

Honourable Speakers of the Belgian Parliament. Distinguished colleagues.

It is my great pleasure to address the Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments where Althingi, the Parliament of Iceland, is represented for the first time.

Each Candidate Country is unique and every Member State, with its specificities, adds value to the Union. Iceland's strength is not least the fact that the country is a well prepared candidate, strategically located in the high north, with knowledge and experience of renewable energy, to name a few.

Iceland is already well integrated in the European legal framework; having been member of the Single Market for nearly two decades.

We have, as members to the EEA Agreement between the EFTA and the EU, already implemented considerable amount of European legislation; we participate in numerous EU projects and we have been associate members of the Schengen agreement for a decade now.

Full membership of the European Union is therefore a logical next step for Iceland and it is my conviction that our membership is both beneficial for Iceland, as well as the EU.

In spite of my personal opinion, I do not want to conceal the fact that opinions differ on EU membership in Iceland, both among the general public as well as within the political system.

No Member State or Candidate Country is as economically dependent on fisheries as Iceland. Outcome of negotiation on that critical issue will, in my opinion, be the "make or brake" of Iceland's membership.

Bearing in mind the Common Fisheries Policies in concurrently under review, I allow myself to be optimistic on the outcome.

Dear Colleagues.

I know many of you personally, and I'm glad to have the opportunity to meet all of you on this occasion. I have felt nothing but support from you for Iceland's application for EU membership, for which I am extremely thankful.

Finally I would like to thank our good hosts for their hospitality and I wish us all a good and constructive Conference.