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Accession Conference with Iceland: three new chapters opened, progress confirmed

Three new negotiating chapters were opened today at a meeting in Brussels of the Accession Conference with Iceland, the fourth such meeting at ministerial level.

The Conference, which was the fruit of extensive work over several months, dealt in total with seven chapters and marked a significant step forward in the process of Iceland's accession to the European Union.

The three chapters opened are:

- Chapter 14 - Transport Policy;
- Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment; and
- Chapter 32 - Financial Control.

In addition, the Conference confirmed at Ministerial level on four other chapters that were addressed at deputies level on 30 March, namely:

- The opening and provisional closure of Chapter 28 - Consumer and Health Protection and Chapter 31 - Foreign, Security and Defence Policy; and
- The opening of Chapter 8 - Competition Policy and Chapter 15 - Energy.

P R E S S

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At the meeting, the European Union delegation was headed by Nicolai Wammen, Minister for European Affairs of Denmark, the European Commission was represented by Commissioner Štefan Füle, and the Icelandic delegation was led by Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade.

With today's Conference, out of a total of 35 negotiation chapters¹, 18 chapters have been opened for negotiations of which 10 chapters have been provisionally closed. Further Accession Conferences are planned next semester in order to take the process forward.

The accession negotiations were launched in July 2010.

Chapter 14 - Transport Policy

Regarding the opening of negotiations on Chapter 14 - Transport Policy, the Union has closely examined Iceland's present state of preparations. On the understanding that Iceland has to continue to make progress in the alignment with and implementation of the *acquis* in this chapter, the EU noted that this chapter may only be provisionally closed once agreement has been reached on Iceland's requests for adaptations to the *acquis* concerning common rules for access to the international market for coach and bus services, the operation of air services and in the field of civil aviation security. Furthermore, Iceland has been invited to provide further information on a number of issues on which agreement will also need to be reached in the areas of air and road transport. In addition, in order to provisionally close this chapter, the EU will need to agree that the following benchmark is met, namely, that:

- Iceland presents an Action Plan to align its legislation with the Single European Sky II *acquis*.

Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment

Regarding the opening of negotiations on Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment, the Union has closely examined Iceland's present state of preparations. On the understanding that Iceland has to continue to make progress in the alignment with and implementation of the *acquis* in this chapter, the EU noted that this chapter may only be provisionally closed once it is agreed by the EU that the following benchmark is met:

- Iceland adopts an anti-discrimination act in order to further align its legislation in the field of anti-discrimination with the *acquis*, and demonstrates that it will be fully prepared to ensure the implementation and enforcement of the EU requirements by the date of accession.

¹ Including Chapters 34 (Institutions) and 35 (Others) which are not screened

Chapter 32 - Financial Control

Regarding the opening of negotiations on Chapter 32 - Financial Control, the Union has closely examined Iceland's present state of preparations. On the understanding that Iceland has to continue to make progress in the alignment with and implementation of the *acquis* in this chapter, the EU noted that this chapter may only be provisionally closed once benchmarks are met regarding the continued revision and implementation of Public Internal Financial Control (PIFC) legislation; the codification of key terminology and the completion of the amendment of the Icelandic Criminal Code in line with the protection of the EU's financial interests Convention and its protocols so as to enable full implementation by the date of accession; on obligations concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission; and alignment with the provisions of the Geneva Convention for the Suppression of Counterfeit Currency with a view to ratification before the date of accession.

In more general terms, the EU underlined that it would devote particular attention to monitoring all specific issues mentioned in its common positions with a view to ensuring Iceland's administrative capacity, and its alignment with the *acquis*.
