



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

**OPENING ADDRESS BY H.E. JANEZ JANŠA,  
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
AT THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
THE BLEĐ STRATEGIC FORUM "CASPIAN OUTLOOK 2008"**

Mr President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Bled!

It is a particular honour and pleasure to open the first gathering of Slovenia's newest brand – the Bled Strategic Forum. The Forum is set out to provide a relaxing discussion point for policy-makers, businessmen and experts, where we will address pressing and strategically relevant global issues. The setting of Bled was chosen in order to offer an environment that stimulates innovative and out-of-the box thinking.

This year's topic – Caspian Outlook 2008 – is particularly relevant for a number of reasons. Let me focus on three: energy, EU neighbourhood policy and the politics of transition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Energy is undoubtedly a forefront topic for Europe and the broader international community. It is not a coincidence that energy security is a priority for most governments in the light of the high oil price and an extremely inflated commodities market. Europe, for example, already imports close to 70 percent of its oil requirements, making it affected by both geopolitical trends and the high oil price. Moreover, the EU's dependence on energy imports is expected to grow. The next challenges will thus be to locate additional external sources and adjust our infrastructure so as to accommodate this shift in energy consumption.

Energy price stability will be possible with improved diversity in two important areas: energy supply and energy production. We not only need diversification along the horizontal axes – in terms of where we import our oil and gas from. We also need it along the vertical axes – this means making a decision on how much of our energy should in the future come from renewable sources?

Europe needs to think innovatively in terms of building new delivery capacities. An integrated and upgraded gas network would be invaluable for Europe. With continuous mutual interest of fully functional relations with Russia, new lines are also needed to connect the European gas market with the Caspian and Central Asia, as well as with the Middle East. We also need to look for flexible gas policies – keeping in mind the environmental concerns – in order to lower market risk for both suppliers and buyers.

Caspian region should become an important partner in European energy policy. It is a region neighbouring to the EU. With the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria into the Union, Europe

will share a common strategic theatre with the South Caucasus states – the so called “enlarged Black Sea region”. Improving strategic cooperation on issues as relevant as energy does not have to be done to the exclusion of anyone. Moreover, I am convinced that a more dynamic relationship between the South Caucasus and the EU will improve stability and democratic progress in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe’s transition is not finished, and I feel confident that the process will continue. The South Caucasus states are in an ideal position to evolve into a politically stable and economically prosperous bridge connecting Europe and Central Asia. This idea is closely linked to the notion of European integration, economic growth and political stabilization. Reform is our common prerogative if we are to keep up with modern trends of competition.

Transition is a process. In Slovenia, we know this, and there is experience here that, I hope, we can share also with our friends from the region. Slovenia is active in helping Western Balkan countries manage their transitions, and I am convinced some of this know-how can also be transferred further east.

Dear Friends,

A European partnership for the South Caucasus states and the broader Caspian region is necessary for a number of reasons, not least as a driver of positive economic and political change.

We need foresight at the EU level. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is undoubtedly a value added framework. We should further develop policy of inclusion rather than exclusion, partnerships rather than rivalries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovenia is preparing for its EU Presidency, which will take place in the first half of 2008. We have already identified a number of priority issues. Amongst them are both EU energy security and EU enlargement. In this respect, the topic of this year’s Bled Strategic Forum is timely. I hope and trust that we will begin to identify the outer lines of these issues already here in Bled – during meetings today and tomorrow. In some way, Bled is a preface to Slovenia’s 2008 EU Presidency.

Excellencies,

When we decided to launch this Forum, we set the benchmark for the quality of debate high. It is my wish and the wish of those who created the Bled Strategic Forum for it to become a place where ideas collide and where we achieve progress through innovative thinking.

With this, I wish you all a pleasant and a successful Forum. At this point, let me thank the organizers, in particular Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel and members of his cabinet. I also appreciate the contribution of the sponsors of the Bled Strategic Forum and everyone that helped setting it up. Last but not least, I want to thank you all for taking your time and help us to embark on what I hope is a bright beginning of a new Slovenian brand.

Thank you for your kind attention and once again – welcome to Bled!