

RULE OF LAW IN ALBANIA – Challenges and Perspectives

Tirana, Mai 16, 2014

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this conference on behalf of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

(...)

We are honoured and pleased that the Faculty of Law of the University of Tirana proposed this project to us. Its subject "Rule of Law in Albania: Challenges and Perspectives" is of utmost relevance for the integration of this country with the European Union.

During the Thessaloniki Summit held in 2003 the European Union reiterated its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The future of the Balkans is within the European Union. In the Thessaloniki Declaration passed by the Heads of State or Government of the member States of the European Union, the acceding and candidate states including Albania and the President of the European Commission affirmed that they all share the values of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human and minority rights.

Furthermore the current EU Enlargement Strategy underlines the importance of placing the rule of law at the heart of enlargement policy. Strengthening the rule of law and democratic governance is central to the

enlargement process. Countries aspiring to join the Union must demonstrate their ability to strengthen the practical realisation of the values on which the Union is based at all stages of the accession process and establish and promote from an early stage the proper functioning of the core institutions necessary for democratic governance and the rule of law.

Countries must ensure that their judicial system is independent, impartial and accountable and that it functions efficiently.

Countries must ensure a strong framework for the prevention of corruption and law enforcement bodies need to be pro-active, well co-ordinated and effective as to ensure corruption cases, including at high level, are properly investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned.

Public administration reform continues to be a key priority and is an essential part of democratic governance and the rule of law, it aims at enhanced transparency, accountability and effectiveness and greater focus on the needs of citizens and business.

Civil, political, social and economic rights, as well as the rights of persons belonging to a minority are key issues. These fundamental rights are broadly guaranteed in law but issues concerning implementation persist in many cases. General societal attitudes to

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vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons remain a common problem.

Discrimination not only by the State but also in daily life is contradicting with the most important European values like freedom, human dignity and equal treatment.

Albania has already made major steps to full membership in the European Union. It has been recognised as a potential candidate country, a Stabilisation and Association Agreement has been signed, Albania has formally applied for EU membership and in its Enlargement Strategy 2014 the European Commission recommends granting Albania candidate status in light of the progress it made on key priorities for fulfilling the criteria towards European integration.

In its Progress Report on Albania 2013 the European Commission, however, has made clear that for the opening of accession negotiations Albania needs to meet five key priorities.

Albania will need to

- continue to implement public administration reform with a view to enhancing professionalism and depoliticisation of public administration
- take further action to reinforce the independence, efficiency and accountability of judicial institutions
- make further determined efforts in the fight against corruption, including towards establishing a solid track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and convictions
- make further determined efforts in the fight against organised crime, including towards establishing a solid track record of proactive investigations, prosecutions and convictions

- take effective measures to reinforce the protection of human rights, including Roma, and anti-discrimination policies, as well as implement property rights.

Most of these issues will be addressed and discussed during this conference and I am very happy that high-ranking stakeholders and experts have joined us today who will ensure that this conference will end with very concrete conclusions regarding further steps that need to be made to accelerate Albania admittance to the European Union.

I would like to express my profound thanks to the Faculty of Law of the University of Tirana, its dean Professor Shegani, to the Head of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Albania, Professor Zaganjori, and to each of you for taking part in this important event.

It is a great pleasure for me to talk to so many students. In a couple of years you will be in responsible positions. Many of you will be decision-makers, each of you can be a change agent. It is up to your generation in which direction Albania then will be steered. It is up to you whether Albania will become a consolidated democracy in which human and minority rights are respected and the rule of law prevails. Looking at your enthusiastic faces I have no doubt that you are conscious of your responsibility and that you will use your chances.

The Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation looks forward to cooperating with you, not only in the context of this project but also in the future.