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

Item: 2012 Progress report on Montenegro

European Parliament

Strasbourg 17 April 2013

SPEAKING POINTS

President,
Honourable Members,

When the Council assessed progress on enlargement at its meeting on 11 December 2012, it took a positive view of progress in Montenegro towards EU accession. Specific issues highlighted included the strengthening of the functioning of the parliament, the judiciary, anti-corruption policy, human rights and the protection of rights of persons belonging to minorities. The Council also noted that ongoing constitutional and public administration reforms had advanced. Montenegro has also continued to implement smoothly its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and to play a positive role in the region, including through constructive involvement in developing regional cooperation.

Many of these issues are also reflected in your Resolution, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the rapporteur, Charles Tannock, for his report and his very positive contribution to advancing Montenegro’s accession process.

Montenegro now needs to build on the progress it has achieved so far and consolidate its reform process. Particular attention needs to be paid to further development of a solid track record in the area of rule of law. Sustainable and lasting reform is needed, in particular with regard to tackling organized crime and cases of corruption, including at senior level. The Council has welcomed Europol's report on the issue of organized crime in Montenegro. Further efforts are needed to ensure the accountability and independence of the judiciary and to strengthen the administrative capacity to implement the acquis.
Overall the accession negotiations have got off to a good start. The Cyprus Presidency was able to open the first of the negotiation chapters with Montenegro, namely Science and Research. [The Irish Presidency has been able, in its turn, to open a second chapter, Education and Culture, at an Accession Conference which took place this Monday in Brussels at Deputy level]. We will do our utmost over the coming months to achieve further progress in the negotiations, including, if possible, the opening of a further chapter.

We are satisfied that, in parallel with the negotiations, the screening process is continuing to make good progress. In December the EU completed its screening of the key rule of law chapters, which cover the Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and Justice, Freedom and Security. Montenegro has been invited to prepare the required Action Plans which constitute the opening benchmarks for these chapters. We do not expect to open negotiations on these chapters during our Presidency. The preparatory work needed must be of a high quality, and this means that it will take some time. However we will continue to encourage Montenegro to take this work forward. This should allow it to tackle these chapters at an early stage in the enlargement process and to start developing a solid track record on the reform agenda. We would hope to see Montenegro submit the Action Plans required during our Presidency to allow for consideration of these issues by the Council.

President, Honourable Members,

You will appreciate that there is a great deal to be done during our Presidency. It is important to keep up the positive momentum, and I can assure you of the Irish Presidency’s commitment to making as much progress as possible in the negotiations.

I would like to end by acknowledging and expressing again my appreciation for the work of this Parliament, and your rapporteur in helping take forward Montenegro’s accession process. I very much welcome the close cooperation between our two institutions, and look forward to continuing to hearing your views and taking into account your expertise as we move these negotiations forward.

Thank you very much for your attention.

ENDS