



**Address
by the
President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at a State Dinner
in Honour of the
President of Slovenia
Danilo Türk and Madame Barbara Miklič Türk
Bessastaðir
3 May 2011**

Honoured President
Danilo Türk, and Madame Barbara Miklič Türk
Honourable ministers
President of the Althingi
President of the Supreme Court
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a special pleasure to welcome here tonight the President of Slovenia Danilo Türk and Madame Barbara Miklič Türk who are visiting our country together with their retinue. Their arrival marks a milestone in relations between our countries, as this is the first time a President of Slovenia has made a State Visit to Iceland.

It is now some two decades since Iceland followed with interest the movement for freedom in your country, and it was with pride that we took the decision to recognize Slovenia's sovereignty and independence, the first nation in the world to do so.

Ever since that time, the achievements of your people have attracted admiration. You have established a democratic system, laid the foundations of a progressive modern economy and gained full membership of the main international organisations of Europe and the Western World.

Slovenia has in many respects become a model, demonstrating how, in an amazingly short time, it is possible to transform a society that was long faced with restricted choice and multiple impediments.

Slovenia has also made a substantial contribution to the creation of the new Europe, showing how small and medium-sized states can make their voices heard and solve problems that sometimes prove difficult for larger entities.

Your country's presidency of the European Union three years ago bore witness to such confident, competent and imaginative leadership, a symbol of a new order in a part of the world which, for generations, was split into opposing camps and had been the theatre of wars and terrible sufferings.

A government based on democratic will and respect for human rights is Europe's most important contribution to the world, a heritage forged from the struggle of the many against repressive rule, given expression in law based on theories set forth by philosophers in the past and refined by the reform movements of the last century.

In this field, Mr President, you have been highly active and influential, both in positions of responsibility in the international arena before you accepted the Presidency and also through your research, writings and teaching. And this leads to a close connection that you personally have had with Iceland. Only a few days ago, an old friend of us both, Dr Guðmundur Alfreðsson, who has long been Iceland's most prominent figure in this field, leading human rights work for the United Nations and serving as Director of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, reminded me how you and he had been partners and associates, travelling together and making joint contributions to learned publications.

Both Slovenia and Iceland have shown how the contribution of small states can be of crucial importance in the struggle for human rights and the legal position of minorities, and your visit now opens up opportunities for extending collaboration between our countries into further areas and laying the foundation for new ventures in the interests of our peoples.

Slovenia has extensive resources of geothermal energy. Iceland has many examples to show how this resource can be applied in the development of sustainable energy systems with benefit for the economy and the living standard of the ordinary persons. An illustration of the benefits can be seen in the fact that since we in Iceland stopped using imported fossil fuels for space heating, and used our own geothermal energy instead, we have every ten years saved the equivalent of a whole year's GDP.

Tomorrow, Icelandic specialists will be showing you and your delegation some of the many applications for which geothermal energy can be used: electrical generation, space heating, glasshouse cultivation, agriculture, tourism, recreation and health.

We hope we can also extend our relations in other fields, for example with greater artistic and cultural exchanges and by urging our people to visit each other's countries. The natural beauties of Slovenia and Iceland, with their varied landscapes, mountain views and the attractions of the ocean, are qualities that both countries seek to make known to others.

Our people also share a burning – and sometimes very noisy – enthusiasm for handball, and superb choirs from Slovenia have visited Iceland and demonstrated how the human voice can be used in another, more artistically impressive, way.

Interesting work, an intriguing project, has been undertaken by Icelandic and Slovenian scholars on comparing the Romantic poets France Prešeren and Jónas Hallgrímsson, whose positions in the minds of our people have made them secular national saints.

Thus, various connections bring our nations together, but on your visit, Mr President, you also share with us Slovenia's experience as a member of European institutions. You will be participating, with specialists and influential people, in a seminar at the University of Iceland, and you have already held discussions with representatives of all the parties represented in our parliament, the Althingi, a legislative institution established more than a thousand years ago, where opinion today is sharply divided on the question of whether or not Iceland should join the European Union.

Your visit, Honoured President and Madame, with your high-powered delegation, is a clear declaration of your will to establish closer collaboration with Iceland. We greatly appreciate such demonstration of friendship.

In that spirit I ask you all to raise and drink a toast in honour of President Danilo Türk and Madame Barbara Miklič Türk, and to the friendship and co-operation between our nations.