

Brussels, 07/10/2010
C/2010/6836

Dear President,

Thank you for your letter of 1st July 2010 whereby you provided the European Commission with the very interesting and forward-looking opinion of the Portuguese Parliament on the accession of Iceland to the European Union {COM(2010) 62}.

The European Commission welcomes the decision of the European Council last June to open accession negotiations with Iceland. This decision clearly underlines the fact that Iceland has a place in the European Union and that all the conditions are now in place to launch the accession process.

Since then, preparations for accession have been accelerated with the adoption of the Negotiating Framework and the formal opening of accession negotiations at the occasion of the First Inter-Governmental Conference with Iceland on 27 July. The Negotiating Framework lays down the general guidelines for the accession negotiations and indicates the reforms Iceland must undertake to join the EU.

Furthermore, the screening exercise, i.e. assessment of Iceland's compliance with the acquis, is scheduled to start this autumn and will last until spring 2011. In line with the renewed consensus on enlargement of December 2006, the Commission will screen key chapters at an early stage, namely, in the case of Iceland, chapters on fisheries, agriculture, financial services and environment. The Commission will apply the same method to Iceland as to any other candidate country and will assess the country's readiness for accession on the basis of the own-merits principle.

The Commission shares the assessment of the European Affairs Committee as regards the main challenges of Iceland's accession to the EU. In this regard, we note with satisfaction that Iceland has taken some measures to amend the rules on appointments in the judiciary and to tackle conflict of interest in Iceland's public life. However, sound implementation of the anti-corruption framework as well as an effective independence of the judiciary need to be fully ensured.

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The Commission fully agrees on the need to find a mutually satisfactory solution in the fisheries area. In line with the 2006 renewed consensus on enlargement, it will carry out an impact assessment on Iceland's participation in the Common Fisheries Policy in the course of the negotiations. As regards whaling, the Opinion mentions in its chapter on environment that Iceland allows the hunting of whales, which is not in line with the acquis and that necessary steps will need to be undertaken as regards the protection of cetaceans. The interdiction of commercial whaling is likely to be a challenging issue in the future accession negotiations.

The first progress report on Iceland's preparedness for accession will be available in November. It will provide an assessment of the measures taken by the Icelandic authorities to address the recommendations of the Opinion. The report will pay particular attention to the most challenging recommendations raised by your Parliament and will clearly indicate priority issues to be further addressed.

I would like, on behalf of the European Commission, to express my gratitude to the Honorable Members of the Portuguese Parliament for their interest and support to Iceland's accession to the EU.

/-/ Maroš Šefčovič