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IP/08/1955

Brussels, 12 December 2008

## European Commission welcomes Switzerland to the Schengen area

***As from today, land border controls between Switzerland and the 24 countries currently making up the Schengen area have been lifted. Switzerland is also joining the Dublin system, which establishes the criteria for determining which Member State is responsible for examining an application for asylum.***

Commission President, Mr José Manuel Barroso, announced: *"I would like to congratulate Switzerland, the European Presidency and all the Member States for their efforts to extend the Schengen area to include Switzerland as from today. My sincere congratulations to Switzerland. Schengen has been successful in dismantling obstacles to unity, peace and freedom in Europe, while also paving the way for enhanced security. Today, Switzerland has once again shown its commitment to cooperating as closely as possible with the European Union for the benefit of the Swiss people."*

Mr Jacques Barrot, Vice-President and Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, added: *"Today marks an important step forward in relations between the EU and Switzerland. I am glad that citizens of the EU and of Switzerland can benefit from the border-free area, which today embraces its 25th member. I would like to congratulate Switzerland on the efforts it has made for this to be achieved. I also welcome Switzerland's accession to the Dublin system. This will, I am sure, contribute to more effective protection of asylum seekers in Europe."*

Following the enlargement of the Schengen area to include nine new members (Estonia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) on 21 December last year, today Switzerland is celebrating its accession. This will facilitate the development of border regions and the expansion of tourism, and will have a beneficial impact on infrastructures. For *bona fide* travellers, moving between the existing Schengen members and Switzerland will be faster and easier. Third-country nationals will be able to travel carrying a single Schengen visa and will no longer need separate national visas.

Switzerland's link-up to the Schengen Information System - which enables information to be shared on wanted and missing people, those refused entry, and lost and stolen property - was secured before its membership could be agreed. In November the Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs concluded that Switzerland met the criteria laid down in the Community *acquis*.

The Commission is certain that the Swiss authorities will take all the necessary steps to ensure that air border controls can be lifted as planned in March 2009.

A pragmatic solution was found for the border between Switzerland and Liechtenstein, and the Commission hopes that the procedures for ratifying the Protocol on the association of Liechtenstein will be completed as soon as possible, allowing Liechtenstein to join the Schengen area by the end of 2009, once an assessment has been carried out.

Switzerland has also acceded to the Dublin *acquis*. In this connection, the Commission on 3 December submitted amendments to the Dublin and Eurodac Regulations that aim to consolidate protection for asylum seekers and to make the Dublin system more effective. This proposal is in line with the desire to create a common European asylum system with which Switzerland will now be associated, involving a very high level of protection for asylum seekers and for those benefiting from international protection within the EU.

For more information on the activities of Vice-President Barrot:

[http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/barrot/index\\_fr.htm](http://www.ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/barrot/index_fr.htm)