



Eye on Slovenia

Working Meeting of Slovenian and Hungarian Governments

No. 21, 5. November 2007
Free Edition
ISSN: 1854-4924

Publisher: Slovenska tiskovna agencija, Ltd., Ljubljana, Tivolska cesta 50, in cooperation with the Slovenian Foreign Ministry, E-mail: desk@sta.si

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Display Issue No. 21 (05.11.2007) ▼

SLOVENIAN AND HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENTS HOLD MAIDEN WORKING MEETING

The Slovenian and Hungarian governments held on 17 October their maiden working meeting, which confirmed the strong bilateral ties and pointed the way forward to closer cooperation between the countries. The meeting was held on both sides of the border, in the towns of Lendava and Szentgotthard. Officials from the two countries signed 15 bilateral agreements, memoranda and other documents as part of the meeting, agreeing to check on the progress in a year's time.

The session of the cabinets was accompanied by the launch of a Slovenian-Hungarian business council and the laying of a foundation stone for a road connecting two Hungarian villages home to the Slovenian minority. A statue was also unveiled to Protestant preacher György Kulcsar, who lived in the area in the 16th century, printing the region's first three books.

The working meeting was agreed on by Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša and his Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Gyurcsany in Ljubljana in January. The place of the meeting was chosen carefully, marking an area where Slovenians and Hungarians have lived together for centuries. This was the second joint session for the Slovenian government, which met the Croatian government in mid-2005. The Hungarian government on the other hand has held meetings with the Croatian, Austrian and Romanian cabinets.



The Slovenian and Hungarian governments pose for a group photo. (Photo: STA)

MINISTER RUPEL: MEETING A CONFIRMATION OF FRIENDLY TIES

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said the working meeting of the Slovenian and Hungarian governments "speaks of the special intensity and friendliness in relations" between the countries. Slovenia and Hungary, he said, have many common interests in the economy as well as in other fields, including in the environment, while they also work closely in the EU.

"The two countries share views on a range of international topics and foreign policy challenges, while they exchange ideas on the Western Balkans because of their understanding of the issue," said Minister Rupel. He

Hungarian companies have also expressed an interest in taking part in the privatisation of oil company Nafta Lendava and Telekom Slovenije, while Minister Vizjak pointed to the possibilities for joint investment in energy facilities. On the occasion transport ministers Radovan Žerjav and Janos Koka signed a statement of understanding on the construction of the Pragersko-Győr railway section on the Ljubljana-Budapest line.



General manager of Trigranit Lorant Kibedi Varga and the general manager of Holding Slovenske železnice Peter Puhan sign a contract on the construction of the new central railway and bus station in Ljubljana. (Photo: STA)

JOINT SESSION BRINGS PROMISE OF BETTER TIMES FOR MINORITIES

The maiden working meeting of the Slovenian and Hungarian governments took place in a border area inhabited by the Slovenian and Hungarian minorities. Prior to the meeting, prime ministers Janez Janša and Ferenc Gyurcsany met members of the Slovenian and Hungarian minorities on both sides of the border as well as the Hungarian minority representative in the Slovenian parliament Maria Pozsonec. The minority representatives said the meeting was extremely productive and proposed that a follow-up meeting be held in the near future.

Minorities are considered an important link between the two nations. Both countries made a commitment to guarantee special rights to each other's minorities in a 1992 agreement. As Prime Minister Janša said after the session, the governments will strive to implement the recommendations of the 9th session of the Slovenian-Hungarian joint commission regarding minority schooling and other minority issues. His Hungarian counterpart announced that Hungary intended to increase subsidies for minorities in Hungary. He said the Slovenian minority would get three-times the current air time for its radio programme, while financing of bilingual schools would be simplified. "We have to do more in this area," Prime Minister Gyurcsany added.

added that Slovenia would welcome Hungary's input in resolving the future status of Kosovo while Slovenia holds the EU presidency in the first half of 2008.

Minister Rupel said the government planned to hold joint sessions with the governments of all neighbouring countries.



The Slovenian and Hungarian governments hold the first part of their meeting. (Photo: STA)

MEETING OF SLOVENIAN AND HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENTS POINTS WAY TO CLOSER COOPERATION

Slovenia and Hungary have strong and problem-free ties and are also close trade partners. The countries share similar views on all the important issues relating to the EU, which they coordinate in the regional partnership. Slovenia and Hungary are part of a group of nine countries that is due to enter the Schengen border free zone in December. The countries have regular political dialogue, while the meeting of their cabinets pointed the way forward to even closer ties.

The foreign ministers of the two countries, Dimitrij Rupel and Kinga Göncz, signed on the occasion agreements that will allow Slovenian citizens to get visas at the Hungarian trade office in Taipei and the Hungarian Embassy in Almaty. Rupel explained that the working meeting discussed cooperation in diplomacy, where Slovenia is interested in having access to the Hungarian diplomatic network due to its many missions abroad.

Along with several agreements in the economy, the countries also signed a memorandum of understanding in agriculture, an agreement on cross-border cooperation of local and regional authorities, an agreement on the maintenance of war graves, a memorandum of understanding in developing e-government services and a programme of cooperation in health. A memorandum of understanding was also signed between Slovenia's Centre for European Perspective and Hungary's International Centre for Democratic Transition, which Minister Rupel labelled a basis for drawing up joint projects for helping countries of the Western Balkans on their path to the EU.



Prime ministers Ferenc Gyurcsany and Janez Janša laying the foundation stone for a regional road in an area inhabited by the Slovenian minority in Hungary. (Photo: STA)

EU ACTIVITIES OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER

Minister Rupel Chairs Dinner of EU Foreign Ministers

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel chaired on 18 October a working dinner of EU foreign ministers as part of the informal summit in Lisbon. The main topics of the dinner were the Middle East, Myanmar, the decision of Turkey's parliament to approve a military intervention in Iraq and Serbia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Rupel said the dinner "came up with a basis for foreign policy activities during Slovenian presidency".

The EU heads of state and government reached agreement at the summit on the reform treaty for the bloc, a major achievement two and a half years after the EU constitution was rejected in referenda in France and the Netherlands. Slovenian officials believe that the EU has managed to overcome its institutional crisis, while the agreement is a result of the pragmatic policies of the member states. The reform treaty is scheduled to be signed in Lisbon on 13 December, after which the process of ratifying it in the members states will begin. It is expected the treaty will take effect on 1 January 2009.

The signing of the treaty allows Slovenia to take over the helm of the EU without having to worry about its future institutional workings. It will therefore be able to focus on developing EU policies and strengthening the bloc's global role.

The agreement is also important for future EU enlargement. Slovenia is a supporter of enlargement to the Western Balkans and a leading advocate of the countries in the region in their efforts to join the EU. Speaking about Serbia's efforts on the path to the EU, Minister Rupel pointed out that chief prosecutor for war crimes in the former Yugoslavia Carla Del Ponte was not fully satisfied with Belgrade's cooperation with the Hague, but hoped that major steps would be taken by Belgrade in the coming weeks.



Hungarian Foreign Minister Kinga Góncz and Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (Photo: STA)

SLOVENIAN-HUNGARIAN ECONOMIC TIES ON THE RISE, BUT POTENTIAL REMAINS

Economic cooperation was one of the central topics of the working meeting of the Slovenian and Hungarian governments. Trade between the countries, which amounts to more than EUR 1bn a year, has been rising rapidly (figures for this year show a 30% increase). Agreements were signed at the session on linking the countries' electricity networks with a 400-kilowatt power line by 2010 and completing the motorway between them. The two governments also agreed to enhance investments.

Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak said there were many opportunities to improve bilateral economic cooperation. For this purpose the countries established a joint business council. According to Minister Vizjak, there is great potential in investment. On the sidelines of the meeting, the Slovenian rail operator, Holding Slovenske železnice, signed a contract with Hungarian company TriGranit, which is to build a EUR 220m central bus and train station in Ljubljana.



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel and Prime Minister Janez Janša at the EU summit in Lisbon (Photo: STA)

CHRONOLOGY

5 October, Podgorica - The Slovenian Embassy in Podgorica opened a joint application centre for handling EU visa requests by Montenegrin citizens. The opening was attended by Foreign Ministry State Secretary Andrej Šter.

8 October, Ljubljana - Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel met Dutch Minister of European Affairs Frans Timmermans. The discussion focused on Slovenia's plans for the EU presidency.

12 October, Ljubljana - Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel met a visiting delegation of the Committee for External Relations of the European Parliament.

15 October, Luxembourg - Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel took part in the monthly meeting of EU foreign ministers that focused on the EU reform treaty, the situation in the Balkans and the bloc's natural disaster response programme.

18 October, Ljubljana - Foreign Ministry State Secretary Andrej Šter received the delegation of the Development Committee of the European Parliament.

18 October, Lisbon - Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel took part in the informal EU summit. Minister Rupel chaired the dinner of EU foreign ministers as the representatives of the next presiding country.