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Second meeting of the Accession Conference with Montenegro at Ministerial level - Start of substantial negotiations

The second meeting of the Accession Conference with Montenegro at Ministerial level was held today in Brussels to open and provisionally close the first negotiating chapter: Chapter 25 - Science and Research.

The European Union delegation was led by Dr. Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus. The Montenegrin delegation was led by Igor Lukšić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration and Sanja Vlahović, Minister for Science of Montenegro. The European Commission was represented by Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.

Today's meeting marked the start of substantial accession negotiations with Montenegro, following their launch on 29 June 2012. Since then, good progress has also been achieved in the analytical examination (screening) of the EU *acquis* with the completion of the outcome of screening for the key Chapters 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security. In line with the Negotiating Framework, these two chapters, which are important for the rule of law, are being addressed early in the negotiations. Montenegro has now been invited to adopt the required actions plans, which constitute opening benchmarks for these two chapters.

Regarding negotiations on Chapter 25 - Science and Research, the EU considered that, exceptionally, benchmarks for the provisional closure of this chapter were not required, given the good general level of Montenegro's state of preparedness in the area of Science and Research, and the limited scope and particular nature of *acquis* obligations in this chapter. The EU therefore noted that, at this stage, this chapter does not require further negotiations.

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The EU also underlined that it would devote particular attention to monitoring all specific issues mentioned in its common position, with a view to ensuring Montenegro's administrative capacity, its capacity to take up EU-funded research projects, as well as continuous and adequate availability of budgetary resources. Monitoring of progress in the alignment with and implementation of the *acquis* will continue throughout the negotiations. The EU will, if necessary, return to this chapter at an appropriate moment.

Further Accession Conferences will be planned, as appropriate, in order to take the process forward in the first half of 2013.
