

**Emergency resolution Nr. 5 adopted at the EPP Congress, Bucharest (Romania),
6th – 7th March 2024**

“Implementation of the Rule of Law in Albania – The Case of Beleris”

Whereas Freddy Beleris, the Greek minority candidate for the post of Mayor of Himara, an Albanian town populated predominantly by ethnic Greeks, was arrested on the eve of local elections, in May 2023, on the allegation of bribing voters;

Whereas Freddy Beleris was elected Mayor of Himara, on May 14th, 2023, while he was in custody;

Whereas his lawyer’s repeated appeals have been turned down and Freddy Beleris has not been allowed to be sworn in, as he remains imprisoned;

Whereas there was an unjustified and unfair detention for 8 months for an alleged accusation of vote-buying of 8 votes for approximately 340 USD; whereas among 31 similar cases, Beleris is the only one still imprisoned;

Whereas Beleris is denied his constitutional right to be sworn in and assume his duties as Mayor of Himara, despite the precedent of similar cases in Albania (MPs Haklaj and Frrokuin in 2001 and 2015);

Whereas there is a procrastination on the part of the Albanian justice system, as his trial started 5 months after his arrest and since then there have been several delays based on a variety of pretexts;

Whereas there are serious concerns about his right to a fair trial: the fact that the main witness, as part of his involvement in the case, has confessed that he was paid by the police, a fact that was not known to the General Prosecution, would suffice to end the criminal prosecution against the defendant in any Member-State of the EU; Vlore Public Prosecutor's Office has presented a copy of Beleris’ criminal record according to which he was convicted in the past by the Albanian courts and that has been proved to be forged;

Whereas the former Mayor, Mr. Gjergji Goro, remains in his position as acting Mayor, despite Beleris’ clear and uncontested victory;

The European People's Party:

- Recalls the concerns expressed in the European Parliament's Resolution of July 12th, 2023, on the 2022 European Commission Report on Albania, regarding the arrest of the new Mayor of Himara, Freddy Beleris, on the eve of the municipal elections in May, which both violated the presumption of innocence and prevented the Mayor-elect from taking office, as he remains imprisoned to this day.
- Recalls that the European Parliament Resolution of July 12th, 2023, linked this matter to the overall respect for fundamental rights, the pending issue of the properties of members of the Greek ethnic minority in the municipal area and the accusations of encroachments by the State.
- Strongly condemns the Albanian government's actions against an ethnic minority Mayor-elect and its direct interference in the electoral proceedings, which go against European values.
- Stresses that the Albanian government's blatant disrespect for the rule of law, fundamental rights, the rights of the Greek minority and, above all, the *acquis communautaire*, creates a political gap between Albania and the EU.
- Stresses that the neglect of rule of law, fundamental rights and media freedom, as well as widespread corruption and the lack of separation of powers, are undermining Albania's accession path to the EU.
- Calls for swift implementation of the opposition's parliamentary and constitutional rights, including its fundamental function to hold the executive accountable.
- Urges the Albanian authorities to respect the Decision of the First Instance Court of GJKKO (SPAK), which was issued on December 11th, 2023, and published on December 21st, 2023, on the rejection of Mr. Beleris' request for a special permit to take his oath as elected Mayor of Himara, stating that Mr. Goro cannot continue to exert the duties of acting Mayor of Himara. Albania's Prime minister Edi Rama did himself refer to this Decision and acknowledged the election results. However, no action has been taken in order to conform with the aforementioned Decision.
- Moreover, yesterday the Albanian court convicted Beleris to 2 years in prison, without taking into consideration the aforementioned testimony of the major witness that he has been paid by the police in order to create a false accusation. This issue raises serious concerns about the implementation of the rule of law in Albania, the right to a fair trial and the institutional grounds leading to EU membership.
- Expresses concern as regards the OSCE-ODHIR Local Elections Report 2023 findings and calls for a swift implementing of the recommendations and electoral reform and for a

constructive and inclusive political dialogue from all sides to address this issue before the next general elections.

- Urges the Albanian authorities to respect the results of the local election of May 14th, 2023, and take all necessary steps to secure that the Mayor-elect is sworn in, as well as to safeguard the right to a fair trial.