



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 RECEPTION FOR THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
(Ljubljana, 24 January 2007)

Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Guests,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the traditional reception for the Diplomatic Corps in the Republic of Slovenia. To me, it is more an opportunity to meet with Slovenia's friends than a formal function held every year. I would therefore particularly like to thank those of you who have come from abroad to attend this reception. I also thank the representatives of the diplomatic community in Ljubljana, especially those who joined us last year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

15 January 2007, the day on which Slovenia completed the switchover to a new currency, coincided with 15th Anniversary of the recognition of the independent and sovereign Slovenia by the then European Community. Introducing the euro is a new chapter in Slovenia's success story. At the present European moment, it is perhaps even more important that the enlargement of the euro area came as a new achievement for the European Union itself.

Slovenia has also put considerable efforts into subsequent European steps, and stands ready for them. This is why it is among those Member States most consistently insisting that delays be as short as possible and that restrictions be lifted. We have actively contributed to the successful outcome of the standstill in the expansion of the Schengen system. We have also welcomed the agreement on the Services Directive. Although more ambitious initially, it signifies a step forward towards implementing the four freedoms of the internal market. It should not be forgotten, however, that the movement of labour is still restricted. As pointed out by the president of the European Central Bank, Mr Jean-Claude Trichet, at the recent ceremony "A Welcome to the Euro", this is especially unusual for a single-currency zone.

We are actively preparing for the responsibilities of the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union. This is the largest project ever undertaken in independent Slovenia, which is all the more reason to rise to this task and carry it out to the best of our abilities. We have fulfilled the Maastricht convergence criteria with the most positive trends in economic growth and employment to date. We have modernised and simplified the tax system, which takes a burden off the economy and increases its competitiveness.

The objective of the remaining reforms is the most equitable and input-based distribution of value thus created. Geographical balance is ensured through the adopted Resolution on National Development Projects. Together with its social partners, the Government will seek to ensure the most equitable possible social distribution within the framework of flexicurity.

We are pleased with the signs of optimism at the European level. This is not only in the European economy with the strongest growth in recent years; generally speaking, freshness is felt across the European Union. With Bulgaria and Romania, the 2004 round of enlargement is concluded. In 1987, Ronald Reagan said to Mikhail Gorbachev: "Tear down this wall". 20 years on, the European Union, with its 27 Member States and almost half a billion citizens, will be celebrating in Berlin the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. This testifies to the vitality of the largest-ever peace project in the history of humanity, which has managed to preserve and open the European space of freedom and prosperity.

In the next year and a half, the EU will be working together according to the programme presented a week ago by the members of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian trio. Slovenia is pleased with the team spirit within the trio. We are already actively monitoring the dossiers to which we will attach particular importance during EU presidency.

European Council President Angela Merkel recently stated that the period of reflection was over. By the time Slovenia assumes the Presidency, the solutions that will strengthen the EU and make it a global actor responding to the challenges of the 21st century should be made clearer. Slovenia continues to believe that these solutions should not be found far from those already agreed upon by all Member States. In foreseeable future, enlargement must remain one of the key EU levers. This was confirmed by the last European Council, as well as by the majority (63 percent) of Europeans who believe that further enlargement would enhance the global role of the EU. A dynamic balance between deepening and enlargement will also be the main focus of this year's Bled Strategic Forum at the end of August. The Centre for European Perspective at Jablje Castle is already fulfilling its mission.

Slovenia has consistently been in favour of an open-door policy for the Western Balkans. The significance of the Euro-Atlantic perspective has further been proven by the peaceful and democratic process of the birth of the youngest European state, Montenegro, although this has primarily been a reflection of the political maturity of the actors in the region. Slovenia has actively supported Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina being invited into the Partnership for Peace. Within the EU, Slovenia also supports liberalisation of the visa regime and progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Resolution of the Kosovo issue has reached its key stage. Whereas directly involved stakeholders will have to show a great deal of moderation and courage, the international community will have to show unity in its support of resolutions that will not divide them into winners and losers. Slovenia is aware of the responsibility that will rest with the Trans-Atlantic community after the decision on Kosovo's status has been taken, and intends to strengthen its contribution in this regard.

Energy is returning to the very core of the European project, 55 years after the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community. With its package at the beginning of this year, the European Commission has set very high expectations. Regarding the development of new technologies in the field, the EU has already taken a tangible step through acceding to the ITER fusion reactor project. In this and other areas the future strategic alliance between the EU and the Russian Federation is of crucial importance.

Unemployment tops the list of concerns of citizens, both in the EU (64 percent) and in Slovenia (61 percent). The European Council meeting in March will offer an opportunity to assess our progress towards solutions providing citizens with social security in a flexible manner and increasing the competitiveness of European economies. The establishment of the European Institute of Technology as the driving force of European innovation is definitely one of these solutions.

In broad dialogue with people from various milieus and of different profiles, Slovenia has already intensified substantive preparations in the field of multicultural dialogue. It has realised its genuine commitment with the initiative to establish a Mediterranean university on the Slovenian coast.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the context of the above priorities, I should add that the list of topics marking the Slovenian EU Presidency will be finalised on 1 July 2008. For the greatest surprise during our rotation would be if there were, in fact, no surprises. This is especially true, given that at the helm of the European Union we will coordinate nearly all topical international issues and express positions on them on behalf of 27 Member States.

Together with its partners in the international community, the European Union must make an additional effort to resolve the situation in the Middle East. Unfortunately, in Lebanon last year we again witnessed how quickly latent conflicts erupt into open violence, thus leaving the mark of war on new generations. Tensions within countries and nations in the region also intensified. All this will have to be taken into consideration in the attempts to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process, in the stabilisation efforts in Iraq and the support of a democratic government in Beirut. A uniform international community must above all do its utmost to prevent a new, nuclear threat from entering the fragile security equation in the region.

Regrettably, the optimism brought about by the compromise on the peace operation in Darfur at the end of last year was overshadowed for some time by violence in Somalia. In this country, too, solutions must be sought through the inclusive process of national reconciliation. It is good that the African Union is increasingly becoming a relevant actor. We are convinced that the European Union will continue to stand by its side.

It is important that Europe can count on an alliance with the United States. NATO continues to be a solid Trans-Atlantic bridge. Slovenia believes in its mission, its ability to transform and its solidarity among allies. NATO's task in Afghanistan is of key strategic importance. In the previous year, Slovenia has climbed to the very top among allies in terms of its *per capita* contribution to operations.

The current expressions of an even deeper commitment to partnership on both sides of the Atlantic are not only a good sign for the Euro-Atlantic community. They also give fresh impetus to optimism that mutual fear of pressure by global competition will be overcome by the re-launch of world trade negotiations. The growth of the global economy continues to be strong (5.1 percent), increasingly due to high growth rates in developing countries, in particular in Asia. We hope that their inhabitants and the world as a global community will benefit from their growing power. It is also imperative for global progress to take into account concerns for integrated and sustainable development. Stern's report warns of climate change being more than just a green winter. If we do not put words into action, we will be exposed to serious economic, social and security risks.

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Finally, allow me to wish you personal happiness and every success in your work in the new year. It is evident that 2007 will pose numerous challenges. I am convinced that through Slovenia's intensified preparations for the European Union presidency, our cooperation will strengthen. Slovenia looks forward to this cooperation and counts on a good year ahead of us.