



**Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Prime Minister Plenković and President Pirc Musar on the occasion of Croatia joining the Eurozone and Schengen area**

Zagreb, 1 January 2023

Prime Minister, dear Andrej,

Madam President, dear Nataša,

First of all, Happy New Year to the two of you and to everybody here around us. I am delighted to be here, with you, today. It is a day to celebrate. It is the season of new beginnings, 1 January, new chapters that are being opened. And there is no place in Europe where this is more true today, that it is a season of new beginnings and new chapters, than here at the border between Croatia and Slovenia. Today, Croatia joins the Schengen area and the Eurozone. Two immense achievements for the youngest Member State of the European Union, and both reached on the very same day. So indeed, this is a day for the history books.

But above all, this is a day of joy and pride for the Croatian people. It is testimony of your amazing journey, your hard work and your determination. It is a day of celebration not only for Croatians, but for all European citizens. From now on, internal borders can be crossed freely, without controls, like here at Bregana. And all the other crossing points at land with Slovenia and Hungary, at sea with Italy, and as of March, by air with all other Schengen States. No more checks, no more passport control, no more queues, just people crossing smoothly, as we can see right behind us. Tourists visiting Croatia will no longer need a separate visa. They can visit with the same Schengen visa as they use to travel to all other Schengen countries. The next generation of Croatians will grow up in Schengen. People will be able to travel freely, business will be unhindered by checks. Seamless travel will bring tangible results for people living along the border, working across the border, or having family on both sides of the border. Communities will grow closer together. And your presence here today, Madam President, clearly shows how important this day is, not just for Croatia, but also for all its neighbours.

We will need to work very closely together to protect Schengen and preserve its benefits. Because indeed, Schengen cannot be taken for granted. Its functioning has been challenged over time and it continues to be challenged. Schengen is about commitment and mutual trust. In Schengen, we rely on one another. And we know that we can trust you and that we can rely on Croatia.

Being able to cross internal borders without controls is one important achievement; being able to pay across borders using the same EU currency is another. And I know by my own personal experience that Croatians will always remember the first time they paid with euros. The first time they held the euro coin minted with your national emblem, the kuna, as a symbol of the successful union between your national identity and your European destiny. Today, you are joining a community of 347 million Europeans who are using the euro in their everyday lives. The euro makes us stronger at home. It facilitates investments and trade across borders, thus making our economy more vibrant. It helps to create jobs, it brings macroeconomic stability and credibility. And as the second most important currency globally, the euro also makes us stronger on the world stage. Indeed, the euro is one of our best collective achievements. And it is, of course, much more than a currency. It is a token of unity, beyond borders and beyond languages.

Dear Andrej,

What an extraordinary success for the people of Croatia. I know how hard you worked for this day to come, congratulations again, to join the euro and Schengen communities, just ten years after Croatia joined the European Union. This is a day of great pride, of great emotion.

Thank you very much for inviting me to be a part of it.



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