

Blinken arrives in Tirana on first visit to Albania

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Online Desk: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Tirana on Thursday in a show of support for its Balkan ally.

Blinken's first visit to Albania is intended to reinforce bilateral relations with a key partner to help maintain stability in the Balkans, senior State Department official Yuri Kim said.

Albania has seen a shift towards the West after decades of isolation under the communist regime of Enver Hoxha.

Today a large majority of Albanians have a very positive image of the United States, according to recent opinion polls.

Blinken is due to meet Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and young Albanians, as Washington welcomes Albania's firm support for Ukraine and its chairmanship of a difficult UN Security Council session last year.

He is also due to meet Afghan refugees in Tirana who fled their country after the Taliban seized power two years ago and are awaiting US visas.

Giant posters in the streets of Tirana greeted Blinken's arrival.

The small Balkan country joined NATO in 2009 and is a candidate for membership of the European Union.