



European Council decided today to open accession negotiations with Serbia in January, at the latest, and without further conditions.

European Council President Herman Van Rompuy stated in Brussels that "the decision on the negotiation platform is a political decision".

"The decision on the negotiation platform is a political decision and needs to be confirmed by the European Council. This is the customary procedure and there are no new conditions. The wording "needs to be confirmed" has been chosen very carefully, said Van Rompuy, indicating that the Council will not take further decisions on the commencement of negotiations.

EU leaders will confirm the negotiating framework for Serbia. Discussions on the opening of negotiations with Serbia were very brief, and the leaders were, at the outset, addressed by High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy Catherine Ashton who praised the courage of participants in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

The proposal that the word "December" be left out of the prepared draft conclusions, saying that the Council was to confirm the opening of negotiations in December, as put forward by Van Rompuy, was immediately accepted by all.

President of the EU Council assessed that this was a historic moment for the Balkans and Europe as a whole.

The decision to open negotiations with Serbia, as well as the decision to start negotiations with Kosovo on the Stabilization and Association Agreement are the direct consequence of the courageous agreement reached between Belgrade and Pristina in April, said Van Rompuy at a news conference.

The Inter-Governmental Conference with Serbia, as he specified, would be held in January, which would mean formal opening of membership negotiations.

Van Rompuy announced that he would travel on Monday to visit Belgrade and Pristina in order to emphasize the importance of these steps forward in the European integration processes of Serbia and Kosovo.

President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso also welcomed, at the news conference, the decision to set the date for negotiations with Serbia, assessing that this was a historic event.

"Let us remember what recently happened in that part of Europe, where there was a war raging and where we are now opening membership negotiations", said Barroso, concluding that this step forward made by Serbia in European integration was "demonstration of the appeal of the EU".

Van Rompuy and Barroso also announced that they would be in Zagreb on Sunday, where the

admission of Croatia to the EU will be officially marked.