

Unofficial Synopsis of the Opinion from the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Iceland

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Icelandic Parliament released its opinion¹ on 9 July 2009, on two separate proposals submitted to Parliament on a possible application for accession to the EU².

The main findings of the opinion include the following:

- The Committee proposes that the text of the Proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution on Application to the European Union be worded as follows:

Parliament resolves to empower the Government to submit an application for membership of the European Union and upon the completion of negotiations with the Union to hold a national referendum on a prospective Treaty of Accession. The Government shall be guided by the majority opinion of the Committee on Foreign Relations on working methods and matters of vital national interest in its preparation and organization for negotiations.

- The Committee recommends there be no pre-conditions for Iceland's application.
- The Committee urges authorities to use the working procedures and structures recommended in the opinion to ensure cooperation, transparency and access to information for all interested parties, including the Parliament, during all stages of the application process.
- The opinion provides important parameters for pending accession negotiations.
- Broad consensus exists among all political parties to give the Icelandic people the opportunity to express its opinion in a national referendum once negotiations have been concluded.
- The Committee describes in detail issues of vital national importance for Iceland in the accession negotiations. These include fisheries, agriculture, energy, public services, social rights and regional issues.
- Iceland's deep cooperation with European states is given historical context; EFTA (1970), EEA (1994) and Schengen (1996/1999). The EU is Iceland's largest trade partner - two-thirds of Iceland's international trade; cooperation with EU states has increased in the field of peace and security.
- Iceland fulfils all of the Copenhagen criteria; Candidature is particularly well-prepared through the EEA.
- Emphasis is placed on the importance of Iceland's culture and language.

The Committee discussed both proposals in broad consultation with interested parties from government, social partners and academia. The Committee solicited input from 102 interest groups, organizations and institutions, as well as the general public, through an open advertisement process, which resulted in the submission of 57 comments.

The Committee decided at the onset to discuss both proposals in parallel, and agreed that the second proposal, submitted by the two largest opposition parties, the Independence Party and

¹ Two minority opinions were also tabled by the opposition parties.

² One proposal was submitted by the Foreign Minister on behalf of the Government and another by the opposition Independence and Progressive Parties

the Progressive Party, addressed important issues which merited valuable consideration. High priority was placed on the consolidation of viewpoints expressed in both resolutions, on finding broad consensus and on ensuring an open and thorough discussion of all issues.

The report is organized into 10 chapters, including annexes:

- I. Working methods of the Committee
- II. Iceland's cooperation with other European States
- III. EU Enlargement and Iceland's possible membership
- IV. Extensive efforts expended over the past years (on the issue of Iceland and the EU)
- V. The application (enlargement) process
- VI. Structure of the negotiations, role of [relevant] parties and information dissemination
- VII. Comments on Iceland's vital national interests in accession negotiations
- VIII. The economic impact of EU membership
- IX. Constitutional requirements of EU membership
- X. Culture, the Icelandic language and EU membership
- XI. Final words