Esteemed President of the Republic of Slovenia, esteemed Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps, your Excellences, distinguished guests.

Last year, Slovenia faced important political changes. These changes have put Slovenia back on the map of countries that not only stand up for democracy, the rule of law and human rights, but are also mutually respectful, honest and open to dialogue in these endeavours. We maintain the utmost respect for all our discussion partners. This may seem like a minor issue – until you experience disrespect first-hand and in your own country. Only then are you truly aware of the importance of mutual respect. And this will be our basic guiding principle in the development of our foreign policy strategy: we want to bring the awareness of our own experience to the international political arena.

This year, our main ambition in foreign policy is the candidacy for UN Security Council membership. We are not embarking upon this candidacy for prestige, in fact quite the opposite. We are doing it because our agenda has two important items that we, as a small but open and democratic country, can represent at the global level. These items are security and solidarity. By security, I do not only refer to military and political security, but also to food and energy security. These challenges can only be tackled through collective action. In the current situation, no country, big or small, can act on its own. And since we come from a small country, we are probably even more aware of this. Hence the argument about security, which we enter without our own interests ahead of those of others. Our interests will always be for the benefit of the community. This is one of our main guiding principles, but it is not the only one.

The second guiding principle is solidarity. Climate change is a key challenge for humanity – and I stress for humanity, not for individual countries. It is a challenge that can only be addressed effectively if we, the developed part of the world, are in solidarity with the rest of the world. If there is one area where we must not compete today, it is climate change. If we compete here to see who has the greatest strategic advantage, we will not be up to the challenge as humanity. A key principle is solidarity with the less developed world, which has in fact contributed less to climate change in the past and still contributes less today. We will uphold this principle in all policy-making at the global level, which is why I am convinced that Slovenia, as a small, democratic and globally conscious country, is an excellent candidate for membership of the UN Security Council. Our views on this topic can make a great contribution.

Slovenia is also fully aware of the role it plays in the European Union and the benefits it receives on a daily basis as a full member. We will therefore focus all our efforts on strengthening unity within the Union, not on pursuing unilateral interests, as may seem appealing to some other European country, but exclusively to pursuing solutions that increase the unity of the EU. And that is what I call the core of Europe. Those are the Member States that continuously implement measures to increase unity.

Our view on NATO membership is exactly the same. If anything, it was last year’s Russian aggression against Ukraine that demonstrated the need for collective security. Unfortunately, individual security is not effective. Despite being a small country, Slovenia will honour its commitments as a full member of the alliance, and there is no dilemma about that.

As I have already mentioned, Slovenia is aware of the advantages of EU membership and of its location close to the Western Balkans, a region traditionally lacking stability. With this in mind, we have put on our political agenda the stabilisation of the situation in the Western Balkans through European Union accession. The EU accession process is the only long-term process that can stabilise the Western Balkans at the moment. There is simply no alternative.

Slovenia and some of its neighbours are the best proof that neighbourly problems are reduced when countries are full members of a larger community. We want to promote this concept to others through our work in the Western Balkans. Last year, Albania and North Macedonia successfully moved closer to the European Union, and this year we want Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular to make great strides forward. Slovenia is willing to actively assist in this process, both through the Implementation Conference and through technical and sincere political support to Bosnia in all its efforts to become a member of the EU.

Let me conclude by saying that it is sometimes a privilege to be a small country. When you realise this advantage, you can be a successful bridge between major countries with outstanding issues. I believe that Slovenia has no outstanding issues with anyone today, and I would like us to be able to make the most of this.

Thank you.