

IVAN BANDIĆ*

Honourable Professors, Excellencies, dear colleagues, media representatives, students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express how pleased I am to be present today in this event dedicated to the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Science and to be able to briefly inform you about the Croatian experience on the road to the EU.

The admission process is one of the longest and let me remind you on the beginning of the whole accession process.

Everything started in February 2003 when Croatia submitted its application for the EU membership. In April 2004 the European Commission issued a positive opinion on the Croatian application and in June Croatia becomes a candidate country. Next year in February 2005 the Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force. The same year in October the accession negotiations were opened. In the period of one year until the October 2006 screening procedure of the Croatian legislation has been carried out.

Now after five years having 34 chapters opened, out of which 25 provisionally closed, I'm sure that we can say that negotiations entered into the final phase and are now coming to an end.

Just today at the IGC (Intergovernmental Conference) we provisionally closed three Chapters (4. Free Movement of Capital, 14. Transport policy and 34. Institutions). I also have to inform you that Croatia has fulfilled all its obligations in three additional demanding Chapters (24. Justice, Freedom and Security, 27. Environment and 31. Foreign, Security and Defense Policy). Now their closure depends on the EU side.

Our aim remains to close most of the chapters by the end of this year and the most challenging ones Chapters 8. Competition and 23. Judiciary in the beginning of the next year. That would enable us the conclusion of the negotiations in the first half of 2011 during the Hungarian presidency. We will do our best as well to sign the Accession Treaty at the end of the Hungarian presidency.

We remain fully determined to implement all necessary reforms, especially the reform of the judiciary and public administration, the fight against corruption at all levels and the restructuring of the shipbuilding sector. This task is a challenging one but we are committed to prove our full readiness for the EU membership when the time comes. It means without a need for additional post monitoring scheme.

We are also pleased with the overall progress that has been recognized by the European Commission in the Progress Report for 2010. We are convinced that this Report is the last one we have received as a candidate country.

* A Horvát Köztársaság budapesti nagykövetségének vezetője, rendkívüli és meghatalmazott nagykövet. Az előadás a Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából a Budapesti Gazdasági Főiskolán 2010. november 5-én rendezett, „A Nyugat-Balkán országainak közeledése az Európai Unióhoz” c. konferencián hangzott el.

Now for political and financial reasons it would be very important for Croatia to receive a precise date for the conclusion of the accession negotiations.

Priority in the period ahead will be the drafting of the Accession Treaty. In January this year the Government already appointed a working group to prepare the draft agreement. Now some talks about possible connection the Croatian Accession Treaty with the changes of the Lisbon Treaty have began, but we will see what it's going to happen.

After the signature of the Accession Treaty the information campaign will be held in order to inform the citizens about the implications of EU membership. Before the accession to the EU the referendum will be conducted and by campaign the Croatian Government wants to convince the citizens about the positive aspects of joining the EU. The preparations for the campaign already started.

According to the recent public opinion survey from September 2010, 55% of citizens who would go to the referendum on Croatia's EU accession would vote to join. Against the membership would vote 35%, since 9% are still undecided.

We believe that the Croatia's negotiations success story will be a strong incentive for all the countries of South East Europe on their European path. Croatia is committed to the regional cooperation and supports all countries in the region in their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. European future for these countries is an important factor for the stability and prosperity of the entire region. In that context we welcome the unblocked Serbian membership bid, by which the European perspective of Serbia has been confirmed.

Here in Budapest as the representative of Croatia, I also have to say that Croatia greatly appreciates constant support given by the Hungarian side during the whole process of the Croatian accession negotiations with the EU.

Since we are having this gathering in the Business school it would not be appropriate not to mention the current economic situation in Croatia. Unfortunately Croatia has been facing the recession for the last two years as other countries. But the recovery is too weak and for this year we still expect one percent GDP decline. Unemployment rate is around 11% and despite slight positive changes in some industries the poor economic situation affects the labour market.

Thank you for your attention.