

## The Delegation of EC to Albania celebrates Europe Day 2009

On 8 May, the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Albania, Mr Lohan held the European Day reception, with the participation of Albanian President, Mr Bamir Topi, Prime minister Mr. Sali Berisha, as well as ambassadors and ministers, Ambassador Lohan declared that: "2009 is a special year for Europe and a special year for Albania: For Europe, the year 2009 marks a historic double anniversary:

- first, 20 years ago, the Iron Curtain fell and peaceful democratic change started to transform Central and Eastern Europe. In the process, the goal of EU membership became the anchor of reforms in the countries of the region.

- secondly, this year, we celebrate the 5th anniversary of the "Eastern" enlargement that brought into the European Union altogether 12 new Member States.

Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, once said: "We are not forming a coalition of states, we are uniting people". What made it possible to unite Europeans - through the "Eastern" enlargement, and indeed through all preceding enlargements -, was of course a shared set of fundamental values.

For Albania, the year 2009 marks two historic milestones on her path of integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures:

- accession to NATO, and
- the application for EU membership.

Both events confirm and strengthen Albania's commitment to the principles of freedom, peace, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and human dignity.

Albania's ambitions concerning these principles have become higher, and so have become expectations within the European Union on what Albania can achieve. At the same time, Albania can count on the full solidarity of the European

Union in helping embed these principles and values ever deeper in the country's political and administrative culture.

2009 is also special because it is a year of elections - elections to the Albanian Assembly and to the European Parliament. The Assembly's Resolution on Albania's integration to the European Union underlines its commitment to free and fair elections. And the European Parliament is very blunt about the significance of the EP elections: "Get the Europe you want! If you don't vote, don't complain!", says its website. Former Czech President Václav Havel described the Europe we want as "... an entity that in an original way fulfills the longings of many generations of enlightened Europeans who knew that European universalism can become the framework for a more responsible human existence on our continent".



Ambassador Lohan delivering his speech on Europe Day 2009

### What is Europe Day?

On the 9th of May 1950, Robert Schuman presented his proposal on the creation of an organised Europe, indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations.

This proposal, known as the "Schuman declaration", is considered to be the beginning of the creation of what is now the European Union.

Everything, therefore, began that day. That is why during the Milan Summit of EU leaders in 1985 it was decided to celebrate 9 May as "Europe Day".

Today, the 9th of May has become a European symbol (Europe Day) which, along with the flag, the anthem, the motto and the single currency (the euro), identifies the political entity of the European Union. Europe Day is the occasion for activities and festivities that bring Europe closer to its citizens and peoples of the Union closer to one another.





# EUROPE DAY

## Musical journey around Europe

Albania was one of the countries celebrating the European day through some special events. A particular successful event, hosted on 9 May by the Head of the Delegation, which particularly raised the profile European Union in Albania, was the concert of the well known violinist Tedi Papavrami and the Symphonic Orchestra of the National Theatre of the Opera and Ballet conducted by the Greek director, Alkis Baltas. Ambassador Lohan, while welcoming everybody for their presence declared that: "Every year on the 9th of May, we are reminded of when in 1950 the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, called France, Germany and other European countries to pool together their coal and steel production.

Since the middle of the last century, the European Coal and Steel Community has grown into the European Union of 27 Member States, and Albania has set out on its path towards the European Union.

The Union's and Albania's rich cultural diversity will be reflected in the repertoire of tonight, in which Maestro Zhani Ciko, violinist Tedi Papavrami and the orchestra of the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet will lead us on a journey around Europe.

The concert was attended by approximately 600 invitees and broadcasted by the Albanian Public Television. The performance was greeted with standing ovations by an enthusiastic audience.



Tedi Papavrami performing at the Concert "Musical journey around Europe"

## European Choir Festival

As part of the European Day celebrations, the Delegation of the European Commission supported the third edition of the European Chamber Choral Festival of Albania 2009 organised by "Syri Blu Association". This was a series of concerts of classic, Baroque and chamber music performed by local and European artists from eight European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Croatia) in the cities of Shkodra, Korça, Fier and Tirana from 7th to the 10th of May. Such

an event was widely followed by the Albanian public and attracted positive reviews in the media.

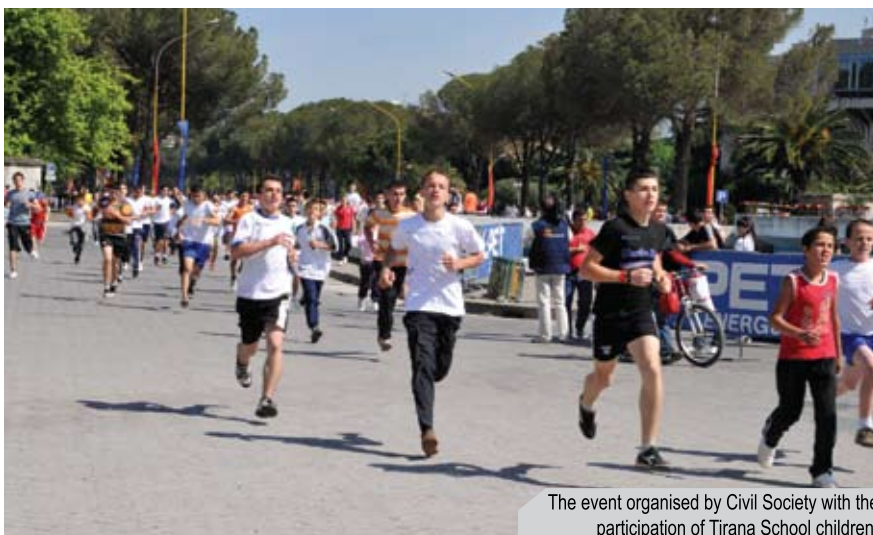
## Good morning Europe

Good Morning Europe was an event organized by civil society in the morning of 9 May. High school children celebrated Europe Day with a concert and dance performances in the main square of Tirana.

The event started with a relay run by middle school children on the main boulevard. 60 schools of Tirana participated such an event, which was held by CESES and supported by the Delegation of the European Commission.



Ambassador Lohan attending the Concert "Musical journey around Europe"



The event organised by Civil Society with the participation of Tirana School children.

# Stabilisation and Association Council EU-Albania held its first meeting.

The Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council) between the European Union and Albania held its first meeting on 18 May 2009. The meeting was chaired by Mr Tomas Pojar, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Albania was represented by Mr Lulzim Basha, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The meeting was also attended by Mr Björn Lyrvall, Political Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, Mr Michael Leigh, director general of the Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement, and Zoltan Martinusz, director in the General Secretariat of Council. The European Union welcomed the holding of the first meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the EU and Albania, following entry into force on 1 April 2009 of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). The SA Council was informed by Albania about its submission, on 28 April 2009, of an application for membership of the European Union.

The SA Council noted the conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 8 December 2008, which welcomed the progress achieved in a number of areas such as electoral reform, improvement of the business environment and good implementation of the interim agreement, and stressed that good governance, enforcement of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as the strengthening of administrative capacity, are still major challenges requiring resolute action, while also encouraging Albania to continue its constructive role in the region's stability. Further, it encouraged Albania to guarantee that free and fair elections are held in 2009, and welcomed the entry into force in January 2008 of the agreement on visa facilitation between the European Community and Albania. The SA Council reviewed developments related to the political criteria by reaffirming the importance of strengthening political dialogue between major political parties, which is a key priority of the European Partnership. The EU stressed the importance of holding free and fair elections in June 2009 so as to meet domestic and international standards, incl. a reliable voters' list, facilitated access to ID cards for all citizens without passports in time before the general elections and complete collaboration with election observers. Regarding the judicial system the SA Council also reviewed progress on judicial reform, which is a key European Partnership priority, stressing the importance

of the rule of law and independence of the judiciary as core aspects of the political criteria for EU accession. The EU called on Albania to safeguard the independence, transparency, efficiency and accountability of the judiciary, to complete the legal framework and to overcome shortcomings by adopting a comprehensive reform strategy for the judiciary.

Regarding efforts in the fight against corruption, which is a key European Partnership priority, EU considered that corruption remains widespread and constitutes a particularly serious problem while regarding human rights the SA Council noted that the protection of minorities the legislative framework is now broadly in place.

The EU has taken note of progress towards establishing a functioning market economy by improving the national cadastre and the registration of property, but noted remaining shortcomings on urban property registration as well as on orderly market exit procedures (liquidation and bankruptcy procedures).

The SA Council noted that the EU welcomed the progress made by Albania in

aligning its legislation and capacity with European standards and in implementing Interim Agreement commitments. In this regard, the EU welcomed the continued progress made in areas such as customs and competition whilst encouraging Albania to step up efforts in other areas, such as energy, transport and intellectual property rights where progress has remained limited. The EU encouraged Albania to step up efforts to improve administrative capacity for the non-trade-related provisions of the SAA and for its implementation.

The SA Council reviewed the implementation of the IA/SAA and SAA, noting that Albania has been implementing the Interim Agreement well and has contributed to the smooth functioning of the various joint institutions. In particular, the SA Council welcomed the progress achieved in aligning with the SAA provisions in the field of competition, whilst Albania took note of the need for further efforts to bring its legislation on imports fully in line with the SAA.

The SA Council welcomed each delegation's decision regarding its SA co-secretary





## The European Commission consults Civil Society on 2009 Progress Report

On 7 May, the Delegation of the European Commission to Albania held a consultation meeting with civil society organisations, aimed at gathering information and opinions from the Albanian non-profit sector for the 2009 Progress Report, currently under preparation. Around forty non-governmental actors exchanged views with the Head of Delegation, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan, on the fight against corruption and the next parliamentary elections, the legal framework for non-profit organisations, human rights issues and the fight against discrimination. Mr Lohan declared that the European Commission has already started preparing the 2009 Progress Report for Albania, which as you all know analyses the economic and political situation in view of country's European perspective

It is noteworthy that in 2009, this exercise will be carried out in a political context marked by:

- (1) the entry into force of the SAA,
- (2) Albania's recent application for EU membership,

(3) and the upcoming general elections which, as I have stressed in various occasions, will be a test for the country's political maturity.

As Ambassador Lohan noted this meeting was part of other regular meetings the European Commission had in the past with some of the organizations. The is-

ssues discussed regarded : Fight against corruption and the upcoming elections, legal framework for civil society organisations, protection and promotion of human rights, and social inclusion and fight against discrimination, as areas where civil society activity and expertise is essential.



Ambassador Lohan at meeting with Civil Society

## Visa liberalisation of the Western Balkans a tangible prospect.

Updated assessments of the implementation of the visa liberalisation roadmaps by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, were presented to the EU Member States by the Commission.

These updated assessments regarding the implementation of the roadmaps towards visa liberalisation represent a further step in the visa dialogue process that the Commission started with five Western Balkans countries in early 2008. The submission of this second set of Commission assessments to the Council represents the completion of an intense phase of activity of a series of field visits and expert meetings in the countries concerned. 15 expert missions have taken place (3 in each Country) with the participation of Member State experts and 4 expert meetings were held covering the policy areas

identified in the Roadmaps of the individual countries.

Vice-President Jacques Barrot, in charge of Justice, Freedom and Security, said, "I am very satisfied by the efforts made by the countries of the region in implementing the Roadmaps and by their excellent co-operation in the organisation of the expert missions. I am confident that visa liberalisation with all the countries of the Western Balkans is a tangible prospect."



## Statement by enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn on the murder of a lawmaker in Albania

On 3 May 2009, the enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn gave a statement on the murder of a lawmaker in Albania. Mr Rehn offered his condolences to Xhindi family and friends.

"I strongly condemn the murder of Fatmir Xhindi.. I call on the Albanian authorities to investigate this crime thoroughly and bring the perpetrator to justice." Declared Olli Rehn from Brussels.

Please visit the websites below or contact the Delegation of the European Commission to Albania

[www.delalb.ec.europa.eu](http://www.delalb.ec.europa.eu)

[www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)

[www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement](http://www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement)

[www.eu2009.cz](http://www.eu2009.cz)

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