

Dear guests, dear audience!

Let me begin by greeting you on behalf of the Republic of Slovenia as the presiding country of the European Union and by expressing my own personal satisfaction with the organisation of the present conference on the role of important social relations, on family and the challenges of the present time, which demands from all of us continuous adaptations, stimulation of innovations and seeking balance between the capital and social components.

The plan of the European Commission is that Europe becomes a competitive, dynamic society based on innovation and knowledge, which can increase economic growth and social cohesion. The operation of a welfare state intervenes in the relations between different groups and therefore significantly influences the relations in the society.

During its presidency, Slovenia focuses on the challenges brought by demographic change not only to the elderly but to all generations. A certain level of intergenerational solidarity must be achieved in each European country. Only the society living in symbiosis and respecting all generations will respond to the challenges of the demographic change.

In the context of demographic change and challenges, the Slovenian Presidency stresses the importance of intergenerational symbiosis and solidarity. The elderly do not only constitute the new economic category, but are an invaluable source of experience and knowledge. Therefore the Member States must create good programmes in order to avoid the marginalisation of the capacities of the elderly; these capacities should be integrated, thus preventing the slip into poverty and social exclusion. This activates also the first two generations to actively include the elderly in their midst.

As regards gender equality, the Slovenian Presidency pursues the goals and priorities of the European Pact for Gender Equality, the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men (2006-2010) and the Lisbon Strategy. At the same time the Slovenian Presidency continues to fulfil the commitments set forth in the Trio Presidency Declaration (Germany, Portugal, Slovenia) "Towards Gender Equality in the European Union", with a particular emphasis on the activities for the elimination of gender stereotypes in society and on the gender mainstreaming approach to be promoted in all relevant policy processes and areas. A significant aspect in the field of achieving gender equality is also the reconciliation of professional and family and private life of men and women, to which Slovenia devotes attention in the framework of the exchange of good practices initiated by the European Commission in the present year.

In view of the fact that family is the primary unit of society, parenthood plays a fundamental role in the society from the aspect of its development and future. The awareness that family has undergone numerous social changes and faced numerous challenges must yield results in the efforts of individual Member States to devote enough attention to family considering children and their parents as well as the society as a whole. It is very important to recognise the importance of family and parenthood at all levels of society. Numerous actors of power, from those in the public sphere to those in the economic and social sectors and the civil society, may support in their decisions and activities the active parenthood and help achieve

a healthier and more promising future for the whole society, as well as significantly contribute to the improved quality of family life.

The values of young people often reflect the values of the whole society; the young, however, are not but passive receivers of transferred messages. As a rule, the relevant areas of young people's life include family and friends. Immediate family members and the most intimate friends are those in which young people have the highest trust. The circle of confidants, however, has ceased to include e.g. classmates and teachers; there is rarely a mention of a best friend, too.

What applies to the entire European area is that new trends appear in private relations. Relationships between parents and children are intensely democratised. They changed from the relationships of control to the relationships of help, encouragement and confidentiality. Family is the source of advice, protection and assistance to the young in dealing with the "outside" world. And it is the same family that all too often creates the "life under the bell jar", for parents wish to protect their children from negative outside influences and keep them near for as long as possible. This has consequences, too – the young cannot or may not live on their own; furthermore, there is the syndrome of "over-responsible" parenting when parents want to offer their children practically everything, both material goods and emotional support.

Ladies and gentlemen,  
family undoubtedly remains the most important pillar of the society development. Without socialisation and quality family life, a human person cannot express all his or her potentials, without family a person cannot become what he or she is. Family establishes the relations between genders and generations, and this cannot be replaced by any other institution. Individual tasks and functions of family may be integrated or reduced, but the primary role of family remains irreplaceable. Family changes within itself as well as in the relation towards the outside world. Therefore it is difficult to see it as a model fixed in advance. The only important thing is that family is always seen as a project enabling humanisation of human beings and their growth in a certain society by requiring a certain commitment and integration from each individual. If we succeed in teaching them, we will complete an important education task for the future European generations.

Thank you.