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**First meeting of the Accession Conference at Ministerial level
with Iceland: Opening of accession negotiations
Brussels, 27 July 2010**

On the basis of the positions of the Parties, the first meeting of the Accession Conference with Iceland at Ministerial level decided today the opening of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) on the Accession of Iceland to the European Union, following the decision of the European Council of 17 June that accession negotiations should be opened.

The European Union delegation was headed by Steven Vanackere, Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Institutional Reforms. The Icelandic delegation was led by Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

During the IGC, the EU delegation recalled that Iceland has been cooperating extensively with the EU across a broad range of areas over the last forty years, as a member of the European Economic Area or applying the Schengen *acquis*, which means that Iceland has already adopted a significant part of EU law. In this regard, the EU underlined that today's IGC marks another milestone in the evolution of the common relationship and that the EU looks forward to further intensifying the already well-established ties.

The EU delegation also recalled that the negotiations are based on Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and, accordingly, take account of all relevant Council conclusions, in particular the conclusions of the June 1993 European Council in Copenhagen and the renewed consensus on enlargement agreed by the December 2006 European Council. Coherent implementation of the renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality, better communication and the EU's capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis for EU action at all stages of the enlargement process, with each country being assessed on its own merits.

P R E S S

In addition, the EU presented the Negotiating Framework to Iceland, which has been agreed by the General Affairs Council on 26 July. The Negotiating Framework takes account of the experience of the fifth enlargement and the evolving *acquis*, and duly reflects Iceland's own merits and specific characteristics. It sets out the principles governing the negotiations and describes the substance of the negotiations as well as the negotiating procedures.

The *acquis* includes, *inter alia*, the objectives and principles on which the Union is founded, as set out in the Treaty on European Union. The Union expects that a future Member State adheres to the values on which the Union is founded. Furthermore, EU accession implies the timely and effective implementation of the entire body of EU law or *acquis*, as it stands at the time of accession. The development of sufficient administrative and judicial capacity is key in fulfilling all obligations stemming from membership.

Furthermore, the EU underlined that on the path towards accession, Iceland would need to continue its efforts to align its legislation with the *acquis* and to ensure its full implementation and enforcement. Serious efforts would be required in particular in the areas of fisheries, agriculture and rural development, environment, free movement of capital and financial services, in order to meet the accession criteria. To this effect, the EU stated that it would closely monitor Iceland's progress in all areas. The regular review procedure aimed at assessing candidate countries' progress towards membership would from now on apply to Iceland as well.

Parallel to the accession negotiations, the Union will continue political and civil society dialogue with Iceland, with the aim of bringing people together and ensuring the support of citizens for the accession process.

With determination and commitment, the EU is confident in Iceland's capacity to bring this process to a successful conclusion.

Contacts between the Iceland and the EU side will be now pursued in order to define the date and the agenda for the first meeting of the Conference at Deputy level.