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**Permanent Mission of Ireland  
to the OSCE**

Rotenturmstrasse 16-18,  
A-1010 Vienna  
Tel: +43 1 71576 9826  
Fax: +43 1 715 5755

[ireland-osce@chello.at](mailto:ireland-osce@chello.at)

## **Irish Presidency of the European Union**

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### **Response by the European Union to the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia, H.E. Miomir Žužul**

The EU welcomes the Croatian Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Miomir Žužul and thanks him for his statement on the priorities of his Government. We also welcome the presence of the Head of the OSCE Mission in Croatia, Ambassador Peter Semneby.

The EU welcomes the commitment made by the Minister to continue the work of reform and democratisation undertaken in the recent years. We regard this as an essential element in relations between the EU and Croatia.

The Union expects the Government to co-operate fully and unconditionally with ICTY. The EU reaffirms the need for General Gotovina to present himself in The Hague to account for his actions. It expects also that adequate conditions are put in place so that war crimes can be prosecuted appropriately by the Croatian courts.

We strongly urge the Croatian authorities to continue to follow the common position of the EU on the International Criminal Court by not entering into any agreement, the effect of which would be contrary to their obligations under the Rome Statute.

As regards Croatia's application for membership of the EU, the Commission's opinion is expected soon and will form the basis for a decision by the Council on the opening of accession negotiations in the light of the Copenhagen Criteria and the conditions set out in the Stabilisation and Association Process.

We regret the decision of Croatia to proclaim a fisheries and ecological protection zone without appropriate regional consultation, and invite Croatia to make every effort to reach an early agreement on the issue with all concerned neighbouring States.

The EU notes with satisfaction the new relationship established between the government and minority representatives. We hope to see a swift implementation of the constitutional law on national minorities. We hope also that this positive atmosphere will result in an increase in the number of people of minority background at all levels of the public administration, including the justice system. We note that the elections held yesterday for the advisory Local Councils constitute a step in that direction.

We are pleased by the decision of the Government to take part in the awareness-raising campaign on the issue of refugee returns, which will be organised by the OSCE Mission. We are confident that, in this new spirit, the return of refugees and displaced persons and their access to governmental housing programmes will be facilitated with the support of the Mission. We look forward to a satisfactory solution to the fundamental question of occupation/tenancy rights of those persons. We hope also that both local and central authorities involve themselves fully with this problem.

We welcome the commitment of Croatia to co-operate closely with its neighbours at bi-lateral and regional level. We encourage the Croatian authorities to support the reform of the municipality of Mostar.

We welcome the decision of the Croatian authorities to remove the visa requirement between Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro and hope it will become permanent in the future

The EU shares the positive assessment of the Minister on the contribution of the OSCE Mission in Zagreb. We look forward to the Mission's continued useful input in all the areas covered by its mandate in close coordination with the Delegation of the European Commission in Zagreb, particularly in the areas of refugee return, minorities, media, monitoring of war-crimes trials and implementation of the judgements. These are important issues also in bringing Croatia closer to the EU.

The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia and the Candidate Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey align themselves with this statement.