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Summary record of the 41st meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 16 September 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports:

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

Fourth periodic report of Albania (E/C.12/ALB/4; E/C.12/ALB/Q/4; E/C.12/ALB/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Albania joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Albania**, introducing her country's fourth periodic report (E/C.12/ALB/4), said that, during the reporting period, Albania had been confronted with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and a severe earthquake. Several laws and strategies had been adopted to ensure the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Covenant. Access to legal aid had been significantly improved and was currently offered by 20 legal aid offices, 15 non-profit organizations and 12 clinics at higher education institutions. In 2023, 7,008 persons had benefited from primary legal aid, compared to 21 persons in 2019, and the number of lawyers offering secondary legal aid had increased from 60 in 2019 to 159 in 2023.
3. Steps taken to reduce the country's carbon footprint included diversifying energy sources and developing a long-term strategy and action plan for increasing the generation capacity of renewable energy sources. Efforts were also being made to address the adverse effects of climate change on economic, social and cultural rights.
4. A comprehensive legal and policy framework on human rights and anti-discrimination was in place. Complaints of discrimination were transmitted by the People's Advocate to the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination. Those bodies worked in close cooperation and their work was subject to oversight by the Albanian Parliament, which allocated their annual budgets and monitored the implementation of their recommendations.
5. The National Action Plan for the Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians (2021–2025) had been adopted to ensure access by those groups to a wide range of services, and financial support had been provided to municipalities, emergency centres and multifunctional community centres. The National Strategy on Education 2022–2026 contained several measures aimed at ensuring inclusive education for Roma and Egyptians, such as the employment of mediators to improve school attendance, the provision of scholarships, textbooks and school transportation, and the prioritization of Roma children in registration for preschool and part-time education. Roma and Egyptian minorities had been taken into account in the national policy on vocational education and training and in the 2023 amendments to Law No. 15/2019 on Employment Promotion.
6. Policies on the social inclusion of persons with disabilities were aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Disability Strategy 2021–2030. The National Action Plan on Disability 2021–2025 had been approved in 2021. Teaching assistants had been provided with enhanced training in order to promote inclusive and quality education for children with disabilities and to increase their participation in society through art, cultural activities and sports.
7. The National Action Plan for LGBTI Persons (2021–2027) and the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 had been approved in 2021, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) had been ratified in 2022. The General Directorate of the State Police had upgraded its data processing system for domestic and gender-based violence statistics and conducted risk assessment analyses during investigations into domestic violence cases.
8. The financial support paid through the Government Social Resilience Package had been increased in 2022. The Labour Code had been amended in July 2024 to include provisions on flexible annual vacations, and flexible working hours had been introduced for public administration employees. The family reunification process for refugees and individuals subject to complementary protection outlined in Law No. 10/2021 on Asylum in the Republic of Albania was aligned with relevant European Union directives. The National Agenda for Children's Rights 2021–2026 had been adopted with a view to enhancing child

protection, including for children in street situations and those at risk of economic exploitation. Guidelines approved in 2023 had introduced a new quality control model for local child protection services, and guidance had been developed to assist labour inspectors and child protection workers in identifying and protecting children subjected to economic exploitation. According to municipal child protection units, forced early marriage was not widespread. Child marriage had decreased significantly and was very rare.

9. The aims of the National Health Strategy 2021–2030 were to increase public health funding, improve service quality and expand health programmes. A law on reproductive health was being developed, and there were plans to introduce in vitro fertilization services at public hospitals in 2024. The goal of universal health coverage was guiding efforts to strengthen the health system, improve emergency response and enhance digital health. Health packages were being expanded to enhance access to medical treatment, especially among vulnerable groups, and psychological and social services had been incorporated into primary health care in 2022.

10. The Ministry of Education and Sport had facilitated remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by developing an online teaching platform. Measures taken to enhance child protection in schools included the development of protocols for preventing and reporting violence and extremism, and municipalities had established mechanisms to address and prevent violence within families.

11. In 2022, guidance on the teaching of subjects in Albanian and minority languages at the basic education level had been published, together with specific teaching plans for national minorities. Educational support offered to children from national minorities included legal guarantees that they would be taught the Albanian language as well as their own language, history and culture. The National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2017–2022 was aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

12. **Ms. Saran** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would like to hear about any specific examples in which the provisions of the Covenant had been invoked before or applied by the domestic courts. She wished to know how the direct applicability and enforceability of the Covenant before the courts was ensured, and whether judges, prosecutors, lawyers and law enforcement officials had received sufficient training on the provisions of international human rights instruments. It would be interesting to hear about challenges faced by the State party in the European Union accession process. Did the State party have a time frame for ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant?

13. She would be grateful to learn whether sufficient funds had been allocated to make free legal aid accessible to persons in difficult economic situations and in domestic violence cases. Information on measures taken to raise awareness of and facilitate access to the legal system, in particular among women and girls in rural areas, would be welcome.

14. She wondered whether sufficient human, technical and financial resources had been provided to national human rights institutions, and what steps had been taken to address recommendations made by the People's Advocate. She wished to know what measures had been taken to strengthen that body so that it could effectively and independently discharge its mandate in full compliance with the Paris Principles, and whether the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had been approached for support in that regard. She would like to know whether the People's Advocate was mandated to encourage the ratification of, and accession to, international human rights instruments, and whether steps had been taken to include acts or omissions of private entities in its protection mandate.

15. The Committee was interested in learning about measures taken to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society; to simplify the registration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); to increase the transparency of media financing; to improve the working conditions of journalists; to ensure consistent application of the Labour Code; and to prevent intimidation and conduct effective judicial follow-up in cases of attacks against journalists. With regard to the maximum available resources specified in article 2 of the Covenant, information on recent measures adopted to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending allocated to the social sectors would be appreciated. Details of measures to address regional disparities, especially those affecting remote and rural

communities, would also be welcome, as would information on steps taken to address growing economic and social inequalities faced by those most at risk of poverty.

16. She asked what the State party had done to update its national strategy on climate change and to reduce risks related to natural disasters, improve resilience, fulfil its commitments under the Paris Agreement and meet its new nationally determined contribution. The delegation might wish to describe the challenges encountered by the Government in developing a national vision for 2030 and in aligning its efforts to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals with activities carried out as part of the European Union accession process. It would be interesting to hear about how the State party had addressed key challenges related to water and air pollution, land degradation, biodiversity loss and waste management in the light of its revised nationally determined contribution. Information on any plans to establish an emissions register would also be appreciated. She would welcome details of how the capacity of the public administration was being built up for interpreting the impact of climate change on Albania and incorporating climate change considerations into sectoral strategies. She wished to know how the relevant policies and strategies had been implemented to ensure that they included women who were vulnerable to environmental and climate change-related problems.

17. It would be helpful to hear about concrete measures taken to minimize discrimination against ethnic minorities and about the implementation of Law No. 15/2019 on Employment Promotion and its by-laws, given that persons with disabilities continued to experience discrimination in employment. She would like to know whether sufficient expertise, resources and support had been provided to ensure the implementation of existing legislation in order to protect the rights of LGBTIQ persons.

18. She wished to know what steps the State party had taken to meet the human resource challenges posed by negative population growth and high emigration rates, to reverse those trends and to improve productivity. The delegation might wish to comment on the transfer to Albania of migrants and asylum-seekers intercepted on the Mediterranean Sea by Italian authorities; in particular, she wondered how the State party ensured that the human rights provided for in the Covenant were not violated under that arrangement. It would be interesting to hear about any measures taken to integrate immigrants into society and address migration challenges, such as protecting and integrating unaccompanied minors and survivors of trafficking in persons.

19. In the light of the gender gaps in terms of pay, labour-force participation and enjoyment of property rights in Albania, she would like to hear about steps taken by the State party to ensure the equal rights of men and women in those areas.

The meeting was suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 3.45 p.m.

20. **A representative of Albania** said that in 2022, the Covenant had been invoked before or applied by the courts in 20 cases related to discrimination, of which 19 had involved the distribution of discriminatory material through computer networks and 1 had involved incitement to hatred on discriminatory grounds. In 2023, the Covenant had been invoked in eight cases involving the distribution of discriminatory material through computer networks. International treaties ratified by Albania had the same legislative weight as the Constitution and took precedence over other domestic legislation.

21. Since 2022, the School of Magistrates and the Office of the Information and Data Protection Commissioner had provided training to judges, prosecutors, lawyers and police officers on topics including institutional mechanisms to address discrimination, the Commissioner's procedures, practices of the international courts, application of the principles of equality and anti-discrimination, and the combating of hate crimes. More than 60 people had received training in 2023 and 18 people had received training in 2024. The Security Academy had provided training on laws related to gender equality and protection against discrimination. Training had also been provided on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto, as well as on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

22. A number of initiatives had been undertaken with a view to harmonizing domestic legislation with the European Union *acquis*, including measures to strengthen the rule of law in line with the highest European standards.

23. The budget allocated by the State to legal aid services had risen from around €170,000 in 2018 to over €1.2 million in 2024, and international donors had raised a further €1 million. That funding was distributed to all primary legal aid centres and to secondary legal aid through courts across the country. In around 55 per cent of cases, legal aid had been provided to individuals belonging to groups that were automatically entitled to receive legal aid, such as children, victims of discrimination and victims of trafficking in persons. Several training activities had been carried out, including in rural areas, to raise public awareness regarding the right to legal aid.

24. **A representative of Albania** said that the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination enjoyed independence in the exercise of their functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and domestic law. The People's Advocate drew up and administered its own budget, whereas the Commissioner's budget was financed by the State and international partners. Their responsibilities were set out in the relevant laws applicable to each institution: the People's Advocate defended individual rights and freedoms in cases where the contested action had been taken by public administrative bodies, whereas the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination guaranteed the right to non-discrimination not only in cases of public action but also in the private sector. The Commissioner had the power to impose sanctions whereas the People's Advocate did not, and the latter's decisions were not legally binding.

25. The two institutions cooperated closely, under an agreement originally signed in 2018. In accordance with a decision taken in 2017, the Parliament was responsible for oversight of their work. There was a mechanism for systematic monitoring of the follow-up and implementation of their recommendations and decisions. Both bodies reported annually to the Parliament, and each provided thematic reports from time to time. In addition, four-monthly reports were issued on the recommendations made and their implementation. The rate of full implementation in the period 2020–2024 had been around 20 per cent. The Parliament also promoted the work of the two institutions, encouraged further cooperation and made resources available. Their budget had doubled since 2020, while staff numbers had increased by 10 and currently stood at 66.

26. With regard to civil society participation, the Parliament was generally extremely transparent about its work and had appointed a coordinator for civil society. A manual had been drawn up to provide guidance on public participation in decision-making. NGOs were active in scrutinizing legislation and the work of the Parliament. The Parliament website was user-friendly and gave answers to the most frequently asked questions. The various committees reported annually on public participation in decision-making.

27. **A representative of Albania** said that the NGO registration procedure had been simplified in 2021 and many of the procedures no longer required judicial decisions. An electronic register had been launched in July 2023, following finalization of the necessary forms by the High Judicial Council. The fee for creating an NGO was a symbolic payment of €2.

28. The Audiovisual Media Authority had recently published a detailed bulletin giving information on the ownership structure of the various media operators, as a first step towards ensuring the transparency of media financing.

29. **A representative of Albania** said that the rights of journalists and working conditions in the media were monitored by the Labour Inspectorate, in application of the Labour Code. In 2023 and 2024, 26 inspections had been conducted in media entities, primarily in response to complaints from journalists regarding labour rights such as unpaid salary, overtime and working conditions. The Inspectorate and the Audiovisual Media Authority had worked closely together on those issues and had signed a memorandum of understanding on continued cooperation. In 2024, seven complaints had been received. In order to raise awareness, the Inspectorate had organized round tables bringing together the Authority, media owners and journalists' representatives, to emphasize the importance of working conditions and observance of all rights under the Labour Code.

30. **A representative of Albania** said that, in key areas, budget allocations for the period 2024–2026 were due to increase slightly. The health allocation would probably be 3 per cent in 2024, going up to 3.1 per cent in 2026. For education, the allocation was calculated to be 3.2 per cent throughout that period, while the allocation for social protection would be 9.8 per cent for 2024 and 9.6 per cent in 2025 and 2026. Each ministry devised an implementation strategy that specified its policies, the measures it was planning and a budget calculation.

31. **A representative of Albania** said that minority issues were dealt with by the Committee for National Minorities under the Office of the Prime Minister. Since 2021, the Committee had made recommendations on the implementation of social measures to benefit the Egyptian and Roma communities. In the area of social housing, it had monitored the applications of Roma and Egyptian minorities in the municipality of Gjirokastra. In 2023, 17 houses had been renovated with the help of funds from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. Members of those minorities were eligible for social rents, 80 per cent of which was contributed by the Government, through the Ministry, and 20 per cent by the municipality.

32. In 2023 and 2024, the Committee had financed three projects to promote Roma and Egyptian culture and tradition, in application of the Act on the protection of national minorities. It had also helped to organize various activities in cooperation with Roma and Egyptian NGOs and with public bodies such as the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination and the People's Advocate. In general, the Committee was implementing the best procedures and measures in its efforts to decrease discrimination against the Roma and Egyptian minorities and to increase their involvement in social and economic life.

33. **A representative of Albania** said that the Government had made several key updates to national climate legislation. It was revising the national adaptation plan with a focus on improving climate resilience. Adaptation measures were being integrated into national and local development plans for sectors such as agriculture, water resources, energy and tourism, all of which were crucial for the economy and heavily affected by climate change. To date, eight municipalities had adopted local adaptation plans.

34. Albania had updated its nationally determined contribution in line with the Paris Agreement, and the Government was committed to revising it every five years in order to set more ambitious targets. In response to frequent natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, the Government had strengthened the disaster risk reduction framework, bringing it into line with the climate change strategy. As well as enhancing local infrastructure resilience, disaster risk assessment and contingency planning, it was investing in improved early warning systems to predict and manage extreme weather events. In that context, the Climate Services for a Resilient Albania project had been unanimously approved and had received positive evaluations from the Green Climate Fund board. It was designed to reach isolated, marginalized and disadvantaged populations, enhance the protection of vulnerable groups such as low-income families, older persons, women and children, and strengthen their ability to exercise their rights to housing, food security, education and health, even in the face of climate-induced disasters.

35. Albania had made great efforts to diversify energy sources through a long-term strategy and an action plan for increasing the capacity of solar and wind power plants. Its solar park would soon be one of the largest in the Western Balkans, with a capacity of 140 MW, and would contribute to the region's energy stability. In 2023, Albania had produced 81 GW of energy, and in the first half of 2024, photovoltaic plants had generated 184 GW; installed capacity was currently 193 GW.

36. Under a pilot initiative of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, 140 solar power units had been installed in a scheme aiming to reach 2,000 user families, with a government subsidy in 2023 of €8 million. Measures had also been taken to increase energy efficiency in public buildings and the transport sector. The Government had launched several training and capacity-building initiatives in 2024, to demonstrate to ministries and other institutions ways of implementing the strategy in their sectors.

37. Several initiatives had been taken to address gender equality and gender balance in the context of the nationally determined contribution. Women had been invited to training

and awareness-raising sessions, along with other vulnerable groups, to learn more about implementation, reaction to climate change and ways of adapting.

38. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would like to know whether the interministerial working group set up to draft reports to international human rights treaty bodies and ensure participation in the consideration of those reports comprised only representatives of the executive or also included representatives of the judiciary and the legislature. He would be interested to know what measures the State had taken to guarantee proper follow-up to the recommendations of the treaty bodies. Lastly, he wished to ask whether the current report had been shared with civil society during the drafting process and before its submission to the Committee.

39. **Ms. Saran** said that she appreciated that time constraints affected the delegation's ability to reply to all the questions, but she was still awaiting answers to certain specific points that she had raised, namely, the challenges the State party faced in harmonizing its domestic legislation with European Union standards; the State party's migration arrangement with Italy; the steps taken to eliminate hate speech against the LGBTIQI community; transgender rights; and provision for gender-affirming care.

40. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that, as an Egyptian, he was interested in that national minority in the State party. The relationship between the Egyptians and the Albanians dated back to the early nineteenth century, when a brigade of Albanians had helped to repel an invasion of Egypt by the British. Many of the Albanian soldiers had subsequently settled in Egypt, had married and had later taken their Egyptian wives and children back to Albania with them. He had been interested to see the name Kadare on the list of members of the State party's delegation. He was a great admirer of the author, the late Ismail Kadare, whose writing had been an inspiration to Egyptians.

41. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Task Force) said that he would be interested to learn why the State party had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and whether it had any plans to do so. He wondered whether the provisions of the Covenant could be invoked directly in the national courts; if so, he would appreciate examples of cases where they had been.

42. **A representative of Albania** said that the process of accession to the European Union involved consultations with civil society and a broad range of other stakeholders. Owing to the particularities of the Albanian constitutional framework, the necessary amendments to the country's basic laws required a three-fifths majority of all votes in the Albanian Parliament to pass. That was also why the enactment of legislative amendments to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons had proved difficult. Under the Constitution, the Covenant took precedence over national law and could be invoked in the national courts. However, there had been no such cases to date.

43. **A representative of Albania** said that the agreement between Albania and Italy on migration was in line with the Albanian Government's commitment to controlling and discouraging irregular migration in the region. It also encouraged regular migration that complied with European and international law, and it reaffirmed the position of Albania as a contributor to the stability of the European Union. Under the agreement, a reception centre and an accommodation centre had been established in Albania that would be managed and funded by Italy. No more than 3,000 migrants could be held at the centres and the maximum length of stay was set by Italian law. Italy was responsible for providing all necessary health-care and security services in accordance with international law. Specialized medical care was provided at Albanian facilities at the cost of the Italian Government, and Albania was responsible for transport between the reception and accommodation centres.

44. **A representative of Albania** said that, in 2023, amendments had been introduced to the law on audiovisual media to address hate speech and bring the law into line with Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council and with international best practice. A parliamentary committee had recently held a meeting with the Audiovisual Media Authority on the outcomes of the Authority's collaboration with the TikTok social media platform for the removal of videos with hateful or discriminatory content.

45. **A representative of Albania** said that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had recently approved the National Strategy for Migration and the corresponding action plan for the period 2024–2030. Its principal aim was to ensure effective governance of migration, address and manage problems and challenges related to migratory movements, and enhance the positive impact of migration on the development of Albania. The relevant goals under the National Strategy for Development and European Integration were to develop effective policies for labour migration, promote regular migration, protect the rights of migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees, and ensure the integration of migrants into Albanian society.

46. **A representative of Albania** said that the Ministry of Education and Sport took steps to ensure that no child's right to an education was violated, that no child faced discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, and that all children were educated in a safe and inclusive environment free from violence. The school curriculum included modules on tackling hate speech, and teachers received training on the issue. The pre-university education system was built on the principle of non-discrimination and aimed to support the full development of all students.

47. Education institutions implemented standard action procedures, in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to identify and support victims of trafficking in persons. The right to education of trafficking victims was guaranteed and they were provided with free textbooks at all grades of pre-university education.

48. **A representative of Albania** said that, every year, the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation published a series of employment indicators for the Roma and Egyptian communities, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Since 2022, the Ministry had been implementing a workplace training programme for young and vulnerable persons who were not in employment, education or training, and a programme to integrate women, Roma people, long-term unemployed persons and other vulnerable groups into the labour market. The aim of the National Employment and Skills Strategy and its action plan for the period up to 2030 was to provide training to and boost employment opportunities for vulnerable groups in cooperation with the public and private sectors. A referral system had been created, in collaboration with local government, to identify and assess the employment needs of vulnerable groups.

49. Under the country's employment promotion policy, persons from the Roma and Egyptian communities received free vocational training and were given priority in employment programmes of the National Agency for Employment and Skills. As a result, the proportion of Roma and Egyptian persons involved in the employment programmes had increased in recent years. Students from marginalized groups were entitled to a full scholarship and free textbooks and notebooks at vocational training centres, and students with disabilities received additional support services.

50. **Mr. Adilov** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know what measures the State party was taking to reduce the large number of young people who were not in employment, education or training; to match education for young people with labour-market requirements; to protect the labour rights of informal workers in sectors such as agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, and construction; and to improve labour productivity. He would appreciate information on any quotas that might be in place for the employment of Roma and Egyptians and persons with disabilities, on the complaint mechanisms available to workers, and on the measures in place to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. How effective were such measures? He wondered what steps had been taken to close the gap between salaries in Albania and the rest of Europe, which was a driving factor of labour migration, and to implement and ensure compliance with occupational safety and health legislation.

51. He would welcome further details about how the State party guaranteed the right to form and join trade unions, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike, including for migrant workers without permanent residence permits. He would be interested to hear what measures had been taken to eliminate restrictions on the right to strike, including the requirement to undergo a mandatory conciliation procedure beforehand and the prohibition on the right to strike for public officials in the transport and television services. He wondered whether collective bargaining agreements could be concluded at the national level; what measures were being taken to close gaps in social security coverage, especially for children

and older persons; and whether workers in the informal economy were entitled to cash benefits from the social security system.

52. **A representative of Albania** said that the State Labour Inspectorate conducted approximately 10,000 inspections every year. Of those, 80 per cent were routine inspections and 20 per cent were triggered by a complaint, an accident or a request. Around one third of the violations found concerned informal work, another third related to occupational safety and health, and one quarter were in relation to working conditions. Fines and other remedial measures were imposed in accordance with the law, depending on circumstances such as the type of violation and the number of employees involved. Most of the 800 complaints received by the Inspectorate every year concerned non-payment of wages, a lack of holiday leave or failure to conclude an employment contract. The number of accidents in the workplace, including fatal accidents, had declined in recent years.

53. Two platforms had been designed and developed, with the support of ILO and the European Union, to increase the productivity of the low number of labour inspectors and improve the efficiency and quality of the inspection process. One was intended to help inspectors decide on the appropriate penalties in a consistent manner, and the other used data mining and artificial intelligence tools to enhance inspection planning and assess the risk of labour rights violations.

54. The construction sector, which was booming and employed a large workforce, had become a focus of occupational health and safety owing to the prevalence of accidents. In 2023, 1,100 inspections had been conducted on construction sites, or over 10 per cent of the total number of labour inspections. Inspectors made sure to inspect all entities involved in a site, and a checklist had been developed specially for the sector, with elements to be checked on a weekly or monthly basis. Risk-based planning meant that areas considered to be at higher risk, whether because they employed a large number of migrant workers or because they were part of the informal economy, for instance, were inspected more frequently. A working group, with support from ILO, was designing an occupational health and safety policy for the period 2024–2030, which should be completed by the end of the year.

55. **A representative of Albania** said that the 2015 amendments to the Labour Code clearly provided for trade union rights and reflected the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). In addition, the Labour Code provided for special protection for trade union representatives, including protection from discrimination and termination on grounds of membership in a trade union. The right to strike was enshrined in the Constitution, but the exercise of that right remained contingent on first going through mediation and conciliation procedures.

56. **Ms. Saran** said that she wished to know what measures were in place to enforce minimum wages and to ensure that they were adjusted to the cost of living; what measures the State party was taking to tackle internal and cross-border trafficking; and what legislative steps had been taken to facilitate work permits for migrant workers and, more generally, to protect their labour rights.

57. **A representative of Albania** said that the gender pay gap in Albania was narrowing. The minimum wage had been increased to €400, and it was a government priority to ensure that it kept pace with cost of living. All registered workers were tracked, be it through the tax authority or the social security scheme, so it was not possible for them to earn less than the minimum wage or to miss out on benefits. The issue remained how to deal with workers in the informal economy.

58. **A representative of Albania** said that, pursuant to amendments to the law on social housing, local governments were required to allocate a minimum of 5 per cent of housing programme slots to families of the Roma and Egyptian minorities, who were henceforth considered a priority category, including in the point system set up by local governments in implementation of the law. The amendments had also introduced a simplified application process for priority groups.

59. The amendments to the law on the promotion of employment had expanded the category of “disadvantaged groups” to include not only parents but also family members of

persons with disabilities and had introduced a requirement to recruit persons with disabilities, including deaf persons and persons with a partial disability, as assessed by the competent body, as well as a youth guarantee scheme and career counselling.

60. **A representative of Albania** said that, pursuant to amendments to two relevant laws, officials carrying out the initial registration of a property, or its transfer, were required to verify, in the case of couples, that both spouses were included on the title and in the records.

61. **A representative of Albania** said that the Ministry of Education and Sport had approved special guidelines on the enrolment of and provision of support to migrant, asylum-seeking or refugee children, children arriving from conflict zones and child victims of trafficking. An interdisciplinary committee assessed the children's education and psychosocial needs and determined in what class they should be enrolled. The school then formed a team to develop an individualized support plan and assigned psychosocial workers to ensure the children's well-being and integration. Measures were in place to handle situations where children lacked identification documents. Of the children returning from conflict areas who had been integrated into pre-university education since 2021/22, 18 remained enrolled, while 4 had moved onto vocational training.

62. **Mr. Hennebel**, noting that civil society contributions to the review, while substantive, had been quantitatively few, said that he wished to hear more about the measures taken to remove obstacles to the registration of births in the Roma, Egyptian and migrant communities; to ensure those communities' access to health-care services; to register unaccompanied or separated children arriving in the country with the child protection authorities; and to improve reception infrastructure for those children. He was curious to know why holders of humanitarian residency permits were not eligible for family reunification and what was being done to address the matter.

63. He would welcome information on the steps being taken to prevent and eliminate child labour in high-risk fields, such as agriculture, mining, construction, domestic work and begging, and to strengthen the enforcement of laws banning child labour; on action taken in response to reports by child protection authorities concerning child labour; on collaboration at the local, regional and national levels to prevent child labour and protect exploited children, in particular; and on measures to support orphans in their transition from institutions to independent adult life. Information would also be welcome on steps taken to reduce the duration of social security contributions required for eligibility for maternity benefits, any provision for paternity or parental leave and the use, in practice, of such leave.

64. He was interested in learning about the adequacy of crisis centres for victims of domestic violence. He wondered what training was provided to law enforcement personnel in handling complaints of domestic violence, and to law enforcement personnel and health-care professionals to ensure the effective implementation of laws on domestic violence and victim protection. He asked whether there were plans to amend the Criminal Code in order to protect children against sexual exploitation and abuse, to introduce the notion of consent in the definition of rape, and to explicitly criminalize femicide, cyberviolence and gender-based, physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence.

65. He wished to know what measures the State party was taking or intending to take to improve access to social housing for marginalized groups; to prevent discrimination in access to housing; to expand eligibility for social housing and employment by taking into account income from informal employment; to ensure that women had access to mortgage loans and entrepreneurship opportunities; and to address long-standing housing shortages, which had been worsened by the 2019 earthquake.

66. He also wished to know how the State party intended to reduce poverty, especially among women, including those living in rural areas, women with disabilities and minority women, and among marginalized groups; how many households had been subjected to forced eviction; what compensation they had been awarded; and what alternative housing solutions had been offered. The delegation was invited to describe the measures taken to address persistent challenges in ensuring access to water and sanitation.

67. He would appreciate receiving information on plans to enhance access by women and marginalized groups to good quality health-care services, particularly in rural areas, through

improved facilities and increased public spending. He wondered what measures were taken to ensure the free availability of emergency contraceptives, especially for victims of sexual violence, and to improve access to sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortions. Information would also be appreciated on HIV risk reduction programmes, in particular for drug users; on measures to curb the alarming rise in HIV-related deaths by, for instance, resolving the medication shortage and ensuring access to affordable viral load testing; and on measures to mitigate the impact of the country's punitive drug laws on access to health care. Were discussions under way in the State party on the possible decriminalization of drug use?

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.