



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE

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Press release on the opening of the international conference "Intercultural Dialogue as the Fundamental Value of the EU"

A two-day international conference on intercultural dialogue organised in Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana, by the European Commission and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia in collaboration with the University of Primorska, was opened today with speeches by the Slovenian Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti, European Commissioners Jan Figel' and Janez Potočnik, and the Ambassador of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, Marko Peljhan. The opening event of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the organisation of which was entrusted to Slovenia as the presiding country of the EU Council, will be concluded tomorrow at an evening ceremony. Speakers at that time will be the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Danilo Türk; the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering; the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša; and the philosopher Edvard Kovač.

The purpose of the conference is to present intercultural dialogue as a precondition for establishing a diversified yet tolerant society, enriched by its diversity, and to illustrate cooperation between different cultures and national identities, between the population's majorities and minorities, with examples of good practice, which will be presented within the framework of certain satellite activities of the conference.

In his opening speech, Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti emphasised that Slovenia's objective during its Presidency of the EU Council is to evoke and give meaning to the positive dimension of Europe's historical interlinkage. He pointed to respect for each nation's language as a basis for co-existence between different nations and cultures, and further presented the programme of the conference, which is intended to signify a new hope that intercultural dialogue may evoke the creative spirit of Europe, thus ensuring the survival of the European Union, as well as the preservation of each individual national and minority culture and the consolidation of common values for mutual growth and prosperity.

In his opening address Jan Figel', the European Commissioner for Education, Culture and Youth, congratulated Slovenia for opening the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and thanked the Slovenian authorities for nominating Mr Marko Peljhan, an intercultural innovator who will help present intercultural dialogue to the public, as Ambassador of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Among the activities of the European Commission in 2008, he mentioned the Slovenian national project dedicated to intercultural dialogue in schools, since youth in particular need to develop intercultural skills from childhood in order to be able to effectively adjust to the changing world and to benefit from the advantages of European cultural diversity. He pointed out that we want to go beyond multicultural societies where different cultures simply exist side by side, to surpass mere tolerance and to achieve instead a real intercultural environment. He

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further pointed out that the year will not only include individual projects, but that he will make intercultural dialogue a priority of all policies within his competence. He particularly stressed the key role of civil society in the endeavours to reach a large number of people with the activities this year. In the long-term perspective, intercultural dialogue is essential for every individual and state, as well as for the European Union as a whole. Commissioner Figel' further appealed that we set the elimination of divisions between people as our common goal in 2008, and that we not only exist but also live together.

For further information please contact Matej Zavrl, spokesperson for the Ministry of Culture.