

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS PRESS CONFERENCE

- We have just opened negotiations with Serbia on its accession to the European Union at the first meeting of the Accession Conference at Ministerial level.
- The launch of accession negotiations is a historically important moment for us and will represent a turning point in the evolution of the relationship between the EU and Serbia, leading to the intensification of the already close ties.
- It will also be a testimony to Serbia's strong commitment to its European course and to the courageous efforts in meeting relevant conditions.
- At the meeting, the EU presented its Negotiating Framework, which was agreed by the Council on 17 December.
- The Negotiating Framework takes account of the experience of past enlargements and on-going accession negotiations, as well as the evolving *acquis*, and duly reflects Serbia's own merits and specific characteristics.
- The negotiations are aimed at Serbia integrally adopting the EU *acquis* and ensuring its full implementation and enforcement.
- It takes particular account of the new approach and the experience acquired in relation to the negotiating chapters on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and to Justice, Freedom and Security, as well as of Serbia's continued engagement and steps towards a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo, leading to the comprehensive normalization of relations.

- This process shall ensure that both can continue on their respective European paths, while avoiding that either can block the other in these efforts.
- In this regard, I take the opportunity to thank the dedicated and skilful work of High Representative Ashton and her colleagues to facilitate the process of normalisation and to its implementation.
- I would also like to thank the Lithuanian Presidency for their efforts in ensuring agreement on the EU General Position on the accession negotiations with Serbia, including the Negotiating Framework.
- Lastly, let me wish Serbia every success in the demanding process that lies ahead. I have every confidence in Serbia's capacity to meet the challenge, bring the accession negotiations to a speedy, successful conclusion and join the EU family as a full Member State.
- Let me assure you that you can always count on our strong support in achieving this important objective.
- Let me also add that not only for the Hellenic Presidency but for the whole region of the Western Balkans this is a great day. It is a great day for the regional perspective towards Europe because for us the euroatlantic perspective of the Western Balkans region is a commitment and also a strategic option for many many years. Once again, I repeat my congratulations to the Serbian people, and my best wishes for our common historical European destiny and path.