



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

**Brussels, 5 March 2010
PCE 45/10**

**Statement to the press by
Herman VAN ROMPUY,
President of the European Council,
after his meeting with Ivo JOSIPOVIĆ,
President of Croatia**

"Our meeting provided an opportunity for me to congratulate President Josipović on his appointment as President of Croatia. I wish him every success in his new function in this key period for Croatia in its path towards integration to the EU.

The EU supports Croatia's accession. It will also give a positive signal to the region.

Over the past year, Croatia made substantial progress in the accession negotiations which are now entering their final phase. Negotiations could be concluded this year provided all the necessary requirements of membership are met.

For that reason let me underline that building on the progress made, Croatia still has to make improvements in different domains. The requirement for full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) also remains essential.

Furthermore, the global financial crisis has severely affected the Croatian economy, but we trust that this will not affect Croatia's preparation for accession.

I welcome the signing of the Arbitration Agreement on the border issue with Slovenia on 4 November and its ratification by Croatia on 20 November.

The implementation of this Agreement is very important for the EU. It will create a model for the whole region, demonstrating that bilateral issues can be resolved in the European spirit.

Good regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is key in the enlargement process. It is important to work on improving bilateral relations, to resolve border disputes and facilitate refugee return.

I welcome the constructive position of President Josipović and his interest in strengthening relations with neighbouring countries, particularly with Serbia.

I will see Serbian PM Cvetkovic later today and will reiterate these messages.

P R E S S

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Our common goal in the next two years is a stable Bosnia and Herzegovina, firmly on its way towards Euro-Atlantic integration. It should not fall behind the rest of the region. Croatia is playing a key role in this regard.

I am encouraged by the recent agreement on the enforcement of final verdicts reached between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an important step towards ending the impunity for war crimes and other serious crimes in this region."

