

WEEKLY NEWS

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Premier Berlusconi: Albania is transformed into a reliable partner

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Berisha and the visiting Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi attended the signing ceremony which followed the official negotiations between the two delegations.

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Premier Berisha and Montenegrin Premier Djukanovic agree to promote cooperation and develop concrete projects

Prime Minister Sali Berisha welcomed today the Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic and the delegation accompanying him. Following the tete-a-tete meeting of the two premiers, the two delegations held negotiations that focused on encouragement of a new vision of bilateral cooperation, European and Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and the regional cooperation.

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Premier Berisha expresses deep gratitude to President Bush and US administration for certification of Albania NATO Accession Protocol

Prime Minister Sali Berisha expresses to the US President George Bush deep gratitude for the two important messages that he sent to the Senate on November 21, 2008 by means of which President Bush certifies Albania and Croatia NATO membership

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Premier Berlusconi: Albania is transformed into a reliable partner



- News conference of Prime Minister Sali Berisha and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi

Prime Minister Sali Berisha welcomed Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who paid today an official visit to Albania. Following the

official negotiations between the two delegations and the signing ceremony of several agreements and cooperation acts between the two countries, the two prime ministers gave a joint news conference.

Premier Berisha: This is a great day for me, my country and all the Albanians because the great friend of the Albanians, the worthy friend who has always loved and helped a lot my country and nation, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi is today here, among us. The Albanians have always seen in Premier Berlusconi a great and worthy friend and they will always have him. I have met often my great friend Silvio Berlusconi in hard times and other times.

But, of course, my meeting today gives me a great pleasure because in front of you, the Albanians and Italians, we signed deals that reach the value of 2 billion Euros. But, as I told to my friend Berlusconi, other deals worth 3 billion Euros will be signed soon with other Italian firms which naturally will pave the way to new investments.

Three years ago, in Italy I held a meeting with Italian entrepreneurs, organized by the Institute for Foreign Trade. My presentation was made with a deep feeling of sadness in my heart because I knew that thousands of them had left my country.

And when an investor abandons his investments and leaves the country, this is harmful for the whole country. I promised to do my best to make my country as attractive and friendly for the investors so that their projects turned into success story in Albania.

And this day came. We have made a lot over these three years in cooperation with the Italian government and embassy, the Institute for Foreign Trade and I am very pleased that as old friends to attend this day event.

After I expressed deep gratitude for the great assistance and solidarity that Italy has demonstrated to my country in the course of the recent 20 years, I demanded to stimulate the Italian investors to invest in Albania, as this is rather important.

I would like to assure them they will have all the facilities and in GoA they will find a friend of their efforts here. We have implemented deep reforms and

Albania is the country with the lowest taxes in Europe, we have reduced bureaucracy for opening of a new business in Albania and now the business can be registered in half an hour in a single window, we have reduced by 2/3 the licenses and permits and we are

establishing the one stop shop for the remaining licenses and permits.

We discussed with Premier Berlusconi cooperation in all the fields, firstly in the energy field. According to my vision, Albania should be transformed into a small energy superpower in the Balkans. We have a potential of 20 billion kWh energy to be exploited; we have a great wind potential; we have licensed the production of more than 1 thousand MW of wind energy, but there is the capacity to produce 4 thousand other MW in this sector.

We are determined to proceed with production of nuclear energy and I see in Italy the first partner to cooperate in this sector.

Also we discussed the close cooperation even in the field of tourism so that the Italian investors come and invest in this important sector for the Albanian economy. We are building the first industrial parks; some of them will be administered by the Italians. However, we still need the Italian cooperation, a rather worthy cooperation in hundreds of projects throughout the country. It is important for us a re-orientation of this cooperation. Firstly, toward support for the small and middle size enterprises in Albania. Secondly, Albania agriculture needs Italy powerful support. More than 40% of Albania population lives in the rural zones. My government will launch a project on increase of olive plantations targeting to plant 20 million seedlings over a 4-5 year period. I found the good understanding and support of my friend. Both of us love eternity and olive is the symbol of peace and eternity.

Also I demanded the assistance of the Italian government for backing GoA initiative to reach the digital age. My nation has the youngest age in Europe. We are extending the Internet connection in all the schools, but this is just the first step.

I got the promise of support in this direction. We agreed to cooperate closely even in the sector of education, culture and health.

The common fight against criminality is a task of our governments. We agreed to continue the brilliant cooperation in this field. I promised to the premier that on the coming week we can begin the procedures for transferring to Albania of the Albanian inmates who are actually suffering their sentence in Italian prisons.

Also my government is willing to sign all the necessary agreements so that to consolidate cooperation in fight against organized criminality. Thus, we agreed on cooperation in all the fields.

I thank you once again, Mr. Prime Minister, for coming here today. I believe this visit will make an historic contribution in the relations between our two countries. Thank you once again!

Premier Berlusconi: Thank you very much my friend Sali, Prime Minister of Albania, for the very warm hospitality provided today. Also I thank you for that very good elucidation that you made to cooperation between our two countries; it is a cooperation that has existed in the past, but which I hope it will further intensify in the future.

It is to Italy's credit to be a close friend of Albania during these laborious decades that have characterized the Albanian life. All of us are aware of the fact that Albania comes from a savage dictatorship and a horrible ideology. And following that very difficult period for the Albanians, it was found a solution through the very close cooperation between our two police forces, the two countries and there have been no problems.

I hope to proceed with the very close cooperation between our two countries and Italy will strongly support that. It has always been a strong supporter of Albania in these years and it will continue to be as such.

We are aware of the relations between the two countries. The presence of half a million Albanians living in Italy is also evidence of the close relations. There are 85 thousand Albanian pupils registered in the Italian schools and along with them are about 18 thousand Albanian students that attend Italian universities. The good command of the Italian language here in Albania makes our relations easier. They say that 80% of the Albanian population speaks and understands Italian language and I take the opportunity to thank Premier Berisha for choosing to use the language of my country, the Italian during our meeting and during the news conference as well.

Thank You!

As my friend Sali emphasized, we are friends for a long time and both of us are part of the European community of freedom and democracy, i.e. of the European Democratic Party in which we cooperate for a long time. Thus, our cooperation has begun since an early time and is based on the identity of values and principles and is characterized by countless work contacts among our colleagues. The Italian firms that signed several agreements for implementation of the works, unveiled in this conference as well, will constantly enjoy GoA support and will have guarantee for simplification of bureaucratic procedures. I emphasize that the Albanian authorities will always find the opportunity to facilitate their activity and reduce bureaucracy in the two premiers, me and Mr. Berisha and the government of Albania as well. And it will not happen as it often does- and you are witnesses of this- with Italian firms when they operate overseas. Albania has made a very important achievement and I believe, even thanks to Italian support, Albania joins the North Atlantic Alliance. Italy will be proud of being the first advocate of Albania at the moment when it will

decide to forward the demand for receiving the candidate status to the EU. I have been pursuing this policy for a long time and I shall continue to do so because I believe that all these ethnic conflicts and international conflicts that unfortunately still continue in the Balkans will come to an end once and for all only with these Balkan countries joining the family of the European countries.

We also worked today with Mr. Prime Minister on some specific points of cooperation. He comes from the medical domain and I work perfectly well with him, but he seems to me like an entrepreneur though. We agreed on some very specific cooperation, we fixed an appointment with the Albanian ambassador to Rome, on this Friday, to settle some initial procedures on which we agreed on and to settle them with pragmatism which perhaps not all the politicians have, but in this case we have done our best, beginning from this Friday.

I conclude my speech through making a public invitation to Premier Berisha that following the victory at the coming elections here in Albania to participate in the weekly lectures at the Freedom and Democracy University, due to be launched in March of the coming year in Italy. I believe it will be a real pleasure to listen to his lecture so that to understand better how a people can pass from total dictatorship into complete democracy.

I thank you once again Mr. Prime Minister for the hospitality, thank you everybody!

Following are some questions made during the news conference:

Question: Mr. Berlusconi, you said that Italy will be proud of being the first advocate of Albania at the moment when it will decide to forward the demand for receiving the candidate status to the EU. But, what about the question of liberalization of the visa system, what is your opinion, are the visas for Albania to the EU going to be liberalized during 2009?

Premier Berlusconi: I have a very positive attitude in this direction and this was expressed even during the recent visit to Albania of the representative of my government, the Foreign Minister Franco Frattini.

Question: Mr. Berisha, Premier Berlusconi said yesterday in an interview given to the Panorama, that he will demand Albania vote to the UNO. Has this issue been part of your discussions and will GoA support the candidature, given that Germany has also forwarded such a request?

Premier Berisha: This issue was not discussed in this meeting. The issue exists and we shall discuss it honestly, open and in full cooperation, when it is the proper time.

Albania and Italy sign 6 deals and cooperation acts

The government of Albania signed today 6 deals and cooperation acts with the government of Italy and some big Italian companies. Prime Minister Sali Berisha and the visiting Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi attended the signing ceremony which followed the official negotiations between the two delegations.

-The Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Anastas Duro and Italy ambassador to Albania Saba DElia signed the deal in the field of labor and the follow-up enforcement protocol.

-Minister of Finance Ridvan Bode signed with Italy ambassador to Albania Saba DElia the Framework Agreement for Cooperation and Development.

-The Minister of Economy, Energy and Trade Genc Ruli and the Executive Manager of the Falcione Edmondo Falcione signed the permit for construction of a regasification plant in Fieri region.

-Likewise, the Minister of Economy, Energy and Trade Genc Ruli and the President of the Moncada Costruzioni Group Salvador Moncada signed a joined statement for building of a large wind farm in Southern and South-eastern Vlora as well as the interconnection line with constant energy between the Italian transmission network and the Albanian network.

-The Minister of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications Sokol Oldashi and the Executive Manager of the Colacem Dr. Colaiacovo signed the Joint Statement for construction of a cement factory in Balldre.

-The Minister of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunications Sokol Oldashi and the President of the Todini Costruzioni Generali, Ms. Todini signed the Joint Statement for construction of the Levan-Dames road segment.

Government will have more devotion to facilitate the activity of the local and foreign business.

Prime Minister Sali Berisha attended today the opening ceremony of the first Annual Economic Forum of Business organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana in cooperation with the Klik Ekspo Group. The premier praised the role of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana, founders of this institution, as well as of all the Albanian businessmen who became the main promoters of the country development.

While considering the business as an essential partner in the integration and locomotive of development of the country and society, the premier ensured that the government will have more devotion to facilitate through new measures the activity of the local and foreign business. The premier ensured that the constant dialogue established over these three years with the business will continue even in the future through considering the business institutions as irreplaceable for the country, the credibility, expertise and trust they convey to the partners in Europe and the region. We as a government, said the premier, shall do our best to support, to facilitate so that yours are success stories. Further on, Premier Berisha attended the opening of the 15-th edition of the Annual International Fair of Tirana, organized by Klik Ekspo Group and visited the pavilions of this fair.

Premier Berisha and Montenegrin Premier Djukanovic agree to promote cooperation and develop concrete projects

Prime Minister Sali Berisha welcomed today the Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic and the delegation accompanying him. Following the tete-a-tete meeting of the two premiers, the two delegations held negotiations that focused on encouragement of a new vision of bilateral cooperation, European and Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and the regional cooperation. The two counterparts considered the bilateral relations as very good and expressed the willingness to consolidate further all-round friendship and cooperation between the two countries. Premier Berisha thanked Premier Djukanovic for the visit and considered this an important contribution toward increase of this cooperation. Also Premier Djukanovic considered Tirana visit and the bilateral negotiations as a brilliant opportunity to mark a new stage in the relations between the two countries. Premier Djukanovic expressed congratulations for Albania getting NATO membership invitation. Premier Berisha expressed to his counterpart the support of the government of Albania for Montenegrin integration efforts into the Euro-Atlantic structures. The progress of our countries toward the EU, said Premier Berisha, is to our best interest and of the region as well. During the meeting the two sides agreed to intensify the efforts of increasing the economic cooperation that is experiencing a higher pace following coming into force of the Free Trade Agreement. They shared the same assessment of opening the borders to create a large market for investments. During the negotiations, the two delegations focused especially on development of concrete projects that increase cooperation between the two countries like the infrastructure project of building Adriatiko-Joniane highway, the examination of establishment of Durrës-Tivar sea line and Tiranë-

Podgoricë air line. Premier Berisha expressed the commitment of the government of Albania to create to the Montenegrin government all the necessary facilities for Podgoricë-Plavë highway, several km of which pass through Albanian territory. Premier Berisha said that work is progressing quickly toward improvement of the infrastructure that connects the two countries like Shkodër-Hani i Hotit, Shëngjin-Ulqin and Vermosh-Shkodër. While considering Shkodra Lake an important asset for the two countries, the two premiers emphasized the importance of common projects for protection of the eco-systems and establishment of the transport services that connect the two sides of the lake. Both sides said that cooperation in the field of tourism between Albania and Montenegro in which both sides have great tourist potentials is another field of mutual interest. Premier Berisha said that development of a regional tourist area will increase the benefits for the two countries. The two sides got committed for intensification of cooperation between the two countries even in the field of culture, education, security, fight against criminality etc.

Speaking about regional developments, Premier Berisha said that the decision of the government of Montenegro to recognize Kosova Independence serves to peace and stability of the region. Premier Djukanovic expressed his positive assessment of the constructive role of the Albanian government for solution of Kosova issue.

Premier Berisha meets Head of Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament Lozançiq

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the Head of Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament Niko Lozançiq. Welcoming Mr. Lozançiq, Premier Berisha considered the relations between the two countries as very good and based on traditionally good relations. Premier Berisha highlighted the importance of intensification of relations between the two countries in all the fields of development especially in the field of economic cooperation as both countries have great potentials. In this direction, the premier emphasized that GoA has undertaken several successful reforms to improve the climate of foreign direct investments and that Bosnia-Herzegovina investors are welcome to invest in Albania. The Head of Bosnia-Herzegovina Parliament Lozançiq thanked Premier Berisha for the hospitality and conveyed greetings of Prime Minister Nikola Spiric and President Haris Silajxhiç.

Mr. Lozançiq said that Premier Spiric is going to visit Albania soon and that the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina has a great political willingness to sign several agreements of economic cooperation and other projects. In the context of this cooperation, Mr. Lozançiq emphasized that work is underway for visa liberalization between the two countries.

Premier Berisha: Reforms will experience no slow-down during electoral year

During meeting today of the Democratic Party Parliamentary group, Premier Berisha said that the governing majority considers the sweeping reforms in all the fields its top priority and that the reforms should not stop although we are in an electoral year. Speaking about the economic reforms, Premier Berisha said they are of vital importance for the country and the government proceeds with several laws and decisions that target to facilitate all procedures for the business climate and investments. Premier Berisha appreciated as rather important even reform in the health sector and he reminded that the health system was found bankrupt during the electoral campaign that preceded the Democratic Party coming to power.

Further on, Premier Berisha said that reforms should continue even in the Armed Forces as they are vital for their consolidation as a NATO member country. Premier Berisha highlighted during his speech that the reforms have as a basic document the obligations stemming from the European Commission Report and the Stabilization-Association Agreement.

Premier Berisha expresses deep gratitude to President Bush and US administration for certification of Albania NATO Accession Protocol

Prime Minister Sali Berisha expresses to the US President George Bush deep gratitude for the two important messages that he sent to the Senate on November 21, 2008 by means of which President Bush certifies Albania and Croatia NATO membership arguing that it will produce only positive effects for the USA and its security.

Through these messages, President Bush confirms to the Senate that Albania and Croatia NATO membership will not influence at all in the US capability of fulfilling the requirements in the field of defense and security beyond the Euro-Atlantic zone and it also encourages the ally countries to finalize as soon as possible the ratification procedures of the Croatia and Albania NATO Accession protocols.

The government of Albania positively assesses the messages of President Bush as another expression of the brilliant relations between Albania and our strategic ally, the United States of America as well as of the close friendship and solidarity that exists between the Albanian nation and the great friendly American nation.

Ambassador Walker praises GoA and Premier Berisha contribution for Kosova independence and implementation of major reforms

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the Head of OSCE Kosova Verification Mission, Ambassador William Walker.

Welcoming Ambassador Walker, Premier Berisha considered it an honor the opportunity of receiving a friend of the Albanians and a real hero the activity of whom represents the highest and most meaningful expression of the human consciousness as well as a worthy contribution for making evident Miloscevic crimes and about which the Albanians will be forever grateful. The history of the Albanians is that of human sacrifice for freedom.

On his part, Ambassador Walker cordially thanked Premier Berisha for the reception and highly assessed the contribution that Premier Berisha and the government of Albania have made for the solution of Kosova issue and its independence.

Likewise, Ambassador Walker positively assessed the great achievements of the government of Albania especially in fight against organized crime and corruption and praised the extraordinary efforts that GoA is making for building the important infrastructure for the country. Also he pointed to Durres-Kuks road which is of a regional character.

Both dignitaries further discussed the recent developments in the region and shared the same view that Belgrades non-realistic approach does not serve to Kosova stability and the region as well.

Premier Berisha: Decentralization process is decisive for consolidation of democracy and sustainable development

Prime Minister Sali Berisha attended today the proceedings of the General Assembly of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South Eastern Europe (NALAS), organized by the Albanian Association of Municipalities. Also attending this activity was Mr. Tarzan Milosevic, President of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities as well as representatives of international local authorities. In his speech delivered on this occasion, Premier Berisha expressed cordial thanks to the organizers of the meeting for their decision on organization of this important event in Tirana.

The premier highlighted that the government of Albania considers the decentralization process one of the greatest efforts in the recent three years, a decisive condition for consolidation of democracy in Albania and for having a sustainable and harmonic development of the country.

Premier Berisha: We support EULEX deployment as important for peace, stability and integration

Prime Minister Sali Berisha held a meeting with the Prime Minister of Kosova Hashim Thaci. Both prime ministers were in Skopje to attend celebrations on occasion of the 100 anniversary of the Congress of Manastir. The two premiers discussed bilateral relations and the recent developments in Kosova. They expressed their determination for consolidation of cooperation between the two countries in all the fields. Premier Berisha said that the government of Albania (GoA) is following with great attention these developments and believes that every project that creates the impression of a partition in the North constitutes a great peril to peace and stability. Secondly, GoA believes that it is its absolute obligation, of the government of Kosova and of all the other governments to provide greater guarantees for the freedom of minorities.

Premier Berisha meets Head of DPA Menduh Thaçi

During his Skopje visit, Premier Berisha met today afternoon with the Head of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) Mr. Menduh Thaçi. During this meeting were exchanged views on developments in the two countries.

Premier Berisha positively assessed the contribution of the Albanian factor in developments in Macedonia as well as the role and contribution of DPA not just in governance, but even now in opposition. Premier Berisha said that the government of Albania considers as rather important the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and the progress made in this direction.

Premier Berisha meets DUI leader Ali Ahmeti

Prime Minister Sali Berisha met today in Skopje with the chairman of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) in Macedonia Ali Ahmeti to discuss developments in Albania and Macedonia as well as the further increase of cooperation between the two countries.

The premier praised the contribution that Mr. Ahmeti and DUI, part of the ruling coalition in Macedonia, have constantly made for the governance of the country. They expressed their willingness to further cooperation between the two countries.

On his part, Mr. Ahmeti thanked Premier Berisha for his assistance and commitment and of the government of Albania as well for holding activities in the framework of this jubilee.

Premier Berisha and Premier Gruevski discuss mutual cooperation and common projects

Prime Minister Sali Berisha is in Skopje to attend the festive activities on occasion of the 100-th anniversary of the Congress of Manastir. Today by noon he held a warm and friendly meeting with the Prime Minister of Macedonia Nikola Gruevski.

Both interlocutors pointed to the very good relations between the two countries and discussed the potential of further intensification and deepening of the bilateral and regional cooperation.

Both prime ministers focused especially on development of concrete projects that promote cooperation between the two countries.

During the meeting both sides expressed their interest for a full cooperation in fight against criminality, drafting of a new legal framework, a new agreement on management of the common waters, their protection, the integrated border control, the new customs border points etc.

Premier Berisha took the opportunity to express to Premier Gruevski thanks for the ceremony that is organized today in the Macedonian capital for the 100-th anniversary of the Congress of Manastir and the Albanian alphabet.

Premier Berisha: GoA will mobilize all necessary funds to reach digital age as soon as possible

Prime Minister Sali Berisha delivered a greeting message today to the National Conference on Information Society, which is holding its proceedings at the venues of the "Tirana International" Hotel.

At the opening speech of the proceedings of this conference, Premier Berisha expressed the willingness of the government to mobilize all necessary funds to reach the digital age as soon as possible.

While listing several projects that the government of Albania has undertaken in cooperation with the international organizations, Premier Berisha pointed to the initiative to provide Internet connection in every school in cooperation with the UNDP, the cooperation with USAID for three main projects like e-taxes, e-business, e-procurement, as well as cooperation with the OSCE for the e-register of the population.

Further on, Premier Berisha expressed thanks to all the foreign donors for their contribution made toward use of the Information Communication Technology in Albania.

Premier Berisha meets with representatives of FIAS, MIGA and World Bank

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today representatives of FIAS, MIGA and World Bank headed by Mr. Dermot Coffey, Program Manager of Invest in the Western Balkans. Attending the meeting

was also Mrs. Camille Nuamah, the World Bank Country Manager.

The target of this visit, by request of the government of Albania, was proposal of a project to support GoA promoting Albania toward FDI and reorganize the relevant supporting institutional framework.

They presented to the premier the most important aspects of a program that helps Albania become attractive to FDI and for the creation of an institutional cooperation in this aspect. They presented successful models of Ireland, Scotland, and Singapore and emphasized that the basic philosophy developed in these countries, is proposed to develop in Albania as well targeting to improve further the business climate through simplification of procedures as well as to generate investments more and more.

The vision of the government, said the premier, coincides with the proposal of this specialized group in this direction.

Premier Berisha: Involvement of civil society in monitoring corruption will make more efficient fight against it

Prime Minister Sali Berisha said in the meeting of the Council of Ministers that a greater involvement of the civil society in monitoring corruption is needed. A greater involvement of civil society in monitoring corruption, emphasized the premier, would make fight against it more efficient. The premier emphasized that development of a close cooperation with the civil society will consolidate further the monitoring mechanism of the state institutions.

Premier Berisha: Law on financing religious institutions is evidence of their deserved respect

Prime Minister Sali Berisha considered the Agreement signed between the government and the religious communities about a month ago as historic and added that adjusts the relations of the state with these communities.

The premier said during the meeting of the Council of Ministers that this Agreement defines in a crystal clear way the state will draft and approve a law on financing the religious institutions, which the premier considered a necessity.

GoA has set biggest budget in country history for higher education over 2009

Accompanied by the Minister of Education and Sciences Fatos Beja, Prime Minister Sali Berisha paid a visit today to the Kristal university campus on occasion of inauguration of its new venues. Appreciating this investment as an important contribution made for improving standards of the Albanian higher education, Premier Berisha said that the government encourages participation of the private sector in the education sector. While considering education as the top priority, Premier Berisha said that for the first time the government has set for 2009 the biggest budget for the higher education worth 100 million USD.

Premier Berisha meets Chairman of New Democracy party in Macedonia Imer Selmani

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today a delegation from the New Democracy party in Macedonia headed by its chairman Imer Selmani. The premier said that he is following with attention and interest the developments in Macedonia and pointed to the necessity of cooperation between the Albanian political forces about important issues of the Albanians there. The premier positively assessed the Ohrid agreement as an excellent and extremely important document that has progressed in a positive way and expressed his belief that in the future will be taken steps ahead toward its full implementation. On his part, the Chairman of New Democracy party in Macedonia Imer Selmani praised Albania progress in the road of reforms and pointed to the EU Report on these reforms.

Premier Berisha: GoA energy policies protect interests of strata in need

Prime Minister Sali Berisha delivered a greeting message today to the 1-st Social Forum of the Energy Community. Attending the forum were senior officials of the energy and social affairs from the EU member countries and the region, representatives of the consumer organizations and of the industries. Also was attending the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Albania Ambassador Helmuth Lohan. Premier Berisha said that while pursuing its energy policy, the government of Albania (GoA) has protected the interests of the strata in need. In October 2007, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the European Community signed the Memorandum of Understanding on social issues in the context of the Energy Community.

Premier Berisha: Government is developing a sustainable supportive policy towards book

Prime Minister Sali Berisha, accompanied by his spouse Mrs. Liri Berisha, visited today evening the 11-th Tirana 2008 book fair, at the venues of the Palace of Congresses. While stopping in front of the stands of the fair- in this current edition are displayed about 50 thousand Albanian and foreign book titles- Premier Berisha expressed his satisfaction at the growing attention to the book which is confirmed even by the organization of this fair, among the biggest. Appreciating the book fair as a great event for the life of the country, Premier Berisha highlighted that a sustainable supportive policy towards book is a government priority.

Premier Berisha meets US ambassador to Albania John L. Withers II

Prime Minister Sali Berisha granted an audience today morning to the US ambassador to Albania John L. Withers II. During this meeting, the American ambassador acquainted Premier Berisha with the new US post election reality and with the expected priorities of the new administration of President-elect Barack Obama. Premier Berisha appreciated that the US elections are a marked event and an historic moment for the great American nation, but even for the whole mankind that finds in the USA the most brilliant model and the greatest guarantee of freedom and its values. The premier emphasized that the relations between Albania and the USA have been and are the main priority of the government of Albania. Premier Berisha said that he is looking forward to close cooperation with President-elect Obama and the new US administration.

Premier Berisha: Financial world is in need of a new Martin Luther in financial sector

Prime Minister Sali Berisha, on a visit to Brussels, attended today as guest of honor the proceedings of the International Business and Leadership symposium. In his speech delivered to this panel, Premier Berisha appreciated the efforts of the developed countries and their commitment for resolving the financial crisis and referred to the G-20 and G-8 efforts in particular. Premier Berisha said that the world financial system needs a new Martin Luther as indispensability to define new control regulation and transparency of the private sector, especially the financial sector. Emphasizing that efforts and deeds to prevent corruption should develop not only in the public sector, but even in the private sector, Premier Berisha said that the influence

and role of this sector is rather important for the economic and social development of the country. During his speech delivered on this occasion, Premier Berisha presented some of the recent developments in Albania as well as its progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. In this context, the premier made an expose of the progress of reforms in important sectors as a result of which Albania records a notable economic growth.

Among other things, Premier Berisha highlighted government of Albania constant commitment to fight corruption in all the fields without compromise as well as to stimulate the most active participation of the foreign investors in our country.

Along with Premier Berisha the symposium was attended by Mr. Nirj Deva, a member of the European Parliament, World Bank (WB) Deputy Vice President Michael Klein, Chair of the Advisory Council of Transparency International Prof. Dr. Peter Eigen, Former Head of Enterprise Financing, European Commission Prof. Rudy Aernoudt as well as the President of the International Association for Human Values Mr. Hans-Martin Schempp.

Premier Berisha meets former President of UN General Assembly Srgjan Kerim

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the former President of the United Nations General Assembly Srgjan Kerim.

Expressing thanks to the premier for the reception, Mr. Kerim appreciated positive developments in Albania as well as results of the reforms in important sectors for the country. Mr. Kerim said that Albania is already considered a successful model of the countries that through reforms are progressing toward development. On his part, Premier Berisha said that NATO and EU integration are the two major projects of the Albanians on which is being worked intensively up to their full implementation. In this context, Premier Berisha made a presentation of the progress of the most major reforms the government is implementing in this direction.

The premier pointed to fight with zero tolerance against organized crime, corruption and informality as a decisive factor for the progress of reforms. The premier focused especially on the measures the government has taken for the constant improvement of the business climate emphasizing that present-day Albania offers very favorable conditions for the successful implementation of the foreign direct investments.

Speaking about electoral reform, Premier Berisha highlighted the commitment of the government of Albania to hold next year the best elections in the country in accordance with all the European standards.

Premier Berisha meets Hollywood actor with Albanian roots James Belushi

Prime Minister Sali Berisha put on a dinner in honor of the renowned actor of the Hollywood with Albanian roots James Belushi, who is on a visit to Albania. Mr. Belushi appreciated as a special pleasure and great emotion this second visit of his after 13 years in his country of origin that gave the identity to him. The renowned actor said he was impressed with Albania changes while he reminded Premier Berisha that his dreams about Albania while in the office of the President are becoming a reality now as a prime minister. Mr. Belushi said that Albania is on the right path and is developing at a rapid pace. He emphasized that he had the opportunity to see and touch in reality the echo he had heard in the USA of the rapid development of our country. The Hollywood actor expressed his satisfaction that, through the Canadian Balkan Resources company that operates in the mining field, is making a contribution by his image to promote the foreign direct investments in Albania. On his part, Premier Berisha expressed his pleasure at this so motivated second visit of the Hollywood actor to Albania and ensured him that the government of Albania will continue to support the foreign direct investment and the domestic investments, thus making the Albanian economy competitive in the world.

Premier Berisha: We are committed to strongly support participation of private sector in education

Premier Berisha took part today in the ceremony of awarding certificates for 26 teachers of public and private schools for attending the course organized by Center for Democratic Education (CDE) on "Teaching and Learning through critical thinking. Premier Berisha praised the initiative of this civil organization and congratulated the participants in the training course. "Through this initiative you have become an excellent example for other 40 thousand teachers in Albania", the Premier said.

The Premier assured once again that government will continue to keep education on top of its priorities, adding that his government is focused on teachers, their dignity, abilities, qualification and working conditions.

Government to stimulate development of olive culture and planting of 20 million new seedlings

Prime Minister Sali Berisha announced today, during the presentation to the Council of Ministers of the draft law on adhering of the Republic of Albania to the

international agreement of olive and olive oil, that the government will stimulate development of the olive culture with drafting of a special program and planting of 20 million new seedlings throughout the territory of the country. To encourage this initiative, Premier Berisha said that the government will draft soon a program creating all the possibilities for planting of 20 million olive seedlings and it will also develop a close cooperation with all the countries that can assist in its implementation.

Premier Berisha receives Speaker of Macedonian Parliament, Trajko Veljanovski

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the Macedonian Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski, who is on an official visit to Tirana.

Speaker Veljanovski thanked Premier Berisha for the hospitality and estimated positively the excellent political relations between the two countries and emphasized the necessity of more intensified economic and trade cooperation.

Premier Berisha hailed Macedonia's substantial progress and pace of reforms and noted the significant progress towards implementation of the Ohrid Agreement.

Premier Berisha expressed gratitude for Macedonia's recognition of the independence of Kosova considering it a great contribution to stability and development of the region.

Premier Berisha and Macedonian Parliament Speaker praised excellent political cooperation, whereas voiced the need of more consolidated economic ties between the two countries.

Premier Berisha and Veljanovski stressed the importance of regional initiatives in order to attract a greater EU attention to crucial projects in the Balkans. Premier Berisha said that with their reforms Balkan countries can provide a different image of the region and Balkan's future is optimistic as all countries of the region are totally committed to development based on the people's free initiative.

Premier Berisha and Veljanovski stressed the importance of joint regional projects, focusing on Corridor 8 project, completion of the railway between Albania and Macedonia, and facilitation of movement of citizens and goods through customs, etc.

Speaker Veljanovski and Premier Berisha stressed the importance of regional initiatives to attract a great attention of EU for major projects in the Balkans.

Premier Berisha stressed that Balkan countries, with their progress, have the possibility to show a different Balkans, and the future of the Balkans is optimistic, because its countries have an iron will in the road of development, based on free initiative of the people.

Premier Berisha: Government is providing a new platform for protection of citizens from risk

At the end of his Durrësi visit, Prime Minister Sali Berisha attended the inauguration ceremony of the fire brigade in Durrësi port, an 80 million lek investment. In his greeting speech delivered on this occasion, PM Berisha pointed to the great efforts being made to consolidate the fire brigade which is vital to save the lives of the citizens, but also to save properties, national wealth etc.

Speaking about the poor security system to risks the country inherited, PM Berisha said that Albania is in urgent need of a new attitude to risk. "The past events are bitter evidence of an unacceptable level of attitude to risk", said the premier. Further on, the premier spoke about a new platform that protects citizens from risks. In this context, he also demanded the contribution of the citizens. Further on, the fire brigade displayed its reaction during an emergency situation.

Premier Berisha follows from very close created situation of an apartment building collapse in Gjirokastra

Prime Minister Sali Berisha set off immediately to Gjirokastra town right after he got the news of the grave situation created in "11 Janari" quarter of the Southern Albanian town because of collapse of an apartment building. And he followed from very close the operation launched to cope with the created situation from this tragedy. Premier Berisha met in the beginning with the survivors of this event and got interested in their condition. He ensured that all the state structures are at the disposal of coping with the situation. At the meeting held in the Emergency Staff set up to cope with the situation, Premier Berisha demanded from all the structures the work focuses on coping with the situation, bringing out of the rubble of the persons trapped in them as well as medical assistance to the injured of this event who are actually hospitalized in Gjirokaster. The premier also visited the injured of this event in Gjirokastra regional hospital and inquired about their health condition.

Canadian investors, motivated to invest in Albania

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the President of the Canadian Cemcorp Cement Company Mr. Armand Nahmiache. Accompanying him was Mr. Tie Domi, the well-known professional ice hockey player. Mr. Domi informed the premier that he had taken his decision to come to Albania, together with Canadian investors, following their meeting a year ago,

on the sidelines of the NATO summit. He said that the echo of the major steps Albania has taken and promotion of its image to Canada urged him to visit for the first time his country of origin and show to the Canadian investors the great potentials that Albania offers. Mr. Domi said that Albania experience was more than what they expected to. Also he promised to come back to Albania, with other investors, so that to make a contribution for development of the country. Likewise, the distinguished player of Albanian descent said he would give his modest contribution for building of a sports center in Albania. The President of the Canadian Cemcorp Cement Company Mr. Armand Nahmiache expressed his interest in building a cement factory in Albania in accordance with all the standards.

Premier Berisha congratulates US President-elect Barack Obama for victory at November 4, 2008 poll

Prime Minister Sali Berisha sent a letter of congratulations to the new President-elect of the United States of America Barack Obama on occasion of his election in this post. In his letter, Premier Berisha writes:

Dear Mr. President-elect Barack Obama!

It is a special honor and pleasure for me that on behalf of the government of Albania and me in person to convey to you the most friendly greetings and most cordial wishes of your historic and spectacular victory at November 4, 2008 poll, your election in the high post of the President of the United States of America. This victory is the result of the electoral campaign, the finest of all times and a living legend of the election history, your messages that occupied the minds and hearts of the citizens of all ages and social groups, without any gender, race or ethnic belonging discrimination of your country.

By their historic vote on November 4 poll, the citizens of your nation changed not simply the power, but even the USA itself and the whole mankind. By your election, the big country of freedom has turned the dream into a reality as never before.

By their verdict in November 2008 poll, the US citizens assessed your governance project as the best platform for the further promotion of the American dream and cause, as the most brilliant vision to lead the leading country of politics, economy, peace and global security over the coming 4 years. Therefore, I take the opportunity to wish you great success in the high and noble office!

The November 4, 2008 poll for the President of the United States of America remain an historic opportunity for your people and country, but they assume a paramount importance even for the international relations and for all freedom-loving nations and peoples worldwide and which find in your

country the most brilliant example and the greatest guarantee of freedom and its values. We, Albanians, are a small nation, we have experienced in the course of our history powerful dramas, long occupations, grave partitions, savage dictatorships, but we have managed to survive and devote ourselves to building democracy and the freedom values in our country because we have found in the USA the worthy ally and friend of our just cause.

We, Albanians, preserve for your great nation the warmest and most friendly feelings of deep gratitude for the support that the American people, as the worthiest friend and ally of the Albanians, has given to our efforts for freedom and national identity.

In this context, I would like to assure you Mr. President-elect Obama that my government and all the Albanians are determined that during your mandate this brilliant tradition of friendship, alliance and cooperation gets consolidated further in all the fields to the best interest of our two peoples.

Congratulating you once again for this historic victory, I take the opportunity to express my highest estimation.

*Yours truly,
Sali BERISHA*

EC Ambassador Lohan hands over to Premier Berisha Albania 2008 Progress Report

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the Head of European Commission Delegation to Albania, Ambassador Helmuth Lohan, who handed over to the Prime Minister Albania 2008 Progress Report, as well as the European Commission Enlargement Strategy. Following their meeting, Premier Berisha and Ambassador Lohan said to the media;

Ambassador Helmuth Lohan: Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

I am pleased I handed over to the Prime Minister of Albania Mr. Sali Berisha the Enlargement Strategy and Progress Reports 2008. Mr. Prime Minister! I have made a summary of the conclusions we have reached. The European Commission enlargement strategy emphasizes that progress of the Western Balkans region toward EU membership can be accelerated if these countries meet the necessary conditions. This means that the EU potential candidates, i.e. the countries that demonstrate their willingness, can attain the status of the candidate countries.

The enlargement strategy of the European Commission implies that if the Western Balkans countries achieve to fulfill certain conditions, naturally, this will be monitored and assessed for each country of the Western Balkans region, then the European

Commission can propose to lift visa obligation during 2009. Albania 2008 Progress Report carries three sections that have to do with political criteria, economic criteria and European standards. In regard to the political criteria, the Report highlights the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law and this based on consensus between the parties. Also the Report writes that Albania has continued to play a constructive role in keeping regional stability and has developed good relations with the neighbors. Further efforts have been undertaken in fight against corruption. Perception of corruption has improved. This is the reason why in the Progress Report of the current year is not used the same language or terms as one year ago. Finally, it should be emphasized that the Parliamentary elections 2009 should be prepared properly and should be staged in that form and in accordance with the international standards. In regard to economic criteria, Albania 2008 Progress Report points to the fast economic growth of Albania that has managed to keep inflation under control. Also there is noticed the progress in the field of privatization and other improvements related to the business climate. The Progress Report also highlights the need of considerable reforms that should be implemented as the Albanian economy faces pressures of competition or the EU market forces. In regard to the European standards, I am of the opinion that Progress Report is realistic in noticing the progress made in several fields and what should be done in the future. Naturally, the Report also writes about the fields where further progress is needed to be made in the future. I don't think of a better way to describe the road traversed up to that assessment of the European Commission than to reiterate the words of Commissioner Olli Rehn at the news conference he gave about two hours ago: For Albania, the glass is half full and half empty, whatever the challenges ahead.

Premier Berisha: I received the annual European Commission Report on Albania from Ambassador Lohan and I would like to express my most cordial thanks for this EC Report. I asked Ambassador Lohan to convey to the European Commission my opinion that this report carries the most objective assessment of developments in Albania in the course of this year. To be frank with you, if it happened to be a bilateral agreement, I would sign it without any amendment. Such is the objectivity of this Report about all-round development of the country. The Report is a relevant working program for my government, but it is absolutely even an electoral program for the requirements it forwards and the problems we should resolve next year. While sharing the same view on the assessments and the objective requirements, I would like to assure you, the European Commission and the

Albanians that the station we have reached to provides a basis for achieving the numerous objectives faster, it constitutes a crystal clear road map which in every requirement forwarded and in every assessment made carries as its goal the interest of the Albanian citizens in the integration process. Our effort to meet Copenhagen criteria has been recognized objectively, but I would like to ensure the European Commission that the reforms will continue non-stop as reforms will consolidate more and more our democracy; they will make the Albanian institutions more and more functional, independent and law dependent. The consolidation of freedom and rights of the Albanian citizens is the only way of their enhancement. Our economic reforms are recognized and positively assessed. But, what has been achieved is simply a source of inspiration for us, to pursue toward further levels, criteria, other practices of economic freedom and fiscal freedom.

Fight against corruption. Ambassador Lohan highlighted the distinguished change, but it is true and I am aware that if we succeeded to come into the half bright moon, there is a long and difficult way ahead, i.e. to meet the objectives we have set; Albania among the 20 cleanest countries. Hence, I would like to close my speech through expressing gratitude and thanks for the objective assessment that the European Commission has made to the work of my government and in general to the institutions of the Albanian state over a year. I express my commitment that the government and all its agencies will have the Report as a work program and naturally, this is the obligation of all the country institutions as European and NATO integration are the projects of the century. We are very much encouraged by the Report, Thank you very much Mr. Ambassador!

President of Kosova Sejdiu: Albania successful integration process, important model for state of Kosova

Prime Minister Sali Berisha received today the President of Kosova Fatmir Sejdiu. Welcoming him, Premier Berisha considered historic the day of visit of President of independent Kosova to Albania. Appreciating the growing role of Kosova in the region, as a factor of peace and stability, Premier Berisha expressed his satisfaction with the positive developments in Kosova as well as for the recognition of Kosova state by the neighboring countries, Macedonia and Montenegro as well as by the other countries, Portugal, United Emirates and Malaysia. On his part, Kosovar President Sejdiu expressed the highest consideration for the strong support that Premier Berisha and the government of Albania have given to developments in Kosova and highlighted that Kosova will be eternally grateful for this support.