

European Commissioner for Enlargement and European  
Neighbourhood Policy

## **Statement by Commissioner Štefan Füle on Iceland**

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Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

European Parliament Plenary Session

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This debate on Iceland and the next steps in its accession process today is very opportune.

I would like to thank your Assembly for its support to Iceland membership and congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Preda, for his high quality report. The European Parliament resolution under discussion is a very helpful contribution to the process. It delivers the right messages to Iceland at the right moment.

The assessment of Iceland's compliance with the acquis, the screening exercise, is on track. Since November 2010, 24 chapters have been discussed and 23 bilateral screening meetings have been completed including fisheries, agriculture, environment, regional policy and financial services.

Screening is an important technical process and the meetings have already identified sensitive issues and challenges in key chapters, such as agriculture, environment and fisheries. This stage of the negotiating process will be completed by June.

We expect actual negotiations to start towards the end of the Hungarian Presidency with the opening of some chapters at the Accession Conference scheduled for 27 June. This is an ambitious but achievable timetable with all sides committed to move forward.

The Commission stands ready to take Iceland's specificities and expectations into account, within the existing approach on accession negotiations and fully safeguarding the principles and rules of the Union. We therefore aim at working in an open and constructive spirit to find solutions acceptable for both sides, in a way that reflects the high level of cooperation that exists between the EU and the Icelandic authorities.

As with any accession so far, we can expect that this will not always be an easy task but we trust that we have embarked with Iceland on a successful journey.

As regards Icesave, and as referred to in your resolution, the Commission would welcome a swift resolution of this matter in the interest of all the parties involved.

Concerning the economy, the banking and fiscal consolidation of Iceland in the framework of the IMF programme has been impressive. The adjustment programme is on track and the government is committed to further consolidation. Enhanced debt restructuring will help strengthen economic recovery. The government is also working on a strategy to gradually lift capital controls. This will contribute to an improved business climate.

Let me also briefly mention the IPA support measures that we are putting in place. A total indicative envelope of € 28 million is foreseen for the next 3 years to support strengthening of administrative capacity and prepare Iceland for the management of structural funds.

Good progress is made in finalising the national IPA programme for 2011 and a number of specific activities have started in the framework of the TAIEX programme.

I fully share your views on the need for a fact-based public debate on EU accession. It can indeed play a decisive role in increasing understanding of the realities of the policies and actions of the European Union and help to dispel myths. Furthermore I much welcome that the Icelandic authorities have started intensive communication activities.

It is encouraging to note that the public opinion on Iceland has improved significantly in favour of the EU over the last year. This concerns both the support for continuing the accession process as well as the attitude towards membership and the image of the EU.

The Commission is building up its own information and communication activities to facilitate well informed public debate. The EU Delegation in Reykjavik is fully operational and actively involved in communication activities and an EU info-centre is planned.