

**Pastoral letter by Slovenian Bishops at the beginning of the Slovenian EU presidency - Ljubljana, 1 January 2008**

With the Slovenian presidency of the European Union our country is invested of a responsibility which has no precedents in its history.

This pastoral letter would like to stress the importance of this moment and invite all brothers and sisters who are part of our Church in this country to jointly support the work of our government for a mostly successful and dynamic EU presidency.

When Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, the leadership of the Catholic Church strongly welcomed this accession. Now is the time to renew this position while Slovenia is taking over the highest possible responsibility within the EU.

The European Union has not grown up only as an economic project. After 1945 the strong need was felt to build a space of peace, cooperation, freedom, welfare, solidarity and respect for human rights.

Endeavours to promote and protect basic human values have never stopped. On the contrary, the recently signed Lisbon Treaty shows renewed efforts in this direction.

During its mandate Slovenia will have to pay great attention to these agreed basic values especially in relation to the situation of certain neighbour countries where human rights are threatened. This presidency will have also to indicate some possible responses to the pressing environmental challenges linked to climate change.

In addition, the Slovenian EU presidency will offer to each of us the opportunity to look at the situation of Catholics in Slovenia. In comparable countries Catholics are in a more favourable position and the Church has better opportunities to fulfil its mission. This should give us the courage to seek for an improved recognition of our rights, for example when it comes to specific needs linked to religion and education – in the private or public sector.

Overall, the next six months will be fundamental to strengthen position and reputation of our country within the European Union and on the international scene.

Europe is the cradle of modern humanism, respect of human dignity and human rights and at the same time carrier of hope for many people in the world.

Only if economic successfulness and political competition will be respectful of principles such as solidarity, truth, justice and dialogue, the European citizens will be able to look more confidently to their common future.

Let holy patrons of Europe: St. Benedict, St. Brothers Cyril and Method, St. Brigit of Sweden and St. Edith Stein – who have witnessed with their lives and suffered for faith, hope and love, intercede with God for all those who will have the duty of making important decision during the Slovenian EU presidency and for our ability to assist them.