



WEEKLY NEWS

A WEEKLY BULLETIN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

YEAR 2/ NUMBER 67

22-31 DECEMBER 2008

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Congratulatory message of Premier Berisha to Albanians on occasion of New Year's Eve

Dear Albanians citizens,
My co-patriots, wherever you are,
Tonight, all of us are waiting with pleasure the New Year.
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Premier Berisha meets working group on reform of economic activities licensing system

Prime Minister Sali Berisha held a meeting with the working group leading the reform of



licensing system of the economic activities. During the meeting it was made a presentation of the proposed draft law along with the activities about which there will be required providing of the interested subjects with permits, license or proxy. The most essential feature of the draft law is that it adopts the silence is consent principle; it uses the Internet technology and the digital application forms; it ensures provide of services through One Stop Shop and simplification of the relevant procedures.

Although the law adjusts establishment of the One Stop Shop only for the licenses allowed by central government, the principles that regulate the licensing process will be obligatory even for the other authorities that issue permits or licenses.

To facilitate beginning of the National Licensing Center activity and given that the second stage of the Millennium Challenge Program that backs this project is due to be launched in early January, during the meeting it was also discussed the Council of Ministers draft that establishes this authority and that during this transition stage, up to the moment the law goes in force, will prepare all the necessary material and human infrastructure basis.

All this legal and sub-legal acts are scheduled to be formally discussed at the routine meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Premier Berisha welcomes IMF certificate of Albania two-digit economic growth

Prime Minister Sali Berisha welcomed at the meeting of the Democratic Party Parliamentary group the conclusion the IMF experts attached to the Albanian Institute of Statistics have reached to certify all the data this Institute has published regarding Albania two-digit economic growth.

The premier said that the two digit growth is the direct result of the deep fiscal and economic reforms the government has implemented and of the successful fight against corruption and organized crime. He also assured that this growth will be even higher in the future.

Premier Berisha: Lustration Law, a major moral obligation to Albanian society

During meeting of the Democratic Party Parliamentary group, Prime Minister Sali Berisha also spoke about the Lustration Law. This law, said the premier, is one of the most major moral obligations to the consciousness of Albanian society which for 45 years has experienced the most savage class struggle.

The premier said that Albania is a free and democratic country and the government will not take any step beyond the required standards for this issue.

Premier Berisha: Albanian citizens will soon travel along Northern corridor

Prime Minister Sali Berisha inspected progress of work at Thirr Kalimash tunnel, part of Durrs-Kuks highway. Premier Berisha congratulated the "Bechtel-



Enka" Company executives and workers for the very good job done and about the pace of work along this road.

The premier said that it will not be distant the day when the Albanians move along this road. This coming spring we shall say together that the corridor of the Albanians was done, said the premier while pointing to the Thirr Kalimash tunnel on its last km.

Premier Berisha invited all the Albanians to visit the road and highlighted that the building of the road gives an answer to those who have not spared the charges against. The premier assured that the government will make further investments on infrastructure projects countrywide.

Premier Berisha: Parliament vote is historic

Answering to the journalists during the inspection of Thirre-Kalimash tunnel about the Parliament voting for the lustration law, Prime Minister Sali Berisha said that yesterday's vote in the Parliament marked an historic victory of the Albanians over political crime. The prime minister added that the Albanian Parliament made history yesterday.

Premier Berisha receives Speaker of Grand National Assembly of Turkey Toptan

Prime Minister Sali Berisha held a meeting with the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Koksal Toptan. Premier Berisha and Speaker Toptan shared the same view that the political relations are in a



brilliant level and the economic cooperation is increased, but this cooperation should be promoted to higher levels. Premier Berisha expressed thanks to Speaker Toptan for the support Turkey has provided Albania with in the NATO integration process and modernization of the country. While highlighting Albania NATO and EU integration as the two major projects of the country, Premier Berisha acquainted Mr. Toptan with the efforts of the government of Albania to meet the required standards. The Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey expressed his belief that Albania will be a NATO member during the coming spring and this will be a significant contribution to regional stability. Also Premier Berisha acquainted Mr. Toptan with the economic reforms implemented and the fiscal system which have brought about the two-digit economic growth of the country and optimism for next year. Mr. Toptan considered impressive the two-digit economic growth and low inflation rate in the context of the world economic crisis.

Mr. Toptan said that Turkey follows with great attention and positively evaluates Albania high economic development thanks to the rather successful reforms the government of Albania has implemented during the recent years. And the Turkish government and people are happy about this.

Premier Berisha highlighted the indelible help that Turkey has provided Albania with in the economic field, education, to upgrade the Armed Forces, in the field of culture, trade. The premier also spoke about the successful implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between the two countries as an important factor in the fast increase of the trade volume over the last three years.

Government approves decision about establishment of Civil Society Development Agency

The Council of Ministers approved in its routine meeting the establishment of Civil Society Development Agency and defines fund distribution as

its task. The premier expressed the determination of the government to raise funds for the civil society annually and emphasized that the main orientation of these funds is monitoring of corruption in the state, the administration and public sector. The premier emphasized that the organizations related to the government and administration should get the priority. The premier pointed out that the draft law is thanks to a working group that traveled several countries and the funds are not conditioned by the other funds these organizations obtain.

Premier Berisha demands from local government to mark potential territories for compensation of owners

During the routine meeting of the Council of Ministers, Prime Minister Sali Berisha



demanded from all the mayors of the country to define lands that should be offered to the owners as compensation. The premier assured that the government will intervene and act decisively toward solution of the owners' issue. In this direction, he pointed to some working groups involved in diversified interventions that can and should be made for the solution of this problem.

Council of Ministers approves establishment of one stop shop for licenses and permits

The Council of Ministers took under examination and approved at its meeting today the draft law on licenses, proxies and permits, thus paving the way to the licenses and permits system being provided at the one stop shop windows.

This draft law has considerable advantages, said the premier as the 30-60 days deadline to get a permit or license is reduced to 1 to 3 days.

This is an effective intervention in the business climate.

Likewise, the premier pointed out that not all the licenses and permits can be included in the one stop shop, as some of them are subject to an unavoidable competition process, such as the case of hydroelectric power stations, but even others. Thus, a restricted number of them, because of the procedures they carry in themselves, remain an attribute to the ministries.

Premier Berisha: Ministry of Justice should draft legal framework for solution of yards issue

Prime Minister Sali Berisha demanded from the Ministry of Justice, during the routine meeting of the Council of Ministers, to forward to the government the legal framework for solution of the yards in use issue. The premier said that thousands of Albanian families are registered at the mortgage offices as owners of the houses built in their land. But, their yards are still acknowledged as an area in their use while they are a property of the homeowners. The premier said that this problem makes difficult all the transactions these families want to carry out and keeps them uncertain in their property through declaring the state as an owner, while it is not. The premier also emphasized there are others who have not built houses in their property, but have bought a building site 30-40 years ago and have built a house there. The solution of this problem, said further the premier, implies a relief for the market; it consolidates further the land market while taking into account the territories has higher prices and values.

Premier Berisha wishes to Christians believers on Christmas Day

Prime Minister Sali Berisha, accompanied by his spouse Mrs. Liri Berisha, paid a visit to the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania and St. Paul Cathedrals, on occasion of the Christmas Day. The premier conveyed to the Catholic community and the Albanian believers as a whole the most cordial wishes on this blessed day of birth of hope and worship.



Premier Berisha praises State Police for devotion and professionalism over 2008

Prime Minister Sali Berisha attended morning the meeting of the annual job analysis of the State Police, where during his speech the premier said that the results of the state police fight with zero tolerance against crime provide all the opportunities to express government positive assessment of the successful job this police has done over 2008. The premier expressed his belief that next year will be the time of

even greater achievements while he emphasized that the State Police managed to bring Albania under the EU average indicators regarding crime level. The



premier demanded an even greater attention to fight against economic crime. The prime minister considered indispensable the coordination of the activity with all the relevant factors. The premier focused on important issues like the utmost respect of rights and freedoms of the citizens, especially at the pre-detention centers and prisons. In this context, the premier highlighted the need of following a rather different practice in dealing with the minors committing penal offence and pointed to the need of close cooperation with the psychologist. I consider extremely important the attitude toward human rights. Hence, I have demanded from the Ombudsman Office and other organizations to rigorously supervise the rights of our citizens in the institutions of sentence suffering, but even while they are in pre-detention. I do not rule out anybody from the theory of mistake, but this is an extremely sensitive issue, said the premier. On the other hand, the premier praised the tradition established by the police forces about the professional and correct stand during electoral processes while expressing the belief that even at elections 2009 the police forces will take all the measures and accomplish their job with honor, i.e. the transportation of the election material and other tasks in the course of the electoral process.

Premier Berisha: Iraqi peacekeeping mission forged solidarity and friendship with the USA

Prime Minister Sali Berisha attended the official welcome-home ceremony of the Albanian servicemen in



Freedom of Iraq peacekeeping mission, stationed in Mosul and Baghdad. In his greeting speech delivered on this occasion, Premier Berisha congratulated the Albanian troops for the successful accomplishment of their mission. The premier appreciated that Albania military presence in Iraq was first of all an expression of respect, gratitude and friendship for the great American nation, the US administration and President George Bush. More than anything else this mission

has forged the solidarity and friendship with the USA, but even with Iraq that is building its democratic system, said the premier.

Also Premier Berisha expressed his total commitment to further the great cooperation with the USA under the President-elect Barack Obama.

The US ambassador expressed thanks of the US administration for the assistance given in bringing peace and freedom to a distant place. He said the American nation keeps in high esteem the servicemen for the courage shown and the sacrifices made while being far away from their families. Attending the ceremony were also the Speaker of the Assembly Jozefina Topalli, the Minister of Defense Gazmend Oketa, the Chief of Staff of the Army Maksim Malaj and other senior military leaders.

Premier Berisha and spouse Mrs. Liri Berisha celebrate with children in need in Elbasan city

Prime Minister Sali Berisha and spouse, Mrs. Liri Berisha visited the children of the center "Home of Hope" and charity home "Mother Theresa" in Elbasan city to celebrate



together with them the New Year Eve. "Holidays without you remain mute," said Premier Sali Berisha to the children of these centers. The children welcomed the Premier with a concert. At the charity home "Mother Theresa", PM Berisha expressed the deepest gratitude for the special care that sisters of Mother Theresa show toward abandoned children.

Premier Berisha: Planting of 20 million olive trees, a priority project on agriculture in 2009

During meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee today, Prime Minister Sali Berisha said that project on planting 20 million olive trees countrywide will be the government priority over 2009.

Premier Berisha: We should enable a better coordination of every investment with state budget

At the routine meeting of Integrated Planning Committee, chaired by Premier Berisha, was approved the calendar of Integrated Planning System. Premier Berisha pointed to the considerable improvements in

2008 strategic planning, underlining there is space for more accuracy in planning process. The Premier demanded a greater care in coordination of other financings with state budget investments.

Premier Berisha: Health system to finally abandon failed socialist system

Premier Berisha expressed the commitment of the government in completing the reform in health system. Considering the reform in health system as vital, the Premier said that new draft law consists of the best legal experience of several countries and includes the suggestions of World Health Organization, UNICEF and UNFPA, as well as some other institutions.

Premier Berisha: Draft law on territory planning and administration, contemporary solution to all bureaucratic obstacles.

During government meeting, Premier Berisha considered the draft law for territory planning, as the Constitution of the territory planning and administration, which establishes a completely new legal basis for this process.

The Premier added that the law will include the amendments sent in parliament yesterday. The amendments include that the construction permit should be issued within 45 days and the principle "silent is consent", but the law needs to determine the type of the permits, said the Premier.

GoA approves 2 billion Lek fund for former political persecuted

The Council of Ministers approved during its meeting the decision about compensation of 1100 former political persecuted with a fund 2 billion Lek



worth. Prime Minister Sali Berisha said that this amount of money will be paid into an account in early January.

Premier Berisha revealed further that he has asked all the municipalities and communes and he is demanding even from the Ministry of Interior that in close cooperation with them to define all the public property that can become available for the compensation of the owners.

Premier Berisha congratulates media representatives at news conference on New Year Eve

Firstly, I greet you. Secondly, I say, year 2008 needs no speeches of what was achieved. 2008 is the year of the



Albanians. Kosova gained its independence marking the crowning of a superhuman effort, a model of resistance of Kosova and the nation that succeeded to declare independence in the context of a consolidated international legal framework. Thus, the Albanians stood on their dignity.

2008 was among the greatest in the history of the nation. Albania received NATO membership invitation. This is important as the Albanians will have the opportunity to build their own future as a free nation; they will separate from their story of survival and enter the history of building their freedom. Secondly, the country is restored to the family of free Western nations following centuries long occupations, partitions, dictatorships. After the brilliant history of Scanderbeg battles, Albania NATO membership marks the most important moment of the country returning into the family of nations it belongs.

2008 is the year of sweeping reforms. The year began with consensus on the justice system law and ended with consensus about Election Code. The reforms have consolidated the institutions; they also separated Albania from Dushk phenomenon and they laid the legal foundations of a free and fair electoral system. The reforms consolidated the Parliamentary spirit of the republic, i.e. republicanism victory.

The reforms were important in the judiciary: it actually functions on a new legal basis of international standards. The High Council of Justice was subject to reform; it was prevented the conflict of interest and recently even in the prosecution office.

The reforms have been the perpetum mobile in all the fields, fiscal, economic, education etc.

The reforms yielded results during this year.

Thus, Albania was qualified the runner-up in the world about business climate reforms overtaking 51 countries. Also, Albania was ranked among the 10 most successful countries for fight against corruption, a real cancer that should be fought every hour, every day, every week so that to reduce and eliminate its repercussions.

This current year Albania was ranked the first in the Balkans for fight against corruption.

The most spectacular result of the reforms was the two-digit economic growth over the first 3 trimesters of the year. This conveys the best message to the international business community. Albania has turned into an attractive country for the FDI. This current December you witnessed signing of concession agreements in energy field worth 3.5 billion euro. This was the year of big privatizations: ARMO, TELEKOM, and INSIG.

Thus, it is the year of promises kept.

But, even a tragic accident happened in Gërdec over 2008. The government intervened energetically to salvage the consequences and reconstruct the area. An investigation process is underway and I hope it brings to justice all the responsible persons.

I believe the Albanians were freer than ever. Their human rights marked new standards. The freedom of the media is respected. There have been aggression acts towards the journalists which should not happen. I have condemned all these acts. It was an official who committed one of the acts and shame on those who failed to bring him to justice. But, the government will not remain silent. We do not accept intimidation on you. I assure you that the government stands against any impingement on you. You represent the parliamentarians of the free speech. There have been other cases, but the responsible persons will be brought to justice. The freedom of the press is a decisive condition for the Albanian citizens to enjoy their freedom.

800 thousand Albanian families have been rewarded better than ever before. Thus, the salaries of 104 thousand administration employees have been increased by 54%; the salaries of the teachers by 75%; the salaries of the medical staff by 81%; pensions in the village got increased by 75% and pensions in the town 45 to 70%. Albania undertook the biggest salary and pension increase as compared to every other country in the continent. I stand unwavering in my policy of salary and pension increase the same as I evaluate the fiscal freedom and low tax. Thus, we have overtaken not only regional countries, but even EU countries. We shall continue this competition, whatever difficult, so that the Albanians have a more prosperous life.

Next year I shall accomplish what remained undone this current year. I promise free and fair elections. This is my major obligation. I shall do my best that the Albanians vote in these elections like the other European citizens. Secondly, I shall respect the verdict of these elections. The reforms will still be the perpetual motion of the government. We shall make efforts to facilitate the business climate so that the global crisis does not hurt us this time. I am optimistic because the legal framework is favorable while the new policy followed has answered to the energy problem. You have witnessed there have been no

electricity cuts from the end of 2007 and on. We succeeded to achieve this not through new resource, but through the policy of putting a high energy price, maximum import and no electricity supply cuts. We are moving toward new resources. Thus, the Albanians separate themselves from a past policy of electricity supply cuts of the population. This does not happen any more and will not.

Thus, there exist all the opportunities for a rapid economic growth next year. I cannot say to what scale will be the impact of the global crisis; but I say we shall do our best so that its impact is in the minimum. I do not expect this crisis becomes sustainable. I expect January 20 marks a turning point. The inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the USA is a moment of great enthusiasm not only politically, but even for the US markets, the leading world economy. Also we shall do our best for Albania NATO membership in April summit. The process is moving ahead. The NATO Accession Protocol is still to be ratified by 7 countries, but most of the NATO member countries have ratified it.

Meanwhile, early next year Albania will forward the official request for EU candidate country. We hope to find the good understanding as we shall implement all the reforms and meet any indispensable requirement for the status of the candidate country.

As a conclusion, I say it has been an unprecedented year in history, but still it was a great year as we would like it.

Happy New Year!

Question: What is your opinion about Scanderbeg figure; it has been at the center of debates recently?

Premier Berisha: I have followed with great attention the debate and I don't agree with the opinion of people brainwashed by one book read and shouting Eureka. Hundreds of books have been written on Scanderbeg figure. To alienate Scanderbeg to a nation is like to do so with Garibaldi to the Italians. However, Scanderbeg is a more distant figure in time, but his story accompanied the Albanians. The women of the North observed mourning for Scanderbeg. The Scanderbeg cult is deserved in our history as he had a state when the others lost it and even Byzantium itself collapsed. Why are they trying to alienate him, to dispel the myth? This is Don Quixotic. This is an old Serbian historiography effort since their Karadjordjevic rulers because they intended to replace him, but unsuccessfully.

Question: What about the "Tema" newspaper? You spoke about media freedom, but a government decision on a certain premises has put this paper in difficulty?

Premier Berisha: God save us from the independent media preferring the armpit of the government. How

can one be independent in the armpit of the government? The independence of the media is not determined whether you stay in the armpit of the government or not, but if you speak freely against the government. I assure you that paper and every other paper is free to write non-stop against this government. To claim that your freedom is threatened what would the other papers say while they do not enjoy the government benefits? Wouldn't they be right to say their equality is violated? There are 30 newspapers in Albania and I know no other paper that is in the armpit of the government. I would suggest not liking the love story with the state. Therefore, this matter has nothing to do with the free speech. The building belongs to the government and it is needed for another destination, that's all. This is simply an administrative issue.

Question: What incentives will you offer for the citizens to get IDs necessary to vote?

Premier Berisha: The IDs will begin to be issued in January. I see a great interest of the citizens to get the IDs. We are making efforts the company satisfies this interest. The lifting of VAT on the cards we decided today, the lifting of several other tariffs has made it possible the Albanian citizens buy the IDs.

Question: Will this be on a voluntarily basis or are there going to be other compulsory mechanisms?

Premier Berisha: We have to negotiate with the opposition about some interventions. It is a question of the elections and the decisions should be common with the opposition.

Question: Why do you consider Durrës-Kukës highway your personal and government great success?

Premier Berisha: The highway will be inaugurated prior the elections; that's why I didn't mention it. I am not going to fix the date. Today, I ordered the Ministry of Public Works put out to tender the project on Southern road axis on the shortest distance Memaliaj-Tepelena. To answer to your question, I say that the merit for the Northern highway goes to the Albanian taxpayers. Naturally, my merit is that I am turning into a reality a dream project that connects two parts of the nation. The project has been in the minds of the people for decades, but it is becoming a reality only now. Secondly, we shall build all the roads on the shortest distances. I am dealing with replacement of the occupation roads with the roads of development. Following Arbri road, which is under construction, the Southern axis, there remains even 34 km Fierzë-Koman road and thus all the shortest roads in all the directions get completed. The Albanians will move along shorter roads.

Question: What about visa liberalization with the EU?

Premier Berisha: The IDs and biometric passports are the main condition of visa liberalization. Everything is progressing in line with schedule. There can be no question of visa liberalization while the Albanians are not yet provided with these documents and I see no other obstacle in this direction.

Congratulatory message of Premier Berisha to Albanians on occasion of New Year's Eve

Dear Albanians citizens,
My co-patriots,
wherever you are,
Tonight, all of us are waiting with pleasure the New Year. We



are impatiently waiting to heartily wish each-other, thus, beside the wish of your friends, relatives, beloved people, I want to add my most sincere and friendly wish to each of you, wherever you are celebrating tonight, in you family, restaurants, clubs with your friends and beloved in Albania or abroad, on duty, in hospital, in prison or on a trip, "Happy New Year, 2009!" May this year bring joy, health, luck and success for you, your families, and beloved people.

Dear Albanians citizens,

On New Year's Eve, I invite you to assess the outgoing year. I am convinced that despite the problems, troubles, or undeserved calamities, we have 1001 reasons to leave behind the year 2008 with the most friendly feelings and deepest gratitude toward it. Year 2008 was the year of the Albanians because this year we turned into reality the greatest national dream of Independence of Kosova, thus we will always remember and honor it as the year of our national freedom and dignity. After a lasting saga of sacrifices, this year Albanians managed to sing at last the song of freedom in their houses and territories.

God Bless Albania!

Year 2008 was an historic and blessed year for Albanians. On April 3, at Bucharest, we received NATO membership invitation. Thus, we concluded the journey toward the west, which started centuries ago by our legendary hero Scanderbeg. After centuries of invasions, severe dictatorships, we came to our destination. Albania came back to the families of nations it belongs too.

Year 2008 was a true and precious friend for every Albanian, because it marked a wide consensus for

great reforms. But, this year, Albanians separated themselves from crimes of totalitarian communist system, in order to push ahead secure toward social peace. Year 2008 was the successful implementation of economic reforms, fiscal revolution, and success of fight against corruption. This year, Albania ranked second in the world for the success of economic reforms. It ranked among ten most successful countries in the planet for fight against corruption. In the last three years, we managed to save 3, 2 billion dollars.

Year 2008 was really prosperous for Albanians, because it registered an economic boom. Albania is the only country in Europe with a two-digit growth, over 10 per cent. It was the boom of trust in world of business and boom of foreign investments. Only in December were signed several contracts with major European companies of a value of 3, 5 billion euro. Year 2008 marked a tourist boom in Albania. During this year, about 2 million tourists visited Albania, compared to 300.000 tourists in 2004.

Year 2008 is the year of greatest infrastructure investments in Albania. The investments, only in national and rural roads, this year have increased 12 times as much, if compared to 2004.

Year 2008 was the year of doubling of students' number in Albania, but above all, it brought a real kindness for about 800,000 Albanians families, thus considerably increasing their salaries and pensions. Thus, starting from July 1:

- Albanian teachers will receive a 75% bigger salary than three years ago

- Nurses and doctors will receive a salary about 80 % 2005.



...s in the village will receive a pension 75% three years ago, whereas, pensioners in ... receive a pension of 40 up to 70% higher. ... all the reasons that make year 2008 ... for Albanians, tonight, I would like to address a special wish to families or citizens that during 2008 suffered so much due to loss of their beloved, or faced unemployment, poverty, illnesses and other problems. I wish 2009 may fill with joy the soul, heart and their homes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this respect, we have the right to believe and hope that another great year is knocking on our door, a year full of hope, understanding, love, employment and prosperity. A year in which we merit the full right membership in NATO and EU membership candidate status, as well as full visa regime liberalization and inauguration of corridor of Albanians. Year 2008 will mark the holding of free and fair election, and together we will continue to change Albania.

Happy 2009, a prosperous year for Albanians and their friends in the entire world!

God Bless Albania!