

EU/ALBANIA: COMMISSION EXPRESSES CONCERNS
OVER CRIMINAL COURT DEAL WITH US

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EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten met Albanian Foreign Minister Ilir Meta on May 8 in Brussels, expressing the EU's concerns about Albania's bilateral agreement with the United States on the International Criminal Court (ICC). A Commission spokesperson said that the agreement signed by the two sides did not comply with the guidelines set down for EU Member States in the common position adopted by Foreign Ministers at last September's General Affairs and External Relations Council. The ICC will try persons charged of a range of offences such as war crimes and genocide.

The guidelines stipulate the terms under which bilateral agreements should be concluded with the US, which has sought such deals as a means of protecting US citizens from the ICC's authority in countries where US personnel are serving. One of the problems with Albania's agreement - signed on May 2 in Tirana - is seemingly that the categories of exemption are too broad. EU Member States are ICC signatories and thus far none have concluded such an agreement with the US.

A Commission spokesperson warned that those countries seeking further integration with the EU should respect the common position and abide by the guidelines. But beyond the disappointment at this apparent lack of European commitment, the Commission says that negotiations launched in late January with Albania towards a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) will continue and that the ICC issue will not have a formal impact on the talks. Indeed, a third round will take place on May 14-15 in Albanian capital Tirana.