



**Address**  
**by the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**at a State Dinner**  
**hosted by the President of Slovenia**  
**Janez Drnovšek**  
**19<sup>th</sup> March 2003**

Your Excellency the President of Slovenia Janez Drnovšek  
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the start of a new century when Europe is striving to find a firm basis for peace and progress it is healthy for us to ponder how richly the smaller nations of this continent have shaped its democratic heritage, culture and identity.

Athens and Rome in classical times were in effect small states by the standards of today, yet they made such an influential contribution to European thought, philosophy, government and law that we still draw on their history for new dialogues. More than a thousand years ago the settlers of Iceland established a unique legislative assembly and laid the foundation for democracy and the oldest parliamentary tradition in the world.

In the last century, the Nordic countries became a model for many others in the formulation of human rights, social justice, public welfare and equality. At an international level they formed an alliance which collectively championed various issues and produced extensive results. Their small size was even considered an advantage, because it demonstrated that they had no hidden agenda.

In the last decade the three Baltic countries showed us how independence movements could manage to shake off the yoke of Soviet rule and earn themselves, in a very short time, a firm place in the community of nations, a success which was partly due to the many advantages that their small size offered them.

Slovenia has made an impressive entrance into this community of small nations which have served as a model for others, the source of

diverse ideas and actions that show the potential for innovation vested in being small.

Over an astonishingly short time, Slovenia has consolidated the democracy and freedom that some larger nations have struggled to achieve for decades and even centuries. While hostilities and bitter conflict raged among its neighbours, Slovenia was a place of peace and reconciliation where the collective will of the nation served as the driving force behind progress and economic reform.

We Icelanders have watched your success with admiration and we highly valued being able to assist you, as the first nation to recognize Slovenian sovereignty and independence.

We have welcomed the increasing opportunities for dialogue and cooperation between our nations and I particularly recall, Your Excellency President Drnovšek, your extremely interesting and informative remarks when you visited Iceland as the Prime Minister of your country last year.

It is therefore a great honour for me to be the first President of Iceland to make a state visit to Slovenia and I offer my thanks to you, Your Excellency, and to your nation for the friendship you have shown to the people of Iceland.

I hope that my visit now will serve to secure our future cooperation even more firmly and lay the foundation for achieving results in many areas. We certainly face a wealth of fascinating challenges.

Iceland and Slovenia could demonstrate the important role that small nations play in the world community. A centre for global dialogue on the role of smaller nations was recently established in Iceland and I hope that, during this visit, we can open the way for participation by political, administrative and business leaders and scholars from Slovenia in the development of this new centre. Cooperation in this arena could equip our nations with new ideas and an array of knowledge which will spur progress in our countries and strengthen our position at the global level.

Iceland, half a century ago, was one of the founding members of NATO and during the last decade it was linked with the European Union through the European Economic Area Agreement. Both frameworks are examples of successful participation by a small nation in extensive international cooperation. Through Slovenia's membership of NATO and the European Union, our opportunities for exerting a collective influence will be greatly enhanced, and it is important to underline here the role that smaller nations play in creating peace, security and progress in Europe.

History teaches us that the larger nations on our continent have never managed, on their own, to lay the foundation for lasting success.

We Icelanders have in recent decades been utilising geothermal energy for space heating, electricity production and healthcare, and we hope to be able to cooperate extensively with Slovenia on harnessing the resources of your country's geothermal fields. In the course of my visit Icelandic power companies will be giving presentations here in Slovenia and I hope that those talks will provide a platform for cooperation between us in the future.

Icelandic tourists used to be frequent visitors to Slovenia and we likewise hope that people from Slovenia will take advantage of the Icelanders' friendship and hospitality to discover the diverse and magnificent nature that the Creator bestowed upon our country.

Opportunities certainly exist in more fields and it is important to create conditions for our artists – writers, painters, musicians and others – to work towards the mutual enrichment of our cultures.

I express my sincerest thanks to you, Your Excellency President Drnovšek, for the friendship that you and your nation have shown to the people of Iceland and I hope that my visit now will serve to secure even further our joint contribution towards the creation of a new Europe.

I ask all our guests to rise and raise their glasses in honour of the President of Slovenia, Janez Drnovšek, and to celebrate the lasting friendship between our nations.