



President of the Republic of Slovenia

**NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR**

**Speech of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar  
at the Court of Justice of EU**

Luxembourg, 26 October 2023

Check against delivery.

*Dear president of the Court of Justice of the EU Koen Lenaerts,  
Dear honourable judges of the Court  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

*I'm honoured to stand before you today as the President of the Republic of Slovenia to celebrate two things that are dear to my heart - the rule of law and art.*

*I am particularly delighted to speak in a country that holds a special place in the heart of Europe - Luxembourg. As a founding member of the European Community and the seat of the Court of Justice of the EU, Luxembourg has been at the forefront of European integration since the very beginning and embodies the essence of a profoundly European nation.*

*To speak about rule of law and art is very relevant in these challenging times.*

*We are confronted with a multifaceted crisis that is testing the very foundations upon which our Union was built. From wars at our borders, the raise of AI, the raise of populism and simplism, that is to offer simple answers for complex problem, to the challenges facing with the biggest challenge of our time - the climate change and its consequences.*

*The ongoing war in Ukraine and armed conflict in the Middle East serve as a stark reminder of the fragility of peace and security in our region and further.*

*The freedoms we enjoy today are not self - evident and we need to safeguard and defend the principles and fundamental values that underpin European Union.*

*These values, the supremacy of the rule of law, respect for human rights, solidarity, are not mere abstractions; they are the lifeblood of our shared identity as Europeans. The erosion of*

*these values in any corner of our Union threatens the integrity of the entire project. It is our responsibility to safeguard them.*

*And primarily to safeguard the rule of law, the supremacy of the EU law and the authority of the Court of Justice.*

*Full and timely implementations of the Court's judgements is the very basis of the rule of law and absolute obligation of the member states. Slovenia respects the efforts of judges and the Court's president Lenaerts to preserve the excellence and expertise, the integrity and authority of this crucial EU institution.*

*We see great value in the EU Rule of Law Mechanism and in the Rule of Law annual reporting.*

*The challenges facing the European Union in the time of war in Ukraine and evolving armed conflict in the Middle East are also the challenges on how to preserve some of the fundamental achievements of the EU - one of them being the principle of the open borders of the Schengen regime.*

*The Agreement that bears its name after the Luxembourg village is just now facing some difficulties, when more and more countries are, while addressing legitimate security concerns, suspending the Schengen regime.*

*I strongly believe in the fundamental principle of opened borders - my first act as president was to lift the border checks at the Slovenian - Croatian border - and I do hope that these new policies are really only just temporary measures.*

*The Schengen regime is one of the cornerstones of the EU integration and promotes openness and cooperation among the EU states.*

*The European Union's commitment to the rule of law, human rights and the humanitarian law must extend also beyond our borders.*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*for 10 years I served as Slovenia's Information Commissioner, and I was actively participating in the process of drafting the General Data Protection Regulation. The GDPR was a landmark legislation that empowered citizens to gain control over their data.*

*The GDPR has been a decisive step in shaping the global standard of safe regulation of data flows and an important component of EU privacy and human rights law.*

*Today, as president, I'm following, as much as my time allows, the debates on how the new and emerging digital technologies, most notably the AI, will affect the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and national bills of rights.*

*The existing AI systems raise real concerns about bias, privacy and intellectual property rights. What worries me is that decision-making algorithms could be using biased data.*

*AI is being used for illegal activities, for illegal surveillance or in armed conflicts, or for propagating misinformation and disinformation online. The latter is even more relevant, since next year a series of key elections are scheduled to take place, including the US, UK, the EU, India and Mexico.*

*The international community must focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the implications of AI in all spheres of life. From economy to education, from deciding who gets a loan to writing essays.*

*In Slovenia, we believe the responsible human and human-rights-centred development of AI technologies is paramount. We must adhere to ethical principles that prioritize transparency, fairness and as stressed - the protection of human rights. The EU AI act, which is being discussed in the EU institutions, aims to be the world's first comprehensive AI law.*

*AI will most likely reshape the balance in society, between states and the companies driving these new technologies and I do welcome the exchange of views and exchange of expertise and opinions on these challenging questions.*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*the relation between law and art might not be obvious to the uninitiated, but we know that one of the marks of a good lawyer is eloquence.*

*It is then no surprise that so many lawyers are also writers. The most respected Slovenian poet France Prešeren, the author of the lyrics of our national anthem, was a lawyer. Many of the Slovenian writers were – and still are – attorneys, judges and notaries. It is no wonder that several lawyers are connoisseurs of art.*

*Public spaces should be adorned by art, but rarely is it of such excellence as can be seen here, in the Court of Justice of the European Union. In part since all the countries are striving to be represented with the best they can offer, but to large extent also due to the close involvement of the judges of the Court and careful selection process. I would like to thank the three judges from Slovenia, dr. Marko Ilešič, dr. Maja Brkan and dr. Damjan Kukovec for their contribution in selecting and presenting the works of art we are seeing today.*

*I am also grateful to Dr. Barbara Jaki, Director of the National Gallery of Slovenia, who presented the artworks. The paintings by Tugo Šušnik are certainly so expressive that any public space in Slovenia or elsewhere would be enhanced by their presence. But let me say a few more words about the statue of the Lipizzaner by Janez Boljka, for it has both symbolic and personal meaning.*

*When debating at the beginning of this year what would be an additional piece of art with particular significance to embellish the Court, the collaboration of National Gallery, Office of the President and the Court resulted in a proposal that the same statue of the Lipizzaner that decorates the central platform of the ceremonial staircase of the Presidential palace in Ljubljana would be very appropriate for the Court. Deciding that it will adorn the staircase of the Court, the Artworks Committee provided a symbolic link with its position in the Slovenian Presidential palace, for which I am particularly grateful to the Judges Lucia Rossi and Damjan Kukovec.*

*There was an obstacle, however: only four casts were ever made, and the one in the Presidential palace was the only one in a public collection. After some investigation my husband found one casting in one of the largest Slovenian private collections owned by NLB bank. I am thankful that the Management Board approved the loan of their Lipizzaner at once.*

*Apart from demonstrating our respect by twinning the offices of the Court of Justice of the European Union with the office of the President of Slovenia, it has another symbolic meaning.*

*The statue represents a beautiful horse of the breed which may be admired in several places in Europe. One of them is Lipica in Slovenia from which the Lipizzaner breed originates. We can admire photos of the beautiful animals, but you will see also photos of the statue in the Presidential Palace and of the Court's statue in Lipica before starting its journey to Luxembourg. It was present in Lipica on a very significant day. The day when UNESCO certificate of inscription of Lipizzan horse breeding tradition on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was delivered.*

*The magnificence of this certificate is that it is bestowed upon stud farms in eight European countries! It was a result of a joint application of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Apart from being a representation of cultural heritage of each of these countries, the statue thus also symbolizes European unity transcending borders, not unlike the decision of the EU countries to entrust the delivery of justice to this illustrious institution.*

*Allow me a little revelation about the significance of the Lipizzaner statue for me personally. On the inauguration day last year, a statuette of an owl made by the same sculptor awaited me in the presidential office. It was a present from my husband and has been on my desk ever since. As a symbol of my legal profession. And as a universal symbol of wisdom and knowledge which reside also in this distinguished institution.*

*Thank you all. To the Court and those who contributed to today's event.*