

(Thanks)

On behalf of my country, I thank all those who have been helping refugees and migrants with great compassion and in various ways, and maintaining public order and security.

Their actions have been well considered and brave. Human dignity has been their first priority. In these difficult times, they have helped Slovenian society and the state to maintain a high standard of humanity and care. This has made us proud and has consolidated us in our noble human virtues. At such decisive historic moments, this is vital for the national character and development.

(The need for a national plan for transitional measures)

I, too, recognise the specific nature and seriousness of this situation. I fully understand our common responsibility. I believe that Slovenian policy-makers have a duty to agree on a course of action. For the purpose of this opinion and discussion, I will call this agreement the national plan for transitional measures to resolve the refugee and migration crisis. This should be a result of joint efforts and enjoy the widest possible political support.

What I ask is that you accept this opinion as my contribution to this daunting task. This plan is needed, because there is no comprehensive common European policy. Slovenia will resolutely and wholeheartedly endeavour for the prompt adoption and implementation of such a policy. However, in the meantime, Slovenia has the duty to take, at its own discretion, all measures necessary to ensure that refugees and migrants are treated humanely and to maintain public order and security. These are political, legal and moral duties.

The need for a national plan is based on the justified expectation that the refugee and migration crisis will not abate. Most of the current measures are provisional and unsustainable in the long run.

(Restoring order on state borders)

The main objective of the plan for transitional measures is to restore order on the state borders. This is the duty and right of Slovenia as a sovereign country. The competent state authorities should restore this order within a reasonable time and in a proportionate manner.

Slovenia needs to calculate the approximate maximum number of refugees and migrants for whom it will be able to provide long-term accommodation and care. This is an unenviable but inevitable task. The approximate number of refugees and migrants who would receive long-term accommodation is a decisive factor in introducing stricter border control measures. In determining the maximum number of refugees and migrants, we should make allowances for the difference between asylum seekers and migrants. The latter in particular are not likely to favour long-term accommodation in Slovenia, as they would be staying here against their will and expectations. Regardless of the differences in their formal status, we should bear in mind our duty to help our fellow humans as they go through this dreadful ordeal.

(The guiding principle of the transitional policy)

The guiding principle of Slovenia's transitional migration policy should be to ensure that the daily number of refugees and migrants on our territory does not significantly exceed the

maximum number of refugees and migrants for whom Slovenia is able to provide long-term accommodation and care.

Special attention must be devoted to the high probability of considerably tightened control on the Slovenian-Austrian border. Since the onset of the refugee and migration crisis, ensuring the smooth movement of migrants on our northern border has been critical.

If we have reason to believe that the number of refugees and migrants crossing the Slovenian-Austrian border will be significantly reduced, Slovenia will have to tighten control on its border with Croatia, which is also the external Schengen border. Otherwise, Slovenia risks ending up with much more refugees and migrants than we are able to properly accommodate for an extended period.

(The risk of becoming a "pocket")

In such circumstances, any hesitation would be irresponsible. Slovenia could become a kind of pocket in which far too many refugees and migrants are seeking refuge or remain. In this case, due to limited humanitarian capacities, discontent among refugees and migrants and public disquiet could increase, and our authorities would be overwhelmed and unable to handle the situation. The humanitarian crisis would thus escalate into a security one. It is our duty to prevent this.

(The need to increase funding for the Police and Armed Forces)

In this regard, we must bear in mind that in order to allow the authorities to tackle the crisis efficiently, more funds must be channelled to the Slovenian Police, Armed Forces and Civil Protection. Insufficient funding is also the reason why, in the past two years, as the commander-in-chief, I assessed the state of preparedness of the Slovenian Armed Forces as sub-standard.

We cannot have high expectations of the Slovenian Police and Armed Forces while failing to allocate them sufficient funding. Given the current situation, I urge you to increase funding for Slovenia's security pillars. I see this as an indispensable part of the national plan for transitional measures.

(Cooperation between state and local authorities)

Another important part of the national plan is constructive cooperation between state and local authorities. The national plan should provide for all forms of cooperation, so as to increase trust between the two levels of power. Only in this way – and by keeping the public informed – can we expect citizens to empathise with refugees and migrants and to support, understand and trust the authorities.

(Active diplomacy)

For transitional measures – which will apply until the adoption and implementation of a common European migration policy – sincere, close and effective cooperation, particularly with neighbouring countries, the participants of the Western Balkan Route mini-summit, EU institutions and the UN, will be essential.

Given the current circumstances and the significance of our northern and southern borders for a transitional solution to the refugee and migration crisis, all-round cooperation with our neighbours, namely Croatia and Austria, is vital. We must work towards enhancing mutual trust, particularly with Croatia, in case Slovenia decides to tighten control measures on the southern border.

(National interest of a strategic nature)

Our transitional measures during the refugee and migration crisis must also reflect our strategic interest in ensuring that Slovenia remains at the heart of the integrated EU. Every major step that we plan, adopt and implement must be weighed against this strategic criterion. Under no circumstances can the border of the heart of the EU shift from our southern border to the Karavanke. This is a national interest of a strategic nature.

(Shaping common European policy)

Today, we are discussing the urgency of a national plan for transitional measures mainly due to the absence of a common European policy on the current refugee and migration crisis. Our most immediate interest is to actively work towards its prompt adoption and implementation. Here, I would like to stress that our vital interest is to strengthen the political, economic and social dimensions of this union and to promote its enlargement. As regards the ongoing crisis and any other major issues concerning the present and future of the European Union, Slovenia will endeavour to strengthen, not weaken, the Union.

(Peaceful resolution of disputes)

In my view, in light of the current refugee and migration crisis, the European Union has two main tasks. Firstly, it must devise a set of immediate and long-term measures to effectively distribute the burden on the basis of solidarity and to make better preparations for another wave. Secondly, it must take a more active role in seeking political solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa.

I believe that Slovenia can agree to a common foreign and security policy that prioritises the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the need for a UN mandate in the event of international military action. Slovenia supports all initiatives to define common international political objectives in the event of engagement in crisis areas around the world.

(Responsibility for cooperation and security in the Western Balkans)

In the context of various formal and informal multilateral initiatives, the European Union and NATO, Slovenia strives for a better understanding and effective resolution of complex issues in the Western Balkans. Slovenia understands the increased sensitivity concerning the refugee and migration crisis.

To respond to certain expectations of the international public, as a co-founder and leader of the informal Brdo-Brijuni Process, I take this opportunity to call for an emergency conference on the refugee crisis. In this regard, I would like to inform you that in early September, my Croatian counterpart, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, and I invited the Vice-President of the United States, Joseph Biden, to the coming summit, which will be devoted primarily to

security issues. Preparations for this informal Brdo-Brijuni Process summit are being made accordingly. Although the refugee crisis will not be at the centre of attention, it will be impossible to avoid, for obvious reasons.

It is important for Slovenia that the EU's efforts to resolve the refugee crisis along the Balkan route are not limited to countries along the route from Greece to Slovenia, but also include at least Austria and Germany.

(Slovenia: EU and NATO member state)

Slovenia is a member of the EU and NATO, and with regard to all potential new groupings, it is necessary that it remain, symbolically and actually, in a milieu which best suits its political and security orientations. Slovenia's engagement in this initiative – and in all other initiatives that concern processes of reconciliation, peace, peaceful coexistence and the resolution of open issues between the countries of the former SFRY – must reflect its membership of the European Union and NATO.

(Inadmissible hate speech)

The ongoing refugee and migration crisis must be discussed critically and democratically. The sensitive character of the issue at hand is no reason to deny each other the right to hold different opinions. And we should all be careful to avoid positions that could be misinterpreted as intolerant and degrading. No one is immune to hate speech, so we should all do our best to avoid it.

(Together)

Despite the complexity of the issue, I am confident that, with sincere efforts, both Slovenia and the European Union will reach the necessary agreement on effective measures. It seems that this crisis might have a more profound effect on our modern society than initially expected. This has compelled us to introduce transitional measures at both the national and EU levels in order to find a strategic solution in a reasonable time.

We find ourselves at a point when the need to treat refugees and migrants humanely, as well as maintain order and security, dictates rapid, well-considered and decisive steps. No one knows, and no one can know, how the current refugee and migration crisis will evolve. However, our differences of opinion are the very reason why we should join forces and devise a joint national and European policy in a way that makes us proud of our actions and serves as a source of inspiration for future generations and other emerging challenges.