



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

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OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

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## ADDRESS

**BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA JANEZ JANŠA  
AT THE JOINT SESSION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY**

*Lendava, 17 October 2007*

*Prime Minister,  
Ministers,  
Representatives of both national communities,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am delighted to welcome you on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. It is a great pleasure for me to open the first joint working meeting of the Slovenian and Hungarian Governments. My ministerial colleagues and I are honoured to be able to host the first part of this historic meeting. We have gathered here, on the beautiful and hospitable plains of Prekmurje, where two friendly nations have coexisted and cooperated for centuries. I am particularly pleased that the representatives of both national communities, along with the ministers of both governments, have also joined us today. Their presence at this meeting is one of the most evident examples of partnership relations between our two countries.

It is very difficult to outline the importance of today's meeting for both countries in such brief terms. I myself see this meeting above all as a confirmation of the fact that we have succeeded in abolishing the various borders which have been separating us for centuries. Throughout history, fate has often created numerous barriers between Slovenes and Hungarians. From the Middle Ages onwards, this very part of Europe was marked by borders between empires and kingdoms. These borders often separated parts of both nations from their home countries. Nevertheless, Slovenes and Hungarians share the common feature of having managed to preserve their national identity despite the many difficult challenges they have had to face.

In this regard, the love of freedom was of key importance. Hungarians' love of their homeland and their love of freedom set an example to the followers of Slovene national awakening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hungarian patriot Ferenc Deák was a model for many of them; in his call to Slovene national leaders, one of the leading Slovene writers, Josip Stritar, wrote in verse: *Pokažite med sabo mi Deáka! (Show me a Deák among yourselves!)*. Similarly, the Slovene poet of national awakening, Anton Aškerc, appealed to Slovene students in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to study in Budapest, where they would adopt a love-of-freedom attitude and acquire a "Hungarian iron will".

Solidarity between both nations was also expressed during the fight against the totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At last year's celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian uprising, we remembered Slovenes who in 1956 offered shelter to Hungarian refugees. Hungary was also one of the countries that resolutely supported Slovenia in its efforts to join NATO after the fall of the Berlin Wall and Slovenia's independence. Many other historical examples indicating the common fate of both nations could also be mentioned. Of course, this area, among others, could not avoid the maelstrom of war that was raging in Europe and the challenges it had brought. Yet, today's meeting of the two governments shows that, while respecting our shared history, we must think above all about the future.

This view is even more optimistic, given that both countries have been members of the European Union since 2004. By joining the Schengen area, the last barriers between our countries will soon be removed. Slovenia and Hungary thus have an excellent starting point for strengthening their role in the European Union, in the North Atlantic Alliance and in the broader international community. The fifteen agreements, memorandums and other documents that are going to be signed today form a very good basis for the further deepening of bilateral cooperation.

The trends in our economic cooperation are encouraging. I am pleased to note that there has been an important increase in the scope of commercial trade – last year exceeding 1 billion euros for the first time – which is an increase of one fifth compared to 2005. But we can do even better. This is also proved by trade figures, which show a 30 per cent increase in trade this year compared to the previous year. Another proof is also the Memorandum of Understanding on establishing the Slovenian-Hungarian Business Council, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments and the Hungarian Government's Investment and Trade Development Agency, the Cooperation Agreement between the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, all of which are going to be signed at today's meeting. These documents, as well as today's founding meeting of the Slovenian-Hungarian Business Council, firmly establish that we are able to identify new opportunities in the field of economic cooperation.

Our determination to increase mutual investment has already started to bear fruit. In the last few months, the Slovenian side has met the key conditions for signing a contract on the biggest joint investment project so far, namely the construction of the Passenger Centre Ljubljana. This investment represents clear proof of Hungarian entrepreneurship, as well as of the openness of the Slovenian market to foreign investment. After decades of discussions, the capital of Slovenia will now finally get a passenger centre, one which will be in line with the most advanced standards.

The strengthening of economic cooperation depends largely on the building of infrastructural connections in the areas of energy, logistics and transport. Hungary is the second most important market for Slovenian Luka Koper, which last year transported a record million tonnes of goods for Hungarian needs. Luka Koper is interested in the development of a strategic and logistical project near the village of Záhony at the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. There are many opportunities in the field of energy as well, since both countries share their concern for ensuring energy security.

Slovenia and Hungary, which have been participating in EU structural funds for more than a decade, assess regional development as an area of innovative potential. I believe that with the regionalisation of Slovenia, Hungarian regions will in the near future find new, development-oriented partners. The activities of both national communities towards cross-border cooperation will also lead to the modernisation of life within the entire border area. Cooperation in the European Union also offers new opportunities in this area. The case in point is the development agency of the Slovenian community in Porabje, which was established last year and whose projects *Sosed sosedu* and *Andovci* are aimed at drawing on EU funds.

Based on the Agreement on cooperation in the fields of culture, education and science from 1992, bilateral programmes in the fields mentioned are being regularly implemented. It is encouraging that interest in cooperation between institutions of higher education has been rapidly increasing. At this point I would like to thank the Hungarian universities which have unselfishly expressed their support to Slovenia in establishing the Euro-Mediterranean University as a means of promotion of intercultural dialogue. I believe that links between schools and educational exchanges will continue to increase in the future. There are good options for achieving this. Our children, agents of future development, will identify new opportunities for economic cooperation only if they have a good knowledge of the culture, characteristics and advantages of their neighbours.

In 1992, with a view to ensuring the protection of rights, the two countries signed the Agreement on granting special rights to the Slovene ethnic minority in the Republic of Hungary and to the Hungarian national community in the Republic of Slovenia. In September of this year, the mixed Slovenian-Hungarian commission for the ninth time made recommendations to further improve the position of both communities. We therefore expect that the two governments will shortly confirm the minutes containing the recommendations. In this regard, I welcome the Hungarian decision that the road connection between the villages of Gornji Senik and Verica will be built, thus facilitating the work and life of Slovenians living in Porabje in many ways. We have to increase the awareness that bilingualism in an ethnically mixed area is an important virtue. We must continue with our efforts to make bilingualism visible and to ensure that it is continuously used in public administration.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to the Hungarian Government for all the support it has given to Slovenia during its preparations for the EU Presidency in the first half of next year. We are aware that our country is facing its most difficult challenge since independence. As Slovenia and Hungary have been expressing support to each other during accession to the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, so it is that in both countries we feel we have a special responsibility when it comes to the European future of the Western Balkans. This is also reflected in today's signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between the Centre for European Perspective and the International Centre for Democratic Transition, which will, by undertaking joint projects, support the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans in the European Union.

Together, we believe in the European idea. We are convinced that the European Council in Lisbon, which my Hungarian colleague and I will attend tomorrow, will successfully conclude a several-years-long effort towards institutional reform. Slovenia and Hungary are aware of their responsibility for the success of European integration. And today's meeting of both governments is the best proof of this.

An old antique saying goes: What could be more pleasant than a friend you can talk to as you would talk to yourself?

Kedves magyar barátaink, üdvözöljük önöket Szlovéniában. (*Dear Hungarian friends, welcome to Slovenia.*)