

Address given by Dimitrij Rupel at the fourth meeting of the EU-Slovenia Association Council (Luxembourg, 15 April 2002)

Caption: On 15 April 2002, in Luxembourg, at the fourth meeting of the EU–Slovenia Association Council, Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenian Foreign Minister, outlines the progress made by his country so that it is in a position to accede to the European Union.

Source: Speech by Minister Dr Rupel at the Fourth Meeting of the EU-Slovenia Association Council, Luxembourg, 15. 04. 2002. [ON-LINE]. [Ljubljana]: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, [06.06.2005]. Available on <http://www.sigov.si/mzz/eng/speeches/02041501.html>.

Copyright: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_dimitrij_rupel_at_the_fourth_meeting_of_the_eu_slovenia_association_council_luxembourg_15_april_2002-en-84992e71-e181-4e1a-99f9-3ef7df78c35d.html

Publication date: 05/09/2012

Speech by Minister Dr Rupel at the Fourth Meeting of the EU-Slovenia Association Council (Luxembourg, 15 April 2002)

On Slovenia's progress in preparations for accession

The Republic of Slovenia will be internally prepared to fulfil the obligations, arising from the EU Membership by the end of 2002.

Slovenia welcomes the European Union's firm commitment, expressed at the European Council meeting in Laeken in December 2001 to conclude negotiations with the best-prepared candidates by the end of 2002, so that the Candidate Countries will participate at the elections to the European Parliament in 2004 as members.

Since negotiations were launched on 31 March 1998 Slovenia has provisionally closed 26 chapters. Slovenia is of the opinion that the accession negotiations have been conducted successfully.

Outstanding results were achieved during the Belgian Presidency, since Slovenia provisionally closed six chapters during that period. Slovenia expects to continue with such pace during the Spanish Presidency of the EU. Slovenia wishes to conclude the accession negotiations by the end of this year at the latest, thus symbolically completing a nearly ten-year process so-called "from Copenhagen to Copenhagen" at the European Summit in Copenhagen.

Slovenia believes that the ratification process of the Nice Treaty should not prejudice negotiations on the Institutions Chapter since the provisions from the Nice Treaty might be transposed into the Accession Treaty.

Slovenia welcomes the proposal of the Commission which contains the main elements for drawing up EU Common Position on Chapter 30 – Institutions.

With the official presentation of the financial proposal, the accession negotiations of ten Candidate Countries enter the final and the most demanding stage. Slovenia welcomes the presentation of the document at this early stage of the Spanish Presidency, since it enables the Commission and the Member States to follow the Road Map of negotiations to their conclusion by the end of this year.

Slovenia believes that there are enough possibilities to adapt the resources for enlargement within the Berlin financial framework provided that political will for this exists. In this historical EU enlargement, part of the funds allocated to the pre-accession assistance in the Berlin financial framework could be allocated to new member states. Slovenia points to the fact that basic principles of negotiation should be fully respected ; it wishes to become an equal member of the European Union as of the day of accession.

There are many proposals in the Commission document that Slovenia supports. These include the possibility of direct top up payments within the common agricultural policy and an increased level of co-financing for rural development as well as an increased share of cohesion funds within the resources for structural policy. Determining necessary quotas and reference quantities for Slovenia is of vital importance for our country.

Slovenia would find itself in impossible situation to finish up as a net contributor on the day of accession.

In its last regular report on progress the European Commission positively assessed the progress Slovenia had achieved. Slovenia considers the 2001 Regular Report from the Commission on Slovenia's Progress to be the best so far, and believes that it represents a correct and realistic picture of Slovenia's preparations for membership of the European Union. The Report gives a positive forecast on the European Commission's second final opinion before the conclusion of accession negotiations. On the basis of the report, the amendments to Accession Partnership were drafted in 2001 and will be taken into account in this year's amendments to the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire by the end of 2002.

May I present the review of Slovenia's progress according to individual criteria for membership:

With regard to political criteria we assess that good progress was made in reducing the backlog of pending court cases. The reduction in the court case backlog shows the efficiency of courts, which is the result of the successful reform of the judiciary. The number of pending court cases has continued to decrease for the third successive year. The latest data show that the number of pending cases of major importance in 2001 have been reduced by 8% in comparison to 2000. The increase in the number of pending cases in the land register was expected due to the reform. At the same time the number of computer-processed entries in the land registry has increased considerably (from 10% to 35% in a year). The HERKULES programme has been introduced in two courts and will be introduced, if necessary, in other courts.

Special attention is being paid to the acceleration of denationalisation processes, since we are aware of the difficulties resulting from the extensive provisions of the Denationalisation Act, which stipulates that claims may be filed by 1 July 2001. In the past year, measures to accelerate settlements and restitution in kind, as well as to expedite procedures were taken. Additional reinforcements of staff in administrative units working in the field of denationalisation have been made.

By 31 December 2001, the decisions had been issued for 64.1% of the total claimed property, of which housing (86.2%) represented the largest part, and agricultural land (52.1%) the lowest. The share of resolved property cases increased by 6.4% in 2001.

As determined in Article 7, Annex C of the Agreement on Succession Issues, guarantees by the SFRY or its NBY of hard currency savings deposited in a commercial bank and any of its branches in any successor state before the date on which it proclaimed independence shall be negotiated without delay taking into account in particular the necessity of protecting the hard currency savings of individuals.

All the questions related to the succession of guarantees are thus recognised as multilateral questions by all successor states of the former SFRY. EU is fully supportive to such solution. The current negotiations are held under the auspices of the Bank for International Settlements in Basel.

The successors expect that the mediator of the Bank for International Settlements, will draft a proposal for the solution of this issue by the end of the first half of 2002.

The public administration reform is to be completed soon, since the acts from this area (the Civil Service Act, State Administration Act, Inspection Control Act and Public Agencies Act) were endorsed by the National Assembly in the second reading and will be adopted in May 2002.

In relations with Croatia, intensified contacts resulted in the conclusion of the negotiations and the initialling of the Agreement between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia on their Common State Border in July 2001. The Committee on Foreign Policy of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia discussed the Agreement and endorsed it on 25 July 2001. Slovenia is thus ready to sign the Agreement. In September, the Agreement between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia on Cross-Border Traffic and Co-operation entered into force. The two countries are working on the implementation of this Agreement. In December 2001, the Agreement on the Regulation of the Status and other Legal Relationships relating to Investments in the Krško Nuclear Power Plant, its Use and Decommission was signed. On the Slovene side, the preparations for ratification are in the final stage. The Slovene-Croatian group is in the process of establishing a new limited liability company, which is to run the power plant after the ratification of the Agreement.

With regard to economic criteria Slovenia notes with satisfaction further macroeconomic stability. Owing to general trends in the world economy, economic growth in the past year was lower than expected; however, we have still recorded high economic growth.

According to the latest estimates, the real GDP growth was 3.0% in 2001. Last year and the year before, the main economic growth factor in Slovenia was exports. In 2001, the average inflation was 8.4%, while the

average rate of unemployment was 6.3%.

The privatisation process of Nova Ljubljanska Banka and Nova Kreditna Banka Maribor started in 2001, when the Government issued call for bids for part of the state share in both banks. In the case of Nova Ljubljanska Banka a potential key investor – the Belgian bank KBC – was selected. Negotiations to make final settlement on the sale of Nova Kreditna Banka Maribor were held with three bidders until 22 March 2002. After the last round of negotiations the Commission for the Privatisation of Nova Kreditna Banka Maribor, which conducts and supervises the sale procedure, decided to propose that the Government temporarily stop the sales procedure, since none of the bids so far corresponded to the objectives of the Government's privatisation programme.

On the basis of the Decree on the Granting of Concessions for Providing the UMTS Services, one concession was granted in 2001 to provide services for the third generation of mobile telephony.

In February 2002 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia began the dissolution of the Development Corporation of Slovenia. The Development Corporation of Slovenia thus ceased to perform all activities including those in the field of granting state aid.

In July 2001, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a Scheme for Attracting Direct Foreign Investments from 2001 to 2004 which is based on removing administrative barriers, improving the supply and providing financial incentives.

Upon the examination of the 2001 Regular Report on Slovenia's Progress towards Accession, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia established that the work concerning the harmonisation of the *acquis* had been concluded in several chapters. The programme of activities has been introduced for an early adoption of the remaining *acquis*.

The Republic of Slovenia is aware of the importance of the actual implementation of the adopted *acquis communautaire*; efforts have therefore been focused on strengthening the institutional set-up to implement the *acquis* this year. To this end the Republic of Slovenia and the Commission have agreed on an Action Plan to fully prepare Slovene institutions for the implementation of the *acquis*.

Slovenia expects that the interim report of the Commission on the implementation of the Action Plan for the preparation of institutions to implement the *acquis* to be submitted to the European Council in Seville in June this year will positively reflect Slovenia's efforts in this field.

Progress in implementing the Europe agreement

The Republic of Slovenia establishes that the implementation of the Europe Agreement is proceeding normally.

The Republic of Slovenia expresses its interest in examining together with the EU and in accordance with Article 3 of the Europe Agreement the possibility of progressing to the second association stage. Slovenia will formally justify its proposal with the proofs of its fulfilling the conditions arising from the Europe Agreement.

The implementation of Annex XIII to the Europe Agreement proceeds without difficulties.

I am very pleased to inform you that the Act on the Transformation of Duty-Free Shops was adopted. In compliance with the provisions of this Act, Duty-Free Shops were transformed on 21 September 2001 and now operate under the same customs and tax conditions as other shops in Slovenia.

The first round of negotiations concerning the liberalisation of trade in agricultural products was completed in May 2000 with the initialling of the harmonised text of the agreement reached plus annexes. The

provisional agreement applies to the liberalisation of trade in these agricultural products until the Association Council adopts the relevant decision. The second round of negotiations on agricultural products started in December 2001, and concerns more sensitive products. The Commission proposed that the negotiations conclude so as to allow for provisional application of the agreement as of 1 July 2002.

Negotiations on the agreement on fish and fishery products were completed in November 2000. According to the Additional Protocol to the Europe Agreement on Association, signed on 7 February 2002 and applicable as of 1 March 2002, trade in fish and fishery products will be fully liberalised over three successive years or earlier if the parties so agree. The Protocol already introduced a free-trade regime for certain fishery products.

Slovenia is pleased with the signing of the bilateral agreement on wine, which entered into force on 1 January 2002.

Slovenia welcomes the successful completion of negotiations for the adherence to the PECA Protocol in certain fields; the negotiations were concluded on 5 December 2001. The Republic of Slovenia expects that the Commission will initiate a formal procedure for its accession to the PECA Protocol in April 2002, and Slovenia will define other fields to constitute part of the Protocol by May 2002. Slovenia will thus to the greatest possible extent meet the conditions for entry into the EU internal market in the field of free movement of goods even prior to formal membership of the EU.

The Republic of Slovenia expects that the Association Council decision on the establishment of the Joint Consultative Committee between Slovenia and the EU Committee of the Regions will be adopted shortly since Slovene local communities are very interested in participating on the Committee. Furthermore, the participation of Slovene local communities in the Committee will be a major contribution to preparing Slovene regions to operate according to the conditions of membership.

At this point I would also like to express Slovenia's surprise at the EU Steel Import Safeguard Measures, which will also affect the manufacturers of steel and steel products from Slovenia.

Within EU's Accession Strategy the Republic of Slovenia has adopted the Restructuring Programme for the Slovenian Steel Industry. The programme was also adopted and endorsed in its entirety by the European Union. One assessment criterion on viability assessment of the steel industry – proposed and confirmed by the European Union – is a certain level of growth in sales and hence also in exports by Slovene manufacturers. Any decrease in exports would therefore represent an infringement from the adopted programme. The EU market is of particular importance for the Slovene manufacturers, since it accounts for 70% of their total exports. The Slovene share of EU steel imports is extremely low, in terms of both its quantity and value, and it in no way poses a threat to the EU steel industry.

The Republic of Slovenia therefore calls upon the European side to reconsider this measure and rescind it for Slovenia.

[...]