



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

**Brussels, 8 June 2011
PCE 0143/11**

**Statement by Herman VAN ROMPUY
President of the European Council
following the meeting
with Ivo Josipović, President of Croatia**

Some two decades after regaining its independence and sovereignty, Croatia is now close to another historic milestone. It is on good track to complete its EU accession negotiations in the nearest possible future. The path was long and sometimes cumbersome, but you are almost there.

Therefore, my first words today are ones of congratulation. Croatia, its citizens and its Government, worked very hard to get to this stage. I express my particular appreciation for the intensity and dedication of the last few months. Reaching the final phase of the accession negotiations is not a matter of simple political decision. It is a strictly performance based process, where progress is measured against dozens of specific benchmarks. The next judgement, of course, is for the European Commission to make. But I am reasonably confident this week will bring good news.

There is further work to be done even after the negotiations will be concluded. President Josipovic assured me that Croatia will continue to work hard on all of its commitments. Strengthening the track record on rule of law, justice reform, the fight against corruption, and the prosecution of war crimes are going to be important points of reference for the 27 Member States.

And it is not enough to present Croatia's case in a convincing manner to the European Commission and the Member States. Perhaps most importantly, it has to be presented to the Croatian people as well. I am confident President Josipovic, the Government of Croatia, and in fact the whole political spectrum will take their fair share in this enormous and joint responsibility.

The significance and symbolic message of Croatia's progress goes beyond the country itself. The future accession of Croatia to the EU will reinforce the European perspective of the whole region. It will be a positive and tangible incentive. It will confirm that dedication and performance in delivering reforms will allow candidates and potential candidates to realise their European ambitions. Croatia will have the special mission now of encouraging and supporting all other countries of the region by sharing its experience and supporting them in their efforts.

I stood at this very same podium just two days ago with President Tadic of Serbia. With him as well I discussed the importance of regional co-operation and reconciliation in leading to lasting stability and security in the region.

P R E S S

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May I use this opportunity to also commend President Josipovic for his personal efforts towards this goal. In particular, I applaud the joint reconciliation initiatives of President Josipovic and President Tadic.

We agree that open issues in the region need to be addressed and solved in a European spirit. The importance of good neighbourly relations cannot be emphasised enough. With courage, vision and determination the region's remaining challenges can be brought to conclusion.

We count on Croatia's constructive and active contribution.
