



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

OPENING STATEMENT

OF PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA JANEZ JANŠA AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE BLEĐ STRATEGIC FORUM "EUROPEAN UNION 2020: ENLARGING AND INTEGRATING"

Bled, 26 August 2007

*Dear President, Mr Saakashvili,
Prime Ministers, Mr Gruevski, Mr Kirkilas and Mr Sanader,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Allow me to first welcome those of you who are here for the first time. I hope you will enjoy your stay. I would like to extend a special welcome also to those who helped us launch the Bled Strategic Forum a year ago. Your positive feedback has encouraged us to gather again at Bled. Stronger for last year's experience, we are looking forward to opening a new discussion with our new friends.

The topic is no less than the vision of the European Union in 2020. High aspirations reflect the re-gained boldness waving across Europe. The EU today is close to setting renewed common basis. This is important to Slovenia. It has always been our conviction that the EU needs fresh ground to continue both enlargement and further integration. Furthermore, improved atmosphere brightens prospect for our presidency which is due to start in four months.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The leitmotiv of building Europe whole and free has inspired cross-generational European project for fifty years. The story with its ups and downs, crises and last-minute twists is approaching its happy ending. Europe is almost free, though not yet entirely. It is almost united, though not yet completely. There are still countries and nations who aspire to join the EU. There are those among them who have already been promised that they will not be left behind.

In our vision of the European Union in 2020, these commitments are fulfilled. Furthering enlargement agenda will therefore be one of the top tasks of the Slovenian presidency. Slovenia will try to help your country, Prime Minister Gruevski, to join them. We will do our utmost to allow the rest of the Western Balkans to make further steps as soon as the conditions are met.

At the same time, the EU will have to come up with solutions to accommodate aspirations from one of the most dynamic regions of Europe – its East and the Caucasus. Last year's conference in Bled bore witness that Slovenia recognizes the European outlook for the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU is at a point where completing the construction of united Europe does not suffice anymore. Seneca said: »To the person who does not know where he wants to go there is no favourable wind.« This is why emergence of what is called a new narrative for Europe must already run in parallel with remaining chapters of the original one. Only then will return to Europe be realised: coming back is finished when together we move forward.

Putting together a fresh vision that will appeal to more than 30 European nations over generations is a great challenge. However, reconciling Europe's diversity within its unity has always been at the very core of European enterprise. It has brought us to a level, where the future of European societies has never been linked closer to the fate of our common undertaking. This is the true message of the process launched with the Laeken Declaration.

Finishing work on the renewed common basis will pave the way to more transparent, efficient and democratic Europe which would be closer to its citizens. In our vision, this should not come at the expense of what Europe has already achieved: dynamic balance among its Member States, smaller and bigger, old and new; peacefully managed and nurtured diversity; a community of law, on both national and European level.

In socio-economic terms, the vision of Europe was set in a prospect of building "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world". European solidarity and social cohesion, cherished around the globe must be sustained in this process.

The implementation of the renewed Lisbon Strategy will be high on the Slovenian presidency agenda and the focus of the European Council next March. Since the strategy was conceived, however, the EU's growing dependence on outside energy sources has made its impact felt stronger. Slovenia recognizes the importance of facilitating the construction of a coherent and sustainable European energy policy.

Dear Friends,

Europe has to change with the world. For any vision of the European Union to be credible, it must take into account external realities that will shape global environment in the future. Outlines of some of these realities are already getting clearer.

The global power balance is expected to shift. In terms of regional security network, enlarged NATO will help consolidate the Euro-Atlantic area of peace and stability. Concerted action on a global level will remain prerequisite for successful fight against terrorism, while open and subtle dialogue will stay the best recipe for managing global interactions among cultures. Discussions on climate change will still feature high on global agenda, hopefully within a fair and effective post-2012 framework.

Population of Europe, representing a quarter of humankind before the World War I, today amounts to less than 10 percent of world population. On the other hand, joint GDP of the EU Member States accounts for more than a quarter of the world GDP. In terms of world trade, this share comes up to a third. In terms of development aid, it is close to a half of the world figure. With the share of euro in global foreign currency reserves at 25% and its circulation surpassing that of dollar, European currency plays a crucial role in emerging global monetary system.

The notion of the EU as an economic giant and a political dwarf is changing. The world looks to the EU for leadership on a wide variety of issues. The EU has already met some of these expectations. It has taken a pioneering role in addressing global environmental issues and a key position in consolidating international law. Its history and cultural diversity make its potential to lead intercultural dialogue stronger than any other place. The start of our presidency in January will coincide with launching of the European year of intercultural dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is up to us, Europeans, to decide what story we want to tell. Our choice has to be a fresh narrative of a reunited continent determined to become an active global player, an innovative force able to catalyze modernity in global society. With the words of José Manuel Barroso: "Losing this opportunity would be the greatest failure of our political generation."

Solutions from the ongoing treaty-amending process are expected to boost the EU's institutional capacity for exerting its global leverage. Inner consolidation will give the EU a stronger voice in world affairs, from global security to climate change. The commitment of all Member States to keep our ranks united around a coherent foreign and security policy will be critical. This, of course, does not exclude national profiles.

Neither does the vision of the EU as a global player put our alliances and partnerships or effective multilateralism as a key objective under question. On the contrary, more active role would enhance the EU's engagement in its neighbourhood and strengthen its commitments in the wider world.

Dear Friends,

By the time we meet here again next year, Slovenia will have completed the EU presidency. We are resolute to make it a success. The task is considerable and support will be welcome. We count on all of you. Our experience of cooperation in trio with Germany and Portugal is positive. A different perspective, a friendly suggestion or a fresh idea can make all the difference. This is why your contributions to this year's discussion are of additional value. I wish you good time here in Bled.

Thank you.