

Statement made by Janez Potocnik on the accession negotiations (Brussels, 21 December 2001)

Caption: On 21 December 2001, in Brussels, Janez Potocnik, Head of the Slovenian Delegation for accession to the European Union (EU), welcomes the conclusions of the Laeken European Council and expresses his satisfaction with the progress of the negotiations for the accession of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU.

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Statement by dr. Janez Potočnik, Deputy Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Slovenia- Sixteenth Meeting of the Conference on Accession at Deputy Level, Brussels, 21 December 2001

Dear Mr President, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

Let me begin by expressing a pleasure of our delegation to participate at the sixteenth meeting of the Accession Conference at Deputy level, the fourth one during the Belgian presidency. Allow me to express my gratitude to the Commission, Member States and especially to the Presidency which made their utmost efforts to reach all the agreements necessary for today's meeting and for the consecutive fulfilment of the "road map" for the second half of this year.

Slovenia is satisfied with the agreements reached in Laeken last week. We welcome the Laeken declaration on the future of the European Union, simultaneously expressing hope that alternative solutions proposed by the Convention will be adopted on the basis of the principle of the widest possible consensus between the EU Member States and candidate countries. We are convinced that the Convention, which will include three representatives of Slovenia, will complete its task successfully in accordance with timetable and aims for which it was convened.

Having in mind the Accession Process, I especially welcome the determination of the Member States in the Summit's conclusions, by which they confirmed their commitment to its completion and reiterated its irreversibility. We are pleased that Slovenia is named as one of the candidate countries which could be ready for the successful conclusion of the negotiations by the end of 2002 so that they can take part in the European Parliament elections in 2004 as members. Slovenia supports the decision that candidate countries will continue to be assessed on their own merits, in accordance with the principle of differentiation, because we believe that the consideration of these merits is the only possible way for successful negotiations on financial chapters and thus for the conclusion of the accession and enlargement process within the envisaged framework.

Slovenia is pleased that the Laeken summit confirmed that the roadmap drawn up by the Nice European Council remains fully applicable and that the proceedings on the drafting of the accession treaties will begin in the first half of 2002. Following the set timeframes, we expect in accordance with Laeken Conclusions that in the beginning of the next year the Commission will propose common positions on agriculture, regional policy and budgetary chapters based on the present *acquis* and the decisions taken in Berlin.

An important component of negotiations on these three chapters is the flow of funds from and to the EU budget. It is our strategic objective to integrate EU funds into our national funds in a manner that will be consistent with the traditional stability of Slovenia's public finance in general and its national budget in particular. Within this framework and taking into account both the level of development and the structure of the economy, Slovenia expects to be a net recipient of funds from the EU in early years of its membership. Although this objective can be achieved through various combinations of financial flows between Slovenia and the EU, each financial package is associated with a specific set of risks, such as absorption and co-financing capacity or the dynamics when full contribution to the EU budget is to be achieved. These risks can be efficiently managed through a well balanced financial package that will incorporate specific concerns of Slovenia in areas covered by the two principal expenditure policies borne by the EU budget, namely the agricultural policy and the structural funds. Slovenia stands ready to start negotiations on financial aspects of its EU accession early next year.

Regarding the chapter on today's agenda, Slovenia agrees that further negotiations on Chapter 9 - Transport at this stage are not necessary. We are satisfied that the EU in the preparation of Common Position on this chapter considered the situation in Slovenia in the area of transport as well as the fact that our country will be able to apply the entire transport *acquis* on the date of accession. Another reason why we welcome the solutions in this chapter is because we see it as a practical implementation of the "own merits and

differentiation" principle.

Dear President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

May I conclude by saying that today's Conference is a particularly important step forward. With a twenty six (and a half) provisionally closed chapters we are actually entering into the finishing line of the final year of negotiations. As you have noticed we are even already measuring progress in negotiations with only part of the chapter agreed.

And finally, let me wish you all the best in 2002 with words Slovenian negotiators wrote on our Christmas cards: Catch the old dream just to make it new - Negotiating Team believes in it and in you.

Thank you.