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***"Balkan forum: The Balkans –
A Masterplan for Peace and Security required"***

Remarks by the Slovenian Minister of Defence Dr. Ljubica Jelušič

Excellencies, honorable guests and colleagues,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to be here and to be able to exchange views with such distinguished participants on the wide spectrum of security issues concerning European peace and security. I am especially delighted to have an opportunity to discuss the Western Balkans and present some of my views in this constructive and fruitful atmosphere here in Berlin. I am convinced that this floor will shape many valuable ideas on how we can maximize our efforts together in stabilizing the Western Balkan countries and integrating them into Europe.

Slovenia has special relationship with countries of Western Balkans due to historical, geographical, economical and cultural reasons. The Western Balkans represent one of the strategic priorities of our foreign policy. We are all aware that stability in the region is essential for the stability of Europe as a whole. Fostering peace and security in the region is thus of strategic interest of EU and could be provided only with strong support for political and economic reform processes in countries concerned. The prospect of EU accession on the basis of agreed principles and conditions has already proved to be a valuable and successful tool. We should be aware of this,

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particularly at present when we mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and 5 years since the enlargement of the EU to Central and Eastern European countries.

Nowadays, the enlargement process regarding countries of Western Balkans is frequently discussed in European political circles and we can often hear the term "enlargement fatigue" in connection with reluctance for continuing the enlargement process at the same pace. However, expanding the area of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom established over the last 50 years in the EU to the region through the EU membership is our long term commitment and historical/moral duty. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the history of the region would have been undoubtedly very different and worse without the prospect of future EU membership. At present with the prospect of the Lisbon Treaty entering into force, EU would be finally able to further review its enlargement mechanisms and adjust its capacity for integration of candidate countries.

When we look at the past few years, the countries of Western Balkans have moved closer to the EU, although their progress towards the reform agenda has been slow and uneven. We are all aware that the limited capacity of the countries in the region requires more than conditions to be set and incentives to be provided. The nation building and wide spectrum of support is needed to implement economic and political reforms, as well as stability of the region. The advantage of the EU is that it can mobilize all available policy instruments to support region's progress offering economic, administrative, financial, technical, security and other instruments. Yet the

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countries concerned need to become more active in implementing reforms and shaping their future as partners and not as subjects of the EU. They should do it for themselves and their citizens since all the reform's processes, democratization and rule of law activities are needed not only to fulfill benchmarks set by the EU but to improve opportunities and raise the living standards of their population.

Unfortunately, countries in the Western Balkans still face certain challenges such as distrust between ethnic groups, poor governance, organized crime, corruption, economic difficulties, political passivity and disagreement. However, Western Balkans journey towards the Euro - Atlantic partnership and a likely membership must remain performance based and could only be led by responsible local forces. Therefore, there is an urgent need for local political elites to realize that local ownership and the reform processes in their countries are first of all their responsibility and that they would eventually bring benefits and welfare to the entire population. The region as a whole needs to move from a long term "protectorate stage" with weak state structures towards an EU/NATO accession, which should after all become a shared vision and foreign policy priority of Western Balkans countries. EU/NATO commitment to support and encourage them in this process is a crucial and an important factor but unfortunately not a sufficient one.

Still we should continue to foster the pace of reforms processes in the region although their implementation is sometimes not as noticeable as we have been hoping for. There is a common understanding that as far as European standards are concerned some progress has certainly been made. A good current indicator of that

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is fulfillment of the visa roadmap requirements, which will enable visa - free travel for citizens of Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in the beginning of 2010. Hopefully, Albania and BiH will intensify their efforts and meet expected conditions by mid – 2010. It is in our and EU's interest that these countries do not stay out of the visa free regime, therefore Slovenia is providing bilateral support and counseling BiH in this field regarding our past experiences. I strongly believe that visa liberalization process would have a large positive impact on future developments of countries concerned, especially with fostering easier contacts, exchange of experiences and intellectual curiosity between its citizens and younger generations, in particular in educational, economical or other spheres. Free movement across Europe will certainly represent a valuable contribution to peace, liberty and better economic opportunities for these countries.

In spite of some positive and optimistic indications, I believe that we are all conscious that Western Balkans' stabilization process will probably not be completed until all states of the region join the Euro - Atlantic community. To successfully achieve this goal we – Europe, the USA, and Western Balkans countries - need to work together on the same course, under agreed timelines and with common objective – towards a whole, free and prosperous Europe. Different perceptions and autonomous goals or objectives of security actors involved in the region must be exceeded and put aside. Euro-Atlantic context, from the membership perspective as well as from the point of view of the integration process, provides an invaluable framework and guidelines for policy shaping and implementation in the defence reform domain, which must be transparent, rational and realistic.

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We rather regret the latest Alliance decision made at the last Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, when BiH was not granted entry into MAP. We believe that we might have missed an important opportunity to make an additional step in strengthening those political forces in the country that strive for closer relationship with the Euro- Atlantic organisations and much needed political reform. On the other hand, by granting Montenegro this clearly recognizes the efforts made by Podgorica in the last few years and is an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. We hope BiH will be given a chance to join Montenegro on this path in the near future.

Regarding Macedonia, we have strong hopes that a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue is found in the near future and that the country can take its rightful place in the Euro- Atlantic community of the nations as decided at the Nato Summit in Bucharest in 2008.

Regarding the current political situation and upcoming elections in BiH, we believe that the transition of operation Althea and reduction of forces in the field should be gradual and with clearly defined end date. We are all aware that expected withdrawals of EUFOR forces from the theatre in 2010 could cause serious shortfalls and problems in implementing mission's current mandate. Accordingly, we are strongly committed to keep our current contribution in the area of operation until the final political decision for launching the transformed operation is reached at the EU level.

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I would also like to emphasize a valuable contribution of the regional cooperation and exchanging of good practices in the South East Europe (SEE), especially with the current financial situation. Only reinforced cooperation among the countries of the region will contribute to consolidating stability, promoting reforms, strengthening the rule of law, promoting reconciliation, respecting of human rights and addressing economic and social needs. After all increased local ownership means that reforms and cooperation should be driven by the countries in the region, which at the end have the strongest interest for that. Slovenia remains committed for active engagement in practical cooperation with the SEE countries in Southeast Europe Clearinghouse initiative (SEEC), where we are striving for concrete and practical cooperation through exchange of information regarding defence system efforts, planning, reforms and needs. We have realized that we can learn from each other's comparable experiences and lessons learned and avoid past mistakes regarding complex defence reform challenges, both bilaterally and in a regional way. All these show that the region has matured significantly, becoming increasingly self aware, ambitious, innovative and interdependent. We have shown our commitment for further enhancing regional cooperation in general and specifically through regional centers with signing of a Defence Minister's Joint Statement last month in Sarajevo, which will enable further advancement also at the working level. Furthermore we believe in added value of other regional incentives, formats and activities for Western Balkans such as Regional Arms Central Verification and Implementation Centre (RACVIAC), Southeast Europe Defence Ministerial process (SEDM) and Stability pact for SEE that all contribute to promotion of mutual confidence, security building measures and broadening cooperation in SEE. After all regional approach as an

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integrated concept to some common challenges provides opportunities for cooperation on specific issues and enables synchronization of valuable resources, experiences and knowledge.

Since regional responsibilities are at the centre of Slovenia's priority list and a focal point of our national interests we have been sharing our experiences with countries of the region at different levels for years now, and will continue to do so in the future. Accordingly, we take our commitment and responsibility for providing such support very seriously. Slovenia remains actively engaged in the region and is striving for a comprehensive approach through different activities in security, military, administrative, development and other fields. As the minister of defence, I would like to stress the continued presence of Slovenian armed forces in the operations EUFOR Althea in BiH and KFOR in Kosovo in spite of current indications and considerations in international community for reduction of military forces in the region. I believe that this clearly indicates not only the extent of our efforts in the region but also our determination to stay committed until the job gets done.

Thank you for your attention.