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MEMO

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EU-Serbia: Important milestone in accession process

Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle participated today in Brussels in the first EU-Serbia Accession Conference. This is what he said after the meeting to the media:

'Good morning, dobar dan i dobro došli!

Ovo je istorijskij dan za Srbiju, ovo je istorijskij dan za EU. This is a historic day for Serbia and also for the EU.

The country is taking another important step on its path to the European Union. Today we made a symbolic start, at the highest political level, to the practical negotiations of individual chapters that will follow in the months and years to come.

This first accession conference marks the beginning of a new and crucial phase in our relationship with Serbia. It is a well-deserved recognition of the progress made over the past years.

Key to this was the determination of the Serbian authorities to embrace the reforms over many years and its courage and unprecedented efforts in the recent months towards the normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

But starting negotiations means entering a very demanding phase. Hard work will be needed, many challenges lie ahead:

First - Belgrade will need to remain fully committed to the normalisation of relations with Pristina and continue to deliver on implementation of all dialogue agreements.

Second - Reforms need to be finalised and the alignment with the EU acquis pursued. Of particular importance are Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights), and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) which will firmly anchor reforms in the area of rule of law.

I believe in the determination of the Serbian leadership to work hard throughout the negotiations in an inclusive way, involving the parliament and civil society and building on wide national consensus. Because the accession negotiations are transformative – changing key features of Serbian society and its economy

I am confident that with such a strong commitment to the European Union agenda and the broad support of its people, Serbia will rise to the challenge of accession negotiations and will set an inspiring example in the Western Balkans.'