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Subject: Tirana Highlights for April 12, 2016

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Subject: Tirana Highlights for April 12, 2016

Tirana Highlights  
April 12, 2016

(SBU) PM Rama in USA:

The local media is covering closely Prime Minister Edi Rama's visit to the U.S. with an emphasis on the meeting at the White House on April 14. The press noted that Rama's social media postings about the meetings with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio as well as with the Albanian Diaspora in New York City. The media reported on the PM announcing a global Albanian diaspora conference in Albania in November 2016.

(SBU) National Poll On Justice Reform:

The Institute for Development and Research Alternatives (IDRA) published a public survey on citizens' knowledge, support, and expectations on justice reform. According to the survey, that the Embassy sponsored along with the Open Society Foundation for Albania, 91% of respondents either "fully support" or "somewhat support" the need for a judicial reform. 90% of respondents believe that the EU and the United States Embassy fully support the reform, followed by the Venice Commission (77%). The respondents reported that judges and prosecutors are less interested in reform. 65% of Albanian citizens are optimistic about the chances of judicial reform being approved in parliament within 2016. However, 66% also think that there will be groups/organizations/individuals who will try to prevent approval of the reform. (Comment: The findings of the survey track with the displays of strong support among the general public for the reform.)

(SBU) Opposition: Free And Fair Elections Albania's Key Priority: Democratic Party Chairman Lulzim Basha met on April 11 with leaders of the opposition coalition parties to discuss electoral reform as well as the platform for the planned 2017 general elections. Basha stated that free and fair elections were the most important priority for Albania. Some of the proposals included possible changes to the electoral system including the possibility of creating a bicameral parliamentary system, the introduction of electronic voting and counting, limiting private donations to political parties, implementing the decriminalization law, and guaranteeing media freedom. The DP invited the Justice, Integration and Unity Party of the Cham community and the New Democratic Spirit of former President Bamir Topi (which gathered around the ruling majority in 2015) to join the opposition coalition. (Comment: The opposition proposals broaden the scope of electoral reform by going beyond making changes to address ODIHR recommendations from 2013 and 2015 elections. Some of the changes in the electoral system raised would require constitutional amendments. Some of the proposals such as electronic voting also appear overly ambitious or have the possibility to create complication down the line, given that previous similar test cases for such a system in Albania were not successful.)

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