



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

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ADDRESS
BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA JANEZ JANŠA
AT THE "A WELCOME TO THE EURO" CEREMONY
(Ljubljana, 15 January 2007)

»No Dreams Are Out of Reach«

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Your Excellencies,

In the first half of the twentieth century, Europe faced the aftermath of two devastating wars. In the second, the Cold War loomed over the continent, splitting it mercilessly into two halves: the free West, and the oppressed East behind the Iron Curtain.

In terms of politics, Slovenia, as part of the former Yugoslavia, was on the totalitarian side of the Iron Curtain, while from the geo-strategic point of view, following the dispute with Stalin, it was somewhere in between. The Slovenian people were denied freedom and well-being, and their eyes were always turning towards the West.

Western Europe had a good Cold War. Western societies healed their wounds, reconciled, and strengthened their democracies in the ruins of the Second World War. They attained unprecedented economic development, and provided their citizens with welfare. By establishing the Euro-Atlantic alliance, Europe effectively secured its freedom.

Slovenes experienced the Cold War differently. Under Communism, Slovenia lagged behind in terms of both economy and civilisation. The average wage before WWII was 80 per cent of the average wage in neighbouring Austria. At the time of the first free elections in 1990, which signified the end of single party rule and collectivism in Slovenia, the average wage amounted to a mere 30 per cent of that in Austria.

With its single party system, the former Yugoslavia could neither solve economic issues, nor eliminate national tensions, which erupted violently as the country disintegrated. The Communist ideology had also failed to establish a system of positive values to form a basis for a society of tolerance and cooperation. The demons of the past and inter-communal tensions broke out violently and, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, caused unprecedented devastation, by far the worst in Europe since the Second World War.

"Nothing taught, nothing forgotten" is how we could paraphrase the statement by a Bourbon King, aptly describing the interim period that the Slovenes and other peoples had to spend in the unnatural environment of Yugoslavian communism.

At that time, Western Europe not only retained freedom and provided for welfare, but also created enough surplus energy to enlarge.

The Slovenes and other peoples included in the last big enlargement owe our gratitude to the leaders of Western European and Euro-Atlantic integrations for having preserved, and during the Cold War defended, and developed a region of freedom, democracy and economic advancement; for creating and strengthening the EU as the common home of these values. Without the EU, the nations freed from Communism, would have had nothing to join. Without the EU, Europe and its nations would be facing a bleak future.

We owe them our gratitude for their decision to open up this space; to invite into it all those who seek to share the same values, and to that end, adopt shared standards.

It is our duty to express our gratitude, since this was a wise and bold decision. It was not merely a result of clinical political consideration. It was a direct expression of human good, an overwhelming victory of responsibility over ignorance, a proof of solidarity and broadness of mind.

Today, nearly three years have passed since the ten new member states joined the EU. Today, Slovenia, as the first among them, is completing the substitution of its national currency for the common European one. Today, our gratitude is so much more apt. Firstly, because the enlargement has proved a success, and secondly, because Slovenia's adoption of the euro has proved that the EU is certainly capable of further development and strengthening.

Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Slovenia has made a successful journey of development and transition. Today marks the landmark of a new successful step. Slovenia met the demanding Maastricht criteria for the adoption of the euro. It will continue to fulfil the obligations of the Stability and Growth Pact. It also successfully prepared for the currency changeover. Today we can establish that this transition was smooth and without any serious problems.

This has been a giant leap for Slovenia and a small step for the European Monetary Union, which had twelve much larger members. Nevertheless, this has also been a step in the right direction for the EU, taken at the right time.

A host of notable and rather less conspicuous efforts were required to achieve this. As a nation, we owe our gratitude for the adoption of the euro to many.

First and foremost to the Slovenian tolar: it was a solid currency, and we bid it farewell with good feelings. It remains an indelible part of Slovenia history, self-confidence and Slovenia's success story. It is precisely because the tolar was a success story that we could adopt the euro; it is precisely because it was so good that its lifespan was so short. It facilitated the next big step forward.

On this day I owe gratitude to the prime ministers and members of previous cabinets, particularly finance ministers, Members of the National Assembly, and governors and members of the governing board of the Bank of Slovenia for timely and correct decisions on a strenuous journey; and to our bankers, business people, and to all users of the euro for providing help and being considerate in the smooth transition to a new currency.

I would like to extend my thanks to the European Central Bank and its President, Mr Trichet, and the European Commission and its President, Mr Barroso, for their help and advice in our meeting the criteria and for the approval.

And last but not least, I would like to thank all the delegations from EU member states, and current and future members of the European Monetary Union, who are present today, for attending today's ceremony. We are glad and appreciate that you have come. We are very happy that the President-in-Office of the EU Council and German Chancellor, Mrs Angela Merkel was able to come. We know that Germany's decision to give up the mark, a strong national symbol, was one of the key decisions on the way to the euro. We respect this unselfish and courageous decision to the benefit of a common European future.

Dear Guests,

For the first time, Slovenes have become part of a great European project. The project is so extensive and has such far-reaching consequences that the first attempts were justly called not the European Union, but European dreams. And for a dream to be realised, it requires hope, faith and courage, which is what the founders of the EU had. It is an indisputable fact that the EU is the most successful strategic political project of the last century and the most successful example of international cooperation and integration in the history of humanity. The EU is the biggest internal market and a leading world exporter.

In comparison with other developed societies on the planet, the EU has the highest level of literacy, the lowest level of poverty and crime, the greatest number of vacation days, and the highest life expectancy. In individual EU countries there are numerous examples of good practices which we can imitate. The EU can serve as a model to millions of individuals and, according to research; it is the most attractive place to live in our global world. But it is not only hard data that testifies to its success – the EU is the greatest peace project in the history of humanity, it is the biggest and the most fruitful place for discussions on the future of the planet, a place, where an understanding of peoples' interdependency, and the relationship between man and nature, has come far. These are solid foundations, on the basis of which effective solutions to the problems the EU is facing can be found - for a higher level of innovation, for a common energy policy, for an attitude towards immigration, for upgrading institutions.

In the world of global competitiveness of the 21st century, the development of the EU will be successful if it is able to find the answers to the key dilemmas of contemporary European reality in time. The key questions are: "How to think about changes in good time? How to think about changes when we are doing well?"

We will be able to do this if we realise our responsibilities to a common European home and not only our rights, and if we realise our responsibility to coming generations of Europeans.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

The introduction of a common European currency has provided a timely answer to the challenges of the future, an answer which considers our responsibility to future generations of Europeans. This proves that European nationals, united in the EU, have a good future. It proves that there are no insoluble problems and no dreams are out of reach.

This is why we have to dare to dream. We have to set high goals. The history of the EU's success has been a history of dreams coming true. Europe needs every dream and hope of every European. So that Europe will be not only a place of efficiency and excellence, but also a place of good.