



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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**Eighth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council  
between the European Union and Croatia  
(Brussels, 6 June 2012)**

**JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

The EU-Croatia Stabilisation and Association Council (SA Council) held its eighth meeting on Wednesday 6 June 2012. The meeting was chaired by Ms Vesna PUSIĆ, Croatia's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, who led the Croatian delegation. Mr Nicolai WAMMEN, Denmark's Minister for European Affairs, led the delegation of the European Union (on behalf of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton). Mr Štefan FÜLE, Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, represented the European Commission.

1. The SA Council welcomed that since the signature of the Accession Treaty in December 2011, Croatia was an acceding country with active observer status in the EU institutions, and that the ratification process was ongoing. The SA Council looked forward to Croatia becoming a Member State of the EU on 1 July 2013.
2. The SA Council welcomed the Commission's monitoring report of 24 April 2012 on Croatia's accession preparations, and took note of the findings and recommendations therein. The SA Council noted with satisfaction that, overall, Croatia's preparations for membership were on track. The SA Council invited Croatia, building on the progress already made, to continue its reform efforts, in particular in key areas such as competition policy, judiciary and fundamental rights as well as justice, freedom and security, and in pursuing further economic reforms. It encouraged Croatia to continue transposing the *acquis* and further strengthen the administrative structures to effectively implement it, in order to be able to fully meet the obligations of membership in good time before accession.

**P R E S S**

3. The SA Council reviewed the state of Croatia's preparations for accession, starting with the political criteria. As regards the public administration, the SA Council noted that Croatia continued its reform efforts, and encouraged Croatia to actively pursue these efforts to consolidate the efficient implementation of the legal framework in order to complete building a modern, reliable, de-politicised and citizen-oriented public service, maintaining the high level of political support which is needed for the reforms.

The SA Council welcomed the progress made in the area of regional cooperation and encouraged Croatia to continue its efforts towards good neighbourly relations, which remained key. The SA Council welcomed in particular the declaration on promoting European values in South-east Europe including a commitment from Croatia that bilateral issues, such as border issues, should not obstruct the accession of candidate countries.

The SA Council underlined that Croatia had continued to engage in cooperation on war crimes cases at the bilateral and regional levels, and reiterated the importance of regional cooperation aimed at prosecuting war crimes. The SA Council encouraged Croatia to continue working towards finding mutually acceptable solutions to all outstanding bilateral and regional issues with neighbouring countries, including succession issues, and to pursue efforts aimed at reconciliation among citizens in the region.

4. The SA Council noted that Croatia was a functioning market economy that should be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term. The SA Council invited Croatia to pursue its reform programme with determination in order to reduce structural weaknesses and to improve its competitiveness. The SA Council, by welcoming the Government's strong commitment to fiscal consolidation, underlined the importance of implementing the appropriate economic measures reflecting a clear and comprehensive strategy for economic and structural reforms, which will be essential to ensure sustainability of public finances, including in the medium term.
5. The SA Council noted that Croatia had reached a considerable degree of alignment with the *acquis* and that it was making progress towards meeting the commitments and requirements arising from the accession negotiations. In most areas of the *acquis* preparations for membership were well advanced. The SA Council invited Croatia to address the issues identified in the Commission's Monitoring report of April 2012 and in particular in the areas of competition policy, judiciary and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security. It noted that Croatia had reached a good level of alignment, and should address a limited number of outstanding issues, in chapters such as free movement of goods, free movement of capital, public procurement, information society and media, transport policy, energy and taxation. The SA Council also noted that Croatia had achieved a generally good level of alignment in other chapters; at the same time, efforts were still needed with regard to the right of establishment and freedom to provide services, agriculture and rural development, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, fisheries, regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, environment and climate change, and customs union.

6. The SA Council reviewed the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement which had largely continued without major difficulties, while noting that some issues still required close attention. The SA Council welcomed that Croatia had continued its participation in the EU programmes and reviewed the state of play regarding financial cooperation and in particular the implementation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).
  7. Finally, the SA Council had an exchange of views concerning recent developments in the Western Balkans region.
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