

# P R E S S R E L E A S E

European Union Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Croatia

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## PRESS RELEASE

### • Croatia – one step closer to the EU, provided there is full cooperation with ICTY<sup>1</sup>

*The European Commission has proposed a negotiating framework for membership talks with Croatia. This document lays down the guiding principles, the substance and the procedures for the accession negotiations. It serves as basis for the Member States to conduct the negotiations with Croatia.*

The European Council in December 2004 decided that accession talks can start with Croatia on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2005, provided there is full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The Commission's proposal will allow the Member States to define the framework for the negotiations with Croatia necessary for the conduct of these negotiations, in due time ahead of the target date. Presenting the negotiating framework Commissioner Rehn said: *"The Commission has delivered its part of the job in timely fashion. Now it is up to the Croatian authorities to prove that they fully cooperate with the tribunal in The Hague. If the Commission were to give its recommendation on the basis of today's information, I could not recommend opening negotiations with Croatia. I trust the Croatian government will take this message seriously. There is no shortcut to Europe, just the regular road, which means the respect of the rule of law."*

#### **What are the principles governing the negotiations?**

Accession negotiations with candidate countries are conducted in Intergovernmental Conferences where decisions are taken by unanimity.

The fulfilment of the political criteria<sup>2</sup> is a precondition for the start of the negotiations. The Union expects Croatia to continue to fulfil these criteria and to improve its record throughout the negotiations. In case of serious and persistent breach by Croatia of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded, accession negotiations may be suspended.

The negotiations will be based on Croatia's own merits and their pace will depend on Croatia's progress in meeting the requirements for membership.

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<sup>1</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

<sup>2</sup> Political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, later enshrined in Article 6(1) of the Treaty on European Union and proclaimed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Account is also taken of the Stabilisation and Association Process conditionality established by the Council in 1997. Parallel to the accession negotiations, the Union and Croatia will continue their intensive political dialogue.

