CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!

Spoštovane veleposlanice in veleposlaniki,

predstavniki Univerze v Ljubljani,

partnerji slovenske kulturne diplomacije,

prijatelji slovenske kulture,

dragi vsi,

As we are gathered here on the eve of Slovenian Cultural Holiday, please allow me to give a brief introduction in Slovene.

*V posebno veselje mi je, da letos na ministrstvu kulturni praznik obeležujemo na nov, svež način, s poudarkom na angažmaju mladih, ki s svojo ustvarjalnostjo dan za dnem živite tisto, za kar si naša država prizadeva na mednarodnem parketu. Razstava, ki jo otvarjamo, je simbolična za mnogo tem, ki so v osrčju slovenske diplomacije: medkulturni dialog, trajnostni razvoj, kreativno gospodarstvo, so-ustvarjanje mladih in še marsikaj. Hkrati nas na inovativen način opominja, kako pomembno gonilo družbenega razvoja sta kultura in ustvarjalnost in kako pomembno mesto imata v mednarodnih odnosih.*

As I just mentioned, we are celebrating our *national* Cultural Holiday with an *internationally* important topic: culture and creativity as the drivers of global peace and prosperity. The Cultural Holiday coincides with the opening of this exhibition, which has a symbolic significance. The “Lie Between” project stands for everything that the Ministry would like culture and creativity to stand for: intercultural dialogue, cross-border co-creation, a positive agenda for youth, sustainable development, and so on.

The project symbolises the “revisited” understanding of culture – not as an *accessory* but the *pillar* of our society. It is vital for all spheres, from education, the economy and health to the environment and stability. That is why it is essential that we nurture culture not only within the boundaries of our countries but also in foreign relations.

The topic of culture in foreign policy has already featured high on the agenda, namely during Slovenia's first EU Council Presidency in 2008. We are determined to keep it there during the Presidency next year, too. We are particularly pleased that the UN has declared 2021 as the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, which is a topic very dear to our diplomacy. We are convinced that the reinforced international focus will give us extra leverage for action.

Before we get to 2021, however, let me outline the Ministry’s priorities in the field of international cooperation in culture for this year. We have been working on these priorities in close cooperation with other ministries, mostly the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Economic Development and Technology, and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, but also with others.

I would like to invite you to visit and re-visit our platform Culture.si, which provides an excellent insight into the Slovenian cultural landscape and its current cultural projects around the globe. I would like to give my sincere thanks to the Ljudmila Association for managing it with such great care.

1. **INVESTIGATIVE ART**

Slovenia is strongly focused on science diplomacy, on the one hand, and on cultural diplomacy, on the other. This year, we decided to join them and place investigative art at the heart of our international cooperation in culture. All Slovenian diplomatic missions are taking part, and we would very much appreciate it if the diplomatic corps could keep their eyes open for any chance of cooperation in this field, too.

In September, Slovenia became richer by one very important platform: the KONS Platform for Contemporary Investigative Art. It aims to promote breakthrough artistic creations that can lead to innovation in the form of better, safer, more sustainable and ethical products and services. Just as importantly, it creates an inspiring environment for the creators of the future among children and young people.

The platform is led by the Kersnikova Institute, the well-deserved host of the 2020 ECSITE Conference. In June, it will bring to Ljubljana hundreds of representatives of science centres and museums under the common title “Echoes from the Future”. Today, we are honoured by the presence of Jurij Krpan, Artistic Director of the Kapelica Gallery, who will provide more information on the topic later.

1. **INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

For more than a decade, the Slovenian Government has been working with the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to place intercultural dialogue at the heart of regional cooperation. A series of high-profile partnership initiatives have been carried out, notably for intercultural learning and trans-Mediterranean translation.

This year, we will be taking part in the MedForum in Šibenik within the scope of Artificial Intelligence and Translation as a tool for dialogue and understanding between cultures.

Together with the Anna Lindh Foundation, preparations have been launched for a major forum to be held in October 2021, which will – again – connect young leaders, civil society practitioners, intercultural experts and policy-makers from Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa.

I am particularly glad to welcome here today Mrs Aida Ridanović, Anna Lindh’s MedForum Director. We have already had the pleasure of listening to her at the Leaders’ Panel of the Creative Forum Ljubljana in November. Thank you for being with us today.

1. **JOINT EUROPEAN ACTION**

We cannot overstate the importance of joint EU action – and the field of culture is no exception. As EUNIC’s Global Director Gitte Zschoch said in an interview this week: “It’s so obvious that you can do a better job when you work together”.

Slovenia strongly supports EUNIC’s focus on developing common projects and joint actions in third countries. This year, we are planning to increase our presence in local clusters by around 30 per cent and strengthen our participation in projects. We would like to see all Member States raise their engagement as well as more actors from non-EU countries participating in projects. We have to make culture truly count in our relations.

However, the internal EU dimension deserves equal attention, reflecting the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within the EU borders and of the spillover effects of culture on other areas, such as the economy, security and the environment.

1. **CREATIVE FORUM 17+1**

With its second edition in November, Creative Forum Ljubljana has grown to be a firmly established regional exchange platform for creative entrepreneurs, creative hubs and policy-makers from the Western Balkans and Southern Mediterranean. The feedback was very positive, and we are delighted to distribute its output document today. Creative Forum Ljubljana being a biannual event, the next one will take place during the Slovenian EU Council Presidency in 2021, with a special focus on education for creativity.

In the meantime, however, we look forward to hosting the 5th 17+1 Forum for Cultural and Creative Industries, which is to take place from 15 to 17 September this year. It is imperative to further integrate the creatives from China and from Central and Eastern Europe. They need platforms to get to know and understand each other, to co-operate and co-create.

Projects such as “Lie Between” are important for this very reason. They are building bridges between people and cultures. They set up spaces for dialogue, co-creation and the indispensable transfer of knowledge. This experience had a profound effect on the individuals who participated. For some students, this might even have been a game changer and a source of extra motivation.

Sincere congratulations go to young architects and their mentors from the universities of Ljubljana and Tsinghua for their outstanding work and for achieving 2nd place among more than one hundred teams. I would also like to thank the University of Ljubljana, especially the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design and the Faculty of Arts, for an extremely fruitful and enjoyable partnership in numerous cultural projects.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to the Chinese Embassy for providing wholehearted support for the Lie Between project. Ambassador Wang Shunqing, we greatly appreciate your efforts, and we hope that today’s opening of the exhibition is a promise of further successful cooperation in the countdown to the 17+1 Creative Forum in September.

The year 2020 is also marked by an important anniversary: 100 years since the arrival in Slovenia of the largest Chinese collection, the Ivan Skušek collection. It is yet another remarkable project, linking culture to research, under the guidance of the University of Ljubljana, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) and the Science and Research Centre Koper (ZRS Koper).