



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 PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL JANEZ JANŠA
AT THE EXTRAORDINARY PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
*Brussels, 24 June 2008***

Thank you, Mr President, for giving me the floor. Thank you, too, for these words of praise for the Slovenian Presidency. I greatly appreciate the excellent cooperation Slovenia has enjoyed with the European Parliament during its EU Council Presidency.

Turning to the President of the European Commission, allow me to confirm, Mr President, that cooperation with the European Commission has also been excellent. In the past six months, the synergy between the Council, the European Commission and Parliament has helped to achieve certain shifts that have made Europe better and more effective, especially with regard to the necessary responses to global challenges.

Honourable Members of the European Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to have an opportunity today to outline the conclusions of the June European Council. It was an interesting meeting, full of challenges. It was, in a way, an opportunity to sum up the shifts that we have achieved together over the last six months. In the first half of 2008, events have followed one upon the other, thick and fast. The shifts that we have made prove that Europe is dynamic, that it is functioning, and that it is capable of addressing problems.

In the past six months – to mention only a few of these shifts – we have enlarged the eurozone and only this last week issued an invitation to Slovakia, which will join the eurozone as of 1 January 2009; we have removed the last of the Schengen barriers, we have inaugurated, and implemented a major part of the programme of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In this respect, I would like to thank, in particular, the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, for a number of events which have taken place in the European Parliament in the Year of Intercultural Dialogue – I myself also took part in some of them. In my opinion, the conference of religious leaders, in particular, represented great added value. This tradition is worth maintaining and continuing in future. We have established the Euro-Mediterranean University on the Slovenian coast, we have reached agreement on the seat of a European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Budapest, and we have established the European Maritime Day. In March, we launched the second cycle of the renewed Lisbon Strategy and introduced the fifth freedom.

We have celebrated several important anniversaries: the tenth anniversary of the European Central Bank, the fiftieth anniversary of the European Parliament and the sixtieth anniversary of the Hague Congress.

As I said before, we could not have taken these steps forward without the excellent cooperation and synergy between the Council, Parliament and the Commission. I would, therefore, like to thank their respective Presidents, Mr Pöttering, and Mr Barroso, for the great personal commitment they have shown us. Without this, it would have been considerably more difficult to coordinate our action and forge ahead. You continually gave us strategic assistance, for which I would like to thank you again. I would also like to

thank the presidents of the political groups and the leaders of parliamentary committees in the European Parliament for the good communication and cooperation they have shown us, especially during these last few weeks following the referendum in Ireland, during a very stressful political period. I can report that, in my view, the Slovenian side regards our cooperation as truly excellent.

I would like to start my report on the June European Council at the point where I concluded my opening address before this House in January, when I was outlining the Presidency priorities, namely with the wish that any person you meet on the street anywhere in the European Union, including Ireland, will say without hesitation that he feels European. That he cares about Europe because he knows that Europe cares about him. I believe that recent developments, including Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Reform Treaty, have given new weight to this phrase. We should be aware that it is not a matter of a crisis with respect to the Lisbon Treaty or Europe or the European Union, generally. I believe, rather, that it is symptomatic of an age-old challenge that has been confronted ever since politics first existed, ever since politics first meant working for the common good, the problem being, "How can we secure majority support for reform proposals and proposed changes at a time when everything is going well, when there are no major external risks and when we are all aware that current generations are so much better off than previous generations? How can we convince people that certain changes must be introduced in order for this good and decent life to continue? How can we ensure progress on these changes at a time when the sun is shining and the weather is nice, or fairly nice? How can we explain that the roof needs to be repaired in good time?"

Should we fail in this endeavour – and this is the problem for both national as well as European politics – the average individual will subconsciously react – as is logical and normal – by defending the status quo. Clinging to the belief that all we have today has been brought by the solutions in place and that, therefore, there is no reason to change them. In such dilemmas, it is considerably easier to drum up fears than to envisage future results which have not yet been achieved. In this case, the challenge is a major one, and the debate at the June European Council clearly indicated that it is a challenge which must be taken up. The same debate also showed our unity in the recognition that while, on the one hand, the enlarged European Union needed instruments that would enable it to be more effective and democratic inwardly, on the other, it needed a new institutional foundation to be more effective outwardly. There is simply no alternative. We can look for variants, but there is simply no alternative to this strategic response.

We agreed to sketch out the way forward at the October summit of the European Council based on a common approach and common analysis as well as on the proposal of our Irish colleagues. Until then, three guidelines should be followed: a solution must be found without undermining the contents of the Lisbon Treaty on which we all agreed and which we all signed on 13 December last year, and which provides good answers to the key challenges faced by the European Union. The agreement is to build on that and not to reinvent the wheel. Another agreement and conclusion is that ratification procedures should continue. Democracy means respect for everyone's opinion on the understanding that each opinion has equal force. It means respect for the decision of the Irish voters as expressed at the referendum, as well as respect for other people's decisions. The Treaty has so far been ratified by 19 Member State parliaments. The UK Parliament in fact completed its ratification during Irish referendum and the European Council meeting. In other words, even at that time, there was one of the Member States keeping the ratification process going and maintaining the momentum. Nevertheless, as I have said, the message that Ireland has sent us must be taken seriously. This is because it is not the first negative response to proposed amendments or to a reform treaty. Also because this is not the last ever treaty to be harmonised and adopted. This is not the last ever amendment that will be proposed by the European Union. Future years and decades will require us to respond to new challenges. Solutions like this, and even more important ones, will have to be harmonised as and when necessary.

This is something that needs to be considered and properly thought out. First, we need to know why this happens. We need to identify all the reasons and, in my opinion, concentrate on the one I mentioned earlier

– the age-old challenge of any political action. At the same time, I believe that we need to focus on communication. Communication has the task of showing the citizens of Europe quite clearly why the European Union needs a new treaty. I think that it is a matter that can be explained to people, that it is not so difficult to do so, but it does take time and the right approach. I think that we also need to work on changing general attitudes towards the European institutions. If you want me to put it even more precisely, I believe that more has to be invested in forming a European identity. A European identity that does not impinge on the national identities of the Member States. But in fact a kind of synergy of European identities. I see the way out of the situation not through the confrontation of different identities but through synergy. I think that, for such an approach, it is very important to be aware that formal acts and formal institutions alone will be relatively slow to form this kind of identity. We need a softer approach, too. This was the subject of a very good discussion with European civil society, if I may put it that way, on the occasion of 60th anniversary of the Hague Congress, in which many excellent suggestions were proposed. Participating in the discussion were the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Commission, the presidents of many other European institutions and hundreds of young people, as well as members of older generations from throughout the European Union. Some proposals were reiterated there, which we should, in my opinion, begin implementing in the future.

The fact that the European Union has many official languages on an equal footing – something that poses a problem to some extent in terms of establishing a European media or, say, a European film industry – should not stop us taking these steps instead of opting for easier actions. One very important aspect of identity is that people identify with a shared value, which could be, for example, a European Union football team. Perhaps we could organise a football match between the European Union and Latin America or the African Union. There have been some attempts to do so in the past. They attracted the European public's attention more than mere meetings. There is a lesson to be drawn from this. Communication must be adapted. We should be aware that present-day technologies are shaping a new approach on the part of young generations to communication, since many new opportunities are being opened up in this field. This enables us to overcome many obstacles which could not be overcome in the past. At the same time, it means that our citizens are very demanding. These are people aware of their rights and of the possibilities to exercise these rights. Communication has to take this into account.

I am certain that between now and October we shall not lose our momentum in pursuing the solutions contained in the Lisbon Reform Treaty. In our discussions at the Council, most of my counterparts from the EU Member States that had not yet completed the ratification of the Lisbon Reform Treaty said that it would be achieved in the next few months. The figures will look quite different by October.

The European Council did not change its agenda although we faced delays in ratification due to the Irish referendum result. The Council agenda concentrated on issues of security, oil and energy price rises, the social consequences of this and, of course, on environmental and energy issues. We agreed on a course of action to deal with the soaring food and oil prices – this will be elaborated by the President of the European Commission – but the European Council did establish that the problem was a serious one. Food prices, which in 2006 had gone up by 9%, last year increased by 40% and went on to peak – in the first three months of this year – at their highest nominal values in the past fifty years.

In a period of six years, oil prices, too, have increased by as much as 500 percentage points, thereby changing the situation strategically. That is why we talked at length in Council about short-term measures, especially those that are indispensable for low-income households and individuals, where a large part of the personal or family budget is spent on food. At this point, we naturally have to determine which of these measures fall to the responsibility of European policy and which to national policy or the Member State Governments. Many of these measures are being adopted throughout the Member States. The European Commission has also adopted a number of measures in its own area of competence. Measures are necessary, and short-term measures are necessary – confining the discussion to long-term measures

along is mistaken. Until the long-term measures kick in, people have to survive, so, in the meantime, help must be offered to those worst affected. Both national governments and the European Union are all expected to act appropriately. We just need to determine the kinds of reaction that are most effective at each level. We are a part of the European Union mainly because within this community, within the European Union, we can find answers to questions that as individual countries we cannot resolve. If we discuss the real reasons for increased oil, food, raw material and energy prices in general, we find ourselves talking about strategic global issues. If there ever was a need for a common European approach to a matter, then that time is now, in this situation.

The real strategic reason for the high prices is the disconnect between demand and supply. In the recent past, demand has substantially increased. In the short and medium term, this gap can be overcome mainly through increased production, further opening up, the market-orientation of farming and energy sectors, and innovations that give short-term results and measures, such as systematic monitoring of food price increases. However, we should foster no illusions. The times of inexpensive food and energy are gone. And they are gone forever. Changing habits and new technological solutions are of vital importance here. The reasons for this – apart from the environmental reasons which we discussed at length in March – are specifically economic and largely social reasons. There is no time to devote more special attention to it.

As for our other conclusions, I would like to state that we have agreed on measures to increase the security of European citizens. The success of the European Union will increasingly depend on its turning outwards. It is, therefore, necessary for citizens to feel that openness will increase rather than jeopardise their security. This is, obviously, conditional on appropriate mechanisms being put in place. The European Council, therefore, confirmed a number of recent achievements in the area of justice and home affairs, including the conclusion of Schengen enlargement and the changeover to the second-generation Schengen Information System by September 2009. The Council confirmed the conversion of Europol into a EU agency, progress in the implementation of counter-terrorist strategy, and the Framework Decision on enhancing the procedural rights of persons in respect of decisions rendered in absentia.

Several steps were taken to serve as good foundations for the energy and climate change package to be adopted by the end of the year. On this point precisely, I can say that this has also been my personal experience after the six months of the Presidency, when it comes to the environmental and energy package, the fight against climate change, the eyes of practically the whole world are upon the European Union. And we are expected to offer solutions. We are also expected to lead others. This situation places a great onus on us. When the European Commission President and I met with some of the leaders of LAC countries at the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit, they pleaded with us to ensure that the European Union stands firm. To ensure that the EU pursues this course of action, since they have some direct insight into the consequences of what will happen if we fail to halt climate change. We also heard some disturbing stories about how significant island areas of some of these countries are already beginning to disappear.

At its June session, the European Council summarised a number of steps forward that have been achieved. I do not have time to list them all. We are delighted to have reached agreement on Galileo. We are delighted to have reached agreement on certain Directives that have waited for a long time to be coordinated. We are pleased to have achieved progress on liberalising the gas and electricity markets. We are also pleased that these solutions have come about, as I stated earlier, on the basis of excellent cooperation between the Council and the European Parliament, its political groups and the chairs of the working parties in the European Parliament. It is gratifying that communications have been realistic and that we have been able to forge ahead.

We are pleased, moreover, with our achievements in terms of making the prospect of a future in Europe – the 'European perspective' – for the Western Balkans a reality. During our Presidency, Stabilisation and

Association Agreements have been concluded with all the region's countries. Even as far as Kosovo is concerned, the European Union played a strategic role in stabilising the area. We are pleased to have coordinated some practical measures and to be able – in spite of certain fears in January when we talked about these priorities and when I answered your questions on the situation in this region – to state today that the situation in the region in general, and indeed the situation in Kosovo, is considerably more stable than anybody could have expected.

Thank you once again for the cooperation which resulted in our synergy. Many of the steps forward that we have achieved, and also some half steps that are now waiting for future Presidencies to complete, were taken only thanks to our combined efforts and good will directed at benefiting Europe.

Thank you.