

EU/NR 82/05: THE EUROPEAN UNION OPENS ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS WITH CROATIA

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THE EUROPEAN UNION OPENS ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS WITH CROATIA

EU Member States decided in Luxemburg on 3 October to launch accession negotiations with Croatia.

The opening of the accession negotiations was made possible by the assessment of the Council of Ministers that Croatia was fully cooperating with the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) set up by the UN. This assessment by the Council was based on a report by the ICTY Chief Prosecutor Del Ponte which outlined the progress that Croatia had made over recent months.

Expressing his pleasure at the opening of negotiations, European Commission President Barroso

said: "I am very pleased that accession negotiations with Croatia will start. I look forward to working closely with our Croatian partners on the many and varied issues which will inevitably come up in the negotiations."

The European Commissioner for Enlargement, Mr.

Olli Rehn, said: "I am

very pleased that Croatia has responded positively to the need to fully cooperate with the Tribunal. In line with what I have said on many occasions, I am delighted that we have been able to decide on opening the negotiations as soon as this condition was met by Croatia: it goes without saying that Croatia must maintain this degree of cooperation with the Tribunal, leading to the resolution of the one remaining issue, namely, the location, arrest and transfer of General Ante Gotovina to the Hague."

After the holding of the first Inter-Governmental Conference the next step will be to start examining with the Croatian authorities the EU acquis

communautaire so

as to see where the Croatian legal framework and administrative capacity need to be adapted so that Croatia can apply EU law as a Member State – the so-called "screening" exercise. This exercise, covering all 35 Chapters of the acquis, will take about a year to complete.

Croatia

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