

## **“EU-SERBIA: We hope that the EC doesn't forget the Prison System”**

Press statement by Commissioner Štefan Füle following his meeting with Branko Ružić, new Serbian Minister in charge of European integration and Tanja Mišćević, Chief Negotiator for Serbia's accession negotiations confirms that Chapter 23 – judiciary and fundamental rights- will be the start of the *acquis* analysis.

'I am delighted to welcome to Brussels today Mr Branko Ružić, the new Serbian Minister in charge of European integration as well as Mrs Tanja Mišćević, who was appointed Chief Negotiator for Serbia's accession negotiations at the beginning of September. We had a very constructive first meeting on the priorities of the reshuffled government and the preparations of the different steps following the decision of the June European Council to open accession negotiations with Serbia. I am glad to see that the Serbian government is now fully back at work and has reconfirmed the strategic priority it attaches to Serbia's European integration process. We have a lot of challenges ahead of us. As of next week, the European Commission and Serbia will launch the screening of the “*acquis*” – the analytical examination, chapter by chapter, of the entire EU legislation – a process which will span over some 18 to 21 months. We will start with Chapter 23 – judiciary and fundamental rights on 25 and 26 September. The framework for negotiations with Serbia is currently actively discussed in the Council on the basis of the proposal that was tabled by the Commission on 22 July. It will have to be adopted by the Council and confirmed by the European Council in order to hold the first Inter-Governmental Conference on Serbia's accession negotiations in January 2014 at the very latest. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement has entered into force on 1 September and Serbia has now a comprehensive framework in place to move closer to the EU and to prepare for its future participation in the Single Market, with all the benefits it offers to business and citizens. In this new phase of relations between the EU and Serbia, the Serbian government will have the crucial task to coordinate and further develop efforts made across the administration on the EU agenda of reforms. I also called upon the minister to urgently revisit the Serbian position on the import of cigarettes from Croatia which is blocking the adaptation of our trade arrangements that is needed because of the accession of Croatia to the EU. I am therefore looking forward to very close cooperation with Minister Ružić on the different priority areas for the forthcoming period. I also appreciated the commitment and professionalism displayed by the new Chief Negotiator Mrs Mišćević. Finally, I assured Mr Ružić that the Commission will continue to support Serbia's efforts with policy advice and IPA funds.'