

JURI – Speech, 21. 1. 2008, Presentation in the European Parliament

Andrej Vizjak, Minister of the Economy

Dear Chair Mr. Gargani, dear members of the committee, thank you for the invitation and for the opportunity to present the Work Programme and the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency in the area of competitiveness and the internal market.

The Legal Affairs Committee plays an essential role in the legislative process on a number of internal market files. The Slovenian Presidency intends to work closely and constructively with the European Parliament on co-decision files during the months to come with the aim to prepare the ground for smooth negotiations and rapid agreements on priority files.

Before explaining our views on individual files, which are of particular interest to you Committee, I wish to make a few remarks on the overall priorities of the Slovenian Presidency in the broader context of competitiveness and the internal market:

At the centre of our attention will be the re-launched Lisbon Strategy which so far has made important contributions to growth and employment and which now enters a second cycle with new challenges and opportunities for the EU in the globalized economy. Building on what has been achieved until now it is important not only to maintain momentum but also to speed up the reform process - at Community level as well as in the Member States. The European Council in March will take stock of where we stand and, most likely, give political guidance for the continued implementation of the reform agenda. In this context, an effective follow-up to the Commission's Single Market Review will play an important role together with other policy initiatives and measures which aim at further improving the business environment in Europe, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, and to strengthen the innovative capacity of the European economy. The Slovenian Presidency is fully committed to these goals and will do its very best to take the reform programme forward.

I would like to point out the important role of the Competitiveness Council, which will meet twice during the current Presidency, on 25-26 February and on 29-30 May. In addition, there will be an informal meeting of Ministers and Commissioners in charge of competitiveness in Slovenia in April. These meetings will deal with a broad range of issues related to the internal market, industry and research - the three main areas of the integrated competitiveness agenda.

On legislative files we will seek support in the Council for balanced solutions which can facilitate early agreements between our two Institutions, avoiding - if possible - lengthy conciliation procedures. The positive experiences of preceding Presidencies in this regard are encouraging.

I will turn now to some particularly important subject areas and legislative files:

1. Intellectual Property Rights

I would like to stress the close link between an effective legal framework for the protection of intellectual property rights and competitiveness. In this context let me underline the priority discussion on the European Patent regulation. The Council has been fully informed by the calls of the European Parliament and industry that the strengthened and improved European Patent system is very important for competitiveness and growth of the European economy.

A discussion at experts' level in the Council in 2007 showed a positive atmosphere and encourages the Slovenian Presidency to intensify the efforts made by the German and Portuguese Presidencies. Therefore we will seek for agreement on European Patent Litigation System and Community patent.

The Council by this confirms the political obligation that after the entirely political agreement on the Community Patent will be reached we will consult the European Parliament again.

I would like to point out also the legal protection of designs ("the Spare parts Directive"). The Council has been following this important discussion in the Parliament with great interest. The Slovenian Presidency will shortly inform the Member States with the opinion of the European Parliament and convene a meeting of the competent Council Working Party to explore the possibilities to reach agreement in the Council and the European Parliament.

2. Company Law

I would like to stress the importance which the Council attaches to an effective, well-functioning legal framework in the EU for companies. The European efficiency depends on its companies therefore the legal framework has to be able to constantly improve business competitiveness.

Let me recall that the Council has already taken a clear stance in support of simplification of the existing Community legislation as a means to reduce the administrative burdens for companies, especially SMEs. In its conclusions the Council gave a clear response to the Commission's Communication on the subject of simplification in the areas of company law and gave its support to remove unnecessary administrative burdens. The Council expects from the Commission to consider presenting additional proposals with this objective in mind already in the year 2008.

The Council awaits with great interest the outcome of the deliberations in Parliament on the Commission's Communication and will continue to cooperate closely with Parliament in the area of simplifying and modernizing the Community legal framework in the area of company law in the area of company law, accounting and auditing on the basis of future Commission proposals.

I would like to give a full support of the Slovene Presidency for proposing the European Statute of private company at the earliest convenience. This proposal enjoys also your full support and attention.

In this context I would like to thank Parliament for the excellent cooperation and for the swift agreement which was reached last year between our two Institutions on the alignment with the new comitology procedure. This augurs well for the future.

The Slovenian Presidency will do its best to reach an equally swift agreement with the European Parliament on the next package of similar measures in line with the principles already agreed upon by the three Institutions.

3. Concluding remarks

I would like to assure the Committee, again, of the Slovenian Presidency's full commitment to a close dialogue and cooperation with the European Parliament and with the Legal Affairs Committee during the months to come with a view to achieving as much progress as possible on relevant files, building on the since long well established cooperation between the Committee and the Council.