Address by Minister of State for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton T.D.,

Item: European Integration Process of Kosovo

European Parliament

Strasbourg 17 April 2013

Note: the plenary debate will take place on the day of the latest round of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. It also takes place in advance of the presentation of the report by the Commission and the High Representative on Kosovo. The contents of that report are not yet known, and the Presidency's remarks may have to be adjusted in light of developments

SPEAKING POINTS

President,
Honourable Members,

Having exchanged views on the situation in Serbia, I would now like to turn to Kosovo.

As you are well aware, the Council took note in December 2012 of the Feasibility Study for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Kosovo. This was without prejudice to Member States' positions on status. The Council also noted that the Commission will propose negotiating directives for a SAA once Kosovo meets the short term priorities concerning the rule of law, public administration, protection of minorities and trade, which are identified in the Feasibility Study. This would be an important step in the EU’s relations with Kosovo, and a step among several initiatives. The Structured Dialogue on the Rule of Law, the visa liberalisation dialogue and the Stabilisation and Association Dialogue, all play an important role in guiding Kosovo’s reform efforts towards further progress on the EU path.

Let me also stress the importance of continued cooperation with EULEX and the work of the EULEX Special
We believe that Kosovo has made progress on the EU agenda and the EU has set out an ambitious agenda for 2013. It is now particularly important for Kosovo to accelerate the pace of reforms. Major efforts are needed to strengthen public administration reform and consolidate rule of law, namely by providing evidence of the fight against organised crime and corruption, judicial reform and freedom of expression.

We stand ready to assist the economic and political development of Kosovo through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region.

There should be irreversible progress towards delivering structures in northern Kosovo which meet the security and justice needs of the local population in a transparent and cooperative manner, and in a way that ensures the functionality of a single institutional and administrative set up within Kosovo, respecting the particular needs of the local population. It is essential that Kosovo further develops an outreach plan for northern Kosovo.

The joint reports of the Commission and the High Representative on progress in the areas outlined in the Council conclusions of December last year will be presented in the coming days. These have been delayed to allow for further progress in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, which is meeting again today.

As I said in relation to Serbia, we recognize and commend the political courage and consistent efforts shown by both Prime Ministers: Mr. Thaci and Mr. Dačić. I would also like to thank the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, for her very active engagement as facilitator of the process.

I encourage Kosovo to continue to engage in the ongoing efforts to reach a mutually agreeable solution on the proposal for an Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo. Agreement on this issue will hopefully lead to a possible decision to open negotiations for a SAA with Kosovo. Solid and continued efforts by Kosovo will further pave the way in the months ahead.

Let me underline that we support Kosovo’s European perspective and want both Serbia and Kosovo to continue on their respective European paths. A visible and sustainable improvement in relations between them would avoid that either can block the other in these efforts.

Thank you very much for your attention.