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## PRESS RELEASE

On 16 July, the Steering Committee of the joint project of the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) "Support to Efficiency of Justice" (SEJ) took place in Tirana. The meeting gathered representatives of the EU Delegation, the CoE and the Albanian judicial and executive powers to discuss the project progress, main results achieved in the last 18 months and the way forward.

The event was addressed by President of the High Court Mr Zaganjori, Deputy Minister of Justice Mr Peçi, Member of the High Council of Justice Mr Mustafaj and Head of the School of Magistrates Mr Sokol Sadushi, whom pointed to number of key issues to successful implementation of the reform, including organisation of the courts and the prosecution, the status of judges and prosecutors and implementation of the decisions of the courts, also raised in the recent "Analysis of the justice system in Albania – 2015".

Mr Yngve Engstrom, Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation, emphasised that "the ongoing justice reform in Albania must be above all private or group interests. It should be a reform driven by knowledge and best practices – not a political one. An efficient and trustworthy judicial system is essential to gain the trust of citizens. Predictable, timely and enforceable justice decisions have a key impact in making a country an attractive location for business and investment. It means a system where justice is not only done, but is trusted by all. Judges and prosecutors are the cornerstone of this reform. They must demonstrate the highest level of integrity and guarantee that no one – no government, no public official and no dominant company is above the law". The EU is the main provider of expertise in the judicial reform process, through the joint EU/CoE project "Support to Efficiency of Justice" and the "EURALIUS" project.

In his remarks, Mr Leyenberger the Executive Secretary the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) of the CoE emphasised the importance of respecting the fundamental principle of independence of the judiciary in the ongoing reform process. Commenting on the CoE and the EU cooperation in general, Mr Leyenberger said that the two organisations work in synergy to harmonise standards and improve the daily functioning of the European judicial systems, the SEJ project being one such example.

SEJ project currently works with 37 courts of different jurisdiction and levels in Albania. Through a coaching programme, the project supports the daily management of the courts in view of the SATURN Guidelines on judicial time-management. *The Analysis of the Justice System in Albania*, a document that serves as a basis of the new Justice Strategy Plan has used the results of the in-depths study, assessment of the Albanian judicial system by SEJ.

### Background:

The EU/CoE Support to Efficiency of Justice, which started in January 2014, aims to strengthen the capacity of the Albanian judicial authorities in different aspects of judicial management and bring their practices in full compliance with the standards and guidelines set by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice. The EU and the CoE have a long-standing cooperation in assisting the Albanian judiciary through joint projects. The SEJ project meets the needs of the Albanian justice system for improvement of the efficiency and quality of justice, also in view of the second key priority identified by the European Commission Albania needs to meet to open

accession negotiations with the EU. The project budget amounts to €1,149,865.87, out of which the EU contribution is €1,000,000 and the CoE forecasted contribution is € 149,865.87.