

**Address by the Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek on the occasion of laying
the foundation stone for the construction of the mosque in Ljubljana**

September 14, 2013

Esteemed Mufti Dr. Nedžad Grabus,
Esteemed President of the National Assembly Mr. Janko Veber, other religious
communities,
Esteemed representatives of the Islamic Community,
Distinguished guests from Slovenia and abroad,

After more than four decades of continuous, peaceful, and systematic endeavours of Muslims living in Slovenia, today is an historic moment for the Islamic Community in Slovenia, as well as a great moment for all of Slovenia. Every religion is entitled to its place for prayers and reflection, and the Islamic Community has been denied that very thing in our territory. The intertwining of various cultures and religions to be realised with the new mosque will not merely exercise the relevant constitutional rights, but will instead grant a very special charm to our city and country. Islam is a rich lore and an integral part of European traditions without which Europe would never have been what it is – an inherently diversified and culturally rich continent. Sound and proper relations with religious communities in the country are one of the basic conditions to achieve long-term stability, social justice, and the successful development of society. It is actually the successful management of diversity – whose important component is the protection of minorities and ethnic groups as well as the right to the free professing of faith – that forms a basis for the provision of conditions for the maintenance, survival, and development of religious minorities.

I will only briefly dwell on the issue why we had to wait for the present moment for such a long time, from 1969 when the first application for construction of a mosque was filed with Slovenian authorities; nevertheless, here are a few circumstances from our recent past. It is certain that the social system after World War II was not well-disposed to religious topics or issues of religious communities, and therefore did not pay them much attention. And although in the second part of 20th century a considerable number of immigrants moved over to Slovenia from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the question of building a mosque has never come out in the open. As far as the period after gaining independence is concerned, it was often claimed that this was due to some particular

characteristics of the Slovenian situation. But is it true that was the only concern? Or did an erroneous opinion that Islam was connected to fundamentalists bring about xenophobic emotions, anxiety, and endangerment? Why did we discriminate against you? How much did politics contribute toward that? Year after year, thousands of Muslims were forced to perform their central common prayer on the greatest Muslim religious holiday Eid in sports halls.

As absurd as that sounds, only recently the opponents of construction of the mosque on the municipal level wanted to prevent its construction by filing an extraordinary referendum, which constituted an inadmissible intervention in the constitutional rights of a religious community. For that reason I ask you to permit me to express my thanks and congratulations to the representatives of the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia, as well as to the policy makers of the city of Ljubljana, in particular Mayor Zoran Jankovič. Despite the fact that some entities attempted to prevent construction with another referendum, they failed to do so for a second time, too.

Although a variety of stakeholders have been making use of the mosque in their battle for predominance, it was reason that prevailed in the end. In a certain period, hate speech and arguments multiplied, as a result of which many European institutions lost their trust concerning the prevalence of tolerance and observance of human rights in our country. The arguments of the opponents frequently bordered on a total absence of reason, let me only remind you of reproaches concerning the “increased permeability of the area,” “the escalation of terrorism,” “second-class citizens,” and so on. Nowadays, most members of the Islamic Community are citizens of Slovenia who nevertheless wish to keep their own religious cultural identity.

It is not only our own constitution, but also the European Charter of Fundamental Rights that speak about respect for cultural, religious, and language diversity. The slogan of the European Union, “United in Diversity” illustrates the integration of European states into the European Union for permanent peace and well-being, and the abundance of different cultures, traditions, and languages. Organization for security and cooperation for one of our members, imposes upon us that we should observe the right of religious communities to their establishment and integration – as well as to free prayer ceremonies and assembling. In addition, acceptance of different faiths plays a positive role in the process of integration since it enables the possibility of dialogue between ethnic and religious communities. Today we can feel at peace since we are faced with the basic proof that our state provides ample support to inter-religious dialogue, which likewise means a regulated legal status of different religious communities and well-established dialogue between the representatives of the Church and the state. With the laying of the stone and the construction of the mosque, our capital is turning into a truly open and pluralistic European city.

This moment is of great importance for Slovenia for the very reason that it is a symbolic victory over all forms of intolerance towards religious communities and, hopefully, over occurrences of xenophobic policies we have witnessed for almost two centuries. This is a step forward into the company of other European countries which have regulated this area a long time ago. This is a step toward proving that we have been able to defy

situations of conflict, and that the battle for the rights of those who think and believe differently has been won. Today we witness a multicultural experience that has resulted in a European-type solution to the problem of prevailing.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once more I would like to extend my praise and congratulations for the long path covered, sincerely wishing that construction is completed according to plans and without unnecessary complications. See you on the opening ceremony in a year or so.