

## **EU-Croatia talks could be halted over war crimes**

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**By Paul Taylor**

BRUSSELS, Nov 9 (Reuters) - The European Commission warned Croatia on Wednesday that European Union membership talks started last month could be halted if its cooperation with the U.N. war crimes tribunal for former Yugoslavia falters.

"Less than full cooperation with ICTY at any stage will affect the overall progress of negotiations and could lead to the suspension of the negotiations," a Commission strategy paper said.

Croatia began delayed accession talks last month after the chief U.N. prosecutor certified it was cooperating fully with the tribunal, even though the top Croatian war crimes indictee, former General Ante Gotovina, is still on the run.

"This full cooperation needs to be maintained and the last remaining indictee must be located, arrested and transferred to The Hague," the EU executive said.

It urged Croatia to do more to resolve the heritage of its 1991-95 war of independence and "substantially improve the prosecution of war criminals, in particular by ensuring an end to the ethnic bias against Serbs".

Among the priorities to be achieved within one to two years the Commission set speeding up the return, re-housing and integration of ethnic Serb war refugees.

Croatia was told to "fully implement with neighbouring countries, notably on trade, the fight against organised crime, border management and readmission, cross-border cooperation and judicial cooperation".

The EU executive said corruption remained a serious problem and that while Zagreb had made progress in reforming the judiciary, it still faced "important challenges which need serious attention".

The report cited persistent discrimination against Serbs and Roma, especially in job opportunities, and urged Croatia to ensure all ethnically motivated incidents were properly investigated and led to prosecutions.

"Creating a more receptive climate in the country is an urgent priority," it said.

Around 90 percent of Croatia's 4.4 million people declare themselves as Croats. More than half of the country's pre-war 600,000 Serbs, the most sizeable minority, left during or after the war.

About 120,000 people have returned but many complained of red tape and problems in getting their houses back.

While the report broadly praises Croatia's macroeconomic policies, saying they have brought relatively low inflation, a stable exchange rate and a reduced budget deficit, it says significant external and fiscal imbalances remain.

"State interventions in the economy remain significant and little progress has been made with respect to the restructuring of large state-owned enterprises," it said.

The development of the private sector and foreign direct investment continued to be hampered by complex rules and deficiencies in public administration and the courts.

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