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**EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE**



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**The European Union – Republic of Albania Security and Defence Partnership**

## [Preface]

1. The European Union (EU) and the Republic of Albania (hereinafter Albania) face a volatile and increasingly challenging security environment in Europe, inter alia due to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, where Russia attempts to change unilaterally, by force, the status quo in Europe. The EU and Albania stand united in the need to uphold and strengthen the international rules based order, in full respect of the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter.
2. The security and prosperity of the EU and Albania are interconnected and interdependent. These links have geopolitical, economic, and security dimensions, including in areas that go beyond traditional strategic issues, such as cyber and hybrid threats, space, the resilience of critical infrastructure and economic security. In view of Albania's strategic goal for the EU membership and welcoming the efforts of Albania to move forward in the accession negotiation process, the cooperation between EU and Albania on peace, security and defence will be further strengthened.
3. Relations between the EU and Albania are based on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, underpinned by shared values of democracy, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Agreement underlines the joint commitment to deepen cooperation of the parties in the field of security.
4. The EU recognised Albania's substantial progress and commitment to reforms on its EU path. In view of this, the European Council in March 2020 endorsed the Council's decision to open accession negotiations with Albania. In July 2022, the first Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations with Albania was held. The second Intergovernmental Conference on accession negotiations with Albania was held in October 2024, opening negotiations with Albania on Cluster 1 "Fundamentals". The meetings of the screening process, including for Chapter 31 "Foreign, security and defence policy", were completed in November 2023.

5. The EU and Albania have respectively adopted important strategic documents that will guide their security and defence policies for the upcoming years. The EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence adopted in 2022 sets out a clear vision for a more robust EU role in security and defence, with strong tailored partnerships at its core. Albania's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2024, highlights the importance of collaboration with allies and partners, including the EU, to address transnational challenges.
6. Albania is an important and valuable partner for the EU in the field of peace, security and defence, and an active third state participant in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), following the signature of the Agreement establishing a framework for the participation of Albania in the EU crisis management operations in 2012. Since 2016, the EU and Albania have in place the Agreement on the security procedures for the exchange of classified information.
7. In the current security environment, the strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is vital for ensuring security in Europe and beyond. As a NATO Ally, Albania is a staunch proponent of advancing EU-NATO cooperation in line with the three Joint Declarations in support of strengthening of the European and Transatlantic security. By strengthening, deepening and expanding the EU and Albania relations on peace, security and defence, the EU-Albania Security and Defence Partnership will contribute to further strengthening the mutually beneficial EU-NATO strategic partnership.
8. The EU and Albania seek to seize the momentum to further intensify cooperation to better address shared challenges. The EU and Albania therefore undertake to further develop, deepen and strengthen cooperation and dialogue across the whole range of security and defence topics, making use of existing frameworks and exploring new cooperation avenues in order to further foster their well-established and mutually reinforcing partnership.

### **General Framework**

9. The EU and Albania have decided to establish and implement a tailor-made, mutually beneficial Security and Defence Partnership that will frame their overall cooperation across the security and defence spectrum. This Security and Defence Partnership will be underpinned by a series of

dialogues and consultations to provide steering and oversight:

- ◇ Inviting Albania to relevant meetings organised by the EU dedicated to security and defence.
  - ◇ Making use of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council to ensure monitoring of the implementation of the Security and Defence Partnership and provide guidance as appropriate.
  - ◇ Establishing an annual Security and Defence Dialogue between the EU and Albania at Directors' level to discuss the broad strategic environment, thematic and geographic security and defence issues, to explore possible cooperation and, as appropriate, to prepare deliverables and ground for discussions at the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council.
  - ◇ Exploring the establishment of additional working level thematic consultations on specific domains of shared interest to prepare the EU-Albania Security and Defence Dialogue.
10. The EU and Albania will increase coordination and close cooperation in multilateral fora, including with other like-minded partners in relevant areas.
11. As the strategic partnership between the EU and NATO is of critical importance to their security and stability, both the EU and Albania will seek additional opportunities to strengthen, deepen and expand this partnership in the framework or the implementation of the three Joint Declarations on EU-NATO cooperation through further exchanges at working and senior official levels.

### **Areas of Cooperation**

12. In addition to exchanges on security and defence policy and relevant regional security, as well as strategic and geopolitical issues in order to better align each other's policy, the EU and Albania will hold targeted experts' consultations and boost cooperation in the following areas:

#### EU CSDP missions and operations

13. The EU and Albania will further strengthen and expand their longstanding cooperation in the field of crisis management. Albania will continue its participation in EU CSDP missions and operations. The EU and Albania will continue developing and strengthening Albania's military forces and

capabilities, including to consolidate their participation in EU military CSDP missions and operations. This may entail, once decided, Albania's contribution to the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity deployment, as well as participation in EU military exercises, including live ones, as appropriate. The EU and Albania will examine options for developing Albania's civilian capacities with a view to increasing experts' participation in EU civilian CSDP missions.

#### Support to Ukraine

14. The EU and Albania share the goal of providing support to Ukraine as long as necessary to prevail and defend its political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. To that end, the EU and Albania will explore options to streamline joint efforts, including the potential participation of Albania in EU initiatives that aim to increase the defence capacities of Ukraine, in line with the established procedures and EU's institutional framework.

#### Countering hybrid threats

15. The EU and Albania will further deepen cooperation on countering hybrid threats, including the follow-up to the Hybrid Risk Survey completed in 2020, and the implementation of its recommendations, exploring the possibility of providing support, as appropriate.
16. The EU and Albania will share best practices in developing strategies, structures and policies, including diplomatic responses to hybrid threats, and will increase cross-participation in exercises as appropriate.
17. The EU and Albania will explore opportunities of deepening their cooperation on research and analyses of hybrid threats, including through the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.

#### Cyber issues

18. The EU and Albania will deepen the existing cooperation, including by enhancing regular

exchanges on the cyber threat landscape, respective policy frameworks and practical cooperative efforts in multilateral fora, including the UN. The EU and Albania will also exchange on tools to prevent, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities, including through diplomatic measures.

19. The EU will further support Albania's efforts to strengthen cyber resilience, including through cyber capacity building and rapid response assistance, where relevant.

#### Capacity building in security and defence

20. The EU and Albania are cooperating under the European Peace Facility to enhance Albania's national security, stability and resilience in the defence sector. The EU will continue to support the Albanian Armed Forces efforts to enhance their operational effectiveness and interoperability, and thereby better protect civilians in crises and emergencies.

#### Strategic communications and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)

21. The EU and Albania will proactively share information on threat assessments as regards foreign information manipulation and interference through bilateral exchanges and explore operational cooperation.
22. The EU will further support Albania in building capacities of its institutions to counter FIMI and to increase information resilience of the population.

#### Non-proliferation and disarmament, conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons (SALW)

23. The EU and Albania will deepen exchanges on non-proliferation, disarmament, conventional arms, and small arms and light weapons, including in the context of the implementation of the regional Roadmap on small arms and light weapons control in the Western Balkans, and the EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking.

#### Counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism



24. The EU and Albania will explore opportunities for further cooperation between relevant actors on counterterrorism, prevention and countering violent extremism related matters. This cooperation should be based on an all of society approach and guided by the Joint Action Plan on Counter-terrorism for the Western Balkans and relevant implementing arrangements.

#### Consultations on relevant defence initiatives, tools and instruments

25. The EU and Albania will consult on their respective defence initiatives, tools and instruments related to security and defence. They will i.a. explore the possibilities and interest for Albania's participation in PESCO projects, in line with the general conditions under which third States could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual projects, as well as in the initiatives related to defence industry. Possibilities for establishing mutually beneficial cooperation between Albania and the European Defence Agency (EDA) will also be explored, in line with respective processes.

#### Training and education

26. The EU and Albania will continue cooperation in the field of training and education related to CSDP and crisis management, including further developing cooperation with the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). The activities will include participation in the ESDC activities, organising training and education activities in collaboration with an ESDC Network Member as the ESDC Associate Network Partner.

#### Integrated border management

27. Building on the existing close cooperation in this area, including in the context of the EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans, and close engagement with Home Affairs agencies, the EU and Albania will explore further opportunities for cooperation in the external dimension of integrated border management, including managing irregular migration, fight against transnational organised crime, human trafficking and international trafficking, with a particular focus on trafficking of arms, drugs and cultural property. The EU and Albania will further explore opportunities for cooperation in the context of European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

Women, Peace and Security

28. The EU and Albania are committed to the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which consists of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its follow-up resolutions, and will ensure that gender equality is integrated in their areas of cooperation on security and defence.
29. Therefore, the EU and Albania will exchange good practices on implementing Women, Peace and Security commitments, and continue close collaboration to ensure gender equality as a political and security related priority and with an aim to reinforce joint responses to current and emerging security and geopolitical shifts.

Protection of cultural heritage in conflict and crisis situations

30. Driven by their mutual values of diversity, inclusion, and the preservation of shared histories, the EU and Albania are committed to join forces, in a collaborative effort, to safeguard cultural heritage, also recognising that crimes related to cultural heritage, especially trafficking in cultural property, represent a threat to their security. The EU and Albania will exchange good practices in the field of protection of cultural heritage from preventive measures and emergency response to criminal investigations, technological innovations, sustainable development policies, and international cooperation.

External aspects of economic security

31. The EU and Albania will exchange practices on the external aspects of their respective economic security policies within the context of peace, security and defence, with the aim to address the risks that both face while maintaining and improving a well-functioning international rules-based system to continue to benefit from an open economy.

**Way Forward**

32. The areas identified in the Security and Defence Partnership will be reviewed regularly in the framework of the EU-Albania Security and Defence Dialogue, taking stock of progress made, giving further impetus, and discussed at the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council with a view to exploring ways to further strengthen and develop the cooperation.
33. The content of the Security and Defence Partnership will be reviewed as appropriate.

(End)