



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008  
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008  
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

**Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council,  
1 January 2008 to 30 June 2008, Home Affairs**

## **We have justified the confidence shown in Slovenia**



Photo: UKOM

President of the EU Council for the field of Home Affairs and Slovenian Minister of the Interior  
Dragutin Mate



On 22 January 2008 Dragutin Mate, President of the EU Home Affairs Council and Slovenian Minister of the Interior, presented the priority tasks of the Slovenian Presidency in the field of internal affairs before the European Parliament. His presentation included the following: “Our plans are ambitious. Preparations for the Slovenian Presidency have been going on for more than two years. Particular attention will be devoted to the security of our citizens while safeguarding privacy. We have taken over the management of part of the external border, which places us under a particular obligation as regards the guaranteeing of security, which we must justify before the citizens of Europe. I assure you that today’s external border is just as secure as the previous external borders, and there is therefore no reason for apprehension. This has been confirmed by all the evaluation commissions which visited our country in 2006 and 2007. We wish to deepen cooperation among the police forces of the Western Balkans in the fight against crime and bring to this region some of the security standards and good practices of the EU.”

A little over five months later we can say that the opportunity that Slovenia has been given has been unique, extraordinary, interesting, instructive, useful, unforgettable and, above all, full of challenges. It has been hard work, and sometimes even fun. The tasks we have faced – which we have accepted as an obligation and a privilege – have been accomplished well, and from every new experience we have drawn knowledge which will be useful for our work in the future. We have given our all and demonstrated our capabilities. We hope that we have justified your confidence in us.

We have prepared a review of the key achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council. Read and judge for yourselves.



## Schengen area: a new timetable for the second-generation Schengen Information System and a continuation of the process of enlarging the Schengen area

The building of the second-generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) is one of the priority tasks of the EU, and at the same time of Slovenia as the holder of the Presidency of the EU Council. As the Presidency in office, Slovenia ensured the adoption of the conclusions of the Council of the EU on the new timetable for the implementation of SIS II. All activities in this field, including the transition from the present system to the new system, are geared towards the target date of September 2009. As the Presidency-in-office, Slovenia has coordinated all the political agreements necessary for a successful conclusion of the project within the envisaged timeframe. The "Friends of SIS II", a group founded at Slovenia's initiative, is identifying key problems in this project and ensuring that it has suitable political support. In the legislative field a regulation and a decision on the testing of SIS II have been adopted during the Slovenian Presidency and we have begun harmonising the legislation which will regulate the transition from the present SIS I system to SIS II.

The Slovenian Presidency has intensively pursued activities in connection with the enlargement of the Schengen area. Following the successful abolishing of border controls on internal flights for the nine new Schengen countries and with the adoption of decisions at the June Justice and Home Affairs Council, the multi-annual process of Schengen evaluations for these countries and the process of the largest enlargement of the Schengen area to date were formally concluded.

Thanks to the extensive efforts of the Presidency we have succeeded in removing the last remaining obstacles to the entering into force of Switzerland's Schengen Association Agreement, which was a precondition for the start of evaluation of Switzerland's readiness for incorporation into the Schengen area. The preparation of the programme and the completion of the first visits to Switzerland by evaluation groups led by experts from Slovenia have enabled the adoption of a Council decision on the incorporation of Switzerland into the Schengen Information System. The Slovenian Presidency has also prepared all the documents necessary for the functional testing of the operation of Switzerland's Schengen Information System. All of this will enable the implementation of the second phase of evaluation in the coming months, as a precondition for Switzerland's incorporation into the Schengen area. This is expected to take place before the end of the year.

*The media also carried the message of Vice-President of the European Commission Jacques Barrot on this historic day for the free movement of people in the EU. The final abolition of internal borders at airports for nine EU Member States was reported by The Parliament and Finance (25. 3.), Süddeutsche Zeitung, News Press and Agence Belga (26. 3.), Die Presse, Europolitics, Agence Belga, Spiegel Online, Hamburger Abendblatt and Die Tageszeitung (27. 3.), EU Observer, Xinhua and Le Soir (28. 3.), Berliner Zeitung (29. 3.), Le Monde and Il Sole 24 Ore (30. 3.), APA, La Charente Libre, Weser Kurier, FAZ, Vjesnik, Oslobodenje, Nova Makedonija, El Pais and Der Standard (31. 3.) and domestic media (27. 3., 28. 3., 29. 3., 30. 3, 31. 3.). Most of them stated that the transition to the summer timetable was the reason for the abolition of internal borders at airports being postponed, and that the abolition of internal borders will involve a separation of non-Schengen and Schengen passengers. For the latter, border controls on internal flights are abolished, but not security checks. These will be carried out by the security service, added the Slovenian media. Most media also listed the countries which are members of the Schengen zone, since this does not coincide with the EU.*



Photo: UKOM/Nebojša Tejić – Salomon, 2000

Last step of the Schengen enlargement: abolition of controls at internal borders

Without a doubt another important achievement of the Slovenian Presidency is the preparation and unanimous adoption of a multi-annual programme (to 2013) of evaluation of the implementation of the Schengen acquis both in the 24 countries that are already part of the Schengen area and in those countries that are set to join Schengen. Part of this is the adopted framework programme of Schengen evaluations for Bulgaria and Romania, which wish to join the Schengen area in 2011.

The openness and accessibility of the European Union is conditioned by the suitable protection of its external borders. The Ministerial Conference on the Future Challenges of External Border Management, hosted by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia on 12 March, showed that it will be necessary to develop integrated border management while respecting human rights and observing the principle of sharing burdens and solidarity, particularly in so-called high-risk areas on the EU's external border.

The ministers also talked about the development and possibility of use of new technologies for passenger checks, for the purpose of preventing undesired access to the EU. The discussion showed that we can count on their introduction in the future, but that we should neither totally replace the human factor in the implementation of border control nor obstruct the smooth flow of passengers at all types of borders.

The ministers also discussed the content of the Commission's report on the establishment of a common European border surveillance system (EUROSUR). This is a decisive step towards the introduction of a common European system for integrated border management in three phases by 2013.

The first phase, the establishment of national coordination centres, is already today an extremely effective reality in some Member States. The same is true as regards the use of high technology such as satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles for border control. The aim of the third phase is to integrate all existing reporting and monitoring systems and create a common information-sharing environment, thus allowing border control authorities to utilise these various systems. The discussion showed that Member States are in favour of the EUROSUR project and support the implementation of the study on its components. These should include technical recommendations for national coordination centres and national systems for the control of land and sea borders and systemic solutions for the establishment of a secure communications network between national coordination centres and the FRONTEX agency.



## **Migration: with the adoption of the Return Directive we have achieved one of the key objectives of the Slovenian Presidency.**

In the field of illegal migration, intensive negotiations took place with regard to the Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (the so-called Return Directive). At the June Justice and Home Affairs Council, following difficult negotiations in the working bodies of the EU Council, where Member States have been trying to find a compromise since 2005, and after four political trialogues with the European Parliament and the Commission, the Slovenian Presidency obtained sufficient support from Member States to formulate the text of the draft Return Directive. With the adoption of the Directive we achieved one of the key objectives of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council in the field of Home Affairs and thus opened the way for further discussion of other legal proposals in the field of migration. **On 18 June MEPs in Strasbourg voted in favour of the text of the draft of this directive, which means that it was adopted at first reading in the co-decision procedure. The Minister commented: "With the adoption of the Directive we have achieved one of the key objectives of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council in the field of Home Affairs. This is the first instrument that will govern, based on common standards at EU level, the legislation applicable to the return of illegally staying third-country nationals and their rights. In most countries, significant progress will be made as regards the duration of temporary custody, which will be shorter."**

In the field of legal migration, we have concentrated on the package of two directives which the European Commission presented on 23 October 2007. The first is the Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment, and the second is the Directive on the rights of immigrants from third countries and the single work and residence permit. We completed the first reading of the text of both directives in the Council and prepared the text for their further discussion during the French Presidency.



Photo: MNZ RS

***At the end of the last session of EU Home Affairs Ministers conducted by Slovenian interior minister Dragutin Mate in Luxembourg, Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security and Vice-President of the European Commission Jacques Barrot expressed his praise for the Slovenian Presidency: "I am happy to have been able to begin my work as Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security with such an efficient and active Presidency. I would particularly like to commend Minister Mate for his extraordinary efficiency in adopting documents, particularly the directive on the return of illegal immigrants, confirmed today, and for his role in international relations, particularly with the USA."***

***Slovenian Press Agency, June 2008***



Photo: Thierry Monasse/STA

In the European Parliament

## Asylum policy

At the informal meeting of ministers at Brdo pri Kranju in January 2008, ministers talked about practical cooperation in the field of asylum. In the light of the outcome of the discussion, we prepared the conclusions which ministers confirmed at the April Justice and Home Affairs Council. The conclusions of the Council emphasise that in the future, as part of the building of a Common European Asylum System, it will be necessary to strengthen practical cooperation in the field of asylum. This will reduce differences between Member States and contribute to the greater effectiveness of asylum systems. Member States expressed their expectation that current projects in the field of asylum will be completed and that the results will be applicable as soon as possible in the practical work of state bodies. The founding of a European Asylum (Support) Office is necessary, in the opinion of the Member States, since such an office could provide support and coordination of all activities in this field.



## External Relations:



Photo: UKOM/Primož Lavre – Salomon, 2000

On 13 March Slovenia organised an EU-US Ministerial Troika Meeting, which included discussion of visa reciprocity and the reform of the USA visa waiver programme. Also present were the US Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and the Attorney General Michael Mukasey.

In discussions the Presidency proposed twin-track negotiations for the entry of EU Member States into the visa-free regime with the USA, which the USA agreed with. The USA will negotiate on national competences with Member States and on European competences with the Commission. President of the EU Home Affairs Council Dragutin Mate made the following statement on the talks with the USA on the visa-free regime: "Great progress was made at the meeting, as we came to an arrangement with the highest representatives of the U.S. administration on how to pursue discussions on issues concerning a visa-free regime for entry to the USA. We all agreed on the necessity of joint efforts to ensure that all EU Member States are included in this programme as soon as possible. In this way all EU citizens could travel to the USA without visas, just as US citizens can already travel to all EU Member States."

In the field of data exchange, the High-Level Group on Data Protection studied and harmonised the principles of the protection and exchange of data between the EU and the USA in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. The ministers agreed that the working group will continue with its work and prepare the groundwork for negotiations for the conclusion of a binding agreement between the EU and the USA on the protection of data in the field of police cooperation and the fight against terrorism



## **Western Balkans: beginning of dialogue for the introduction of a visa-free regime and a new method of police cooperation between the EU, the Western Balkans and Europol**

In external relations, Slovenia focused its specific priorities in the field of security and police cooperation on relations between the EU and the Western Balkan countries. The security situation in the Western Balkans is reflected in the security situation in the EU. We have achieved great progress in the field of police cooperation between the EU, the countries of the Western Balkans, Europol and the European Police Academy. We have devoted considerable attention to strengthening the SECI Centre (South-East European Co-operative Initiative Regional Centre for Combating Transborder Crime) in Bucharest and made a commitment to the strengthened and more effective operation of the network of leading EU officials for communication in the Western Balkans, as well as prepared and adopted the second report on the implementation of priority tasks from the action plan for the Western Balkans.

In March 2008, in conjunction with the Austrian interior ministry, we organised a conference in Vienna entitled “Strengthening cooperation in the fight against serious crime – the contribution of regional threat assessments to security in Europe”. All the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey agreed to take part in the conference and supported the idea of assistance in elaborating a common organised crime threat assessment in South-Eastern Europe. The Slovenian Presidency then held a seminar for analysts from the SECI Centre and from the countries of the Western Balkans, who will be involved in the preparation of this document. The idea of drawing up a regional threat assessment of this kind was supported by the conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council.

With all of the activities mentioned above we have taken a major step in the direction of approximating security standards in the region to EU standards, at the same time encouraging cooperation among agencies.

During the Slovenian Presidency, the Commission commenced dialogue for the establishment of visa liberalisation with the Western Balkan countries. The Presidency worked closely with the Commission on this, since the possibility of visa liberalisation is of great importance for these countries and confirms their European perspective.

In the European project of transferring good practice in the field of the fight against terrorism to the countries of the Western Balkans, we have succeeded in ensuring the cooperation of the countries of the Western Balkans, which will contribute both to their efforts in approximation to the EU and to the establishing of higher security standards in the region. The project involves the transfer of nine examples of good practice reflected by 16 recommendations formulated on the basis of the conclusions of the first evaluation period of national mechanisms of the fight against terrorism. In this context we organised a meeting of counter-terrorism experts from the EU and the countries of the Western Balkans.





## **Police cooperation: strengthened and better circulation of important information**

In the field of police cooperation, in a desire to strengthen cooperation between the second and third pillars, i.e. between the bodies responsible for internal and external aspects of security, the Slovenian Presidency launched an initiative on establishing possible mechanisms of cooperation between Europol and the civilian missions of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) for the reciprocal exchange of information. The decisions adopted by the Council in this field will lead to gradually closer cooperation between Europol and ESDP missions, and above all to the stronger and better circulation of important information.

The foundation for police cooperation in the EU over the next decade was laid with the decision to transpose the Prüm Treaty into EU law. This act laid the legal basis for the exchange of information from national databases containing DNA profiles, fingerprints and vehicle data.

The transposition process began during the German Presidency, when political agreement was reached on the basic Decision on strengthening cross-border cooperation, particularly in the field of the fight against terrorism and cross-border crime. The complete transposition of the Treaty required the adoption of the “Prüm Implementing Decision”, which was harmonised by Portugal, and the legally binding annex to this Decision, which was harmonised during the Slovenian Presidency.

***The conclusion of the process of transposing the Prüm Treaty into the European legal framework thus confirms the successful work and the coordinated approach of the three Presidencies – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia.***



Photo: Wiktor Dabkowski/STA



## **Organised crime: through the introduction of regional organised crime threat assessments to a better insight into the structure of the problem of organised crime**

During the Slovenian Presidency, Europol elaborated an organised crime threat assessment for 2008 (OCTA 2008), which was adopted at the June session of the Justice and Home Affairs Council. The Slovenian Presidency prepared and adopted the first report on the implementation of the priority tasks of the EU in the fight against organised crime on the basis of OCTA 2007.

In the field of the fight against organised crime and serious cross-border crime, the Slovenian Presidency succeeded in concluding the dossier on Russian organised crime threat assessment (ROCTA). We have ensured a deeper insight into the structure of the problem of organised crime, which in the future will be a good basis for the better identification of priority tasks and, consequently, for the better planning of measures for the fight against organised crime and serious cross-border crime in a given region. Regional threat assessment will also serve as a source for the elaboration of an OCTA for the EU, and thus contribute to its quality.

## **Terrorism: enhancing the security of explosives as a way of preventing access to them**

In the fight against terrorism, Slovenia has taken several decisive steps and presented an action plan on enhancing the security of explosives. This is a fulfilment of the commitment from the declaration adopted by the European Council following the terrorist attacks in Madrid.

The Slovenian Presidency included the draft action plan among the priority dossiers in this field and in three months succeeded in harmonising the text of 48 measures from the fields of the internal market, technical harmonisation, transport, research, detection and police cooperation. The implementation of these measures will contribute significantly to preventing the abuse of explosives and precursors for terrorist attacks.

## **Europol: a qualitative leap forward in the fight against organised crime thanks to better effectiveness in detecting criminal organisations**

Under the Slovenian Presidency, EU interior ministers reached political agreement over the Council's decision to set up a European Police Office (Europol). In accordance with this decision, Europol will be transformed into an EU agency and on 1 January 2010 will start being funded from the Community budget. The new legal basis will enable the establishment of a powerful Europol which will help Member States in the fight against terrorism, organised crime and cross-border crime, and will be capable of responding rapidly to the new threats of organised crime.



## Hidden from view: providing the highest level of security to participants in events



Photo: MNZ RS

*Since the beginning of the Presidency, four events at the ministerial level have been held in Slovenia in the field of Home Affairs alone. The most demanding of them was undoubtedly the Informal Meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers. This was the first ministerial event and was attended by more than 35 delegations and numbered more than 450 participants. The delegations were led by approximately 26 ministers, who all require a high level of security. More than 250 representatives of domestic and foreign media were accredited. This was a real challenge from the logistical and organisational point of view, but the event was carried out to the highest standards without any problems, as many foreign delegations acknowledged. Security also ran without a hitch, with a high level of quality, at all other events connected with Slovenia's Presidency of the EU Council. Moreover, a great deal of work was done in the field of communication. The service responsible for communication with the public provided timely and quality information about events.*



Photo: Milan Tomažin

See you in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia

Ministry of the Interior,  
Ljubljana, 26. June 2008