ADDRESS
OF
H.E. MR KARL ERJAVEC
AT THE TRIESTE WESTERN BALKANS SUMMIT

Trieste, 12 July 2017

I would like to express my appreciation to minister Alfano for hosting us here in Trieste – a city which also has a very special meaning for us, Slovenes.

I will try to be brief, since a lot has already been said, and I believe the time has come to implement what we have agreed in the last couple of years.

I have been involved with the Berlin process from the very beginning. Initially, the process stemmed from an honest idea on how to reconnect infrastructural corridors within the EU with those of the region and boost regional economy.

As with all honest and good ideas, it started to grow, and more substance and relevant topics were added to our discussions.
In Trieste today, we can safely say that the Berlin process has become an almost avant-garde and inclusive platform, where we do not merely discuss issues, but take important decisions. Even more importantly, we give impetus to our discussions regarding enlargement in the framework of the EU.

Enlargement needs to be discussed. In this context, allow me to note that, at the last meeting of foreign ministers of the Brdo Brijuni process, which I co-hosted with my Croatian counterpart on 3 (third) June, the ministers agreed that the enlargement process needs new dynamism. We were of the opinion that enlargement should become an important topic in discussions on the future of Europe, simply because it is part of the future of the Union.

If the EU is to realise all its potential, it must start from within Europe itself. We have talked about this many times, but it's worth repeating – the region of Western Balkans is a part of Europe, and the sooner it becomes a part of the EU, the better for the Union and the region. But before we come to this point, some things need to happen – on the part of the Western Balkans - and also on the part of the EU.
To quote the joint letter of the Brdo-Brijuni ministers: "While not lowering or changing the existing conditions, we would like to propose examining ways to adapt the methodology and possible steps within the enlargement process in order to enhance its efficiency and the result-based approach". This is especially important for the areas covered by chapters 23 and 24.

Why is this important? You just have to look on the margins of today's Summit. We have with us a representative of the youth forum and a representative of the civil society forum. They have been discussing the same things, but from a different angle. And their ideas are worth listening to.

With the rule of law and strong institutions come hope and prospects. With prospects come jobs and economic recovery.

The Slovenian initiative ‘Positive agenda for the youth of the Western Balkans’ is intended precisely for this purpose – to close the gap between reality and the much needed prospects for young people in the region. And I'm glad that RYCO (rajkOB) and other initiatives in this framework will make a difference.
I would especially like to note the work being done by the Joint Scientific Conference. Education is a key instrument for transforming societies and instilling values in young people.

When discussing economic recovery, it is vital to strategically rethink additional possibilities for closing the economic and developmental gap between the EU member states and the region.

The Berlin process gave us some answers and options; for others we have to look at existing EU mechanisms.

When discussing the future of Europe, we are actually discussing our common challenges. As recent years have shown, issues can no longer be dealt with in isolation. The world is becoming small, Europe even smaller. Everything is interconnected, especially our security challenges.
The fight against terrorism is a long-term battle, which we cannot win in one day. But we can win it together. And the approach needs to be inclusive. This is why Slovenia launched the idea of Integrated Security Governance in the region. It rests on three pillars, which are interconnected and must be properly coordinated in order to be successful – the fight against organised crime, the fight against terrorism and effective border control.

When discussing the future, we must also consider the issue of migration. This question concerns not only the security of our borders, but also our ability to find inclusive answers. In this way, we can deal with the challenge in a coordinated and democratic manner, respecting the human rights and values upon which Europe was built.

Let me return briefly to the rule of law which I already mentioned. In this regard, I cannot completely ignore the question of respect for international law. In this field, EU Member States have always set the standard – not only for the Western Balkan countries, but the rest of the world, for all democracies. I firmly believe that respect for the obligations arising from international treaties, decisions of international courts and tribunals and other sources of international law is the very foundation of the European Union.
To conclude – I value our discussions and our meetings. They are invaluable also in terms of the possibilities they offer for public communication. This is one of the areas in which we must all invest additional energy. Promoting and raising the profile of our activities must be joint tasks, ensured and actively supported by our colleagues in the region.

Thank you!