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

Item: 2012 Comprehensive Monitoring Report on Croatia

European Parliament
Strasbourg 17 April 2013

SPEAKING POINTS

President,
Honourable Members,

On behalf of the Council it is a particular pleasure for me to address you today before you adopt what should be the very last Parliamentary resolution on Croatia in advance of its expected accession to the EU on 1 July. Croatia held its first European Parliament elections on Sunday (14 April) to elect the 12 MEPs who will represent its citizens in the European Parliament for the 12 months leading up to the European elections in 2014.

The process of ratifying the Accession Treaty for Croatia is advancing well, and we are confident that it will be completed on time. This will allow us very soon to conclude what has been a long journey, which started ten years ago. It is a process which will finally see Croatia take its right and proper place in the family of European peoples.

Croatia's accession to the EU on 1 July, as well as the start of accession negotiations with Montenegro and the granting of candidate status to Serbia, are a strong testimony that, when conditions are met, the EU delivers on its commitments. This strengthens the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans region. It demonstrates the positive and stabilizing effect of enlargement - to the benefit of both the EU and the region as a whole. We fully support the view, as expressed in your resolution due to be adopted tomorrow, that Croatia's accession process testifies to the credibility of the EU's enlargement policy and its transformative effects.
The assistance and monitoring undertaking by the Commission has been a key part of this process. The Council has reiterated the importance it attaches to close monitoring of Croatia’s fulfillment of all the commitments it has undertaken in the accession negotiations, including those which must be fulfilled before accession.

The final Monitoring Report on Croatia presented by the Commission last month has confirmed that Croatia is generally meeting the commitments and requirements arising from the accession negotiations in all chapters. Substantial results have been achieved in a number of areas where action was required and which the Council highlighted in its conclusions last December. These relate in particular to the areas of competition policy, judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security. But significant progress has also been achieved in meeting other important commitments. I commend Croatia for all that it has achieved over recent months.

This means that - as you recognize in your resolution - Croatia is on track to meet the outstanding requirements for membership. The Commission has concluded that Croatia will be in a position to take on the rights and obligations of EU membership on 1 July, and the General Affairs Council is due to adopt conclusions on this latest Commission Monitoring Report and its recommendations next week.

I would also underline that Croatia, the Council and the Commission are currently working on comprehensive technical adaptations to the EU acquis to take account of Croatian accession. This is an important but time-consuming task - vital if the EU is to be completely ready in time.

Before concluding, I would also like to recall Croatia’s commitment to ensuring that bilateral issues do not obstruct the accession process of candidate countries. Croatia is expected to continue to play an active role in regional cooperation.

Given the importance of good neighbourly relations and the need to implement legally binding international agreements, the Council encourages Croatia to continue to address all outstanding bilateral and regional issues, including succession issues, building on the progress achieved so far. We particularly welcome Croatia and Slovenia’s decision to sign a Memorandum of Understanding aiming at finding a solution to the Ljubljanska Banka issue.

Further efforts are also needed to tackle impunity for war crimes through the impartial handling of outstanding cases and through continued full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.
President, Honourable Members

I would like to close by expressing our gratitude to this Parliament, and in particular your rapporteur, Libor Rouček, and the previous rapporteur, Hannes Swoboda, for their contribution to the efforts to take forward Croatia’s accession process. Cooperation between this Parliament and the Council has been very good. Together we have helped ensure that Croatia can take its rightful place as the 28th Member State of the European Union.

Thank you very much for your attention.

ENDS