



EC finances the construction of the Joint Border Crossing Point between Albania and Montenegro

The works for the construction of a new Joint Border Crossing Point between Albania and Montenegro started on 21st of April 2008. The project, worth €1.1 million, is funded by the European Commission. Present at the inauguration ceremony were the highest officials of both countries, Prime Minister of Albania Mr. Sali Berisha and his Montenegrin counterpart Mr. Milo Djukanovic as well as the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan and the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Montenegro, Ambassador Leopold Maurer.

The construction of the Muriqan (Sokobine) joint border point is the very first one of this kind in the Western Balkans. Its aim is to further facilitate the cooperation between the two countries. Another major objective will be to ensure efficient and secure borders and promoting local "people-to-people" type actions. The construction of this border point will contribute considerably towards the improvement of the social and economic development in the border area between Albania and Montenegro.

The border crossing point will be composed of one main building which will consist of two levels with separate offices (customs, police, veterinary and phytosanitary) for each nation and additional facilities for inspection and sequestration, disinfections, weighing of trucks, etc.

The Head of the European Commission to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan said during the inauguration ceremony that "this border crossing shall help Albania and Montenegro to work together for ensuring efficient and secure border services. I believe that it will become a symbol of successful cooperation between the two countries, and a benchmark in the Western Balkans."

The Prime Minister of Albania Sali Berisha considered the launch of this project as a great symbol not only for Albania and Montenegro, but for the entire region. "This border crossing shall be a symbol of the government's resilience to fight organized crime with zero tolerance. It shows our strong will and determination to fight smuggling and establish the rule of law. It perfectly reflects as well the

common will of our countries to build up a fruitful friendship. We are working together towards a common vision; which is the European one."

According to the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic the construction of this joint cross border is a noted proof of the strong will of both governments to work together to implement the European standards in the field of border control. "We are constructing this checkpoint to reconfirm the excellent state of relations that exist between Albania and Montenegro. We very much hope that this climate will carry on to be improved constantly in the future," he said.

This new Joint Border Crossing Point between Albania and Montenegro is part of the financial assistance provided by the European Union for the construction of 11 border points in Albania with a total amount of € 5.4 million. It confirms the seriousness of the European Commission to assist Albania and the Western Balkans countries to consolidate this delicate and highly significant sector.

Albania received the official invitation to join NATO

The Summit of the North Atlantic Alliance, held in Bucharest from 2 - 4 April 2008, decided to invite Albania and Croatia to join the alliance. The leaders of the NATO member countries regarded the membership of Albania and Croatia as significant for the values of the Alliance, on the basis of the accomplishment of the performance standards and their contribution to the Euro-Atlantic security. The leaders of the Alliance underlined as well the fact that the invitation to join NATO reconfirms the positive assessment of the Albanian contribution in the NATO-led military missions in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as for the maintenance of security in the region. The invitation to join NATO is a major achievement for Albania. The Albanian Government will need to continue to fulfil the requirements attached to this invitation to make it a reality.



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General; Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Albania and Bamir Topi, President of Albania

Albanian Government and European Commission sign Financial Agreements on Cross-Border Cooperation for € 2.65 million

The Minister of European Integration, Majlinda Bregu and the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan, signed on April 16th four Financing Agreements on behalf of the Albanian Government and the European Commission for the implementation of assistance under the Cross Border Cooperation Component of the European Union Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). As a potential candidate country, Albania benefits from IPA funding for cross border activities on all of its borders, including those with neighbouring EU Member States. The aim of all these IPA cross-border cooperation programmes is to assist the local communities on both sides

of a border. More explicitly, they will contribute to help them address many issues of common interest on the basis of a single set of rules.

The Financial Agreements for 2007 consist of various support programmes for different regions of the country. On the occasion of the signature, Ambassador Lohan said: "The programmes signed will make an important contribution to the development of the regions in question, to their economies, to tourism, to environmental protection and last but not least to people-to-people actions across borders. They reflect the European Union's strong commitment to support regional cooperation in the Western Balkans."



The Minister of European Integration, Majlinda Bregu and the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan

International Consortium on law enforcement

With the sponsorship of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, the members of the International Consortium (IC) convened in Tirana, on April 3rd 2008, to address issues relevant to the consolidation of the rule of law and law enforcement in Albania.

Most of the practical work of the IC is achieved through its seven working groups that focus on critical issues, such as integrated border management, organized crime, information management, legal reform, training and equipment, community policing/ crime prevention and witness protection. The International Consortium (IC) is a group that includes Embassies, International missions and non-governmental organizations that offer development assistance to the Government of Albania in the area of law enforcement and rule of law. Representatives from Albanian Government law enforcement institutions are also members and work co-operatively with the international community to ensure the fulfilment of the IC's objectives.

These include the open and active sharing of information, the optimum coordination of activities and the cooperative delivery of assistance among the members of the group.

EC - Albania Meeting on Economic and Financial Matters

The representatives of the Albanian Government and the European Commission met in mid-April in Tirana to discuss economic and financial matters and the obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the Interim Agreement in the fields of internal market and competition.

The regular meetings of the EC - Albania Working Parties allow the Commission and the Albanian authorities to engage in fruitful discussion on a range of issues related to Albania's path towards the EU.

The Albanian Minister of European Integration Mrs. Majlinda Bregu led the discussions on behalf of the Albanian government. She described Albania's progress and outlined the government's plans for further improvement. To make further progress towards the EU, Albania needs to establish a satisfactory track-record of implementation of its obligations under the SAA, starting with the trade-related provisions contained in the Interim Agreement. Albania needs also to continue working towards fulfilling the Copenhagen economic criteria, which

require the existence of a functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces in the EU.

The Commission underlined that it will continue to play its part under the agreements signed with Albania and more broadly through the Stabilisation and Association process. The Albanian authorities assured the Commission that they will continue to show determination in fulfilling the commitments they have undertaken.

TACTA PROJECT KICK-OFF



Mr. Yngve Engstrom (EC DG Enlargement Head of Unit), Mr. Florjon Mima (Deputy Minister of Finance, Albania), Mr Helmuth Lohan (Head of EU Delegation in Albania), Mr. Giuseppe Favale (Head of International Relation Area - Italian Customs), Mr. Perparim Dervishi (General Director of Customs Administration of Albania)

The European Union Project TACTA (Technical Assistance to Customs and Tax Administrations) was officially introduced on 4th April 2008 in Tirana. The project is led by the Italian Customs Agency and is targeted at the five countries of the Western Balkan Area; Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. Its main objective is to help the gradual modernisation of the organisational structures and the operational procedures of the Customs and Tax Administrations of these countries and bring them in line with EU standards as well as developing new strategies against fraud and illegal trafficking.

The representatives of the five Beneficiary Administrations, the European Commission and local

and foreign Authorities attended the meeting. The welcome address was delivered by Mr Ingve Ingström, who chairs the Department in charge of TACTA in the European Commission's Enlargement Directorate-General. In his message he underlined the fact that: "Through this € 7.1 million project, we aim to achieve a number of significant economical and institutional objectives. The most important out of them are two: to strengthen the commercial exchanges through a legal framework and transparent regulator and a greater participation and secondly to assist them in the application of the EU suggestions during the process of Association and Stabilization in the Balkans".

The TACTA Project was awarded by European tender to the public-private

Consortium known as "ITACA" (International Technical Assistance for Customs and Tax Administrations) which was promoted by the Italian Customs Agency. This Consortium is able to rely on its partners' high-level expertise as well as the direct participation of Customs and Tax Administrations and external support by other EU Member States' Administrations.

The TACTA Project started with a preliminary stage on 1st February this year and will follow in the footsteps of the former CAFAO Programme (Customs And Fiscal Assistance Office Programme) that was launched in 1996 and most recently managed by Eurocustoms.



The TACTA Project Director, Ms. Natalina Cea, is explaining the details of the Project



Ambassador Lohan in Korça and Elbasan

The Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan, visited a number of selected vocational education schools and vocational training centres in Elbasan and Korça (Southeast Albania) from 9 – 11 of April 2008. These schools have received direct support through European Union assistance programmes for a total of € 8 million. This assistance aims at supporting the reform in Vocational Education and Training in Albania. These EU funds are used for the constructions and equipment of schools, as well as their capacity building and system development. As part of the decentralisation policy of the Albanian government, many of the projects have been implemented in regions of the country outside Tirana. The assistance gave particular focus to the development of Regional Vocational Education and Training Centres. The Centres offer a broad variety of courses, workshops, trainers and equipment because they combine school and training centre functions under one roof.

During his stay in Elbasan the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan said: "I am here to see for myself how our assistance is contributing towards the improvement of the everyday life of the citizens and to plan ahead for the future. We have assisted projects in the fields of educational and vocational training. I am very happy that these centres are so efficient in the process of training and then employing of the students who attended them. It is helping decrease unemployment in Elbasan. Now we have a project that will assist disabled persons to join the labour market. We would like as well to contribute towards the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of this city".

The Mayor of Elbasan thanked the Head of the EU Delegation to Albania for all the assistance given so far. Mr. Qazim Sejdiu noted that: "The assistance offered for the Vocational Training Centre speaks for itself. It is a success story. We are ready to present to the EU Delegation the details of another project that will contribute massively to the protection and revitalisation of the historical sites of the city of which we are very proud of. We are grateful to all the EU assistance."

Ambassador Lohan visited all institutions that are involved in the VET programmes in Korça as well. During the meeting he had with the Mayor of Korça, Ambassador Lohan said that: "Korça is a city with an important past and there is no doubt that it has a brilliant future ahead.

Mayor of Korça Niko Peleshi, happy with the results achieved thanks to the EU assistance told Ambassador Lohan that: "I would like to guarantee you that following the examples of the VET experience we would work to prepare other projects to benefit from other EU assistance programmes".

The European future of the Western Balkans and Turkey lies in the hands of their people



The EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn

The EU Commissioner for Enlargement held an important speech in Brussels on April 17th during the Conference "Civil Society at the Heart of the EU's Enlargement Agenda". Mr. Olli Rehn expressed the view that: "The European future of the Western Balkans and Turkey lies primarily in the hands of their people and their democratically elected leaders. It requires both political will and citizens' support. Civil society organizations can help achieving this".

In his speech Mr. Rehn spoke about the present state of the relations between the EC and all these countries. Referring to the Western Balkan countries Mr. Rehn said that "they have moved closer to the EU over the last couple of years. They have a chance to accelerate their integration with the EU this year. This depends on concrete progress in reforms".

Speaking about the Enlargement process in these countries as a whole he underlined as a significant element the fact that "Reforms are not done only for the EU, but primarily for the people of the region". The Enlargement Commissioner noted the significant role of the civil societies in improving the internal democracies.

"Balkan and Turkish civil society organizations have spread the European spirit by promoting the basic values of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. Together with independent media, they have resisted resurgent nationalism and fundamentalisms, and helped build bridges of inter-ethnic confidence. Civil society in these countries still has its challenges," he said.

Mr. Olli Rehn concluded by reconfirming the will of the European Commission to increase the financial support to civil societies.

"In the period 2008–2010 it will amount to € 130 million for the Western Balkans and Turkey. The new facility will support three types of civil society development projects: local civil society initiatives and capacity-building, especially reinforcing the role of civil society; partnerships and networks between civil society organizations in the EU and the enlargement countries; and programmes to bring journalists, young politicians, trade union leaders and teachers into contact with EU institutions," said the Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn.

Please visit the websites below or contact the Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana
www.delalb.ec.europa.eu
www.europa.eu
www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement
www.eu2008.si
 Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana, Albania:
Rruga Durrësit, 127-1, Tirana, Albania

Telephone: (355) 4 2228320 or 2230871 - 2228479 - 2234284 - 2229851 Fax: (355) 4 2230752 or 2274412
 e-mail: Delegation-Albania@ec.europa.eu

Publisher: Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission

If you would like to receive the next edition please email: suela.thanasi@ec.europa.eu or contact the Delegation of the European Commission to Tirana