow and the government can better fund its priorities;
- solutions to the energy problems and problems regarding land ownership and usage.

... so the EU is helping Albania to meet them

The EU's main objective in Albania is to support and encourage the government and the Albanian people in their efforts to overcome their inherited problems, so that they can create the economic strength and democratic system that will, one day, enable their country to become a member of the EU. This undertaking was given in the 'EU–Western Balkans declaration' pronounced at the EU summit in Thessaloniki, Greece, on 21 June 2003.

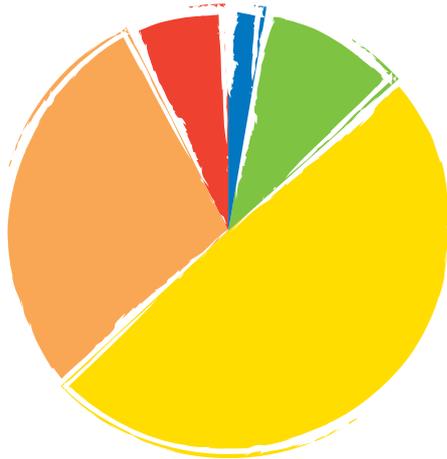
The most important of the many initiatives taken by the EU in cooperation with Albania (and the other countries of the region) was the establishment, in 1999, of the stabilisation and association process (SAP). Through this process the EU supports the Albanian people in their efforts to make the political and economic transition that will help them towards closer association with the EU and eventual membership.

In real terms, this means:

- helping to develop a modern legal system compatible with EU standards, and a better trained and equipped public administration;
- strengthening policing and public order;
- strengthening democracy and human rights in Albania, e.g. by providing assistance to NGOs;
- developing energy, transport and water networks;
- supporting local community development by providing funding for hundreds of projects at local community level across Albania;
- developing regional and cross-border cooperation with neighbours;
- strengthening Albania's environmental institutions and enforcing environmental law;
- supporting Albania's active participation in EU educational programmes such as the EU inter-university exchange programme, Tempus.



**CARDS allocation 2002-04
(by priority sector)**



EU financial assistance provided through CARDS (Community assistance for reconstruction, development and stabilisation) underpins the objectives and mechanisms of the stabilisation and association process.

Priority sectors	Million EUR
Democratic stabilisation	4.5
Administrative capacity building	17.0
Justice and home affairs	75.0
Economic and social development	42.4
Environment, natural resources	11.0
Total	149.9

...with the promise of EU membership when conditions are met

The EU sets requirements for Albania's European integration and is helping Albania to meet them: the reward will be eventual membership of the European Union. This was spelt out by President of the European Commission Romano Prodi when he told the Parliament in Tirana on 31 January 2003 'I personally believe that the Albanian people and their institutions will meet this challenge successfully and will bring European standards to their country. Commitment, determination, patience and realism are the cornerstones of the strategy and Europe will be at your side, with help, support, advice and encouragement.'



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Where can I find more information?

Further information on the EU's relations with Albania and the other countries of the western Balkans is available from the Commission's dedicated website:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/index.htm

If you have a specific question concerning the European Commission's external relations policies, please e-mail the 'Relex feedback' mailbox through the following web address:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/feedback/question2.htm

For other questions on the European Union, you can contact Europe Direct by e-mail through the following web address:

<http://europedirect-cc.cec.eu.int/websubmit/?lang=en>

or by telephone, by dialling the single freephone number:

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (from any country within the European Union),

or the chargeable number:

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