

ADDRESS
BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL JANEZ JANŠA
AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Strasbourg, 16 January 2008

Mr President of the European Parliament,
Mr President of the European Commission,
Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure – and, indeed, also a matter of great pride – to be here with you today. I am very proud as a Slovene whose country has been entrusted with the Presidency of the EU as the first new European Union Member State to be awarded this honour. It is an honour for me as a European whose Union is entering 2008 with a signed Lisbon Treaty, and enlarged euro and Schengen zones.

I assure you that in the coming months until summer, if you invite me, I shall be delighted to come here more often, and certainly after each meeting of the European Council. I indeed look forward to close and constructive cooperation with the European Parliament throughout the six-month period.

I. THE EU – IN THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF MANKIND THERE IS NO SIMILAR DECISION THAT WOULD HAVE BROUGHT SO MUCH GOOD TO SO MANY PEOPLE

Today is a historic day, in many respects. Slovenia is presenting the priorities of its EU Council Presidency in the European Parliament as the first new Member State, as the first member from behind the former Iron Curtain, and as the first Slavic country to lead the Council of the European Union.

This would have been impossible without the profound changes that have occurred on the European continent in the past quarter of a century. They have enabled Europe to become united, to a large extent, united in a Union of peace, freedom, solidarity and progress. All this was unthinkable for millions of Europeans only 20 years ago.

In May of this year, exactly 20 years will have passed from a very special and personal experience of mine. Allow me to share it with you, too, since it contains a great deal of symbolism related to the changes I have just mentioned.

In 1988, two other journalists and I, and a non-commissioned officer, were arrested, imprisoned, tried and convicted before a military court because we had criticised the then totalitarian communist regime in Yugoslavia, and in particular, the militaristic aspirations of the Yugoslav army. Without the fundamental

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rights to defence, without the right to a lawyer and with the public excluded. We were tried in the middle of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia – at that time still one of the republics of Yugoslavia. We were tried in a foreign language. Despite the trial being secret and despite the threats of military intervention on the part of the Yugoslav army, tens of thousands of people filled the

streets and squares in quiet protest. They demanded respect for human rights and democracy. They set in motion the beginnings of change.

After exactly 20 years, I stand before you, before this distinguished assembly, in the European Parliament, in the middle of Strasbourg, a city which I can reach without stopping at borders. And as Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia and President of the European Council, I can address you in my mother tongue.

If anyone had predicted such a possibility twenty years ago in my prison cell, I would obviously not have believed one word of it.

But it did happen. After only two decades in a life of one generation.

In the meantime, Slovenia established a democratic parliamentary system and market economy; it became an independent, internationally recognised state. Today it is a member of the European Union, NATO, eurozone and part of the Schengen area. In 1988, more than 20 years ago, our income was approximately 4000 euros per capita in purchasing power. In 2007, this figure rose to more than 22,000 euros. We have attained 91 percent of the European Union average. Our economic growth exceeded 6 percent last year. Our unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in history, and it is one of the lowest in the European Union. The poverty rate is the second lowest in the eurozone. Slovenia is the third least-indebted member of the eurozone, and ranks among the first six Member States in the EU Reform Barometer.

Similar great progress has also been achieved by other former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, now Member States of the European Union.

After the borders came down in the Schengen area between Italy, Austria, Hungary and Slovenia in December last year, thousands in Slovenia and on the other side of the former border took part in spontaneous celebrations of this symbolic step. Those of you who were with us – The President of the European Commission was there; and in other places, too, merry crowds had gathered despite the cold weather – were able to see that reactions were very emotional. This was the feeling everywhere on other former borders of the one-time Iron Curtain, from the Baltic to the Adriatic.

On this occasion I met an older Slovene couple at the former border crossing among the merry crowd. They both had tears in their eyes. They told me of the hardships they had endured for decades of their lives at the hard border, and later the humiliation they suffered almost every time they crossed the border. The lady said she hardly dared to believe that this was really happening, that the border would practically no longer be there. That something was emerging that, 20 or even 15 years ago, she had not even dared to hope for.

I wish that the members of the European Parliament who had supported enlargement of the EU and also the Schengen area could have been there on that December evening. It would have been most gratifying for them. But because it was impossible for all to be there, may I take this opportunity to say: THANK YOU.

Thank you on behalf of that older couple living at the disappearing border, at the former border crossing; on behalf of thousands and tens of thousands, on behalf of more than 100 million Europeans in Central and Eastern Europe who 20 years ago were still on the other side of the Iron Curtain, some in prisons

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and without political and many human rights, while today we are together and united in Europe. With real possibilities to lead a good life and be offered opportunities never available to our predecessors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You may not even be aware of how immense the consequences have been of your decision to express solidarity and support our aspirations for freedom. This decision is probably unprecedented in the entire history of mankind. The decision to have brought so much good to so many people. Thank you on behalf of those of us who are here because of you, who champion freedom and solidarity and were not in any way forced to take such a selfless decision. Because you cared.

We of the generations not born in the European Union view the developments of past years and decades with somewhat more emotion. For us, the European Union is not something to be taken for granted. We have knowledge of a different, far worse alternative. This is another reason why we are prepared to do everything to ensure that the Union is preserved, developed and strengthened.

Our principal objective is for Europe to progress in as many areas as possible in the next six months. We defined these key areas as early as when we formulated the 18-month presidency programme along with Germany and Portugal. It was a unique experience, and cooperation in the trio was excellent, as was the contribution of European institutions. This Parliament has already been informed of this programme and also of the significant progress made in its implementation by our two partners in the trio last year.

Slovenia will make every effort to complete what has not yet been done. Our starting point remains the above programme, since we wish to maintain the continuity of European Union policies. At the same time, we shall dedicate ourselves to new challenges. As the last country in the trio, we shall see to a smooth transition to the next trio.

II. THE LISBON TREATY AS THE FIRST POLITICAL PRIORITY OF THE EU

The main achievement in the implementation of the programme thus far was the agreement on the new EU treaty, which was signed in Lisbon in December last year. Let me express my recognition of the personal commitment of Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Minister José Sócrates to this issue, which has brought us to this result. Let us remember the uncertain and difficult circumstances under which the German Presidency took on this project one year ago. The Berlin Declaration containing the agreement in principle that the European Union should obtain a new foundation – the treaty – was the first breakthrough on the way to Lisbon. After successful agreement on the mandate for an intergovernmental conference at the June European Council, our Portuguese colleagues continued the successful work done by the German Presidency. Under their leadership, the intergovernmental conference concluded successfully, and we obtained a new treaty, the Lisbon Treaty.

On this occasion, I would like to highlight the important role and contribution of the European Parliament – especially of your representatives at the intergovernmental conference – in forming the new treaty. Furthermore, I would also like to highlight the important role of the European Commission in reaching an agreement on the Treaty. Since I have closely followed this work and I am familiar with it, I can speak from first-hand experience. Last year, the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, and the President of the European Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso, demonstrated great personal commitment by offering strategic assistance to both presiding countries. The synergy of efforts of all three key EU institutions enabled us to successfully sign the Lisbon Treaty.

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This Treaty will ensure the greater efficiency and democratic functioning of the enlarged European Union. It will facilitate decision-making in many new areas and strengthen the role of the European Parliament and national parliaments.

However, by signing the Treaty, our task is far from being completed. We have now entered the period of ratification, which is – as we have learned from the 2005 experience – the most sensitive stage in the process of adoption of the Treaty. Let me stress that ratification is the sole responsibility of each Member State. In this connection, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to Hungary on having already successfully completed this process. We hope that by the end of the Slovenian Presidency, the majority of the Member States will have followed in Hungary's footsteps. The Slovenian Parliament will take a decision on ratification before the end of this month.

The goal is to have the Treaty enter into force on 1 January 2009, which among other things also means that there is still much to be done as regards the necessary preparations. Therefore, we are already cooperating closely with France, the next presiding country, in order to ensure that everything is in place for the Treaty to enter into force. In so doing, we will also cooperate closely with the European Parliament.

III. ONLY HEALTHY ECONOMIC GROWTH CAN BE THE PERMANENT BASIS OF GREATER PROSPERITY

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The progress of the European Union in the area of economic reform in the Member States and the establishment of the internal market has been encouraging in recent years. During this time, the EU economy has been strengthened, with considerable increases in productivity and employment rates.

In the next three-year cycle of implementation of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, we must, above all, continue in the same direction as we have so far, putting the investment in people, modernisation of labour markets, an increase of entrepreneurial potential, provision of affordable and reliable supplies of energy, and environmental protection at the top of the list. In order to effectively launch the new three-year cycle at the spring European Council, it is necessary to adopt the Integrated Guidelines in good time, which is the responsibility of the EU institutions.

Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

At this point I would like to re-emphasise the importance of constructive interinstitutional cooperation.

Implementation of well planned reforms in the Member States with the support of the institutions at the EU level, where the implementation of common policies means added value, is key for the continuation of sustainable economic growth. Since this growth can be challenged by many problems, continual reform and adaptation are a necessity. There are several major challenges we are facing right now.

Among these key challenges are increasing oil and food prices, and the high-profile turmoil in financial markets caused by events in the mortgage market in the US. The Slovenian Presidency will devote all necessary attention to relieving their consequences. To this end, the comprehensive programme of activities of the European Union to strengthen the stability of financial markets will be rounded off in the first half year. Furthermore, it will be necessary to ensure greater transparency in markets, strengthen control mechanisms and cooperate more closely at the international level.

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IV. THE EU AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

In March last year, we took on ambitious commitments for tackling climate change. The Bali conference held in December last year provided us with a clear timetable until the Copenhagen

conference scheduled for the end of next year, and it is on this agenda that our European ambition is focused. It remains to be shown that we can achieve success by taking appropriate action and that we can reduce impacts on the environment by investing in new technologies along with those already available. It is important to develop market instruments in order to reach the goals of energy and environmental policies at the lowest possible cost.

Over the course of the next week, the European Commission will publish legislative proposals implementing the commitments to fight against climate change which the European Council made a year ago, thereby helping to formulate our policies. I can say that with this legislative package, Europe is standing before the historic undertaking of gradually transforming its economy.

The Slovenian Presidency will devote special attention to this area at both meetings of the European Council. Taking into consideration the global context and the timetable until Copenhagen, the Presidency hopes that our agreement on legislative acts will be reached during the first reading with you, distinguished Members of the European Parliament, so that implementation of the necessary reforms can begin as early as next year. In so doing, we would strengthen the role of the EU in international negotiations for a post-Kyoto regime and would contribute to the adoption of the agreement in Copenhagen at the end of 2009.

In this respect, the European Council meeting will constitute an important milestone. My ambition is that the meeting will provide us with clear guidelines for our future work and that our collective intentions to adopt the package as soon as possible will be confirmed. We want the final solutions to be objective and just, and anticipate that the goals will bring results according to our commitments, while at the same time being realistic and attainable, and that they will not hinder the development of individual Member States. Since this debate will also continue after the Slovenian Presidency, we are already cooperating with future presidencies. What the EU actually needs at the earliest possible time is a clear legislative framework for forming a stable and predictable environment for investors, as well as for a gradual change in the habits of consumers of energy.

V. THE FIFTH FREEDOM – THE FREE FLOW OF KNOWLEDGE

Investment in people, knowledge, research and new technologies remains one of the main goals of the Lisbon Strategy. A society based on creativity and knowledge is increasingly becoming a necessity in modern Europe. However, merely investing in knowledge is not enough. This year we have an opportunity for in-depth debate on the nature of the EU internal market we would like to have. We must ensure that there will be no obstacles to the flow of ideas and knowledge. At the spring European Council, we therefore wish to add a fifth freedom – the free flow of knowledge – to the four existing freedoms of the European Union, where the EU has so far attained remarkable progress. Greater mobility of students, researchers and professors will also contribute to this. The advantages of the EU internal market must become more accessible to consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises. Further rapid progress in the actual setting-up of the internal market of services and innovations is of vital importance for implementation of the EU reform strategy. We will do our utmost to bring about progress in liberalisation of the internal energy market. Moreover, I would also like to report you at the end of our Presidency that we have reached a successful agreement in this area. We hope that we will

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succeed in taking the necessary steps forward towards a better, less costly and more reliable supply of energy for our citizens and enterprises.

VI. ENLARGEMENT AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

– INSTRUMENTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND GREATER SECURITY

Distinguished Members of the European Parliament,

In speaking of the future of the European Union, mention must be made of the enlargement process, which is still incomplete. Enlargement has been one of the most successful policies of the European Union. In 2006, the European Commission, in its report entitled "Enlargement, Two Years After", convincingly demonstrated that the most extensive enlargement of 2004 benefited both "older" as well as "newer" Member States of the European Union.

Glancing at the map of Europe confirms our impression that enlargement is an unfinished story. It is vital that this process should continue, in compliance with the commitments undertaken on the basis of fundamental principles, primarily the fulfilment of requirements for membership. The Slovenian Presidency will make every effort to continue accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey.

The countries of the Western Balkans represent a particularly important issue. When the EU Council Presidency was last held by a Member State bordering this region – Greece, the foundations were laid for integration of the countries of the Western Balkans through the Thessaloniki Declaration. We are of the opinion that now, five years on, the time has come for the confirmation and consolidation of the European perspective of these countries. The Presidency intends to encourage their progress along the way. I would like to stress, however, that we are not advocating the lowering of criteria or indeed any form of "shortcut". Not at all. We would like the EU to actively intervene in this area and to step up its involvement in assisting these countries in their reform processes.

Let us not forget that a solid and tangible European perspective is an indispensable lever of necessary change and reform in these countries. This is why we want to strengthen this perspective with concrete measures in various areas.

At the very core of the Western Balkans lies Kosovo. In the 1970s, Kosovo gained autonomy and became part of the federal system of the then Yugoslavia. The status of Kosovo was practically equal to the status of a federal republic. Fifteen years later, Mr Milošević unilaterally revoked Kosovo's autonomous status and then carried out an attempt at ethnic cleansing that was stopped only by the international community. Peace was restored after the intervention, but the issue of Kosovo's permanent status has remained unresolved.

Today, this is one of the most demanding issues facing the Union. It would be desirable, of course, if the issue of Kosovo's status could be resolved in a way fully acceptable to both sides directly involved. Regrettably, the lengthy negotiation process shows that all possibilities for such an outcome have been exhausted. It is, moreover, unlikely that agreement can be reached on this issue in the UN Security Council in the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, we are all aware that repeated postponement of finding a solution can drastically destabilise a large part of the Western Balkan region. This would be the worst possible outcome. Kosovo is chiefly a European issue. The Slovenian Presidency will build on the decisions taken by the

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European Summit in December. There are foundations in place on which consensus has already been built. There is fundamental political consensus in the European Union regarding the deployment of a civil mission in Kosovo. We agree that the current status quo is unsustainable and that the Kosovo issue demands a special solution, one that cannot be applied to any other situation in the world. Within this framework, the Presidency will be coordinating solutions

enjoying the broadest support within the European Union and at the same time guaranteeing long-term stability in the region.

Kosovo, of course, is not an island in this region. For the European Union, all countries of the Western Balkans are of equal importance. For Slovenia more than for many other Member States of the European Union, as this region is in our direct neighbourhood. The current situation in the Balkans is an unfinished story in the geopolitical transformation after the end of the Cold War. We would like it to end happily, the European Union bears a responsibility for it; we owe it to the nations and cultures of this region. The stability of the region is of exceptional significance for the entire European Union, and this is attainable only within the European perspective.

Serbia has, by tradition, always played an important role in the Western Balkans. It is important that we encourage Serbia's setting out on the path to Europe through a proper approach and despite possible short-term turbulence and hesitation.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted candidate status as early as 2005, but no date has yet been set for the start of negotiations. The country has implemented many successful reforms, but some still have to be completed and in doing that it needs our assistance. It must not be allowed to fall victim to the situation in the region. The earliest possible resolution of the Kosovo issue will also be important for this country's internal stability.

I would like to highlight the role of Albania, a country that lived a special history of its own after WW2 and is appreciated today for its contribution to the stability in the region and its constructive attitude in resolving the future status of Kosovo. Montenegro, a country that has also seriously set out on its path of reform with a view to being included in the Thessaloniki Agenda, can be put in the same category.

The post-Dayton structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina with an international presence and internal political instability in past months leads us to believe that this country needs special attention. A great deal has already been done and support for its European perspective has been strengthening, but further assistance is needed. We should not forget the refugees who have not yet returned home, or the serious crimes that have as yet gone unpunished. For the European future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the entire region, punishment of these crimes against humanity, peace and reconciliation are of fundamental significance.

Numerous reasons require the further strengthening of our cooperation with our neighbours, strategic partners and others. I have today already mentioned the external European Union border. There are important and valuable partners beyond the border whom we must involve in our manifold activities.

The European Neighbourhood Policy is a welcome instrument of enhancement of the area of stability and prosperity beyond our borders. Equally important are the eastern and the western dimensions. Let us not forget Ukraine, Moldova, the Southern Caucasus and North Africa. We would like processes such as the Barcelona Process and Euro-Med to be strengthened. We need intensive dialogue, and, time and again, new circumstances call for new forms of cooperation. These are most welcome.

What we do not need is duplication, or institutions competing with the EU institutions and covering a part of the EU and a part of the neighbourhood at the same time. The EU is a coherent whole and only as

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such can it be sufficiently effective in establishing peace, stability and progress in the neighbourhood and beyond.

We shall also strengthen cooperation with our strategic partners in the world. During our Presidency, we intend to organise four summits; with the US, Russian Federation, Japan and countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. With the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean we shall establish cooperation with the aim of achieving sustainable development and combating climate change and poverty. During the Slovenian Presidency, we would like to consolidate and hopefully formalise the partnership and cooperation of the Russian Federation. During the Slovenian Presidency, the European Union will provide reliable support for the Middle East Peace Process. The European Union will be involved in the implementation of the pledges made in Annapolis and Paris. We would like both Israelis and Palestinians to live secure, free and successful lives, and we shall champion the peaceful co-existence of the two countries.

VII. THE ROLE OF THE EU IN THE WORLD IS GROWING

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time is coming for the European Union to assume a new, strengthened role in the world. Europe is entering 2008 with the signed Lisbon Treaty, the expanded euro and Schengen areas, solid economic growth, a stable euro and over three and a half million more jobs than at the beginning of the previous year. Therefore, there are numerous reasons for conducting the Council of the European Union in an ambitious, optimistic way and – I hope our French friends will not resent that – with a vision. Vision is always a must. If you do not know how to adjust the rudder, every wind is the wrong wind. And there is a lot of wind. In particular the wind of change. The last two decades have seen changes affecting not only Europe, but the whole world. And in the years to come, the world will continue to change – even faster than before. Some changes have already occurred but have yet to be fully evaluated. We have much to say about the economic rise of India and China. In 2005, at the beginning of the British Presidency, I listened to the speech of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair before this high assembly. He pointed to these changes, drawing attention to two new rapidly growing powers, namely India and China – incidentally, this week both countries signed a number of bilateral economic and trade agreements. These new actors are speeding up their investment in knowledge, research and development and in improving their competitiveness. It has been rightly concluded that the European Union is consequently obliged to reconsider and take appropriate steps to ensure that the competitiveness of Europe does not fall behind. In recent years, we have listed all our disadvantages and proposed measures to remedy them. Many of these measures have been carried out, some unfortunately not. However, I do not wish to reiterate our goals and commitments from the Lisbon Strategy. At the end, I do wish to point out that it does not suffice to address the global changes facing the European Union only in terms of “competitiveness” and “combating terrorism”. Both answers are correct, but alone they do not suffice.

At the global level, the European Union faces the following key challenges, to which it will sooner or later have to provide answers in addition to those we have heard so far:

1. The first such challenge is the issue of reform of the UN and the establishment of a new global order. The European Union can play a key role in this reform.

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2. The second challenge is combating poverty. This is one of the top priorities. The international development assistance provided by the European Union is significant, but not always effectively used. To make it more effective, we need to focus in particular on: first, education, i.e. the raising of education level in poor societies, and second, on buying food and other products, which are to

be donated, in countries and regions where assistance is directed. This is the only way we can help these areas strengthen their agricultural and economic positions, and tackle the causes of poverty in the long run. When it comes to international development assistance, the word “competitiveness” must be replaced with the word “cooperation”. We should be gratified that undeveloped countries are developing and that the poor are becoming richer. The more countries develop, the more they will be able to contribute their share to combating poverty.

3. The third challenge is combating climate change. With the last year’s European Council conclusions, the European Union became a global leader with stronger credibility and stronger influence. This role must be maintained. We will achieve this by ensuring that, in the fight against climate change, when negotiating with other global partners, the same burden-sharing criteria are applied within the EU and on the outside. .

4. The fourth such challenge is intercultural dialogue. It is now needed more than ever. In the long run, conditions for world peace and for finding responses to the major security threats faced by the modern world cannot be created in the absence of intercultural dialogue. Therefore we are pleased that 2008 is also the year in which the European Union pays special attention to intercultural dialogue. The European Union dedicates a great deal of attention to intercultural dialogue. We are pleased that the President of the European Parliament was able to attend the opening ceremony in Ljubljana at the beginning of the month and that many important events will be organised on this subject by the European Parliament. You are making a very great contribution to, firstly, reinforcing awareness of the need for this dialogue and, secondly, to our taking real steps forward.

We hear from time to time that all the above issues are not really true priorities for the European Union, and that we should deal with domestic problems – but I am convinced that that is too narrow a view. Because the way we address these four key questions in future, the way the European Union exercises its greater role and influence in the global world will be critical in determining the following:

1. peace and security for our citizens,
2. sustainable and secure European Union energy supplies, and
3. managing migration pressures on the European Union.

The more the European Union is capable of acting as a global player on such a basis, the stronger are the guarantees for its citizens to lead peaceful and safe lives, and for stable economic and social development.

VIII. I CARE ABOUT EUROPE BECAUSE I KNOW THAT EUROPE CARES ABOUT ME
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by assuring you that Slovenia has undertaken this task with a highly conscientious attitude, after three years of intensive preparations.

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Our Presidency may not be on such a large scale as the French, or as high-profile as the German one, and our civil servants may not have such an excellent and long-standing tradition as the British. We might make some mistakes, express something too directly or perhaps even naively. But we promise to work responsibly and devote ourselves to real issues. We will not compete for the spotlight with others. That is just not important to us. We know where we started from 20

years ago, when Slovenia was underestimated by many. We know what we have had to do in order to to be successful and to be here today.

It is our greatest wish that our contribution will, month by month, increase the general happiness of European citizens. That, in time, some day any person you meet on the street anywhere in the European Union will without hesitation answer, when asked whether he or she cares about the future of the European Union, "I care about Europe because I know that Europe cares about me."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are perhaps not there yet, but we are well on our way and clearly on the right path.

Thank you.

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