



President of the Republic of Slovenia

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**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
at the traditional New Year's reception for the Diplomatic Corps**

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Dear Prime Minister, Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassadors, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Let me begin by extending my warmest New Year wishes. May it bring us all good health, tolerance and positive energy. These qualities will be essential in meeting the challenges that lie ahead.

The past year was far from easy. Elections in democratic countries worldwide saw significant support for populist movements, leading to mixed reactions. Despite this, it is vital that we remain vigilant in protecting and upholding the fundamental achievements of civilisation—including the rule of law, justice, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The ongoing aggression by the Russian Federation in Ukraine continues to inflict devastation that will be felt for generations. The irreparable loss of human life—both military and civilian—the widespread destruction of infrastructure, and the severe and lasting damage to the environment will make rebuilding trust between the two nations immensely challenging.

In the Middle East, Israel is being allowed to do anything under the pretext of self-defence. The killing and starvation of the Palestinian people, including countless children and women, and the destruction of hospitals, schools and homes, continue unabated. It is tragic that there is little response from the international community to this unbearable suffering and the daily loss of Palestinian lives.

The same goes for the climate crisis. Its impact on our planet and on our lives is grossly underestimated by far too many politicians. They are supported by powerful individuals and interest groups whose financial interests would be threatened by any meaningful climate agreement.

Human dignity within us, dignity for us all, dignity for the environment surrounding us.

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The gap between rich and poor is widening. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals and multinational corporations may be the major obstacle to ensuring that people around the world have equal opportunities in an era of rapid technological advancement, especially through accessible education. And yet balanced development is essential. Skilled labour remains in short supply, and robots cannot replace all human work in the future.

This is the legacy we carry into 2025. If the predictions of a tariff war come true, the entire world will feel its impact. However, we must bear in mind that not everyone will be affected equally. Defence spending is rising, an unavoidable reality. But diverting more funds to weapons risks undermining the development of other vital public services. This burden will not fall on the wealthiest, but on those who value the quality and accessibility of public health and education.

The coming year will see continued superpower rivalry. But it doesn't end there. New players – wealthy individuals who can purchase media space or even directly support their chosen political options around the world – are stepping firmly into international relations.

All this is fuelling discomfort, uncertainty and confusion among people.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe we can all agree that every human being has the right to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment. In a multipolar world – a world driven by the race for prestige and power – this right remains elusive. The pursuit of short-term gains and narrow interests comes at a significant cost. The real concern is how high these costs may be. It is therefore our duty, especially for small and medium-sized nations, not to remain silent, not to wait passively for the outcome of major power rivalries, and not to stand idly by in the face of global crises and growing inequalities. By breaking the silence, we, as responsible politicians, must speak out much more often and louder about the challenges we face – challenges that require nothing less than intergenerational reflection. On this occasion, I would like to focus the debate on two topics. The first is the implementation of the policy of inclusion in the processes and relations of the international community. The second concerns the factors that have a decisive impact on a country's ability to cope with the changing dynamics of the global economy.

Discussing the **policy of inclusion** means discussing its implementation at the neighbourhood, regional and global levels.

In the *neighbourhood*, Russia's aggression against Ukraine remains in the spotlight. The Russian Federation is blatantly violating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. But Ukraine wants peace, as does the entire international community. But for peace to be achieved, both countries need to engage in the peace process. I remain hopeful that they will come to the negotiating table this year. Ukraine, as a sovereign state and a victim of aggression, must have the final say on the negotiations and the content of any agreement. And rightly so. The territorial integrity of states is a fundamental principle of international law and essential for peaceful relations between nations. Without respect for this principle, international relations cannot be viable – whether between neighbours, between EU member states and NATO, or between any countries at all.

In the European Union, we need to place particular emphasis on discussing *integration at the regional level*. From the EU's perspective, enlargement—meaning the accelerated accession of candidate countries on the basis of expected and consistently implemented reforms—is a crucial political, economic and geostrategic issue.

For the majority of people in the candidate countries, the EU represents a source of stability and a guarantee of a democratic future based on the rule of law and the protection of human rights, including the rights of minorities. Clearly, the European Union expects candidate countries to fulfil all the required conditions for membership, as has been required of previous candidates. However, it is important to emphasise that the burden and responsibility for successful enlargement is a shared one. Candidate countries, Member States and European institutions must all contribute to this common endeavour. Indeed, delays in the enlargement process – for whatever reason – risk fostering disappointment, opposition to the EU and a tendency among the populations of the candidate countries to seek or accept alternative paths of development.

Unfortunately, the enlargement process is still progressing slowly. As a result, young people are leaving, while those who remain are vulnerable to the influence of non-EU actors. The recent elections in Georgia and Moldova speak for themselves. It is not enough to simply acknowledge that both countries have been targets of malicious disinformation campaigns and other destabilising activities by global actors in our neighbourhood. Above all, we need to reflect on whether we can afford to keep these young people waiting another twenty years—or more—for the next wave of EU enlargement.

Inclusion is equally important *at the global level*. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Slovenia is aware of this. We actively engage in discussions with all nations, stressing in particular the vital importance of respect for international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, in global relations. Therefore, Slovenia finds Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza unacceptable. Equally unacceptable is the failure to comply with international court decisions aimed at putting an end to such atrocities. War crimes, wherever they occur, must also be condemned, including the genocidal practices attributed to Sudan.

The road to peace is never easy. Yet our diplomats pursue it with unwavering confidence, standing tall. Our history, of which we are deeply proud, is not tainted by colonialism. During and before World War II, we were ourselves victims of fascism, Nazism and foreign occupation. For us, the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II is a solemn reminder and a commitment to do all we can to ensure that such horrors never happen to anyone else. We also recognise that in order to achieve a lasting peace, certain essential conditions must be met. Chief among these are justice and equality in all spheres. Equality must begin at the symbolic level, which is why Slovenia actively seeks solutions to address the stark inequality and under-representation of women in leadership positions in international institutions, including the United Nations.

However, the policy of inclusion must be discussed not only in the context of multilateralism, but also with a clear understanding of the reality of a multipolar world. After the end of World War II, countries had to adapt quickly to the special status of the two superpowers. The same was true after the end of the Cold War. We understand what this means: without the superpowers, globally important decisions cannot be made. Without them, discussions on how to ensure human dignity for all become impossible. Competition between them, or an exclusionary approach towards them, is counterproductive and cannot guarantee the creation of a predictable, stable international community, which is essential for effective cooperation in addressing global challenges. The future of relations between the superpowers and other countries must be shaped by honest dialogue, not by exclusionary monologues. Slovenia can, wants and is fully capable of being part of such a future.

Ladies and gentlemen, When discussing **changes in the global economy**, we need to take into account the drivers that will decisively shape the dynamics of development in all regions of the world, not only in Europe.

The first driver to be highlighted is *science and technology*. Simply put, those who lead in scientific research and control cutting-edge technologies dominate the world and shape development policies, including the green transition. The European Union is not a global leader in technological development, and we are fully aware of this reality. Mario Draghi's report may serve as a final wake-up call, reminding us that the European Union still has a chance to catch up with the rapid technological advances taking place elsewhere. In doing so, the EU can maintain its capacity to deliver economic and social progress. A fairer and more environmentally sustainable Europe can only be built in this way.

The second driver is *demographics*. While much attention is devoted to global conflicts and the risk of large-scale military confrontation, far less attention is paid to another, quieter battle that is already underway: the competition for highly educated talent.

By some estimates, the developed world will face a shortage of up to 85 million skilled workers by 2030. The projected annual loss of income if countries fail to respond to this threat and fill the vacancies with appropriately educated professionals could reach hundreds of billions of euros. It is therefore imperative that countries develop and implement strategies – if they haven't already – to identify, educate and train workers. Creating a favourable environment for both domestic and foreign talent is essential to drive technological innovation and economic progress. This is a message that anti-immigration populists need to take seriously. They need to recognise that the notion of an ethnically pure country is, and will always be, an illusion. At the same time, we must not overlook the need for policies that effectively manage and embrace population diversity.

To conclude: The year 2025 will be a year of major tests for the entire world. The European Union, in particular, will face challenges from the major powers. Its competitiveness is waning due to a technological lag in the global race for influence in international relations. However, this does not mean that we—as the EU and as individual nations, especially small and medium-sized ones—can afford to remain mere spectators to the strategies of the superpowers and other financially

dominant actors. We must confront these challenges with seriousness, prudence, and courage—together. The path to progress is clear: the more we embrace inclusiveness, whether in dialogue with the superpowers or in treating migrants as valued and equal members of our societies, the greater our chances are to respond effectively to rapid economic change, to strengthen our comprehensive global role, and to create the conditions for people to live in dignity.

As statesmen, politicians, diplomats and opinion leaders, let us focus on developing an inclusive, long-term vision rooted in the values that define our common humanity, regardless of our differences. In this sense, inter-generational reflections or agreements on the future of our civilisation—whether on building peace, promoting economic cooperation, or protecting our environment and climate—should carry far greater weight than the many agreements to which we commit ourselves, but which we rarely implement fully and consistently. Time is still on our side, but it won't be forever. When it runs out, future generations will judge us for our lack of responsibility.

Thank you.