

Working together for a win-win result

Two years have passed since Iceland applied for membership in the European Union and the negotiations are progressing well. The concrete results are summed up in the Enlargement Package just published by the European Commission and this is a good opportunity to take a look at where we are on our joint path.

Iceland and the European Union already share many policies, a lot of legislation, and our economies are well integrated. As a result of our strong ties through the European Economic Area, Iceland has a well-established political will and administrative capacity to approximate effectively to the European Union. The decisive steps Iceland took to initiate its economic recovery and its successful completion of the IMF programme have put it firmly on the road to recovery.

The prospect of EU accession can provide further stimulus for Icelandic economy. EU membership has also proved to be conducive to foreign investment that brings resources, technology, jobs and opens up new markets. Moreover, while it is true that the Eurozone goes through turbulent times, the euro is one of the world's strongest currencies and continues to offer significant benefits to the Member States that participate. All this can serve Iceland's economy, the bulk of which is based on trade with its EU partners.

We are now entering a more demanding phase of the negotiations, where issues such as fisheries, agriculture, food safety and environment will have to be addressed. These issues are sensitive, but they present a common challenge for both of us. Building on the good cooperation so far, it is important that we continue to work together to identify how to deal with that challenge. I remain convinced that we can take Iceland's specificities and expectations into account within the existing approach on accession, while fully safeguarding the principles and the *acquis* of the Union. This will provide the win-win solutions to serve our mutual interests and eventually bring us even closer for the benefit of all citizens.

Public support for the EU accession is essential. I therefore welcome the efforts made by the Icelandic government and parliament to provide information to citizens about the European Union and the negotiation process. I hope that this will help to dispel some of the myths and fears that exist in Iceland. The EU Information Centre, which will open in Reykjavik in few weeks time, will also play a part. Only a transparent and shared accession process can lead to a transparent result, offering the best for Iceland and for the European Union.

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This article is published on the occasion of the publication by the European Commission of its second progress report on Iceland, on 12 October 2011.