

The Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments Bratislava, 26 May 2007

RAISING NATIONAL EUROPEAN AWARENESS

**Speech by Mr. Janez Sušnik,
Speaker of the Slovenian National Council
(Transcript)**

Distinguished President, distinguished Speakers,

Allow me to, just in a few words, share some of my experience in the course of years of my mandate that I experienced in the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia. The National Council of the Republic of Slovenia consists of 40 non-professional members, who are not members and representatives of political parties; that is why it is quite possible for us to try and come closer to the EU in a slightly different way and to bring the EU closer to our citizens.

As a representative of the local interests in the National Council as well, it is one of my tasks to work with my constituency and elsewhere around the country. One of my tasks is also to present the events in a different way and the views that I come across in the course of this and similar conferences within the European Union. Many people are interested in grand topics, such as the future of Europe, the time of reflection, and they want to know what these topics are all about in first place; they are also interested in what is going on behind that closed door in Brussels or Ljubljana, so they need to know, they want to know what the future of the EU will bring; ecologic policy, climate change, and in the rural areas, people are really interested in the future of agricultural policy. There are many people that come across many of these topics on the daily basis; roundtables are a common thing in our country with respect to raising awareness on European issues as far as the citizens of Slovenia are concerned.

These very direct meetings with our people stand for the way we want to work, since we can make a note on the good things that our membership has brought, and maybe people do not even think about that, such as new facilities, greater development of their local area, utilising the resources from the European Union, and general things. With the young and their parents, a pleasant thing to discuss is also the potential of studying abroad, exchange of practices and similar things. At the same time, when they meet with us and meet us as people, they see that the EU is not something distant and that the decisions that are made within the bodies of the European Union come close to them.

Such work has paid in the decision of Slovenia to enter NATO and the EU, and also the last opportunity when Slovenia entered the EU monetary system, which was something that was received in a very good way by our citizens. But anyway, in spite of all that I have said, I believe that our mutual discussion can be very constructive. We also gain ideas for some solutions and our inhabitants on the other hand also gain a new insight into something; in other words, they find it much easier to understand that some compromise is needed sometimes, a solution that maybe is not in our favour, but on the other hand, we can gain in some other areas.

So the National Council over the last 15 years set up different ways of cooperation with the civil society and our citizens. On one hand, this relationship and cooperation has shown in the public and openness of the way we work; on the other hand with some activities, such as organisation of different meetings, conferences, lectures, different public debates; the topics are usually topical and very interesting, prevailing in the area of economy, European Union, finance, regional development and other matters. Such way of working of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia for sure strengthens its role and we are actively striving for our Council to actively participate in monitoring of the development of Slovenian society and European society, in the field of economy, culture, health, and social affairs, and so on and so forth.

That is why I would like to welcome European deputies coming from Slovenia, Slovenian Commissioner, representatives of the delegations of Slovenia in the EU, and delegations of the EU in Slovenia, as well as the representatives of institutions visiting Slovenia; I would wish for such contacts to be even more numerous. In this way, the inhabitants have been introduced to the work of the EU in a better way and by doing so we feel more closely connected to the EU and feel that we are a part of the EU, I assess that with great optimism. And that is why we need to keep striving in the spirit of national EU awareness.

Thank you.