



Media release

Tirana 23 November 2020

Switzerland funds reconstruction of houses in Albania: Federal Councillor Cassis gets an update on the status of the projects

During his official visit to Tirana on 23 November 2020, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis met the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Gent Cakaj and President Ilir Meta. The talks focused on Switzerland's commitment in Albania, Albania's chairmanship of the OSCE and the candidacy of both countries for the UN Security Council. The head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) also visited an SDC project to restore destroyed houses.

Switzerland and Albania have maintained diplomatic relations and close bilateral ties for half a century. The two countries officially established diplomatic relations in 1970, and Switzerland opened its first embassy in Tirana in 1992. For Mr Cassis, the 50th anniversary was reason to celebrate. "I am extremely pleased to be able to mark this anniversary with a visit. 50 years of diplomatic relations; half a century of friendly relations. The past 12 months have powerfully demonstrated our solidarity to one another. Following last year's devastating earthquake, Switzerland sent humanitarian aid on the very same day. And we have worked closely during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Meetings with ministers and courtesy visit with the president

On the agenda for the official meetings were political and social issues, the economy and vocational education and training. With Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, Mr Cassis also discussed the challenges of recent months and Albania's current chairmanship of the OSCE. The head of the FDFA emphasised Switzerland's support for the Albanian chairmanship and praised its achievements. Mr Rama expressed his thanks for the good cooperation and summarised the most important topics of the forthcoming Ministerial Conference on 3 December 2020. With the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gent Cakaj, Cassis went on to discuss topics of bilateral interest and the political situation in Albania and the Western Balkans as a whole. With President Ilir Meta, Mr Cassis looked back over 50 years of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania. Since 1970, the two countries have continued to expand and reinforce their strong and friendly relations.

Swiss humanitarian aid in Albania

Mr Cassis concluded his official trip with a visit to a Swiss-supported project for the renovation of houses damaged in the devastating earthquake of November 2019, which killed more than 50 people and left 30,000 homeless. Together with Minister of State for Reconstruction Arben Ahmetaj, Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis went to see how the emergency relief from Switzerland has helped with reconstruction. "Within hours of the powerful earthquake, a team from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit travelled to Tirana. In the meantime, our staff already present had contacted cooperation partners and the local authorities. This ensured that aid was swiftly delivered to where people needed it most," said Mr Cassis, praising the high quality of the two countries' cooperation during this difficult time.

Long-standing partners in international cooperation

Albania's development and the stability of the Western Balkan countries and their European integration are of central importance for Switzerland. Switzerland has been active in the region through its international cooperation strategies since 1995. Albania itself is a priority country for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). Since 1996, Switzerland has invested around CHF 345 million in Albania's development, and is one of the country's most important bilateral donors alongside Germany. Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis expressed Switzerland's willingness to continue supporting Albania in its reform efforts and acknowledged Albania's stabilising role in the Western Balkans. "I am proud that we are able to support Albania on this journey. Switzerland supports Albania's efforts to build democratic structures and institutions and its integration in the European family."