

Meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus and the Minister for European Integration of Albania (3 December 2012)

Caption: On 3 December 2012, a meeting is held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nicosia between Erato Kozakou-Markoullis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, and Majlinda Bregu, Albanian Minister for European Integration, in order to discuss Albania's potential accession to the EU. Highlights of the meeting include the assertion that EU enlargement in the Western Balkans is one of the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the expression of appreciation on the part of the Albanian Minister at Cypriot support for Albania's European integration.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus. The Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the Minister of European Integration of Albania, 03/12/2012. [ON-LINE]. [Nicosia]: Republic of Cyprus, [04.12.2012]. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.cy/mfa/mfa2006.nsf/All/66EC163781E16B52C2257ACA0025F7C7?OpenDocument>.

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Publication date: 01/12/2013



The Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the Minister of European Integration of Albania - 03/12/2012

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, met today at the Foreign Ministry with the Minister of European Integration of Albania, Mrs Majlinda Bregu, who was on a working visit to Cyprus at the invitation of the Foreign Minister under her competence as President of the General Affairs Council of the EU (enlargement aspect). Mrs Bregu's visit follows the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Mr Edmond Panariti, to Cyprus, on October 4, and the visit of Minister Marcoullis to Tirana, on July 31.

During the consultations the European perspective of Albania was at the top of the agenda, particularly in view of the Conclusions of the General Affairs Council on Albania of December 11. Following their meeting, the two Ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania on Cooperation in the field of European Integration.

In her statement to the media, the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed her happiness to welcome the Albanian Minister of European Integration to Cyprus, noting that EU enlargement to the Western Balkans has been one of the priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was evident, as she said, by the fact that her first visits after the assumption of the Cyprus EU Presidency were in the Western Balkans, which included a trip to Tirana on July 31, during which there were very fruitful consultations. In addition, as the Minister noted, Minister Bregu's visit comes also as a continuation of the successful visit of the Albanian Foreign Minister, Mr Edmond Panariti, in Nicosia, on the 4th of October.

"In this context, I have reiterated to Minister Bregu that the Cyprus Presidency has been evidently fully supportive to the European integration of Albania and has been encouraged by the dedication of the Albanian Government to score swift process of necessary reforms that will bring Albania closer to the EU," stated the Minister, adding that the MoU in the field of European Integration, which was signed earlier, constitutes further proof of the commitment of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to assist Albania in its European path.

As the Foreign Minister noted, during their meeting with Minister Bregu, views were exchanged and developments were assessed as regards the European perspective of Albania, particularly in the context of the conclusions on enlargement that will be the topic of discussion of the General Affairs Council (GAC) of December 11, which will examine the enlargement package submitted by the European Commission for the year 2012 and which will be presided over by Dr Marcoullis.

"As we have declared from the very start of our Presidency, we will be presiding over all Council formations in an honest broker manner, aiming at achieving the best possible outcome arising from the prerogative and unanimous decision of the 27 Council members," noted the Minister of Foreign Affairs. She also indicated that regarding Albania, the Council is called to address the Commission's recommendation on granting candidate status to Albania, subject to completion of key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform, as well as revision of parliamentary rules of procedure.

To this end, Dr Marcoullis encouraged Mrs Bregu to keep on persevering to make the goal of obtaining candidate status a tangible reality, for the benefit of all generations of Albanians, while she stressed that the Republic of Cyprus will continue to support this goal and the ultimate integration of Albania to the EU. The Minister also highlighted the importance of proceeding with further concrete steps in relation to the implementation of the 12 key priorities, "which constitute a sine qua non for the ongoing advancement of the European perspective of Albania".

Finally, the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the belief that this is an achievable target which will not only integrate Albania in the European structures, but also aims at enhancing regional cooperation and

good neighbourly relations.

On her part, the Albanian Minister of European Integration expressed her pleasure to be in Cyprus and thanked the Foreign Minister for inviting her, reiterating once again the appreciation for Cyprus' support towards the process of Albania's European integration, "not only during the Presidency", as she indicated. Congratulating Cyprus on its EU Presidency, Mrs Bregu said that "you have done it very well and, considering the fact that Cyprus is one of the smallest countries in the EU, having the Presidency even in times of crisis is a big challenge, and I think you did it correctly and very well."

Noting that they look forward to the decision expected to be made by GAC on the proposal of the European Commission to grant the candidate status to Albania, Mrs Bregu pointed out that the EU integration process is of great interest for the Albanians and the Republic of Albania, "and this process is taken with seriousness and being quite sincere in always trying to deliver the main message that we still stick to the merit-based approach of EU integration". To this end, the Albanian Minister stated that they welcome very much the strict and clear judgment by the EU member states, and expressed hope that "this strict and clear judgment will continue to be there, despite the financial crisis and some climate of not always trusting when it comes to the deliverables that the countries should make for EU membership".

Referring to Albania's achievements during the last years, Mrs Bregu noted that the most important one is that the EU agenda has brought in a lot of motivation and that is how it should continue to be, in order "to bring the inspiration, the motivation and the good spirit based on which the EU itself was arranged". She added that "this is the most important message that should be sent to our countries, being potential candidate countries or candidate countries or countries that have opened negotiations, that the EU is a tangible process and we are going to be part and members of the EU, to the day not only that the EU by protocols, bureaucracy and timing will decide, but when reforms will take place as they take place in other EU member states." Mrs Bregu assured that they are committed to intensify our efforts and to build on the progress made to advance on these reforms.

Finally, as regards to the MoU signed earlier, the Albanian Minister expressed her gladness that the administrations of the two countries will have the chance to work closely together, by exchanging views and expertise, and organise trainings and visits on joint studies or research.

(Last Update: 4/12/2012)

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