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## MINISTER RUPEL'S VISIT TO US CONFIRMS CLOSE TIES

Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel paid a three-day working visit to the United States of America from 13 through 15 June. The visit was aimed at bolstering bilateral ties and dialogue, presenting Slovenia's priorities for its spell as EU president in the first half of 2008, and discussing transatlantic topics. Minister Rupel met in Washington with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, as well as several members of the Congress. On the final day of his visit, Rupel headed to New York for talks with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Slovenia's recognition by the US in April 1992 is one of the milestones of Slovenian statehood. In the subsequent years, US support would prove crucial for Slovenia's transition and its efforts to join the EU and NATO. The two countries have enjoyed friendly and problem-free relations throughout. Moreover, they have built a strategic partnership and alliance that is manifested in regular dialogue on political, security and defence issues at all levels. Cooperation is expected to become even more intense when Slovenia holds the EU presidency in the first half of 2008.



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (left) and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (right) during their meeting in Washington. (Photo: BOBO)

## MINISTER RUPEL DISCUSSES EU PRESIDENCY PLANS IN US

The talks held by Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel with US officials in Washington focused on Slovenia's upcoming EU presidency. One of the main topics was the priorities of the presidency, a feature of which will be efforts to strengthen transatlantic ties. US officials voiced interest in Slovenia's priorities related to the European constitutional treaty, the expansion to the Western Balkans and dialogue among civilisations.

In a meeting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Minister Rupel voiced support for future enlargement of the EU. According to him, the area between Greece and



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (right) meets US Congressman Robert Wexler (left). (Photo: BOBO)

## OUTLINE OF 15 YEARS OF US-SLOVENIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

- \* The US recognised Slovenia as an independent state on 7 April 1992.
- \* The countries established diplomatic relations on 11 August 1992.
- \* The US opened its embassy in Slovenia in 1992; current US Ambassador to Slovenia: Thomas Bolling Robertson.
- \* Slovenia opened its embassy in the US in 1992; current Slovenian Ambassador to the US: Samuel Žbogar.
- \* Former Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek met the then US President Bill Clinton in November 1998; Former Prime Minister Drnovšek was received by US President George W. Bush in 2002.
- \* In June 1999 the then US President Bill Clinton visited Slovenia.
- \* Slovenia hosted the first summit between US President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin in June 2001.
- \* In July 2006 Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša paid an official visit to the US, during which he met US President George W. Bush.

## SLOVENIA AND US ENGAGED IN CLOSE AND DIVERSE COOPERATION

Bilateral relations between Slovenia and the US are excellent and the two countries have no open issues. Washington supported Slovenia's efforts to join NATO and has expressed appreciation for the presence of Slovenian military instructors in Iraq and the presence of Slovenian peace-keepers in the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The US has also praised Slovenian efforts in promoting stability and development in Southeast Europe, particularly in Kosovo.

Slovenia's chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) prompted many contacts between Slovenian and US officials in 2005. The countries will in the future also be working together within the framework of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as Slovenia

Slovenia needs to be turned into a region of countries belonging to the EU and NATO. He assured Secretary Rice that Slovenia would play a meaningful role in this respect. He pointed to the work of the Centre for European Perspective, which was established by Slovenia in May 2006 to help countries in the region in their efforts to join Euroatlantic organisations. He also outlined plans for a conference on »European Union in 2020: Enlarging and Integrating«, to be held by the Bled Strategic Forum at the end of August.

Minister Rupel invited Secretary Rice to visit Slovenia as part of the EU-US summit that is to take place during the country's presidency. He announced an official invitation to the summit would be issued to US President George W. Bush in the near future. While the date of the summit is yet to be determined, Minister Rupel said it would likely take place in April or June of 2008. The EU-US summit was also a topic of Minister Rupel's meeting with National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley. Moreover, Minister Rupel outlined the priorities of Slovenia's EU presidency in a debate held at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies featuring US officials and representatives of various think-tanks.



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (left) and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (right) during their meeting in Washington. (Photo: BOBO)

### **MINISTER RUPEL AND SECRETARY RICE DISCUSS INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**

US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice and Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel also discussed international topics at their meeting in Washington. Their talks revolved around the future of Kosovo, energy security and environmental protection - matters that are expected to be on the agenda as Slovenia presides over the EU.

Regarding Kosovo, Minister Rupel urged patience in deciding on the future status of Kosovo in the UN Security Council. He said it was important not to cause new instability in the region. He believes the issue needs to be solved quickly enough, but without unnecessarily complicating matters with those who have reservations. Following the meeting, Minister Rupel said the US administration was very inclined to a quick implementation of the plan drawn up by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari, which also enjoys the backing of the EU.

Discussing energy security, Minister Rupel and Secretary Rice exchanged views on the importance of the Caspian Basin and the Caucasus for satisfying Europe's energy needs. Minister Rupel also used the opportunity to praise the US stance on global warming presented at the recent G8 summit in Germany as a step forward. US plans for a missile defence shield in Europe were not a topic of the talks, although Minister Rupel voiced a desire for good EU-Russia relations following the meeting with Secretary Rice.

recently received an invitation to join the organisation pending the conclusion of membership talks. Slovenia is the only EU newcomer to be a member of the US Visa Waiver Programme, allowing its citizens to enter the US without a visa. The US State Department recently placed Slovenia in the top group of countries in the fight against human trafficking. Relations between the countries are expected to be bolstered by Slovenia's upcoming stint as EU president.

### **International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance**

The countries have also worked closely in the framework of the Slovenia-run International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF). This humanitarian organisation, established by the Slovenian government in 1998, has helped clear more than 70 million square metres of mine-laden land in SE Europe. The US is the biggest donor to the ITF, contributing over 70 million euros so far.

Slovenian Ambassador Samuel Žbogar decided in February to launch a fund-raising campaign that would see him take part in marathons to promote the ITF and collect funds for its work. His goal is to raise 38,000 dollars by October for the rehabilitation of six Bosnian children injured by mines. The ambassador has so far managed to raise 35,000 dollars, while the US State Department has announced it would double all funds of up to 25,000 dollars.

### **US an Important Trade Partner for Slovenia**

The US is an important trade partner for Slovenia, although both sides believe there is plenty of room for strengthening business cooperation. Trade between the countries amounted to 570 million dollars in 2006, which is a 30% rise over 2005. Slovenian exports, which include pharmaceuticals, furniture, home appliances and steel and aluminium materials, accounted for two-thirds of the exchange. Investment activity between the countries is relatively modest. Slovenian companies present on the US market include Krka, Gorenje, Hermes Softlab, Tomos, Kompas, Iskra Avtoelektrika, Impol and Unior.

### **THE SLOVENIAN COMMUNITY IN THE US**

American Slovenians are credited for playing an important role in getting the US administration led by President George H. Bush to recognise Slovenia following its independence. The presence of Slovenian emigrants in the US is closely linked to the city of Cleveland in the US state of Ohio. The city is home to 80,000 people of Slovenian descent and is considered to be the biggest Slovenian city outside of Slovenia. American Slovenians are associated in a number of organisations, which promote Slovenian culture and ethnic awareness in the US.

Slovenian emigrants and their descendants have adjusted well to the American way of life and many of them have become successful businessmen, scientists, artists and politicians. Three Slovenian senators – George Voinovich, Tom Harkin and Amy Klobuchar – currently serve in the US Senate, while Congressman James Oberstar is one of the longest serving members of the House of Representatives. Voinovich, Harkin and Oberstar have all been honoured with the Golden Order of Freedom for their role in securing Slovenian international recognition and promoting Slovenian-US ties. Slovenia was also recently paid a visit by Undersecretary of the US Air Force Ronald Segal, a

## MINISTER RUPEL MEETS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS DURING VISIT

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel met several members of the US Congress, including some of Slovenian origin, during his stay in Washington. Slovenia's EU presidency topped the meeting with Congressman Robert Wexler (D-Florida), who is the chairman of the Europe Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Minister Rupel said that many important issues were facing the EU and the US in the coming year and expressed his hope for a united stance on important issues.

Minister Rupel met James Oberstar, Democratic Minnesota congressman of Slovenian descent, and took part in a luncheon with Senator George Voinovich (R-Ohio) and Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), both of whom also have Slovenian roots. He also took part in a dinner event hosted by Slovenian Ambassador to the US Samuel Žbogar to mark the 15th anniversary of Slovenia's recognition by the US, which was attended by representatives of the US administration and American Slovenians. Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota), the third member of the Senate with Slovenian roots, was among those present.

retired US astronaut, who in 1994 became the first person of Slovenian origin to fly to space aboard the Shuttle Discovery.



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (left) and Senator of Slovenian origin James Oberstar (right) embrace at the outset of their meeting. (Photo: BOBO)