



ADDRESS

**BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL JANEZ JANŠA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE ABOLITION OF INTERNAL AIR BORDER CONTROLS
AND THE DEFINITIVE ENTRY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA INTO THE SCHENGEN AREA**
Zgornji Brnik, 31 March 2008

*Minister Pereira,
Mr Commissioner,
Mr President of the National Council,
Colleagues,
Members of Governments,
Deputies of the National Assembly,
Members of the National Council,
Excellencies,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Three months ago, when Slovenia joined the single European area of free movement of people and capital in part, we held our first celebration. Today, we held a second and final one. When, in the past three months, we crossed the former borders, we found ourselves wondering why in Europe in the past decades we had needed borders manned by police and, before 2004, in the Slovenian territory, by customs officials at all. Not so long ago, our borders were even guarded by armed military units. The recently-abandoned border police, police and customs posts today seem like an anachronism, archaeological skeletons from the not so very distant past. They are rather like a monument to the lost opportunities of earlier generations who, mainly on ideological grounds, were unable, without demarcation and divisions, to agree on and ensure cooperation for the common good.

In the spring of nations, a mere twenty years ago, Eastern and Central Europe finally succeeded in establishing democracy and healthy economic foundations. In 1991, one of the tragic acts of this transition period between totalitarianism and democracy also took place at the airport, which is today called Ljubljana Jože Pučnik Airport. Then Peter Petrič, a brave member of the Slovenian Territorial Defence, lost his life defending the airport against a tank unit of the Yugoslav Army. On 28 June 1991, two journalists, Nikolas Vogel, a German citizen, and Norbert Werner, an Austrian citizen, were killed by shots fired by the Yugoslav Army on this runway, precisely where this celebration is being held today. In June 1991, the airport itself also suffered a destructive attack by the Yugoslav Army's air forces.

Today when, here in Slovenia, we are celebrating the final act of several countries joining the Schengen area of free movement of people, we would like to extend our thanks to all the members of the Slovenian

Territorial Defence and police officers who, in 1991, defended or took back land, air and maritime border crossing points. Seventeen years ago, the defenders and liberators of Rožna Dolina, Šentilj, Holmec, Brnik, Radgona and other border crossing points enabled decisions to be taken that paved the way for Slovenia to join the democratic family of European nations.

In conditions of shared political and economic rules, in an area that strives to bring its development potential together, there is no need for conventional borders. The European Union's wish is to create conditions of prosperity and economic growth for the citizens of the European Union and to help those outside it. We would like to see the healthy economic environment extend to the Western Balkan region too. This is the only way to bring ethnic conflict to an end and finally silence the sound of weapons and the voice of extreme nationalism.

The principle of abolishing internal borders does not mean, as some feared, less security for the citizens of the countries that are members of the Schengen group. Quite the contrary, statistics show that there is greater legal certainty since Slovenia has been part of the Schengen Information System. During this period, according to Slovenian statistics, the Republic of Slovenia has, on the basis of the European Arrest Warrant, arrested 76 wanted persons, seized 369 stolen vehicles and traced 39 missing persons. Following alerts issued by Slovenia, authorities abroad arrested 21 persons and traced four missing persons whom we had failed to locate until joining the Schengen area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The final act is being performed today – the abolition of internal air border checks. This will make the Schengen area complete: the open sky above all the members of the Schengen group has now been included. The single Schengen area is one of the foundations of freedom, cooperation and progress in the European Union.

I would like to take this opportunity, now that we have reached the final stage of this process, to once again thank the previous EU Presidency, the Republic of Portugal, especially for its key support in the integration of the candidate members into the Schengen area in the crucial decision-making period. An important role in coordinating the candidate members in the process of joining the Schengen area was also played at that time by the Slovenian Ministry of the Interior and the Minister, Mr Dragutin Mate. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the people from other ministries, services and institutions or from the airport services here and at the other two airports where we have also abolished border control, those of you who participated in this important project, thus enabling Slovenia to play an equal part in the fine future of Europe.

Thank you.