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Answer given by Mr Várhelyi  
on behalf of the European Commission  
(24.7.2020)

The demolition of the National Theatre on 17 May 2020 occurred at a moment when the European Union had been consistently calling for dialogue between authorities, civil society and other stakeholders before taking an irreversible decision. The Commission regrets that the call for dialogue was not followed up by the relevant national and local authorities. It should be noted, however, that the competence to make decisions concerning the National Theatre, based on consultations and recommendations made by experts, ultimately lies with the Albanian authorities.

The Commission has publicly expressed concern about the use of force by the police during demonstrations. The Albanian competent authorities launched investigations on the demolition and related events. The Commission has called upon the authorities to carry out effective and thorough investigations.

The protection of cultural heritage is a fundamental value of the European Union. In the context of the accession process, the Commission will continue to actively encourage all relevant national institutions in Albania to promote a policy that respects cultural heritage. The recent decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Albania will provide the framework for further strengthening the rule of law in the country. The Commission will continue to engage with the competent authorities in Albania on this important matter.