

MARTENS: "EUROPE MOVES FORWARD WITH TURKEY & CROATIA"

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The European People's Party has welcomed the EU Foreign Ministers historic agreement to open membership talks with Turkey.

EPP President Wilfried Martens referred to the meeting on 16 December 2004 of the EPP heads of government and party leaders defining their position: *◆The accession negotiations are an open-ended process; the outcome cannot be guaranteed◆*.

He congratulated the 25 EU Member States◆ last-minute deal on the negotiating framework for Turkey: *◆There was no way back. After decades of cooperation, we owed it to Turkey to start accession negotiations◆* he said.

Martens also welcomed the decision to start accession negotiations with Croatia and stressed the unwavering support of the EPP to Ivo Sanader◆s government on this issue. *◆The EPP asked the EU to start accession negotiations with Croatia on March 2005 because we were convinced that the Croatian authorities were fully cooperating with the ICTY and were taking exhaustive measures to arrest Ante Gotovina. We welcome that, finally, the EU recognized these efforts and adopted - although belatedly - this decision, which will be decisive for the stability of the Western Balkans◆*, he said.

For the EPP President the agreement for the start of Turkey and Croatia negotiations is a positive signal in a difficult moment for the European Union: *◆Europe moves forward when EU Member States work together for the strengthening of the European integration project◆*.

Martens has also called on the need for EU Member States and the European institutions to thoroughly inform the European citizens about these important decisions.

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