



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

INTERVIEW

BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA JANEZ JANŠA FOR THE PRESS AGENCY »XINHUA« AND THE NEWSPAPER »GUANG MING DAILY« (China)

The upcoming visit is your first visit to China. What is your objective of this visit?

I see my official visit to China as the confirmation of good and friendly relations between Slovenia and China. At the same time it also marks the 15th anniversary of the establishment of our diplomatic relations. This is an excellent opportunity not only to positively assess the past cooperation but also to set goals for the further strengthening of our bilateral ties. There are excellent opportunities, especially in the economic field. This is why a strong delegation of businessmen representing 50 successful companies and institutions from Slovenia is joining me on my visit to Beijing.

Furthermore, Slovenia will hold the forthcoming Presidency of the EU and it is important that there are established ties with the political leadership of China which is an important strategic partner of the EU. My visit is therefore also an expression of mutual interest to exchange views on the most important questions of the EU-China dialogue as well as on other global issues, such as world trade, climate change, energy security and others.

How do you evaluate the bilateral relations between Slovenia and China?

The cooperation between the two countries has been developing well. We are pleased to have maintained high-level contacts and regular consultations ever since 1992. The two Parliaments have also been maintaining constructive and regular dialogue.

China is Slovenia's most important trading partner in Asia. Our trade in goods and services exceeds 300 million euro annually and is still growing. However, we strive for finding the ways to achieve more balanced trade relations between Slovenia and China. Therefore, we are opening the Slovenian Economic Representative Office in Shanghai which we expect to be instrumental in helping Slovenian companies to further strengthen their presence in the Chinese market.

Moreover, we have established good and growing cooperation in the fields of culture, science, technology, education, tourism and in many other fields. There is an interest, and I believe it is mutual, to further deepen and expand our all-round cooperation. Following this aim, a number of bilateral agreements are going to be signed during my official visit to China. They are linked to the fields of culture, education, defense, investment cooperation, and academic cooperation and people-to-people exchange.

In the past months, the Taiwan authorities attempted to hold a referendum on joining the United Nations, which is an international organization of sovereignty states. What is Slovenia's position about Taiwan's attempt?

Slovenia's has always respected the "one China" policy and demonstrated this also during this year's General Assembly of the United Nations. Also other EU Member States have a similar position regarding this question. However, our appeals are directed towards maintaining regional stability and solving pending issues in a peaceful manner. We believe that a positive solution is to be found through enhancing dialogue across the Taiwanese strait. Modern European experience shows that by strengthening economic relation it is possible to solve even the most difficult political questions.

The Beijing Olympic Games will be held in August next year. What do you expect from the Games? In which fields do you think that Slovenian athletes are capable of winning medals?

I think that the Summer 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing represent a historical challenge for China. It is a great honour for every country to have the opportunity to organise the world's most prominent sport event. I have no doubt that China will justify the trust of the international community, prove its responsibility and organise an excellent sport event to the benefit of all. I believe that at the same time it will use this unique opportunity to promote the values of peace, solidarity and responsibility towards present and future generations.

In Slovenia, of course, we have great expectations for our athletes. We are aware that they will face a very tough competition and that it will not be easy to win medals. However, we remain optimists. There are some excellent sportsmen and sportswomen in Slovenia that are capable of winning even the hardest competitions. We have high expectations particularly for our rowers, judo fighters, athletes, gymnasts and shooters. At the last Olympic Games in Greece, Slovenia won four medals and we remain confident that it will be possible to surpass this number in Beijing.

Slovenia will take over its half-year EU presidency from January 1 next year. How do you plan to develop relations between the EU and China during the presidency? How do you think about the prospect of relations between the EU and China?

The growing global political and economic role of China increases the need for a regular and enhanced strategic EU-China dialogue. The International and global environment demands an ever more coordinated response from all stake-holders. In this context the relations between the EU and China are rapidly evolving. It is very positive that the EU and China spare no effort to come closer to the conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that would comprehensively regulate the relations between the two.

I believe that the EU and China have every opportunity to further extend their cooperation in the areas of innovations, training and the use of creative potential of human resources. The EU is also interested in the transfer of high technologies, which would help ensuring China's sustainable development. In addition, the cooperation in addressing the most important global issues, such as the world trade, migration management, climate change, and need to provide energy resources, should also be intensified.

Of course, we can not oversee the fact that the EU is the biggest buyer of Chinese products, and that China is the second trading partner of the EU. Last year, mutual trade reached a record 254 billion euros, which is an increase of more than 20% compared to the previous year. On the one hand, such trade flows improve the competition in the European market, and on the other hand, they contribute almost 70% to the EU's total deficit in foreign trade. Therefore, we need to find ways towards greater trade balance in our economic relations and also towards making China's economic growth less dependent on exports. I am confident that

at the forthcoming EU-China Summit at the end of November in Beijing it will be possible to move towards these goals.

Kosovo's future status is a vital issue concerning the prosperity and stability of the Western Balkans. The European Union is still divided over the Kosovo issue. What will Slovenia do to bridge the gaps inside the EU over the Kosovo issue?

Slovenia does not wish to see Kosovo overshadowing a positive message about the real and concrete European perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans. However, we are aware that Kosovo will be the main item on the EU's foreign policy agenda during our Presidency in the first half of 2008. The maintenance of unity in the EU will be of utmost importance with regard to the definition and implementation of the future status of Kosovo.

We welcome the recent direct meetings between the delegations of Belgrade and Pristine. Their commitment to the negotiation process and the Troika's increasingly pro-active role are a positive sign. The solution must be found as soon as possible. Any prolongation of the status quo could have negative effects on the stability of Kosovo. Slovenia and all other EU countries have an interest to maintain peace and stability of the region. I believe that this challenge can most effectively be addressed by building on the Ahtisaari plan, which the EU has already expressed its clear support for.

There can be no doubt that in the EU there is a shared concern for the developments after the 10 December when the Troika is to present its report. We still believe that a UNSC Resolution would be the best way to achieve a lasting solution, but we must prepare for less than ideal scenarios too. It will be of utmost importance to maintain unity of the EU and the transatlantic community.

Serbia has concluded technical talks with the European Union about the Stability and Association Agreement (SAA). When will the EU initial and sign the SAA with Serbia? When does Serbia expect to become a full member of the EU?

In September I wrote a letter to my colleagues in the European Council comprised of the heads of states and governments of the EU countries and the President of the European Commission. In the letter I expressed my full support to the further concretization of the European perspective for all countries in the Western Balkans; of course, based on individual approach and according to their progress in meeting the necessary conditions and standards.

Regarding Serbia, we fully support a firm anchoring of Belgrade into the EU integration. This is crucial for maintaining the stability of the wider region. Slovenia welcomes that the SAA was initiated just recently under the Portuguese Presidency and we hope that it could be signed during our Presidency. However, it is Serbia's turn to move and to meet the expectations of the EU and the wider international community regarding its cooperation with the ICTY. We hope that Serbia will show concrete results within next weeks by arresting the remaining fugitives and thus enabling the EU to proceed with the integration process.

The run-off of Slovenia's presidential election will be held on November 11. Who do you think will prevail and why?

Regardless of who of the two candidates - that are going run against each other in the second round - will be elected, the cooperation with the future Slovenian president will surely be active and constructive. I will be most pleased if Lojze Peterle - a candidate that I know and support - wins in this final round. He was the Prime Minister of the first Slovenian democratic government and an active participant in the making of the Slovenian State.

Slovenia is the first of the 10 new EU members to take over the EU presidency. What does Slovenia do to prepare the presidency? For a country of only 2 million people, does Slovenia feel it is a big burden to take over the presidency? How do the Slovenian people think over the presidency?

The priorities of the Slovenian Presidency were to a large extent determined in the 18-month programme of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies, which was prepared in close cooperation of the trio countries and endorsed by the GAERC in December 2006. As the priorities of each Presidency depend largely on the progress achieved by the previous Presidencies in individual dossiers, we will only be able to speak about exact Slovenia's priorities towards the end of the Portuguese Presidency. We must also be prepared for various extraordinary events and possible crises that might happen during our Presidency which will require a quick and coordinated response of the EU.

The Presidency will be a demanding but also a challenging task for the Slovene public administration. More than 1500 employees in Slovenia and 170 in our Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels will be actively involved in day-to-day business of the Presidency. Also other representations all over the world will take their part in the running of the Presidency. Slovenia will organize more than 2000 meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg, more than 1000 coordination meetings in New York, Geneva and Vienna, and more than 150 events in Slovenia. An important part of our agenda will be also political dialogue with third countries; there will be around 200 meetings with EU partners around the world from prime minister to expert level.

Citizens of Slovenia are great supporters of Slovenian EU presidency, as this means great recognition and challenge for the government, country and their people. For half a year Slovenia's capital Ljubljana is going to be the capital of Europe. It is a historic opportunity to promote our county and to increase its visibility and recognition worldwide.