



**III Conferenza Nazionale Italia - America Latina e Caraibi**  
**Roma, 16 – 17 ottobre 2007**  
**Ministero degli Affari Esteri - Sala delle Conferenze Internazionali**

**Dimitrij Rupel**

*Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia*

*Dear Secretary-General, Mr Enrique Iglesias, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Please allow me to begin by extending greetings on behalf of Slovenia - the incoming Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2008 - and thanking our Italian hosts for the invitation. This is an important contribution to our preparations for the presidency and we thank you for this opportunity.

The Republic of Slovenia is to assume an important and responsible task of co-chairing the fifth EU-Latin America and the Caribbean Summit to be held in Peru's capital Lima, on 16 and 17 May next year.

The summit is one of the largest EU events involving third countries during our presidency and will be attended by 60 Heads of State or Government from both regions. Our goal is to strengthen strategic partnership between the two regions, based on common values, economic, political, cultural, historical and also

human ties. Taking this into account, Slovenia will strive for the summit to be a step forward in strengthening economic cooperation, with the objective of increasing trade between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean in the future. With 1.2 billion euro per year - this makes 3 million euro per day - the European Union is at the same time the largest foreign donor and traditionally the most important foreign investor in the region.

We would also like to emphasise the significance of cooperation between the regions in the fields of social cohesion, climate change and fight against drugs as well as development cooperation programmes.

**Fight against poverty, social inequality and exclusion** Social inequality is a global problem and an enormous challenge for every society. Countries tackle it in different ways. Positive experience and results from different corners in dealing with social inequality are worth taking into account. Slovenia has its own experience which could be of interest to other countries from the historical and political perspective.

In the times of the socialist economic model, Slovenia was not able to effectively address these problems- its GDP was decreasing, reaching only 30 per cent of the European average.

In 1991, the country took a different path: towards market economy and joining the European structures. Sixteen-year long experience with development of this model is reassuring us in the belief that we have made the right decision and chose an adequate framework for the development of our society (today, Slovenia's GDP according to the purchasing power amounts to 88.8 per cent of the European average).

Slovenia is today a member of the Euro area and soon-to-be member of the Schengen area. On 1 January 2008, it is assuming presidency over almost 500 million inhabitants of the European Union.

Slovenia is of course prepared to share its transition experience with Latin American and Caribbean countries, thus helping them find an optimal path for sustainable economic and social development of the region.

### **Problems of Transition**

What is the essential problem of transition? After 1989, the Soviet, Eastern-European and also Yugoslav Socialist political and economic models slowly disappeared from political, academic and other public debate in Europe. The European (EU and NATO) integration was founded on a rejection of, and anti-thesis to, those Socialist models. Today, European political life, especially in the new member-countries, is still - to a certain degree - inhibited by remains and marginal relevance of Socialist models.

This *inertia*, characteristic of some former Communist countries and varying with the levels of political culture and economic development, should not be confused with Social-Democratic, Labour and Western European Left Parties' policies that are directed towards social cohesion, fair education, health, retirement, social and cultural programs, political and human rights etc. When we criticize »Socialism«, we criticize the politics of exclusion, corruption and authoritarian rule; we reject centralized, Government controlled, non-competitive, inefficient economy and nondemocratic media.

Europeans have generally recovered from such »Socialist« traditions, and the EU is always ready to report on them to our Latin American friends who have not had such experience in the past, or - maybe - have not recovered from some aspects of such experience. It is, of course, not easy and not popular to persuade politicians and national leaders to consider the experiences and to avoid the mistakes of other nations. But we can always try.

Slovenia has achieved positive results during its transition from Yugoslav Socialism. Yugoslavia could have survived had it managed the problems of democracy, cultural variety and economic initiative.

Of course, its demise was connected with the world-wide crisis of Socialism that was due - in a nutshell - to authoritarian rule and to neglect of human rights. Slovenia succeeded, because it embraced the European - the EU - model. The EU was, and remains the practical alternative for European nations. The EU has provided answers to some key questions of the modern world. The main challenge today is size. To respond to it, nations have to integrate, but integration must not neglect national and cultural identity. The miracle of the EU is a successful response at the same time to the problems of pluralism and integration.

Integration today is vital, because all of us are - on top of the problems of security and economic rationality - facing challenges of energy security and climate change.

### ***European Union's experience***

The European Union is an example of a successful model of alleviating economic underdevelopment and poverty between and within countries (through e.g. European Social Fund). The European Union has proven to be a successful project of overcoming differences and particularly old antagonisms in the European continent.

Slovenia would not be able to achieve the results mentioned before had it not been a part of this - let me put it this way - mega-project of European integration. Slovenia's integration into the European Union facilitates sustainable planning of all aspects of the societal development.

I believe this could be an important topic in the regular dialogue between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, and at the Lima Summit, since based on its positive experience the Union has the will and interest to assist the region in searching for a sustainable social and economic development model.

It should also not be forgotten that lessons of success stories of development in Latin American and the Caribbean countries could be extremely useful for the European Union.

The two regions have already been cooperating successfully within multilateral organisations (UN, Human Rights Council, various specialised UN agencies, etc.) which represents an excellent basis for further enhancement of political cooperation. The EU and Latin America and the Caribbean consistently advocate effective multilateralism and further strengthening of United Nations' role in the modern international community.

The Lima Summit will tackle two topics of common interest: the first being of social character (i.e. "*Poverty, Equality and Inclusion* ") and the second of environmental character (i.e. "*Sustainable Development: Environment; Climate Change; Energy* "). Slovenia advocates improving the quality of primary and vocational education, which is indispensable in the fight against poverty, and promoting the development of small and medium sized enterprises, which can increase possibilities for employment in the Latin America and the Caribbean.

Slovenia and the European Union also attach considerable importance to the adjustment to climate change that affects every individual and all countries in the world. **Despite exceptional progress in science and technology, man cannot conquer nature.** Global warming causes the melting of glaciers, which results in low water level in rivers. This in turn causes difficulties in drinking water and energy supply on the one hand and raises sea level and causes flooding of large

parts of Earth's surface on the other. The European Union **also has extensive experience in the protection of endangered animal and plant species.**

Slovenia **appreciates the role of its neighbour Italy in the Latin American region (companies, schools) and is convinced that links between Italy and Latin America are of exceptional importance for relations between the European Union and the region.** I am convinced that our Italian friends, due to **their valuable experience with the European Union - Latin America and the Caribbean relations,** will contribute to further all-round strengthening of relations between our two regions.

Dear colleagues, the Republic of Slovenia is fully confident that each and every Member State of **both regions will contribute its share to the success of the V EULatin America and the Caribbean Summit in Lima.**

*Thank you very much for your attention!*