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PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

Ambassador Helmuth Lohan tours the North of Albania to observe and discuss with locals the contribution of EC assistance to the country's development

The Head of the Delegation of the European Commission, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan starts tomorrow a two-day tour in the north of the country where he will take stock of the EC-funded projects. During his visits to project sites, Ambassador Lohan will give special attention to the local communities in order to find out first hand and discuss with them the impact of the projects in a diverse range of areas from environmental clean-up, to judicial and administrative infrastructure, border management and many more.

In Rubik, Ambassador Lohan will visit the site of the copper smelting plant where an EC fund of almost € 4,400,000 has contributed to the clean up and isolation of the hazardous waste of copper and zinc. The plant has been polluting the surrounding area since the late 1930s and exposing the population to hazardous air, ground and water contamination. Earlier this year, Ambassador Lohan visited a similar project, the site of the nitrate fertiliser plant in Fier, where another €1.5 million EC-funded project has once more enabled the cleaning up of the site and the betterment of environmental conditions favourable to the health of the surrounding community. The European Commission will continue its contribution to healthy environments through another action aiming at cleaning up the Chlorine-alkali plant in Vlora.

In Burrel, Ambassador Lohan will visit the Treasury Office which has benefited from a country-wide action funded by the EC with €192,300 to improve the functioning of the Treasury Department within the Ministry of Finance by improving working conditions in its district offices. Therefore, along with the Treasury Offices in various districts in the North and South of Albania, the Treasury Office of Burrel has been renovated and refurbished to bring tangible improvements in logistics and working conditions of staff that will in turn improve their internal operations and their services to the public.

In Peshkopi, Ambassador Lohan will visit the newly renovated Dibra District Court. An EC-funded project of €320,800 addressed problems such as lack of isolation rooms for defendants, a security system, fire prevention measures, computer networks as well as humidity, cracked walls etc. The newly renovated building includes one penal court room, four civil court rooms, and necessary facilities for the judges, prosecutors, defendants and the public. Furniture and equipment were also an important part of the renovation of the Court.

The visit to the Dibra District Court will be followed by that to the Property Registration Office. A newly completed project of €1,161,000 has contributed to improvements of the cadastral maps, of the Immovable Property Registration System through the supply of equipment necessary for accurate mapping in 16 such offices in Albania.

Later on, Ambassador Lohan will visit the Civil Status Office in Peshkopi to take stock of the implementation of the project on the modernisation of administrative address and civil registration systems. Mainly funded by the European Commission with €2,5 million, this project is steering Albania towards a modernised address and civil registration system an essential challenge the success of which affects many other reform processes in the country, including those in health, taxation, social security, free movement etc. EC assistance in this area has

already bore fruit in the improvements noted with voters' lists used in the June 28th general elections.

In Bllata, Dibër, Ambassador Lohan will also visit the Border Crossing Point with FYROM which is currently being constructed through a total EC fund of more than €2,7 million aiming at improving border police surveillance, patrolling and control capacities and those of the Customs Service along the entire Albanian border. The construction and enhancement of capacities of altogether 10 border crossing points between Albania and its neighbouring countries is an important step towards better control and prevention of illegal trafficking that will bring the country closer to the EU in various aspects.

Last but not least, Ambassador Lohan will visit the Special Operative Group site in Bllata, the infrastructure and technical capacities of which are being raised through a total EC fund of €1,5 million that is being spent on 17 such buildings across the country. The aim is again to improve the surveillance and control capacities of the Albanian border authorities.

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