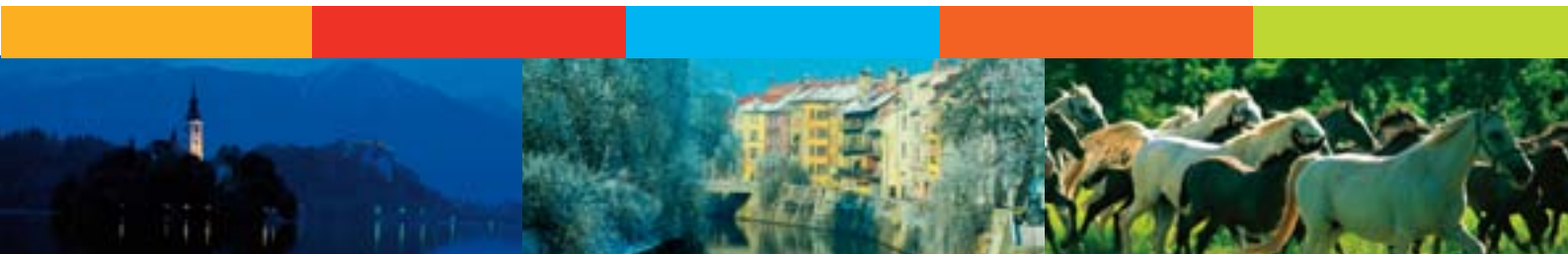


EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions



The Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Committee of the Regions

1 January - 30 June 2008



Interview with
Prime Minister Janez Janša, Pages 8-9



Slovenia can spearhead a Europe of projects and policies

On 1 January 2007 Slovenia was the first Member State from eastern and central Europe to introduce the euro. On 1 January 2008 Slovenia will be the first of these countries to hold the Presidency of the EU, it may also be the last to hold this office since the Lisbon Treaty plans to abolish the system of rotating presidencies as from 1 January 2009.

Above and beyond such symbolic achievements, the Slovenian Presidency will probably also be the first since 2000 to have a work programme which does not include the issue of treaty reform.

Indeed, thanks to the agreement reached in October, the Community has finally begun to move forward once again. The new treaty, which may be the result of a difficult consensus but is probably the best conceivable option so far, recognises the key role played by local and regional authorities in European integration. It represents considerable progress for these authorities, recognising the principle of local and regional self-government, bolstering the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and including territorial cohesion and cultural and linguistic diversity among the objectives of the EU.

In the coming years, institutional reform should no longer be the main European challenge for local and regional authorities. Instead, the Europe of projects and policies will once again be on the agenda, which is all to the good since Europe cannot hope to convince its citizens if it has nothing but good intentions to offer.

Local and regional authorities must react positively to the major challenges which will shape Europe in the near future: the response to the challenge of climate change and energy policy, the future of the EU budget and thus of cohesion policy, and the revision of the Lisbon Strategy.

On the latter point, the European Council of 13 March 2008 will be crucial. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) will hold a "territorial dialogue" on 4 March 2008 in Brdo, proposing practical measures for the involvement of the local and regional tiers of government in the revised Lisbon Strategy.

Naturally, as the voice of local and regional authorities in the Community decision-making process, the CoR will work closely with the Slovenian Presidency on all dossiers with an impact at local and regional level. The CoR's Slovenian delegation, which represents 210 municipalities, will have a major part to play in this undertaking. This Presidency is also their presidency and I am sure that they will be excellent ambassadors to the other countries of the EU for the know-how, culture and friendliness of Slovenia, a true European crossroads.

Michel Delebarre
President of the Committee of the Regions



Working with the regions is a top objective for our presidency

During the first half of 2008, the Republic of Slovenia, the first of the new EU Member States to hold the EU Presidency, will put special emphasis on the consolidation of institutional links that can help close gaps in the development of regions, thus ensuring an internally as well as an externally strong Europe, thus acting as a competitive partner in today's globalised world.

The Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy, which is responsible for the efficient functioning and development of local government, administering the structural and cohesion funds, and for balanced regional development, will endeavour to boost partnerships between the regions of the Member States and beyond. Thus one of the priorities of our presidency will be to promote events that are directly related to the Committee of the Regions' role as the representative of regional and local interests.

Slovenia is fully aware of the importance of involving regional and local authorities, in line with the subsidiarity principle. We will seek to jointly achieve targets for the benefit of all regions, municipalities and cities. Activities relating to the future of cohesion policy will also play a significant role during the presidency. By taking into account the specific potential of individual regions, cohesion policy can gain greater recognition and increase the welfare of all EU citizens.

One of the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency will be the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy. The Territorial Dialogue conference will deliver a valuable contribution to this. 2008 marks the start of a new three-year Lisbon cycle, and this will provide an excellent opportunity to adopt recommendations for even greater involvement for regional and local structures in future, based on the analyses which the Lisbon Monitoring Platform, led by the Committee of the Regions, has drawn up.

Slovenia will also pay special attention to the Western Balkans. Good neighbourly cooperation, particularly with regard to launching closer institutional ties in the area between the Alps, the Adriatic and the Pannonian basin, which, of course will be based on the new Regulation on a European Grouping on Territorial Cooperation, is one of our priorities.

We are delighted that the first session of the CoR's new presidency following the agreement on the Reform Treaty will take place during the Slovenian Presidency and that the key guidelines and priorities for the upcoming two-year term will help to reinforce the discussion on the subsidiarity principle and the role that regional and local authorities play in the future of the EU. The new era that lies ahead sets a challenge for us that we must meet together, in the best way possible.

Ivan Žagar
Minister for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy





Irena Majcen
Head of the Slovenian national delegation and Mayor of Slovenska Bistrica

Political priorities and mission of Slovenian national delegation

Three years after joining the European Union and one year after introducing the euro, Slovenia is taking over the Presidency of the EU Council. This project exceeds everything we have faced since our country became independent, in terms of its scale and the demands and responsibilities involved at home and abroad. The Presidency, coming at an extremely important time for the EU following the conclusion of the agreement on the Reform Treaty, provides an opportunity for enhancing the role of the Committee of the Regions, above all in institutional relations and in terms of regional and local authorities' efforts to encourage a sense of belonging among the public in Europe.

The Slovenian delegation, comprising seven members and seven alternates, is conscious of its basic mission and responsibility to represent local and regional interests at the Committee of the Regions, in its capacity as the only EU body standing for and championing the views and interests of authorities at sub-national level in the individual countries represented in Brussels.

Most encouraging for us is the fact that three quarters of all European legislation is implemented by authorities at sub-state level. There is much consensus among the people of Slovenia regarding European issues, together with a sense of attachment to European values, and this greatly encourages the mayors of our municipalities to concentrate their efforts, in the course of the Slovenian Presidency, on bringing the European Union closer to its citizens. We hope our efforts will encourage others throughout the rest of the EU.

It is Slovenia's firm desire that the countries of the Western Balkans join the Union in the near future and the Slovenian representatives of local authorities are keen to play an active role in cooperating with our counterparts, especially from Western Balkans countries.

We wish to help raise the profile of the Committee of the Regions in the 210 municipalities of Slovenia. The sincerity of our intentions and the excellent cooperation established with the Committee is best illustrated in the agreement to organise a total of five CoR events in Slovenia in the course of the Presidency. The extraordinary meeting of the CoR Bureau, the first following the changeover to the new CoR presidency for the 2008-2010 period, offers an opportunity to confirm the political priorities for the Committee of the Regions' work for the coming period.

Analysis of the way that regional and local authorities are included in the national programme for attaining the five Lisbon Strategy

targets, which are being reviewed as part of the Committee of the Regions' Lisbon Monitoring Platform, will be endorsed at the 2008 Conference on Territorial Dialogue, which is being organised outside Brussels for the first time; this conference will deliver its conclusions in time for the European Spring Council.

Boosting the involvement of local and regional authorities in implementing the Lisbon Strategy, especially by means of cohesion policy instruments, will be the main aim of the 2008 Territorial Dialogue conference. The results of the Lisbon Monitoring Platform show that 96% of the regions and cities involved believe they should play a more important role in implementing the policy for achieving the revised EU targets for economic growth and job creation.

It is the firm desire of the Slovenian delegation that the European Council acknowledge the importance and findings of the analysis of involvement of regions, municipalities and cities in national programmes, and that the Committee of the Regions ensures that follow-up reports are drawn up in the framework of the Lisbon Monitoring Platform in the coming years. Only in this way will it be possible to secure comparable data and adopt the right measures at regional and local level to ensure general progress and enhanced wealth for all EU citizens.

The inaugural meeting of the Committee of the Regions' expert group on the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in January, together with the meeting of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion (COTER) in June, constitute a challenge for the development of new models for links and cooperation between regions and areas in EU countries, as well as between countries beyond the EU's borders. The EGTC project is in keeping with the Slovenian Presidency priority to involve countries of the Western Balkans in partnership links, and, in doing so, local authorities in these regions will be offered new forms of partnership.

The existing dynamic cooperation between Slovenian local authorities and municipalities in the countries of the Western Balkans – the numerous bilateral links should be highlighted here – represents an excellent opportunity to promote the Committee of the Regions more widely. The Conference on the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is another Committee of the Regions and CoR Slovenian delegation event being organised in the course of the Slovenian Presidency, confirms the CoR's commitment to promoting the EU's cultural, social and economic values in the regions.

The Slovenian delegation would highlight its commitment to taking pro-active steps, in the framework of the Presidency, to secure a qualitative improvement in the EU in the future and, thus, boost people's sense of belonging to the Union. In addition, Slovenian local authorities will work closely with the Committee of the Regions to continue to champion the interests of regional and local authorities at European level.





Delegation in Ljubljana: Robert Smrdelj, Siniša Germovšek, Aleš Čerin, Franci Rokavec, Irena Majcen, Franci Vovk, Jasmina Vidmar, Anton Smolnikar

Members of the Slovenian national delegation

Irena MAJČEN – head of Slovenian national delegation (EPP)

Irena Majcen was born in Novo mesto and after graduating in 1980, she worked at an agricultural cooperative in Slovenska Bistrica. In 1991 she was elected to the town's executive council. She became Slovenska Bistrica's first woman mayor in a 2005 by-election and was re-elected the following year. In 1992 she stood as a Parliamentary candidate for the Slovenian People's Party (SLS). In 2005 she became a board member of the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia (SOS) and alternate member of the EU Committee of the Regions. She has been vice-chair of SOS and head of the Slovenian national delegation in the Committee of the Regions since 2006.

Aleš Čerin (PES)

Aleš Čerin is Deputy Mayor of Ljubljana, the city where he grew up and graduated in law. His career in public administration has seen him rise from chairman of the executive board of Bežigrad municipal assembly in the 1980s to secretary-general of the first democratically elected government. From 1992 to 2005 he worked for the Mercator supermarket chain and was a board member from 1997. He is the author of the following books: *All My Presidents* (1999) and *The Best Team* (2006).

Anton Smolnikar (PES)

Anton Tone Smolnikar, born in Kamnik in 1949, is a journalist by profession. For 30 years he worked for TV Slovenija, where he mainly reported on economic affairs. He is currently in his fourth term as Mayor of Kamnik, which is one of Slovenia's largest municipalities. He was a member of Slovenia's delegation of observers at the Committee of the Regions prior to accession and became a full member in 2004.

Robert Smrdelj (EPP)

Robert Smrdelj has been mayor of Pivka municipality since 1998 and was elected for the third time in 2006. He was previously a member of the board of the public road planning and maintenance company, chairman of the board of the Notranjsko-Kraške regional development agency, chairman of the Postojna agricultural and forestry association and chairman of the Notranjsko-Kraške regional council. Since 2003 he has also been chairman of the Association of Municipalities of

Slovenia, and deputy-head of the Slovenian delegation to the Committee of the Regions.

Franci Rokavec (EPP)

Franci Rokavec has been active in local administration since 1990. He has served as a member of the executive council for agricultural affairs and regional development, member of the municipal assembly and later, chairman of the Litija municipal council, amongst other roles. From 1996-2000 he was an MP in the Slovenian Parliament and served on the Constitutional Committee, where he concentrated specifically on regional affairs, referendums, citizens' initiatives and EU accession. He was state secretary at the Government Office for local administration and regional policy for two years. In 2006 he was elected as Mayor of Litija municipality and became a member of the presidency of the Association of Municipalities of Slovenia.

Franci Vovk (EPP)

Franci Vovk was first elected as Mayor of Dolenjske Toplice municipality in 1998, the same year that the municipality was established, and is now in his third term. He previously worked in the motor industry, but left in order to devote himself to his new role and ensure that the new municipality started operating effectively as soon as possible. A graduate of the School of Engineering, he completed an international MBA at Brdo pri Kranju in 1994.

Jasmina Vidmar (ALDE)

Born in Maribor, Jasmina Vidmar studied economics at university and was involved in setting up and running numerous civil society initiatives in the city (Marš student radio station, the Katedra student paper, youth cultural centre). She has been a member of the council of Maribor municipality since 1994 and is the secretary-general of the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia. She is also a member of several working groups set up by the Slovenian government and international organisations (Nalas, Coppem).

Alternate members

The alternate members of the Slovenian delegation are: **Anton Štihec** (Mayor of Murska Sobota municipality); **Jure Meglič** (Deputy Mayor, Tržič municipal council); **Štefan Čelan** (Mayor of Ptuj municipality); **Siniša Germovšek** (member of Bovec municipal council); **Blaž Milavec** (Mayor of Sodražica); **Branko Ledinek** (Mayor of Rače-Fram municipality); **Breda Škrjanec** (member of Grosuplje municipal council).





Brdo Congress Centre grounds, Ljubljana centre, Villa Brdo

COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS' AGENDA

DATE	JANUARY	VENUE
8	Slovenian government meets European Commission	Brdo, Slovenia
9	Commission for Sustainable Development Commission working group on the CAP health check	Brussels
10	Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE)	Brussels
17	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Expert Group	Brdo, Slovenia
18	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER) seminar on urban transport	Grenoble, France
22-23	Conference on Innovation and Clusters	Stockholm, Sweden
31	1 st meeting of COTER working group on cohesion	Brussels
DATE	FEBRUARY	VENUE
5	Bureau	Brussels
6-7	Plenary Session	Brussels
19	Commission for Constitutional Affairs (CONST)	Brussels
21	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)	Brussels
25	Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)	Brussels
27	Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS)	Brussels
28	Commission for Culture, Education and Research (EDUC)	Brussels
DATE	MARCH	VENUE
3-4	Bureau	Brdo, Slovenia
4	Territorial Dialogue	Brdo, Slovenia
7	Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE)	Brussels
11	EGTC Expert Group	Brussels
13-14	European Council	Brussels
DATE	APRIL	VENUE
8	Bureau	Brussels
8-10	Cities of the Future Forum	Brussels
9-10	Plenary Session	Brussels
15	Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS)	Brussels
16	Commission for Constitutional Affairs (CONST)	Brussels
17	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)	Brussels
18	Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)	Brussels
24	DEVE seminar on 'Health in Europe: a strategic approach'	Dortmund, Germany
25	Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE)	Brussels
29-30	Commission for Culture, Education and Research (EDUC) and seminar on 'Promoting research and innovation for regional development'	Sardinia, Italy
DATE	MAY	VENUE
8-9	Meeting of mayors of capital cities of the EU Member States and candidate countries	Slovenia
DATE	JUNE	VENUE
2-3	RELEX seminar on European Neighbourhood Policy	Slovenia
6	ECOS seminar	Logroño, Spain
12	Commission for Constitutional Affairs (CONST)	Brussels
17	Bureau	Brussels
17-19	3 rd CoR Communication Forum	Brussels
18-19	Plenary Session	Brussels
19	EGTC Inter-institutional Conference	Brussels
19-20	European Council	Brussels
25	Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE)	Brussels
26-27	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)	Ljubljana, Slovenia
27	COTER seminar on 'Making territorial cooperation work'	Slovenia
30	Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)	Brussels





Headquarters of the Committee of the Regions on Brussels' Rue Belliard

The Committee of the Regions - an introduction

Around two-thirds of legislation decided at EU level is implemented by local and regional authorities. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) was created in 1994 to give local and regional representatives a democratic say over the content of these laws.

The European Commission proposes EU legislation and the Council, gathering national government ministers, is responsible together with the European Parliament for determining the final content of EU laws. The EU Treaties require the Commission and Council to consult the CoR whenever proposals are made in areas that have repercussions at local or regional level. The Maastricht Treaty (1992) set out five such areas – economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. The Amsterdam Treaty (1997) added five more areas – employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport. This means that the CoR is consulted on the majority of the EU's legislative work.

The Commission, Council and European Parliament can also consult the CoR outside these areas if they see important local or regional implications to a proposal, while the CoR can draw up opinions and reports on its own initiative, which enables it to put issues on the EU agenda.

There are three main principles at the heart of the CoR's work:

- **Subsidiarity:** this principle requires that decisions are taken at the closest practical level to the citizen. The EU should not take on tasks which are better suited to national, regional or local administrations
- **Proximity:** all levels of government should work transparently and as close to the citizen as possible, so that the public knows who is in charge of what and how to make their views heard
- **Partnership:** European, national, regional and local government should work together throughout the decision making process.

Members and mandate

The CoR has 344 members and the same number of alternate members. They are proposed by their countries and serve a four-year term. Members must hold an electoral mandate or be accountable to an elected assembly. Members who lose their seat in an election also automatically lose their seat in the CoR. Each country chooses its members in its own way, but must reflect a political, geographical and regional/local balance. Slovenia is represented by seven members and seven alternates.

The Committee organises its work through six specialist Commissions (sub-committees):

- Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy (COTER)
- Commission for Economic and Social Policy (ECOS)
- Commission for Sustainable Development (DEVE)
- Commission for Culture, Education and Research (EDUC)
- Commission for Constitutional Affairs, European Governance and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (CONST)
- Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)

The Commissions, consisting of CoR members, draw up draft 'opinions' on proposed legislation. The opinion is then voted on at one of the five CoR plenary sessions which take place each year. An opinion is adopted if it wins majority approval.





CoR members, MEPs and regional representatives at the OPEN DAYS closing session, October 2007

Political groups

Four political groups are represented in the CoR: the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and Union for Europe of the Nations - the European Alliance (UEN-EA).

Bringing the EU closer to the public

While the major part of the CoR's work is its participation in the legislative process, this is not the end of its role. CoR members live and work day-to-day in their home regions and cities, whether as regional president, mayor or councillor. This keeps them in touch with the concerns of the people they represent, and they are then able to bring those to the heart of the EU process when they come to Brussels for CoR meetings.

The CoR and the Reform Treaty (Treaty of Lisbon)

The Reform Treaty, agreed by heads of state and government at the Lisbon European Council on 19 October and signed in the Portuguese capital on 13 December 2007, is designed to ensure that the EU can work more effectively and focus on delivering prosperity and security for its 500 million citizens. In the words of European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, it will give the EU the "capacity to act".

The new Treaty recognises the principle of local and regional self-government, strengthens procedures for implementing and monitoring the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as including territorial cohesion and linguistic and cultural diversity among the EU's objectives.

It requires the European Commission to take into account the local and regional dimension of its actions before proposing legislation and to assess the financial and administrative burden that an EU law may entail. In cases where the EU has legislated, where according to the subsidiarity principle it would have been more appropriate for a region or Member State to do so, the CoR is given the right to challenge such laws at the European Court of Justice.



Conference at CoR building



EU leaders at the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, 13 December 2007



Stronger regions mean stronger Member States and a stronger EU

What are the priorities during Slovenia's Presidency of the European Union?

If I had to sum up this demanding task in just one sentence, it would be to say that the underlying thread running throughout the Slovenian Presidency of the EU27 will be 'the future of the European Union' in its broadest sense. In Europe and elsewhere in the world people have come to realise that one country acting on its own does not have the capacity to face global challenges such as climate change, security, competitiveness and growth. What is needed is joint action. That being said, a large share of the responsibility for striking compromises and formulating joint responses falls squarely on the shoulders of the country holding the presidency. Slovenia sees this challenge not only as a great honour and responsibility but also as an opportunity for the future of the whole Union.

We are delighted that an agreement was reached on the Reform Treaty under the Portuguese Presidency. Naturally, Slovenia will closely monitor the ratification process of the Reform Treaty and will encourage on those countries where delays may be possible. Nonetheless, the Slovenian Presidency will be the first for some time which will not be primarily concerned with the EU institutional basis. This will allow the EU to devote more of its energies to other issues.

During our presidency the three-year review of the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy awaits us, along with the launch of a new cycle which we hope will allow the European economy to continue to grow. We believe that positive results have been achieved in a number of areas, but that more needs to be done in others. During our presidency, we would also like to highlight a number of issues that have become relevant, as we have also been able to observe from our own experiences, especially with the Slovenian Development Strategy. There is still a lot of work ahead of us. I firmly believe that a stronger EU also means stronger Member States. That is why close cooperation between all Member States, and their ongoing commitment to the implementation of the national reform programmes is of key importance.

In Slovenia, we see the environmental-energy dimension as being one of the key issues for the future of the European Union. The European Union has set itself high aims in this area; but given the need to avoid catastrophic consequences, they are realistic. Our agenda will include adhering to commitments – in other words, establishing the way in which the burden will



Prime Minister Janez Janša on his vision for the Slovenian Presidency, his plans for regionalisation and his support for the CoR's Lisbon Monitoring Platform

be shared between the Member States, to ensure greenhouse gas emissions are reduced and the share of renewable sources of energy in the national energy balance boosted. Indeed, we would like the lion's share of this package to be finalised during the Slovenian Presidency.

Emphasis will also be put on enlargement policy which has proven to be one of the EU's most successful policy areas to date. We would like to pay special attention to the improvement of the European prospects of the Western Balkan countries, as their stability is important not only for the region but also for the security and wellbeing of the whole European Union. Accordingly, the Slovenian Presidency will be directing its efforts towards strengthening the area of common European values within the Union, and cooperating with our immediate neighbours and other third countries.

The process of regionalisation and devolution in Slovenia has intensified during your government's term. What is your assessment of this in Slovenia?

The regionalisation of Slovenia is one of the government's key projects. In Slovenia's Development Strategy, we set an objective to achieve a rate of development which is three percentage points higher than the EU average. This means that we would attain the average level of prosperity in the European Union within ten years, or perhaps even by 2013. We're now on the



road to achieving this, yet it would be difficult for us to fulfil this objective without regionalisation, because development policy needs implementation at regional level.

With its accession to the EU, Slovenia became eligible for cohesion funds to finance its development projects. We are currently number one among the new Member States in terms of effectiveness, and are also at the very top of the list regarding the share of cohesion funds spent directly on efforts to achieve the aims of the Lisbon Strategy. Indeed, more than half of our cohesion funds are earmarked for this aim, a proportion which will continue to grow in the future. We have made good progress so far. However, it is only possible to realise the full potential and aims of regional policy within the framework of the EU's cohesion policy and through a comprehensive economic policy at state level, which integrates regional criteria as benchmarks and guidelines in reaching its development plans.

Slovenia needs development which is tailored to the needs of its individual regions. That is why local self-government is an important focal point for the activity of the current government – not just on paper, but also on the ground. Accordingly, we have adopted a resolution on national development projects, the implementing document for the Slovenian Development Strategy, which comprises 35 strategic projects across the whole country with which we hope to achieve faster and more uniform development in all regions. We have also adopted new legislation which regulates municipal financing in a fairer way, providing municipalities lagging behind with access to more funding.

The central theme in our efforts to achieve a more balanced development is the introduction of regions. An important step towards achieving this goal was taken in the second half of November 2007 with the adoption by the government of a complete package of legislative measures. Through its introduction we will be able to take decisions on ways of making the best use of development potential that are more in line with the real needs of local communities. I believe the creation of regions that are inter-connected and open to the world is the way forward for an innovative, universally developed and successful Slovenia.

We see the environmental energy dimension as being one of the key issues for the future

What contribution can the Slovenian Presidency make to consolidating the role of Europe's regions, municipalities and towns in the process of achieving the aims of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs and ensuring it continues to grow?

The interdependence between cohesion policy and the Lisbon Strategy was underlined by the introduction of new measures in the area of cohesion policy and, even more so, in the preparation of the operational programmes for the 2007-2013 period. Last but not least, cohesion policy was given a new aim: "European territorial cooperation".

Just how the main priorities of cohesion policy contribute to achieving the aims of the Lisbon Strategy will be of particular importance. Stronger, better developed and interlinked regions will not only strengthen individual Member States but also contribute to a stronger European Union. That being said, responsibility for strengthening the role of Europe's regions, municipalities and cities does not lie solely with the country holding the presidency. It is the joint responsibility of the presidency and the Member States, as well as the regions, municipalities and cities themselves.

During its presidency, Slovenia will be organising a number of events relating to the CoR's activities, including the Lisbon Monitoring Platform, which will facilitate the discussion of the various visions of cohesion policy, particularly the role of regional communities in achieving the Lisbon Strategy objectives.

This will also be the theme of the international conference Territorial Dialogue 2008, which will be held prior to the Spring European Council. This conference will discuss the final report of the CoR's Lisbon Monitoring Platform, and will present its recommendations to the European Council. The Presidency will also be coordinating the implementation of the first action programme on the implementation of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities. The conclusions of the Spring European Council will also include a number of common guidelines for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda.



The Slovenian Parliament in Ljubljana



E-government: PM and his Ministers hold a paperless meeting





Vineyard in south-west Slovenia

Slovenia and EU cohesion policy

Slovenia has been allocated EUR 4.1 billion from the EU's structural and cohesion funds for the 2007-2013 period under the 'convergence' objective, aimed at countries and regions with a GDP of less than 75% of the Community average. In the case of Slovenia, the entire country is eligible.

Slovenia will add a further EUR 957 million to the EU investment from its own resources.

The main objectives of the Slovenian 'National Strategic Reference Framework' (NSRF) are to improve the welfare of its citizens by promoting economic growth, job creation, strengthening human capital and ensuring balanced development, at the regional level in particular.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Slovenian NSRF is built upon a number of strategic thematic and territorial priorities:

- Promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation and technological development
- Improvement of the quality of the education system, training and research and development activities
- Improved labour market flexibility and employment security through job creation and the promotion of social inclusion
- Ensuring conditions for growth by providing sustainable mobility, improving the quality of the environment and by providing the appropriate infrastructure
- Promotion of balanced regional development.

Emphasis will also be given to the improvement of institutional and administrative capacity, in particular of the public sector, as this is a necessary condition to accelerate economic growth.

Slovenia has set a number of target indicators to measure the impact of the cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 period. These include increasing the share of innovative companies from the current figure of 21% to 44% by 2013, to contribute 0.75% to the annual GDP increase and boost the employment rate by 1.7%.

Slovenia is earmarking a significant amount of structural and cohesion financing on Lisbon Strategy related investments in support of jobs and growth. The NSRF data indicates that these categories of investment will exceed 65 % of the total available funds.

The NSRF priorities will be implemented through three operational programmes. The first programme, aimed at 'strengthening regional development potentials', will receive EUR 1.7 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The main goal is to enhance competitiveness, foster entrepreneurship, innovation and technology development, and facilitate job creation, including in the tourism sector, while taking into account environmental and social concerns.

The second operational programme, for human resources development, will be funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The third programme, targeted at environmental and transport infrastructure development, will be financed by both by the ERDF and the cohesion fund.

The ERDF will also finance initiatives under the European Territorial Cooperation objective, which covers cross-border, transnational and inter-regional co-operation. The managing authority for structural and cohesion funds in Slovenia is the Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy.

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The new Črni Kal viaduct connecting central Slovenia with the Adriatic coast

Slovenia and the Lisbon Strategy

The reform programme implementing the Lisbon Strategy comprises a number of priority tasks and specific measures based on the guidelines for growth and jobs for 2005-2008. The tasks address the challenges we are facing, by encouraging structural adjustment and further economic liberalisation, stimulating economic growth and employment. The renewal of the Lisbon Strategy for the 2008-2010 three-year cycle will be developed under the Slovenian Presidency, which will draw up the EU Council's Spring Summit conclusions and seek consensus with other Member States on the renewed strategy.

The measures for achieving the Lisbon Strategy objectives in Slovenia are divided into five development priorities: a competitive economy and faster economic growth; the effective generation, two-way flow and application of knowledge for economic development and quality jobs; a more efficient and less costly state; a modern welfare state; and higher employment levels. Last but not least, they also tie in with measures for achieving sustainable development.

We intend to stimulate competitiveness and achieve higher growth with the proposed measures and, above all, encourage faster business development, particularly amongst small and medium-sized enterprises, establish a more favourable business environment, consolidate the flow of domestic and foreign investment, encourage the creation of a more innovative and technically advanced economy and provide better quality jobs for a more educated and highly qualified workforce.

Strengthening cooperation between the research and academic world on the one hand, and the economy on the other; for the development of new technological, organisational, design, marketing and other business solutions, represents the best way of ensuring greater innovation and faster technological progress.

We would like to improve the efficiency of companies operating in the public sector and make better use of public communications infrastructures, speed up restructuring of the energy market, and boost the competitiveness of transport and

logistics services. At the same time, we will ensure that these structural reforms will take place in a stable macroeconomic environment.

By raising the standards of professionalism and transparency in public administration, improving the quality of its services and strengthening its consultative role, we will boost the efficiency of government administration. We intend to introduce a system for assessing the impact of regulations in terms of unnecessary administrative and regulatory restrictions on competition and economic activity and also to introduce measures to abolish such restrictions.

We will seek to close the gap between the country's investment needs and traditional sources of funding by introducing public-private partnerships for implementing and financing both public services and investment in infrastructure.

Efforts to deliver sector-based objectives will focus on ensuring the sustainable development of Slovenia. Yet there can be no guarantee of the reform's success without appropriate financial support. The EU cohesion policy (structural and cohesion funds) will also play an important role in the

implementation of these measures.

Special attention is also being put on territorial cohesion, its objective being to help achieve more balanced development, establish sustainable communities in urban and rural areas and ensure greater consistency with other sector policies which have an impact on spatial planning.

Particular emphasis is being given both to the contribution that towns make to growth and jobs and to the support of economic diversification in rural areas. I believe that cross-border, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation should complement the above three priorities to ensure that closer cooperation between European regions can further speed up economic development and contribute to sustainable development.

Ivan Žagar
Minister for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy





Slovenian folk singers in traditional costume

Introduction to Slovenia

Slovenia lies at the heart of Europe, at the crossroads between the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Pannonian basin and the Karst plateau. Austria lies to the north, Hungary to the east, Croatia to the south, and Italy to the west. Slovenia became an independent state on 26 June 1991, following the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is a democratic, stable and successful central European state, fully involved in the international scene.

Slovenia is divided into 12 statistical regions, which provide a geographical framework for the allocation of EU structural funds. Amendments to the Slovenian Constitution were adopted in June 2006, paving the way for first steps towards the introduction of fully-fledged regions and the possibility of devolving responsibility for a large proportion of public tasks away from central government. At the local level, there are 210 municipalities, 11 of which are classed as urban municipalities.

Slovenia is a country of mountains, water and forests: in Europe, only Finland and Sweden have more woodland. Nature reserves account for almost 11% of Slovenia's territory. The largest is the Triglav National Park, covering 83 807 hectares – one of the largest protected areas in the EU. Slovenia also boasts a wealth of plant and animal life. It is home to more than 3 000 varieties of ferns and flowers, and over 50 000 different types of animals, many of which are endemites.

The Skočjan caves, with the largest underground canyon in the world, were placed on the UNESCO list of world heritage sites in 1986. The wetland system in the caves, together with the Sečovelje saltpan and Lake Cerknica, have special status under the Ramsar Convention for the conservation of wetlands.

Population

The majority of Slovenia's population is ethnically Slovene. Italian and Hungarian communities, living in the coastal area and in the north east respectively, have the status of autonomous minorities whose rights are constitutionally protected. Other ethnic groups (Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Yugoslavs, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Albanians) mostly arrived in Slovenia as economic migrants after the Second World War. Slovenia is also home to a Roma community whose rights are protected by law. There are Slovene minorities in Italy, Austria and Hungary. Between 250 000 and 400 000 Slovenians live outside the country.

State structure

Slovenia is a democratic republic. Its constitutional set-up is founded on the principle of democratic parliamentary rule in which the legislative, executive and judiciary are separate. The **Parliament**, is divided into two chambers, the national assembly and the national council. The national assembly is the representative of the people, with 90 directly-elected members, who serve a four-year term. The national council, which has 40 members, represents specific social interests and participates in the legislative process, but does not have the power to adopt laws.

The **President of the Republic** is elected for a five-year term in direct elections, which are called by Parliament.

The **Prime Minister** is appointed by Parliament in a secret ballot and by an absolute majority of its members. Parliament also appoints the ministers based on a proposal by the Prime Minister.

The judiciary is divided into general courts and specialist courts including the labour and social court. The general courts are organised into four different levels: local courts, district courts, high courts and the Supreme Court in Ljubljana. The **Constitutional Court** is the highest judiciary body in Slovenia.

The first Slovenian **ombudsman** was appointed in September 1994. He/she reports to Parliament.





Mount Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain, in the Julian Alps

Milestones in the history of Slovenia

- 6th century:** Ancestors of today's Slovenes first settle in the territory.
- 7th century:** Creation of Duchy of Karantania, the first Slovenian state.
- 745:** Karantania becomes part of the Frankish kingdom.
- 9th century:** Freising manuscripts, oldest known example of writing in Slovenian.
- 14th century:** Slovenian provinces become part of the Habsburg Empire, and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- 1550:** First book printed in Slovenian.
- 1584:** First translation of the Bible into Slovenian.
- 1809-13:** Austrian Empire cedes Illirian provinces, including Ljubljana, to Napoleon's France. Slovenian national consciousness grows.
- 1848:** Campaign for Slovenes to unite in a single kingdom within the Austrian Empire.
- 1918:** End of the First World War: Following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ethnically Slovene territory is split between Austria, Italy, Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
- 29 November 1945:** Slovenia becomes a separate republic within the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.
- 15 September 1947:** Most of the Adriatic coastal region of Primorska is reunified with Slovenia under the Paris Peace Treaty.
- April 1990:** First democratic elections.
- December 1990:** Plebiscite on a sovereign and independent state (88.5% of voters in favour).
- 25 June 1991:** Slovenia declares independence.
- 23 December 1991:** Adoption of Constitution.
- 15 January 1992:** The European Union officially recognises Slovenia.
- 22 May 1992:** Slovenia becomes a permanent member of the UN.
- 1 February 1999:** Europe Agreement enters into force.
- 29 March 2004:** Slovenia joins NATO.
- 1 May 2004:** Slovenia joins the EU.
- 1 January 2007:** Slovenia adopts the Euro.

COUNTRY FACTFILE

Surface area: 20.273 km²

Population: 2 million

Capital: Ljubljana (330 000 inhabitants)

Other major cities or towns: Maribor, Celje, Kranj, Velenje, Koper, Novo mesto, Ptuj, Nova Gorica, Jesenice, Trbovlje, Murska Sobota.

Regional entities: Primorska, Notranjska, Gorenjska, Dolenjska, Bela krajina, Koroška, Štajerska, Prekmurje.

Official language: Slovenian, in ethnically mixed areas also Hungarian and Italian

Religion: chiefly Roman Catholic, however there are 43 other officially registered religious groups

Total border length: 1370 km (670 km with Croatia, 318 km with Austria, 280 km with Italy, and 102 km with Hungary)

Coastline: 46.6 km

Rivers: the total length of all streams, rivers, and tributaries is 26 600 km

Average altitude: 556.8 m

Highest mountain: Triglav, 2864 m

Surface covered by forest: 1 163 812 hectares

GDP per capita (in EUR): 14 811 (2006);

Employment: 741 586 employed, 83 252 self-employed, 85 835 unemployed

Unemployment: 6.0 % (2006)

Inflation: 2.5 % (2006)

Exports (in 1 000 EUR): 16 760 596 (2006);

Imports (in 1 000 EUR): EUR 18 311 592 (2006);

Most important trading partners:

Exports: Germany, Italy, Croatia, Austria, France;

Imports: Germany, Italy, Austria, France, Croatia.

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia





Lipica, home of the famous Lipizzaner horses, is seeking structural funds' aid to develop the local stud farm industry

Local government reform and regional development

The comprehensive reform of Slovenia's public administration was triggered by a series of events:

- the country's first democratic elections in 1990;
- Slovenia's independence in June 1991;
- the adoption of Slovenia's Constitution at the end of 1991.

Initially, these reforms focused on setting up administrative institutions that Slovenia needed to establish following its independence; over time, they concentrated on bringing the country's system of public administration in line with the constitutional division of powers. The modern concept of local government was formally established in 1994. Through this comprehensive decentralisation, Slovenia's municipalities set the foundations for democracy at local level, based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Slovenia established a new, modern system of local government in less than 15 years. The creation of municipalities also signified an important step towards boosting public participation in decision-making in local public affairs. Key milestones included the Local Self-Government Act and Local Elections Act in 1993, referendums on the creation of local authorities, the Financing of Municipalities Act, the creation of the country's municipalities and the first local elections in 1994, ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1996 and the adoption of the Capital City of the Republic of Slovenia Act in 2004.

Between 1994 and 2007, major effort was made towards improving the legal framework governing the organisation and activities of municipalities, primarily aimed at providing systemic solutions such as steps determining cooperation and links between municipalities, the role and status of representative associations, a procedure for appointing delegates from municipalities to international organisations, the concept of incompatibility of functions for municipal officials, the special status of the indigenous Roma minority, the creation of a new system for financing municipalities and measures finalising the local electoral system.

At the same time as conditions were being met for local administration at municipal level, moves were under way to

create the country's regions, thus opening the way for further decentralisation: regions were to carry out all those national responsibilities which it was possible to cover at regional level, as well as tasks that municipalities had hitherto been unable to carry out by themselves, i.e. both core competences and transferred powers.

In line with the changes to the Constitution in June 2006, draft laws have been prepared which will regulate issues such as the regions' responsibilities and powers, their public bodies, funding, voting procedures in regional bodies, territorial coverage, names and the seats of the future regional governments, together with the transfer of powers from national to regional level. According to government plans, elections to the regional bodies could be held this year.

During the last mandate (2004-2007), particular attention was paid to simplifying procedures such as the process of appointing mayors, adding to the criteria for incompatibility of functions and conflicts of interests for municipal officials, providing local administrations with greater access to public databases and introducing information and communication technologies into the work of local administration, determining the activities of supervisory committees and establishing pay scales for municipal officials. Far-reaching changes were made to the system for financing municipalities, with particular emphasis on giving the latter greater autonomy, introducing more co-financing for regional (inter-municipal) projects, and promoting closer links between municipalities for carrying out joint administrative tasks.

For the implementation of its development objectives and its inclusion in the EU's cohesion policy, Slovenia has been divided into 12 development regions (NUTS 3 statistical units) and two cohesion regions (NUTS 2) Vzhodna Slovenija (Eastern Slovenia) and Zahodna Slovenija (Western Slovenia). The former has a population of around 1.1 million and covers approximately 60% of the country's surface area. Western Slovenia, meanwhile, numbers some 0.9 million inhabitants, covering around 40% of the country.

The Promotion of Balanced Regional Development Act (2005) stipulates that the municipalities and the state are responsible for regional development during a transitional period until the regions are established. The decision-making bodies of the





Tourism has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of Slovenia's accession to the EU. Below, bridge in the Soča valley

development regions are the regional councils, composed of the mayors of the municipalities in the region concerned. They adopt the regional development programmes and determine how regions are organised. Development partnerships are implemented through the regional development councils, which have a well developed internal structure (President of Regional Council, Committee for the Economy, Committee for Infrastructure and the Environment, Committee for Human Resources Development, Committee for Rural Development etc.). The municipalities provide two fifths of the members of the regional development councils; the business world accounts for a further two fifths, whilst NGOs operating at regional level make up the remaining one fifth. These bodies receive administrative and technical support from the regional development agencies, which also carry out other regional-level development tasks that are in the public interest.

Regional policy has already undergone partial decentralisation. Regional development programmes for 2007-2013 have been adopted in all 12 development regions, along with the associated implementation plans for the first three-year cycle. In the framework of EU Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013, regional development was established as a priority in the Operating Programme for Strengthening Regional Development Potential, which targets the co-financing of key regional projects outlined in the implementation plans. Decisions are adopted in keeping with the principle of partnership between the various administrative levels.

With the creation of the regions, responsibility for regional development will become part of the regions' core competences, and the responsibilities of the development region bodies will be transferred to the regional institutions.

Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia

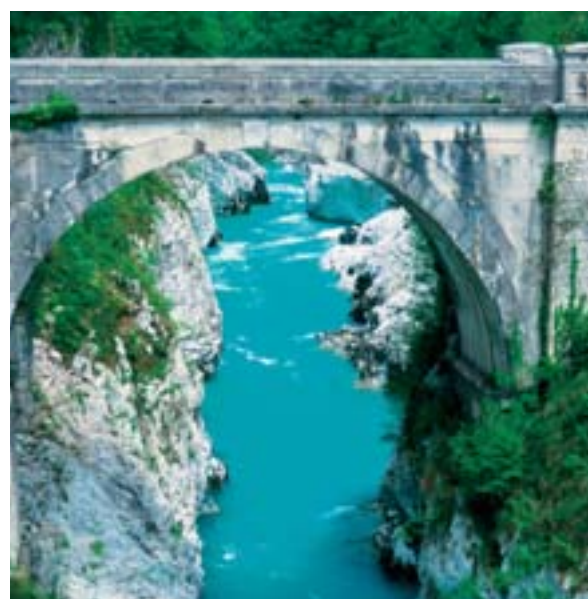
The Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia (SOS) is the largest association representing municipalities in the country. It was established under the Local Self-Government Act in 1992 and granted the status of a representative organisation by ministerial decree in 2002. The association consists of 146 municipalities covering a population of almost 1.7 million. Its principal aim is to represent the interests of its members, boost cooperation between them, and share best practice.

Chairman: Franc Kangler, Mayor of Maribor
 Vice-chairpersons: Bojan Šrot, Mayor of Celje
 Irena Majcen, Mayor of Slovenska Bistrica
 Tone Peršak, Mayor of Trzin
 Secretary-General: Jasmina Vidmar, member of the Maribor City Council
 CoR contact: Miha Mohor, national coordinator

Association of Municipalities of Slovenia

Some 115 municipalities are members of the Association of the Municipalities of Slovenia (ZOS), which was set up in 1998 and has the status of a local interest representative body. The association acts in the legal, economic and political interests of its members and other Slovenian municipalities at national and international level.

Chairman: Robert Smrdelj, Mayor of Pivka
 Vice-chairpersons: Anton Kovše, Mayor of Podvelka
 Zvonko Lah, Mayor of Mirna Peč
 Secretary-General: Polonca Drofenik
 CoR contact: Staša Marolt, national coordinator





Left, Church of the Assumption on the island in Lake Bled.



Right, the Ljubljana dragon - symbol of the capital

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