



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

ADDRESS

**BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL JANEZ JANŠA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY**
Portorož, 9 June 2008

*Mr President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering,
Mr President of the European Commission José Manuel Durão Barroso and Madam Barroso,
Mr Secretary General of the Arab League Amr Moussa,,
Mr President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia France Cukjati,
Honourable Commissioners and Deputies,
Honourable Rectors and Professors,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I would like to wish you a warm welcome to one of the most beautiful places in the Mediterranean part of Slovenia. From today on, Portorož and the Municipality of Piran will no longer be mere tourist resorts on the Slovenian coast, they will also be the university at the point where all 39 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership come together. And the credit for this achievement goes to all of you who have come to Portorož today. Your presence here is an expression of wholehearted support for one of the most important projects of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue – the inauguration of the Euro-Mediterranean University.

The Euro-Mediterranean University is the result of the work of all those of us who have as partners been involved in the development of the Barcelona Process, which is even now entering a new phase with the upgrade to the Union for the Mediterranean. Europe and the Mediterranean have, since time immemorial, been connected in totality. European culture, art and science still draw inspiration from the achievements of the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and others who, in their own time, helped shape the region to which we belong. The Mediterranean is the meeting place of the major monotheistic religions and of many languages and diverse cultures, all of which lends it its own unique charm now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Let me restate a fine thought expressed recently in an article by European Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, which is here with us today, the Mediterranean – the 'sea at the centre of the earth' – was once the cradle of Europe; nowadays it is Europe's future.

We are aware that this is a partnership of countries and cultures that are similar yet diverse in many aspects. That it is a region of many antagonisms and pronounced differences. That is it a region not only united but also divided by its common sea, not only enriched but also troubled by its diverse cultures. That this plurality makes the region not only interesting but also unpredictable. But it is precisely because we are so diverse that we feel the need to meet up, the need for dialogue, research and mutual enrichment.

In the first half of the twentieth century, on the very basis of an understanding of the Mediterranean humanistic heritage, the pioneer of the philosophy of dialogue, Martin Buber, drew attention to the fact that the world is not only the union of nations and people but also the sum of dialogues between them. Among other things, this philosopher also left us the following thought, which is very much in accordance with today's ceremony: "There is genuine dialogue - no matter whether spoken or silent - where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them. Something takes place between one being and another the like of which can be found nowhere in nature. All real living is meeting."

Truth is the foundation of peace and justice, but oftentimes it can only be reached through lengthy study and research. In the eleventh century, one of the greatest Islamic intellectuals and classical authors of medieval humanism, Al Ghazali, explained this fact with the following thought, "Whoever follows a path in search of knowledge, Allah will guide him into a path leading into Paradise." All religions cite the continuous process of learning as the highest standard of human perfection. Reading, education and training have always been defined as the fundamental obligations of Jewish, Christian and Islamic humanism.

Plato taught that "Education is the art of making man ethical; it is not a business or a pragmatic exercise of rhetoric." Considering the profound truth of Plato's thought, it becomes clear where the key to the future of the Mediterranean area - a future of perfect peace, tolerance and mutual cooperation - lies: in educating young people and making them ethical beings who are open to the world and regard intercultural dialogue as an important human value. This will also be a fundamental added value for the new university. And each individual working or teaching at this institution will be an ambassador of a special kind for intercultural dialogue.

I am highly delighted to be able to welcome such a great number of university rectors and other representatives of academia, who have gathered today on the Slovenian coast. The university which is being established today - and which is already starting to be known under the acronym EMUNI - would not be possible without the solidarity demonstrated, all through the process of setting it up, by a great many academic institutions from all over the Euro-Mediterranean area.

I am aware that a great deal of effort and knowledge has been put into the creation of EMUNI. And today's ceremony does not mean that our work is over. Far from it. But, at present, I am gratified and grateful to see EMUNI enjoy the political, moral and material support of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament and the European Commission. In addition to the 39 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the new university can also count on favourable attitude from other parts of the world. The generous donation from Kuwait is one example of this. All this support will enable EMUNI to further develop and raise its profile to join the most excellent among institutions of intercultural cooperation in the international community. I would like to thank you most sincerely for your understanding, your cooperation and for the positive decisions taken in the demanding process of bringing EMUNI into the world.

Vivat Academia! Long live this Euro-Mediterranean University we share!

Thank you.