

Janez Janša: From now on we will be able to actively participate in and make suggestions regarding all important international debates.



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PREMIER JANŠA, WE HAVE CONCLUDED THE SIX-MONTH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. SLOVENIA IS RECEIVING

CONGRATULATIONS FROM ALL SIDES. WITH WHAT FEELINGS DO YOU EXCEPT THEM?

My feelings are good, very positive. I believe we have done everything that was possible, considering the circumstances. Everybody who cooperated in the Presidency project must be congratulated. A six-month leadership of the European Union is a difficult task at all levels, but an additional challenge for Slovenia is the fact that this is the first time we have taken such a task upon ourselves, and that we have relatively scarce administrative capacities.

HAS SLOVENIA ACHIEVED WHAT SHE WAS EXPECTING AND PLANNING DURING THE PRESIDENCY? DO YOU ESTIMATE THAT OUR PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN AS

GOOD AS THE PRESIDENCY OF OTHER, BIGGER AND MORE EXPERIENCED COUNTRIES? WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THIS IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE?

Slovenia set itself realistic, yet still very ambitious goals, and reached them successfully. Our Presidency may not have been as glamorous or resounding as the presidencies of some bigger Member States, but nevertheless we achieved some important substantial breakthroughs. On the European as well as the world map, during its Presidency Slovenia proved itself a competent country with a vision. We were successful in determining principles for the distribution of burdens of the environment protection, as well as the stabilisation of the Western Balkans. We initiated a new and ambitious cycle of the Lisbon Strategy; we placed the European Union at the head of the fight against climate change, strengthened intercultural dialogue and enabled the Western Balkans to start down the road to the European Union. After almost two years of complications, we made a breakthrough in negotiations on a new agreement with Russia. If there had not been a rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland, we could have crowned our list of successes with encouraging statistics on the ratification of this document in Member States. In addition, Slovenia gained valuable experience during the Presidency, made alliances and systematically gained knowledge on world problems. From now on we will be able to actively participate in and make suggestions about all important international debates.

THE PRESIDENCY PAID A LOT OF ATTENTION TO THE STATES OF WESTERN BALKANS, TO MEASURES THAT WOULD BOOST THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND TO DISCUSSIONS ON MEASURES AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE. WHAT ARE THE GREATEST SUCCESSES IN THESE AREAS?

During the Slovenian Presidency, the European perspective on the Western Balkans was confirmed. Two key achievements of the Presidency are the completion of a network of Stabilization and Association Agreements with all the countries in the Western Balkans region except Kosovo, and the beginning of a dialogue on visa liberalization. We successfully initiated a new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy, which is focused on the implementation of national reform programmes. The decision by Member States that the reform process should be continued even after 2010 is of special importance. At the European Council meeting in March EU leaders implemented the so-called fifth freedom - free flow of knowledge. We agreed on initiatives for strengthening business competitiveness, particularly for small and medium-sized companies. We called for enhanced investment in people, as well as for the implementation of a flexible yet secure labour market. We also determined a time frame and principles for the adoption of the energy/environment package. By doing this we set an example even to our world partners in combating climate change. Climate change is one of the key issues at a world level at the moment, demanding global partnership. This is the reason climate change was one of the key issues at all the summit meetings with third countries I chaired as president of the

Council of the European Union during Slovenia's Presidency. Our partners from Japan, Latin America and Caribbean, the United States of America and the Russian Federation are all aware of this issue. But what is missing is the next step – a clear commitment to the 'green revolution'. By adopting the energy/environment package the European Union has already taken that step.

THE IRISH 'NO' ON THE REFERENDUM ON THE LISBON TREATY ON 12 JUNE BECAME A CENTRAL ISSUE OF THE SECOND SUMMIT MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DURING THE SLOVENE PRESIDENCY. WHAT EXACTLY DOES THE IRISH CASE MEAN FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?

The ratification procedures in Member States continue. The European Council will determine possible solutions to this situation in October - until then, the European Union and life in it will go on. I believe we will find a solution for implementing the Lisbon Treaty. The new institutional foundation, enabling the efficient and democratic functioning of the enlarged Europe in times of globalisation, remains one of central political priorities of the EU.

YOU PLACED SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE ADOPTION OR ON THE AGREEMENT ON SOME LEGISLATION WHICH WILL HAVE IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL CITIZENS OF THE EU, BUT THEY ARE NOT NECESSARILY THE CENTRE OF PUBLIC ATTENTION. WHAT IS THIS LEGISLATION?

During our Presidency, a number of legislative acts or European directives with important consequences for the lives of individuals were adopted. One of these is an agreement on the European Satellite System Galileo. When we will all be using the Galileo system instead of GPS in our cars in 2013, there probably won't be anyone who remembers that the agreement was achieved during the Slovene Presidency. Just as there is nobody today who remembers which Member State presided when the Community negotiated the introduction of the euro.

In the first half of 2008 we also managed to agree on the Working Time Directive, which protects the rights of employees in Europe. The common EU standard will substantially increase the rights of employees in some Member States, where the maximum work limit is up to 78 hours a week.

We have also achieved a compromise over the ownership unbundling of energy companies. The debate lasted for a long time before the 'big players' were willing to negotiate and open the way to cheaper energy. Sooner or later this will affect our electricity bills, lowering the costs.

The Directive on Returning Refugees also falls in this category, as well as the determination of the seat of the European Technological Institute. We all know that European knowledge will be germinating in Budapest and our best minds won't always have to cross the sea to gain extra knowledge.

THERE ARE REPROACHES HEARD THAT SLOVENIA DID NOT DO ENOUGH TO ENCOURAGE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN CROATIA AND THE EU. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

During the Slovenian Presidency, the accession negotiations between the EU and Croatia continued in accordance with the negotiation framework, the enlargement strategy and the decisions of the European Council from December 2007. The negotiations on the EU side are led by the European Commission, not the presiding country, and they advance according to the fulfilment of membership conditions and criteria known in advance. During our Presidency, Croatia opened negotiations on those chapters for which conditions have been fulfilled. Unfortunately, after the elections, our neighbouring country occupied itself for too long with the one-sided attempt to initiate an Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone, even though the country had committed itself otherwise in the accession documents. Had they acted differently, that would have enabled them to fulfil the conditions for the additional opening chapters, which was then not possible. Of course, Slovenia would offer its help, because it is also in our country's interest that Croatia joins the European family as soon as possible.

IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS INFLATION WAS ALSO A BIG SUBJECT, THE LEADING CAUSES OF WHICH WERE SUPPOSED TO BE THE HIGH PRICES OF FOOD AND OIL DERIVATIVES. YOUR PARTY PROGRAMME FOR THE NEXT TERM ACCENTUATES THE IMPORTANCE OF LONG-TERM ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH CREATED - WELFARE FOR ALL. HOW WOULD YOU RELIEVE THE DIFFICULTIES OF PEOPLE CAUSED BY HIGH OIL AND FOOD PRICES?

The high prices of oil and food affect us all, especially people in developing countries. This is a complicated phenomenon, with several causes and consequences, affecting EU politics in all fields. In the agriculture sector the EU has already taken measures to relieve the pressure of food prices by selling intervention stock, decreasing export subsidies, abolishing the fallow land obligation for 2008, increasing milk quotas and temporarily abolishing import customs duties on cereals, which enabled the EU to improve supply and help stabilize agricultural markets. But these are all just short-term measures. At the June EU summit there was a constructive debate with suggestions for a systematic and long-term approach to solving this problem. We must continue to try to increase energy efficiency, competitiveness, energy savings and energy source diversity. The national governments of Member States must take measures in their own countries. Slovenia has already taken measures with the means available. Unfortunately, we can not affect oil and raw material prices, and this contributes to what I have said before - that these issues should be dealt with systematically on a global scale.

NO DOUBT THE PRESIDENCY HAS MADE SLOVENIA MORE RECOGNIZABLE IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD. SLOVENIA HAS ALSO FOUND ITSELF STANDING FIRMLY ON THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL MAP, WHICH IS A GREAT ACHIEVEMENT. BY LEADING THE EU SLOVENIA, WAS SUPPOSED TO BE 'BAPTISED BY FIRE'. WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE, HOW DOES IT AFFECT SLOVENIA IN PRACTICE?

The more Slovenians are active and recognised on the world stage, the better solutions, agreements and benefits we can guarantee for ourselves. The Presidency of the Council of European Union and the European Council was an important investment in the future of our country in this regard.

We shouldn't forget that during the Presidency Slovenia was visited by a few ten thousand journalists, politicians, officials and world public opinion makers, who were able to get to know our culture and our natural sites of special interest. The positive opinion they gained about our country and people is a great contribution to the promotion of Slovenia. We also presented Slovenia to guests at a number of cultural-promotional events we organized in European states.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EU, THE SOMETIMES CONFLICTING NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN INTERESTS?

There are things that have bound Europe together in spite of its diversity. I'm talking about common values and a common European identity. After the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, Europe has found a common language. The great European family is still bonding after fifty years. We are preserving diversity in culture, language and tradition, because our unity is based on common values: freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and equality. What is important is that we all face the common challenge of the 21st century, which are: the struggle against poverty, terrorism and climate change. We have to be aware that nobody will be able to face these challenges alone - we have to unite our power, knowledge and experience and find suitable answers to the challenges of our time, which will greatly affect our common future.

Of course, each country has its own national interests. Each Member State usually follows its own national interests, but they can not be implemented regardless of the others. The search for consensus is one of the pillars of the EU.

The Slovene national interest was to successfully carry out the Presidency of the European Union. Even though it was our first try, judging from the international assessment, we reached our goal regarding our national interest, as well as taking steps forward that are important to other Member States. And as long as they continue to implement the European agenda by implementing their own interests and vice versa, there is no need to fear for our common future. Experience has taught us that the EU has found its way forward each time it has been put to the test - especially because we know how to keep in step and find solutions which don't exclude anybody.