

Croatia joins the European Union

On July 1st Croatia has officially finalised its accession to the European Union, becoming its 28th member state. Ten years after it applied for EU membership, Croatia became the second former Yugoslavia state (after Slovenia) to join the EU family. Last week the EU leaders also decided to launch negotiations on Serbia's EU membership, as well as talks on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo.

“You have returned Croatia to its rightful place in the heart of Europe,” [Commission President José Manuel Barroso](#) said, addressing Croatian people on the accession day. “Croatia has changed enormously over the last decades,” he stressed, adding that today “it is a fully democratic nation, with respect for freedom, for fundamental rights and the rule of law.” It is also “an example to others in the region,” as the country “has undergone difficult reforms and held out the hand of reconciliation,” Barroso believes.

[Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Council](#), also welcomed Croatia's accession, saying that “membership is not just about respecting and shaping rules, but as much about sharing the responsibility for our common endeavour.”

Moving the enlargement process forward, the [European Council](#) decided on 27-28 June to open EU accession negotiations with Serbia. The first intergovernmental conference will be held in January 2014 at the very latest. Prior to this, the negotiating framework will be adopted by the Council and confirmed by the European Council at its usual session on enlargement.

The EU leaders also adopted Decisions authorising the opening of negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and Kosovo, following the Serbia-Kosovo agreement which President Van Rompuy called “historic.”

More information: [Conclusions of the European Council](#)