

2018-2021 SWISS COOPERATION STRATEGY FOR ALBANIA

# 'Swiss-Albanian Relations, Solid and Dynamic'

*"An important goal of Swiss cooperation work is to see Albania move towards European integration. However, there is some homework required to move forward on this path. We are determined to support Albania in doing such homework tasks," said Ambassador Graf*

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"I am pleased that the financial envelope for the four years strategy cycle 2018-2021 shall increase by around 20% to more than 100 million Swiss Francs. This is a sign that both Albania and Switzerland estimate the cooperation experience so far as successful and that it is worth to continue and even expand it," the Swiss Ambassador to Albania, Christoph Graf told Albanian Daily News.

The Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Albania during the 2018-2021 period will be unveiled on March 7, 2018.

"I am pleased that State Secretary for Economic Af-

fairs, Ms. Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch will travel to Tirana to participate in the launching event of the new Cooperation Strategy. This is an indicator that economic relations deserve adequate and increased attention," said Ambassador Graf.

In a comment on Albanian's drive to join the European Union, Mr. Graf said he did not observe an "EU fatigue" among Albanians. "Some 90% favour a future of Albania in the European Union. I meet many Albanians that are very realistic about the pace of European rapprochement. The EU accession process is

a gradual process, there are no jumps nor short cuts on this path. The different steps and requirements need to be understood and transparently explained to the citizens," said the Swiss Ambassador in the following interview:

**- Mr. Ambassador, the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Swiss - Albanian cooperation last year is being followed by another momentous event- the unveiling of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Albania during the 2018-2021 period. Which is the significance of these two milestones for**

**the relations between Switzerland and Albania?**

- It shows that bilateral relations between our two countries have intensified, and that they are very solid and at the same time dynamic. We look back on a very stable and steadily growing joint cooperation programme in the last quarter of a century. I am pleased that the financial envelope for the four years strategy cycle 2018-2021 shall increase by around 20% to more than 100 million Swiss Francs. This is a sign that both Albania and Switzerland estimate the cooperation experience so far as successful and that it is worth to continue and even expand it. I am pleased that State Secretary for Economic Affairs, Ms. Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch will travel to Tirana to participate in the launching event of the new Cooperation Strategy. This is an indicator that economic relations deserve adequate and increased attention.

**- Which are some of the achievements from the 2014 - 2017 Swiss cooperation programme in Albania, one of the poorest nations in Europe?**

- Swiss Cooperation focuses on areas where it can make a difference. Hence it has

been supporting for example the decentralisation agenda of the Albanian Government. In 10% of all municipalities Switzerland helped to establish one stop shops with modern administrative services for the citizens. Or in the economic field, Swiss assistance facilitated the employment of more than 6'000 young people in promising sectors such as tourism, ICT and agro-processing, combined with vocational training measures. In Shkodra and Lezha, the Swiss Government enabled a 24 hours water supply service for more than 170'000 citizens. And in the energy sector Switzerland helped Albania to optimize its benefits from the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) through negotiation support and establishing a Gas Transmission System Operator (Albgas). These are just a few of the results.

**- What lessons have been learned from the past experience, and have the expectations of the previous programme been met?**

- Overall, we see Albania as a country that makes considerable progress in its development path. Reform dynamics are high, important reforms are under way, such as in the justice sector, in public administration, in the energy



## Francophonie Award for Geneva's Albanian People's University



Director Krasniqi-Malaj

and water sector, as well as in regional and municipal development. However, reform efforts still need to be sustained and consolidated. Switzerland stands ready to support such consolidation in areas where there is action and energy, where there is political will and commitment. I am very pleased to see for instance a renewed government commitment in strengthening basic health care. With the new Cooperation Strategy we signal readiness to support such efforts.

**- Your Excellency, the cooperation of the two countries is entering a new phase as indicated by an increased Swiss aid. What are the major goals and priorities of the Cooperation Strategy for Albania during the 2018-2021 period?**

- An important goal of Swiss cooperation work is to see Albania move towards European integration. However, there is some homework required to move forward on this path. We are determined to support Albania in doing such homework tasks, improving standards to European levels in fields such as democratic governance, economic development including fostering a more attractive business climate and labour market, providing adequate water and energy supply as well as waste and basic health services to the people.

**- What do you expect from the implementation of the 2018-2021 Strategy?**

- The ultimate goal of the new Cooperation Strategy is improving the lives of the Albanian citizens. All Swiss supported projects and programmes have one thing in common: they are people-centred. They also follow an inclusive approach: vulnerable groups of society such as Roma, youth, women receive particular attention. A strong and lively civil society and independent media are important ingredients

for a functioning democracy. The Swiss cooperation programme includes funding of initiatives of NGOs and even individuals that strengthen plurality, access to information and democratic debates at local level in a courageous, respectful and innovative way.

**- Rule of law is one of the keys to a functioning democracy. It is easy to frame laws, but implementation of them by all is difficult and there is still a high rate of corruption, organized crime, and cannabization in this country. In your view, how can the Swiss experience help in consolidating a culture and atmosphere of the rule of law in all segments of Albanian society?**

- Swiss support can offer models, ideas and give inspiration of how to shape democratic mechanisms and strengthen the rule of law, based on our direct democratic tradition and dialogue culture. A lively and functioning democracy requires, however, not only strong checks and balance systems between the executive, legislative and judiciary power, it requires also the active engagement of its citizens. I encourage all Albanians to take responsibility for public affairs, to engage in debates about protecting nature and rivers, improving the transparency of election processes etc. In order to improve such civic engagement, a new Swiss supported programme will contribute to strengthen civic education in schools.

**- Mr. Ambassador, stability and prosperity of the Western Balkan countries constitute a fundamental goal of the Swiss foreign and security policy. How has Switzerland's engagement contributed to transforming the region, known before as the 'powder keg' of Europe, into a peaceful area eyeing European integration?**

- Switzerland has somehow special relations to the Western Balkan countries. We

host a large number of people from this region, mainly from Kosovo, but also significant numbers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia. My government is supporting the Western Balkan countries in their transition towards democracies and market economies since more than 20 years, currently with more than 100 million Swiss Francs per year. The still ongoing tensions in the region are a matter of concern. We welcome the increasing dialogue between the countries and the regional initiatives in the frame of the Berlin Process to make further progress in regional reconciliation and integration.

**- Polls rank Albanians on top of the WB countries in support of EU accession. But the country still lags behind other countries like Serbia and Montenegro which can join the EU by 2025 as it was predicted in the recent Enlargement Strategy by the European Commission. Do you think it might create an atmosphere of 'fatigue' among Albanians, and how can Swiss cooperation and experience keep alive their aspiration to join the union?**

**- I do not observe an "EU fatigue" among Albanians. Some 90% favour a future of Albania in the European Union. I meet many Albanians that are very realistic about the pace of European rapprochement. The EU accession process is a gradual process; there are no jumps nor short cuts on this path.**

The different steps and requirements need to be understood and transparently explained to the citizens. Once again: to be part of Europe requires homework to do, with promising and positive outcomes, not for the sake of European integration, but for the benefit of the Albanians' quality of life. Switzerland with its new Cooperation Strategy stands ready to continue supporting Albania on this journey.

TIRANA- Albana Krasniqi-Malaj, the current director of Albanian People's University in Geneva, Switzerland has won this institution of integration and culture the annual prize of Francophonie.

As reported by ATA, Krasniqi-Malaj said it is a great honor and privilege to receive a prize of such proportions. This prize will be awarded in an event slated for March 15 in Berne, Switzerland.

Geneva's Albanian People's University has dedicated the entirety of March to Francophonie, including on its agenda plenty of cultural events almost daily, such as book promotions and debates on French art and culture.

The International Organisation of La Francophonie represents one of the big-

gest linguistic zones in the world. Its members share more than just a common language. They also share the humanist values promoted by the French language. The French language and its humanist values represent the two cornerstones on which the International Organisation of La Francophonie is based.

The International Organisation of La Francophonie was created in 1970. Its mission is to embody the active solidarity between its 84 member states and governments (58 members and 26 observers), which together represent over one-third of the United Nations' member states and account for a population of over 900 million people, including 274 million French speakers.

## Domestic violence in Albania, Denouncements on the Rise

TIRANA - This year's first meeting of the National Committee for Gender Equality discovered that there have been 4500 denouncements made by women who have reported cases of domestic violence and other crimes to Albanian police authorities. This is a figure which has seen an increase compared to a year ago, when this figure was 380 cases lower. Although this shows an increase of cases, experts say that the awareness against

domestic violence and trust on the institutions is growing too.

The minister of Health and Social Protection, Ogerta Manastirliu said that last year some 5200 women were employed. Meanwhile, the deputy Prime Minister, Senida Mesi said that Albania is the first country of the region which has established gender quotas. In the meantime, a special fund of some USD 90 mln has been allocated to support gender policies.