

## **I can see the finishing line**

**During my time as Commissioner for Enlargement, I have witnessed the very real progress that Croatia has made on its path to the European Union.** Indeed, your country has come a long way in the last five years, as the prospect of EU membership stimulated extensive reforms. Although 2010 presented many challenges, particularly the on-going impact of the economic crisis, Croatia continued to progress and the foundations are now in place for the last big push towards your accession to the European Union.

**Looking back on the accession process of my own country to the EU, I know that there are times when everyone wishes that the process could be accelerated.** However, I also know that speed is not the most important factor: only the quality of the work will deliver benefits for both Croatia and the EU.

**EU accession will benefit you, your children and your grandchildren far into the future.** The last wave of enlargement clearly demonstrated that the better the preparation, the greater the benefits will be. It is in everyone's interest that the foundations of Croatia's accession are built on stone and not on sand.

**These solid foundations are being put in place, to the benefit of every citizen in Croatia.** However, laying the foundations for the future involves implementing the most challenging reforms. Croatia needs to demonstrate that it can provide a stable and predictable legal environment for all. An effective and efficient legal system must be seen to regulate property rights; to be efficient and impartial with only the best candidates appointed as judges; to ensure that corruption, which harms all sectors of society, is effectively prosecuted at all levels; and that minority rights are guaranteed in practice. Although such reforms can be evidenced by a change in people's mindset, effective implementation is the most objective way to measure progress. It takes time to build up a convincing track record.

**I am particularly encouraged by the positive role that Croatia has played in fostering better relations within the region.** Recent agreements on extradition with Montenegro and Serbia help to ensure that justice is effectively implemented across the region. The next stage is to extend this good work into dealing with the legacy of the past. The first steps have been taken to deal with the issue of refugees at the regional level. Further initiatives, both on this issue and in dealing with war crimes, through full cooperation with the ICTY, would demonstrate that the region as a whole is looking to the future, not to the past.

**While implementing these final reforms, we must not lose sight of the progress achieved thus far.** The requirements of **the EU internal market** have provided Croatian consumers with higher standards of protection and tax-payers with better value for their money. The opening of trade has increased the availability of affordable goods while increasing investment and export opportunities for businesses. EU accession will also make the Croatian economy more attractive to investors and helps create an environment conducive to growth and jobs. Croatia is on the verge of becoming an integral part of the biggest economic bloc in the world.

**The European Commission will continue to support Croatia's work and closely monitor her progress.** The report we adopted today gives a snapshot of where Croatia stands in meeting EU requirements. It explicitly acknowledges what Croatia has achieved so far, while providing a precise picture on the remaining issues to be addressed in order to complete the negotiation

process. I would like to encourage Croatia to continue its hard work in the months ahead, as our final, common goal is drawing closer and closer.

**Stefan Füle,**

Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

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