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Eleventh meeting of the Accession Conference at Deputy level with Croatia, Brussels, 27 July 2010

The eleventh meeting of the Accession Conference with Croatia at Deputy level was held today in Brussels, following the start of negotiations on 3 October 2005. The European Union delegation was headed by Ambassador Jean de Ruyt, Belgium's Permanent Representative to the EU. The Croatian delegation was led by Ambassador Vladimir Drobnjak, Chief Negotiator for Accession Negotiations with the EU.

On the basis of the information provided by Croatia and the considerable progress made with preparations in all areas under Chapter 12 - Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy and Chapter 32 - Financial Control, the EU noted that, at this stage, these chapters do not require further negotiations and therefore can be provisionally closed.

The European Union also underlined that it would devote particular attention to monitoring all specific issues mentioned in its common positions with a view to ensuring Croatia's administrative capacity to implement an effective policy in the respective chapters, and in particular for Chapter 12 with regard to its control capacity, the implementation of the national programme for upgrading establishments as well as animal welfare. The EU will, if necessary, return to these chapters at an appropriate moment.

Furthermore, the EU and Croatia considered proposals for transitional arrangements in Chapter 12 - Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy concerning laying hens in cages not compliant with the *acquis*, structural requirements for establishments in the meat, fish and animal by-products sectors, and certain seeds and plants not having passed Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) examinations. Furthermore, a special regime for the passage of products of animal origin through the Neum corridor was considered.

P R E S S

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Finally, on Food Safety, the EU emphasized the importance for Croatia of ensuring that EU food safety requirements are fully complied with at the time of accession.

On Financial Control, the EU underlined that it was important for Croatia to continue close co-operation with EU bodies to ensure, upon accession, sound financial management, transparency and control of the use of EU funds, as well as the protection of the financial interests of the EU.

Further details on the chapters are provided below:

Chapter 12 - Food safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Policy

The negotiations on Chapter 12 - Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary policy were opened on 2 October 2009 at an Accession Conference at Ministerial level. At this meeting of the Conference the EU noted that, in order for the chapter to be provisionally closed, Croatia would have, *inter alia*, to submit an approved national programme for the upgrading of establishments for products of animal origin, including establishments for animal by-products, and demonstrate sufficient progress in the implementation of this national programme and the devotion of sufficient human and financial resources for monitoring of the upgrading process. Croatia would also have to provide all necessary guarantees regarding the setting up of a fully EU-compliant system for official controls of live animals and animal products, and continue to set up and develop relevant administrative structures, further increase its administrative capacities and infrastructures, and demonstrate sufficient administrative capacity to correctly implement and apply all *acquis* covered by the chapter on accession.

Chapter 32 - Financial Control

The negotiations on Chapter 32 - Financial Control were opened on 26 June 2007 at an Accession Conference at Ministerial level. At this meeting of the Conference the EU noted that, in order for the chapter to be provisionally closed, Croatia would have, *inter alia*, to adopt and implement Public Internal Financial Control (PIFC) legislation and inherent policies supported by adequate implementation capacity; to safeguard the State Audit Institution's functional and financial independence; to align the Criminal Code with the protection of the EU's financial interests (PIF) Convention and its protocols and its legislation for the protection of the Euro against counterfeiting, and to set up effective and efficient coordination.

Since the start of negotiations, all 33 screened chapters have been opened for negotiations and 22 chapters have been provisionally closed. Further Accession Conferences will be planned, as appropriate, in order to take the process forward.