

## **Annex G – Stakeholder Views**

### *British Embassy Tirana*

1. **The exclusions in July 2022 have not detrimentally impacted UK-AL relations, and have reinforced our reputation as an international leader in tackling criminality and corruption.** At the time of writing there is no evidence to suggest diplomatic relations or operational cooperation with the Government of Albania has suffered as a result of these exclusions. Additionally, UK action received support both from considerable sections of Albanian society and from international partners.
2. **However, in response disputed Democratic Party leader Sali Berisha has launched public attacks against both HMG and HMA Tirana personally.** Berisha has repeatedly accused HMA Tirana of being corrupt and colluding with the Socialist Government of Albania to suppress the opposition in Albania. These claims do not gain much traction outside Berisha's electoral base, but they have caused a degree of reputational damage to the UK amongst his supporters. They show that the UK's decisions have put pressure on Berisha.
3. **There has been a deterrence impact from the exclusion decisions.** Senior politicians and officials have contacted HMA Tirana a number of times to ask whether further individuals will be excluded or sanctioned, and when a new list might be decided. This is a regular question in interviews with the Albanian media, which has helped sustain the debate over ending impunity. We have also received plaudits from politicians and civil society for not publicising the names in the first wave, as that has made other individuals worried they may be included in future. While it is difficult to capture direct evidence of a reduction in corrupt practices, we anticipate our action will have influenced some of the choices such individuals make and indirectly reinforced the determination of the independent justice institutions to pursue prosecutions of senior figures in Albania.
4. **If Berisha's legal challenge to his exclusion is successful HMG will face international reputational damage, particularly in the Western Balkans region.** The set of exclusions in July received considerable regional news coverage. Berisha's regular public attacks on HMA Tirana have maintained focus on UK action against him. Should his challenge be successful, Berisha would seek to publicise this fact as evidence that he has not committed corrupt or criminal acts. This risk is heightened by the timeline for local elections which take place in May 2023, where Berisha faces a tough challenge to retain his party's share of the vote and seats. A successful challenge would undermine UK credibility internationally and regionally and reduce the leverage and deterrence impact that the threat of further anti-corruption action (e.g. sanctions, further exclusions) provides.
5. **Withdrawing Berisha's exclusion ahead of his legal challenge would lead to at least as significant – and likely greater – reputational damage.**

Berisha would publicly exploit this in the same way as if he had successfully legally challenged the decision. Additionally, withdrawing the decision ahead of a legal challenge would likely be portrayed – and interpreted - as an embarrassing U-turn by the UK Government.

*International Strategy, Engagement and Devolution (ISED) with input from Home Office International Operations, International Migration Unit, and Returns Logistics Operatons*

6. **The UK has taken this action and we recommend sticking with the decision to exclude** because we recognise the detrimental impact that SOC and corruption has had on Albania and the Western Balkans. This also reaffirms that the UK takes strong action without prejudice where we assess their presence not to be conducive to public good due to their involvement in SOC and corruption. This action also highlights to Albania that the UK takes corruption and SOC seriously and is a reminder for the Govt of Albania to take further steps to tackle corruption.
  
7. **The original submission outlined the potential risk of negative impact which these exclusions presented to Home Office equities.** At the time both the CSN Team and Home Office International Operations (HOIO) took actions to mitigate impacts and FCDO Western Balkans Department and British Embassy Tirana considered the risk of a tangible impact on UK-Albania cooperation at political and operational levels as low.

**Dropping the Berisha exclusion could present reputational risks to HO and wider HMG.** The UK has received recent public criticism from senior Albanian leaders (including PM Edi Rama) over the presentation of Albanian migrants in the media.