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INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

**SPEECH BY
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. I am pleased that today's subject is intergenerational solidarity. I do believe that today's society can successfully face the challenges of 21st century such as accelerated technological advancement, the process of globalisation and especially demographic change only by living together and respecting all generations.

Demographic challenges are one of the central topics both at the European Union level and in the member states, since the attainment of the Lisbon objectives largely depends on managing those challenges. Demographic challenges require actions in several fields and especially at all levels: EU, national, regional and local. These actions should follow the principle of subsidiarity¹ and bring the decisions closer to the citizens.

As the president of the EU Council for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities I must acquaint you with some activities of the Slovenian Presidency linked to the efforts and achievements of the German and Portuguese Presidency.

As you probably know, especially German Presidency was very active in its efforts to manage demographic challenges. It followed the communication of the European

¹ **The principle of subsidiarity** is defined in Article 5 of the Treaty establishing the European Community: "In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community." The purpose of this principle is to make decisions as closely as possible to citizens and continuously check whether the activities at the EC level are justified as regards the possibilities at the national, regional or local levels.

Commission on the Demographic Future of Europe based on the *Green Paper – public discussion*² on this topic. One of the key findings of the discussion was that the ageing of the population was a challenge that can be responded to by creating favourable conditions to support people who want to have children, and take all opportunities offered by a longer, more productive and healthier life.

In seeking adequate solutions, the member states should observe the frame of reference proposed by the European Commission's communication and containing the following political guidelines:

1. promoting demographic renewal in Europe;
2. promoting employment of older people;
3. observation of needs of the ageing population in spatial planning, environment policy and access to new technologies;
4. receiving and integrating immigrants in Europe;
5. ensuring the sustainability of public finances as well as appropriate level of social security of each individual and intergenerational justice.

During the German Presidency the EU Council for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities thus adopted the Resolution on the Contribution of the Elderly to Social and Economic Development, the initiative Alliance for Families, and the basis for structuring the European debate on demographic change.

The Portuguese Presidency focused its attention on creating conditions for easier reconciliation of professional, family and private life, which is one of the key factors for the encouragement of demographic regeneration of the Old Continent. An appropriate tool may be the implementation of the flexicurity concept in practice.

The issue of how to maintain the balance between flexibility and security and thus ensure the social security of individuals as well as enable the modernisation of labour markets was discussed early this month by the ministers of employment and social affairs at the informal meeting in Slovenia.

During the discussion, most ministers emphasised the intergenerational solidarity which must be guidance in the preparation of individual measures, for flexibility and security are necessary in all periods of life.

Intergenerational Solidarity for Cohesive and Sustainable Societies is the title of the conference prepared by the Slovenian presidency in cooperation with the European Commission and non-governmental organisations and taking place in late April in Slovenia. The aim of the conference is to find new approaches to making policies promoting solidarity and cooperation between generations, to summarise them into conclusions and to discuss them at the meeting of the EU Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

² **Green paper** is a document published by the European Commission in the field of a certain policy, thus starting a public (written) discussion. The document addresses interested actors – governments, organisations and individuals – invited to participate in the process of consultation and discussion based on the given issues. In some cases, green papers encourage the subsequent adoption of legislation.

Europe faces especially two demographic trends: longer life expectancy and lower fertility rates. The intergenerational paradigm from the past is now disturbed; the elderly population share is growing. Today's way of life and division of labour especially in the urban environment slow down contacts among these three generations, which results in changing mutual relationships. Inappropriate systemic responses may result even in creating conflicts among generations.

This is why policy makers and decision makers must know the reasons for the potential conflicts among generations and seek, together with social partners and civil society, the appropriate solutions and develop new forms of solidarity enabling sustainable social development. My wish is that the presidency conference would contribute to this.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Slovenia has been aware of demographic challenges for over a decade. So far we have tried to respond in different fields, especially in the field of parental care and care for the elderly. In 2006, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Strategy for the protection of the elderly 2006 – 2010 – Solidarity, Symbiosis and Quality Ageing of Population, which addresses the demographic change and its consequences from a broader point of view, foreseeing, among others, the establishment of **local intergenerational centres**. The aim of intergenerational centres is to unite all public and civil potentials for quality ageing and solidary symbiosis of generations in a community. The operation of a local intergenerational centre is based on a synergic connection of the local schools, social welfare, health care and culture as well as voluntary, humanitarian, leisure and other organisations of all generations in a community.

Before I conclude, let me briefly present such intergenerational centre in the municipality of Komenda – as an example of good practice in addressing the problem of ageing society in a local community.

In 2005, the municipality of Komenda, acting on the initiative of the Intergenerational Society Komenda, decided to take responsibility for pleasant ageing and symbiosis between the generations. First it commissioned a research on the living and needs of the third generation from the Anton Trstenjak Institute of gerontology and intergenerational relations, and then prepared, based on the findings of the research and the relevant international and national documents, the Development programme of care for the quality ageing and intergenerational symbiosis in the municipality of Komenda for the period 2006-2015, foreseeing the establishment of the municipal intergenerational centre.

Intergenerational centre as a building is still under construction; however, the activities and programmes are already being implemented under the auspices of the Intergenerational Society of Komenda in close cooperation of the Anton Trstenjak Institute.

At the moment they successfully organise weekly meetings of the members of the first and third generations, weekly meetings of primary school children and retired

persons, voluntary socialisation and the transfer of computer skills from the first to the third generation.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Europe faces one of the most demanding tasks in its millennia-long history: how to preserve its culture with low birth rate not ensuring the renewal of the population, and how to take care for a growing share of the third generation. Fortunately the research has shown that Europeans want more children; therefore the member states must create conditions in which each individual may have as many children as he or she wants. The most important factor is quality and secure jobs. On the other hand we must ensure that the second and third generations remain active within the social division of work, as long as their health allows them. When they cannot work any longer, quality ageing must be guaranteed by justly dividing the care between the individual, his or her family and local, regional and national establishments.

My primary intention today was to demonstrate the fact that demographic challenges require actions at all levels: EU, national, regional and local. In adopting each measure we must be aware, however, that all three generations constitute a single family, municipal, national, European and global community. Within this, each generation is equally needed and precious.

Thank you for your attention.