

MILAN PREDAN: EU HAS TO STRENGTHEN ITS INFLUENCE TO HIS ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD

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MILAN PREDAN is a professional diplomat with journalistic background. Before entering the Slovenian foreign service he was for 10 years chief editor of the second largest Slovenian daily newspaper Večer. After serving as diplomat in Italy he returned to the newspaper and took over the position of the general manager of the company. As of the beginning of this year he is heading the office of the Slovenian EU presidency in Sofia.

You may read the full story in the [Analyses section of the website of the initiative "Now-interacting with the European Parliament!"](#)

Which are the key priorities of the Slovenian presidency of the EU that have been already completed? Which are the main obstacles?

"We have defined four priorities of our presidency: the support for the Western Balkans in approaching the EU, support for the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty, pushing forward the EU climate change and energy package and work on the new phase of the renewed Lisbon strategy. As you know none of these priorities could be completed because everything is in the process and will be in the process for some time. But I think so far, after four months of the presidency, Slovenia can be quite satisfied with some of the results which were already achieved. We had to deal with a very tough issue of Kosovo and it is not just my belief but rather a common opinion that Slovenia has approached this problem in a proper way. The recognition of the independence of Kosovo might not be the best solution but it was the best among the bad solutions. There was none that could satisfy both sides, Serbs and Kosovars, and a decision had to be taken. Nobody would gain and all sides would lose if the status quo would continue. In this respect, I believe the Slovenian presidency has achieved a maximum that could be achieved. With regards to the other Western Balkan countries, Slovenia is very active in bringing the Thessaloniki agenda, adopted during the Greek presidency in 2003, which has promised to these countries the future EU membership, back into the focus of attention of the EU. Since Slovenia was once a part of the former Yugoslavia and being the first ex-Yugoslav republic to join the EU, it is understandable that we consider it even our moral obligation as the presidency to push forward the European perspective of the Western Balkans. I believe that in this respect progress was made as well. Serbia has signed the Cooperation-Association Agreement which only some weeks ago seemed unfeasible, Bosnia and Herzegovina finally adopted the police reform and opened the possibility to sign SAP as well, Montenegro is making good progress towards the EU membership and negotiations for visa liberalisation for all WB countries are advancing.

As regards the climate change and energy package, this is one area we could be particularly satisfied

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with. With the last European Council in the end of March the EU member countries agreed on some roadmap how to reach consensus on this package. It is not an easy issue because everybody is certainly in favour of decreasing greenhouse gases and increasing the use of renewable energy but it has impacts on the economy. The decision made during our presidency was that the basic principles how to achieve the ambitious environmental goals without decreasing the competitiveness of the European economy should be reached by the end of 2008 in order to enable the European Parliament to approve the package before the end of its mandate in next summer. I think this is quite an achievement. As far as the Lisbon Strategy is concerned the new three years' phase of the implementation of the renewed Lisbon Strategy was launched. We believe that this is again something the Slovenian presidency can be satisfied with. Moreover, it has to be considered that the presidency does not work only on those big issues that attract the attention of the media but on many less attractive and as well demanding "smaller" and sometimes very technical issues in many different areas. The echoes from Brussels prove that in this respect Slovenia is as well doing a good job.

The EU did not reach a common position on Kosovo independence. How does Slovenia plan to deal with this problem on the national, regional and European level?

I would not agree with you that the EU has not reached a common position. The EU countries have approached the new reality in Kosovo and have agreed that they will decide upon their relations with Kosovo according to their national interests and according to the international law and they have agreed on sending the EU civil mission to Kosovo. So it means that the EU did not split on this issue. It is true that not all EU countries have recognised the independence of Kosovo and that some of them announced that they are not going to do so. However, I did not understand their position as they will never do it but that they intend to wait and see how things in Kosovo will develop, particularly in relation to the Serbian minority. What was achieved as regards this issue was probably the maximum that could be achieved. After all, the EU cannot decide about the recognition of Kosovo on behalf of the member states. It is a sovereign decision of each country.

What about Turkey?

Slovenia supports the EU accession of Turkey but the focus of our presidency is on the countries of former Yugoslavia - Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro -, as well on Albania. Previously, I did not mention Macedonia. We have made efforts to help them in getting some agreement with Greece in the dispute about the name, unfortunately so far it did not happen. This is a problem we have to work on and hopefully solution will be found during our presidency.

Slovenia has been very active in the process of persuading member states to approve the Lisbon Treaty. How would you summarise your role in the process of the ratification? How do you expect the Lisbon Treaty to be approved by the end of the year?

So far 11 countries have ratified the Treaty and the most what the presidency could do was to ratify the Treaty among the first. It's again a sovereign decision of each member country. However, it is an obligatory topic in our bilateral talks with the countries which are in the process of ratifying. We expect that the Treaty will be ratified by all member states by the end of the year and we would be satisfied if the majority of the countries would take this decision during our presidency. Now, there will be a referendum in Ireland but our presidency is quite optimistic that the Irish people will approve the Treaty. I believe the document is a good compromise between the very - maybe too - ambitious goals of the EU Constitution and the need that the EU somehow consolidates its institutions. I believe that most of the

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countries, most of the national parliaments have recognized this advantage.

France has already pointed her key priorities during the upcoming presidency. How do you cooperate with your French colleagues and would you comment some of these priorities - for example the Mediterranean Union and the EU army?

Most of the issues that we are dealing with will have to be continued by the French presidency. No distinct line can be drawn between the two presidencies and they have to work together. France has set its own priorities; however, as the Slovenian presidency does they will as well depend on other member states in implementing those priorities. As regards to some of the topics that you have mentioned, you know there were different opinions within the EU on the issue of the Mediterranean Union. The question on the future directions of the European neighborhood policy - how to achieve a balanced approach between the Eastern and Mediterranean dimension of this policy - was put forward. By including all the EU countries in this process a reasonable solution was found. Moreover, it is beneficial for the EU that each presidency defines some of the priorities according to its own preferences.

For Slovenia it was the Western Balkans, for France it's the southern Mediterranean. The EU has to strengthen its influence to his entire neighborhood. As regards to the EU army it is certainly an intriguing project which will provoke a lot of debate in the forthcoming months. I wish our French friends a lot of success in persuading the member countries that establishing the EU army would be a good idea.

The interview was taken on April 22, 2008.