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President of the European Commission

**Statement by President Barroso
following his meeting with Mr Igor
Lukšić, Prime Minister of Montenegro**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Press Point

Podgorica, 8 april 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be in Montenegro. I congratulated Prime Minister Lukšć on the 1st 100 days in office. It is quite appropriate for me to be here on that very day, because European integration is at the heart of the Prime Minister's government. The Governments inclusive approach is positive. Joining the European Union needs a broad consensus.

My visit to the region demonstrates a very fundamental point:

The European Union's strategic commitment to the enlargement perspective of South Eastern Europe - including Montenegro - remains as firm as ever. I would like to stress this at the outset.

Montenegro is at a decisive stage. Its candidate status is a fair recognition of its achievements.

But it also a responsibility for the future: a responsibility to prove that Montenegro is ready to deliver on all its obligations.

I am pleased with the commitment and the efforts demonstrated by the Prime Minister's Government, and I have congratulated him on his work so far.

But more work remains to be done. It is important that the Government has elaborated a detailed Action Plan that focuses on the shortcomings identified in the Commission's Opinion, which provides you with a clear road map for progress.

The key now is implementation. Strong leadership and ownership are needed to address the priorities, in particular those related to the rule of law.

We need to see concrete results in this crucial field – from fighting organised crime and corruption to strengthening judicial independence. This is also key to the business environment and thus in Montenegro's own interest.

Results are the best proof of political will. Because EU accession is not just about ticking boxes - it is about a track record of enforcement on the ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to be very clear: Montenegro is on the right track. It should build on this dynamic and intensify its good work.

The EU Commission will continue to support Montenegro along the way. We will, as usual, apply strict and fair conditionality in this process. And we will report to EU Member States in October on the progress Montenegro has made.

My message to the people of Montenegro is clear: I am confident that you can meet this "European challenge" - with our help – but of course mainly with your own energy and talent. I am sure that Montenegro will soon be able to take its rightful place within the European family.

Thank you.