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Minister Fajon and her team in an informal video conference of EU foreign ministers and the Gulf Cooperation Council
Author: MFEA

“Thank you to everyone who worked day and night to ensure that our citizens were brought home quickly and safely, and special thanks to our consular department and the embassies in Abu Dhabi and Cairo.”

Tanja Fajon
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

We have just completed one of the most challenging diplomatic operations, safely bringing home nearly a thousand Slovenian citizens from the Middle East war zone earlier this month. As Minister Tanja Fajon emphasises in her introductory article, this operation demonstrated effective cooperation among relevant bodies and individuals at both national and international levels, as well as exceptional professionalism and dedication from everyone involved, including staff at the Ministry and the Slovenian diplomatic and consular missions.

Ambassador Samuel Žbogar emphasises that diplomacy is successful when everyone works as a team. For this issue of the Diplomatic Bulletin, he and his colleagues from the Permanent Mission in New York reflect on Slovenian foreign policy after the Security Council.

This issue is largely focused on science. We present some highlights of Slovenia's diplomatic work in this field, including Sunita Williams' visit to Slovenia and an excellent project combining science and art with development aid. Even the section "In the past..." is dominated by science this time, reporting on the International Geophysical Year that took place a century ago. Dr Boris Frlec, Ambassador and former Foreign Minister, who passed away last month, also had a background in science. He will be remembered as an excellent diplomat, a distinguished expert and a great man.

We also commemorate the fourth anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To mark the occasion, the Bled Strategic Forum organised a roundtable discussion on how Ukraine's efforts are shaping the future of European security, resilience and democracy. Hearing a variety of opinions, stories and recommendations prompts reflection on how long this war has been raging. Are we sufficiently aware that it has now lasted almost as long as the world wars of the past century? And now missiles are already flying over another region...

This issue also features an article about the traditional Slovenian carnival character, the Kurent, taking part in a carnival traditions festival in Argentina. We wish you a pleasant start to spring, despite current developments in the world.

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EVACUATION OF SLOVENIAN CITIZENS FROM THE GULF STATES: WHEN DIPLOMACY BRINGS YOU HOME SAFELY

Global crises often reveal the true value of diplomacy and underscore the importance of a robust network of diplomatic and consular missions. When airspace closes, commercial flights are cancelled and citizens are searching for a way home, diplomacy shifts from relatively abstract policy to highly practical consular work. This was once again demonstrated by the events following the United States and Israeli strikes on Iran.

In the first days of the attacks, uncertainty prevailed and many questions remained unanswered. The world watched anxiously to see how events would unfold and how the Iranian leadership would respond. Following Iran's initial response of launching missiles towards Gulf states, it became clear that this confrontation would differ from that of June 2025 and could escalate into a wider regional conflict.

An emergency virtual meeting of EU foreign ministers followed on Sunday afternoon, providing an opportunity to exchange information with European counterparts on the rapidly evolving situation. Even at EU level, there was no clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the United States and Israeli operation. Nevertheless, there was a shared recognition of the need for a swift response to organise the evacuation of European citizens, as the situation was deteriorating by the hour. The window for action was rapidly narrowing. It is fair to say that few, if any, EU member states had been fully prepared for the possibility that the Gulf states – home to many EU citizens – might become collateral victims of an attack on Iran, necessitating a large-scale evacuation within days.

Images and reports of Dubai's iconic Burj Khalifa engulfed in flames quickly spread across the public domain. Reports of attacks on infrastructure were also emerging from other Gulf states. Calls and messages from distressed Slovenian citizens began to pour in, seeking assistance and evacuation. Airspace over the Gulf was closed and commercial flights were cancelled. As a major global transit hub, Dubai effectively ceased operations overnight, with countless flights grounded. The events of that weekend foreshadowed what would become one of the most demanding weeks of the past four years.

A rapid response was required. An ad hoc crisis team, comprising representatives of the relevant authorities, other relevant ministries and security agencies, was therefore established. We were confronted with a deluge of information, including misinformation, and operated under intense pressure, fully aware that the situation in the region could deteriorate further at any moment.

We began planning evacuation scenarios and exploring a range of options. Each day involved close coordination with numerous agencies, continuous assessment of possible evacuation routes and difficult decision-making.

The Slovenian Ambassador in Abu Dhabi performed exceptionally, as did the Slovenian Embassy in Cairo. Throughout this period, we also received up-to-date information from other diplomatic and consular missions in the region, including Tel Aviv and Tehran. The Consular Department operated around the clock, while we remained in close contact with other EU member states to explore possibilities for joint evacuations.

I held discussions with foreign ministers across the region. Many expressed their willingness to assist, while also making clear that this was not their conflict, even as they were compelled to respond to developments in the region.

The evacuation of Slovenian citizens from the Gulf represented a defining test of this mandate, confronting Slovenian diplomacy with an exceptionally demanding challenge. As the saying goes, a friend in need is a friend indeed. This crisis has demonstrated that Slovenia can rely on a wide network of partners, even in the most difficult circumstances. I am particularly pleased that we have once again demonstrated the professionalism and effectiveness of Slovenian diplomacy, and that the partnerships developed over the past four years have proven their value. Ultimately, this confirmed that our principled foreign policy has enabled us to build partnerships that contributed to the safe and relatively swift return of our citizens.

Slovenia evacuated more than 1,000 people from the affected area within a very short period, including 919 Slovenian citizens and 154 foreign nationals. To achieve this, a total of nine evacuation flights were carried out in just seven days: three from Oman, four from Dubai and two from Riyadh. For the ground phase of the evacuation, four coach transfers were organised from areas with restricted airspace (Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha) to departure points in Oman (Muscat) and Saudi Arabia (Riyadh), from where the evacuation flights were subsequently operated.

I am therefore especially grateful to the foreign ministers of the Gulf states, with whom we remained in constant contact throughout this period. They offered concrete assistance with the evacuations and were personally engaged in efforts to ensure the safety of our citizens.

Through sustained diplomatic, consular and political efforts, we were among the first EU member states both to initiate and to complete evacuations by the end of the week. We succeeded in bringing approximately 900 Slovenian citizens safely home.

I am confident that we have learned a great deal from this experience. It has strengthened our resilience and enhanced our preparedness for future challenges, particularly in light of the growing number of conflicts worldwide and the increasing need for effective diplomatic and consular action.

Tanja Fajon, Minister

SYNERGY OF SCIENCE AND ART IN A WATER MANAGEMENT PROJECT USING SPACE AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

In the summer of 2025, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs' department responsible for cultural diplomacy also assumed responsibility for the field of science diplomacy. Previously, this area had been covered within the scope of other policy domains, particularly global challenges and economic diplomacy. Consequently, the department was renamed the Department for Cultural and Science Diplomacy, and the directorate became the Directorate for Economic, Cultural and Science Diplomacy.

Scientific institutes and research play a crucial role in addressing environmental and other global challenges, as well as promoting economic development, because they facilitate the testing of new technologies, the development of innovations and international cooperation.

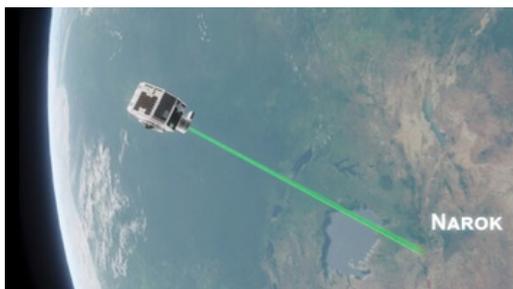
Although we may not associate science with culture and art, these areas are actually closely connected. Through art, science can reach a wider audience by appealing to people's familiar and intimate perceptions. This allows scientific ideas to transcend the purely factual dimension and foster a deeper understanding of their message.

"One question that often arises at international conferences is how to convey complex scientific findings to the general public. One approach is to use culture and art, which appeal to our emotions. Stories and images are easier to understand and remember than dry facts and graphs." (Ambassador Tanja Miškova, Slovenia's Ambassador-at-Large for Water Diplomacy)

Recognising that science can reach people more easily through art has led to a collaboration between the SPACE-SI Slovenian Centre of Excellence, headed by Prof. Dr Tomaž Rodič, and artist Eva Petrič. Their partnership is a compelling example of the fusion of scientific research and artistic expression.

The innovative development project "Satellite Data and Digital Twin Models to Support Management of Transboundary River Basins in Kenya" (2023–2025) was implemented through collaboration between the Centre for International Cooperation and Development, the SPACE-SI Slovenian Centre of Excellence, the company C3M and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). The initiative was supported by Slovenian Official Development Assistance (ODA) and diplomatic efforts, particularly water diplomacy and the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. The project aimed to develop advanced methods for managing Kenyan river basins and to strengthen the resilience of local communities facing droughts, flash floods and other consequences of climate change.

This pioneering project involves integrating satellite and in-situ data, including information from Slovenia's first microsatellite, NEMO-HD, as well as developing so-called digital twin models of riverine ecosystems. These models facilitate the simulation of various scenarios, ranging from extreme rainfall to prolonged droughts, thereby supporting timely decision-making. Particular attention was paid to the areas around Lakes Victoria and Turkana, as well as the cities of Kisumu and Narok and their wider surroundings. The same methods were also used to analyse the extensive flooding that affected those regions in 2024.



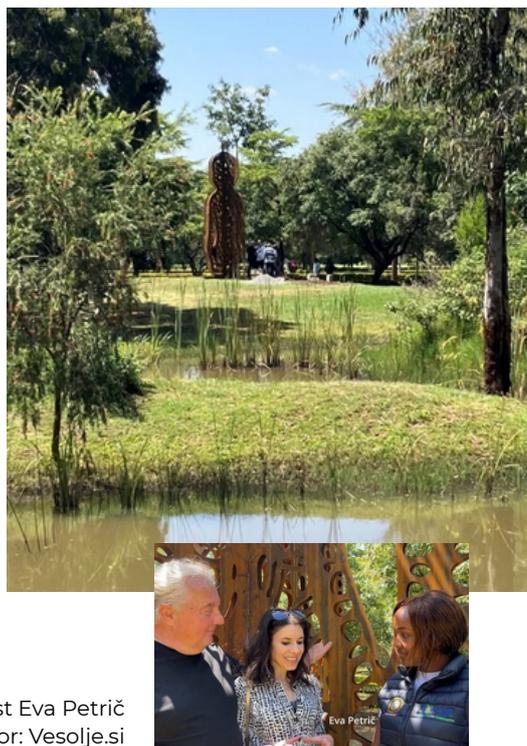
The Slovenian satellite Nemo-HD circles the Earth sixteen times a day, spending only a short time above its homeland. Most of the solutions developed for Slovenia are useful all around the world. Just as they do in Kenya, they contribute to finding solutions on the ground. Therefore, we aim to share our capabilities with others in order to help address global climate change.

Satellite Nemo-HD / Author: Vesolje.si

This approach was partly shaped by Slovenia's experience of the severe floods of 2023, which revealed the limitations of using satellites to observe torrential events; cloud cover obstructed optical measurements and extreme turbulence on the water's surface affected radar measurements. As a result, the strategy has been upgraded to include digital models using digital twins of river basins. These models allow computer simulations of flood events even when satellite measurements are disrupted or impossible. When Kenya faced similar challenges a year later, the Slovenian-Kenyan team was therefore better prepared to respond.

A distinctive feature of the project is the Conduit@EmpathyI installation, which blends science and art. Designed by artist Eva Petrič in collaboration with Dr Rodič, the six-metre-high sculpture functions both as an artwork and a supporting structure, incorporating built-in measuring devices and sensors that monitor environmental parameters. This installation forms part of the research infrastructure by enabling the calibration and supplementation of satellite data in the field. Its design features motifs inspired by Idrija lace, symbolising the interconnectedness of people, nature, technology and diplomacy. The concept of "conduit" therefore serves as both a metaphorical and literal link between orbital data and social space. Located in the park of the University of Nairobi, it has become a focal point for cross-sector communication through art. In this way, art plays an important role in science by contributing to a sense of humanity and wholeness while encouraging progress in areas that remain unexplored.

Instalation Conduit@EmpathyI and artist Eva Petrič
Author: Vesolje.si



The project was inaugurated during the state visit to Kenya in June 2025 by the Slovenian President, Nataša Pirc Musar, who emphasised that climate change is not only an environmental issue, but also a matter of peace, dignity and access to basic resources. "And water is the most precious of all," said President Pirc Musar.

Following the opening ceremony, Henriette Geiger, European Union Ambassador to Kenya, commented on the artwork: *"Your artistic performance was simply wonderful, meaningful and moving! We will make sure that your artwork remains operational and connected to the innovation centre that we are funding at the university. It is very encouraging to meet people who are making a difference."*

This placed the project within the wider context of water diplomacy and development cooperation, making it an integral part of the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Transboundary Water Management in Africa.

The project itself emerged from a dynamic process. The collaboration between Prof. Dr Tomaž Rodič and artist Eva Petrič began with a performance co-organised by economic and water diplomacy at the Expo Dubai exhibition in March 2022 to mark UN World Water Day. This was followed by their participation in the UN Water Conference in New York in March 2023, organised through the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the UN in New York. At the event, they committed themselves to developing cost-effective technologies for river basin management, including solutions suitable for use in less developed countries. On the sidelines of the conference, Slovenia and Kenya also examined Kenya's needs for solutions developed based on experience gained following the floods in Slovenia.

The result is a pioneering developmental project that goes beyond traditional technology transfer. A satellite, digital models and the Conduit have been combined to create a comprehensive system that functions both as a scientific instrument for the precise management of water resources and a communication platform that translates space-based data into social awareness through art. The project in Kenya is a prime example of broad cooperation and connectivity, bringing together science, art and diplomacy to create sustainable solutions to global challenges.



“This is a true example of partnership for the future, where science, technology and international solidarity work hand in hand to create a safer, more sustainable and fairer world,” said President Pirc Musar at the opening.

President Dr. Nataša Pirc Musar at the opening
Author: Vesolje.si

Because of its innovative character, the project has been presented at various international forums. The most notable events include the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in Nairobi in 2024 and the tenth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention (MoP 10) in Ljubljana. At the latter event, held in October 2024, the Conduit was formally handed over to the Kenyan side.

Furthermore, the project is related to gender equality, which is also the theme of this year's UN World Water Day, 22 March. The long-term impact will be most evident in the increased competitiveness and professionalism of women and men alike, who will both play an equal role in the workplace.

For the Slovenian Centre of Excellence and the wider research and economic community, the project represents far more than just an international reference. It proves that even a small country can develop a comprehensive model, covering everything from satellite technology to its application on the ground, and successfully implement it in other environments. This enhances the credibility of Slovenian expertise in Earth observation, digital modelling and crisis management, while creating opportunities for new, high value-added technological products and services. The project strengthens Slovenia's position as an innovative partner at the intersection of science, diplomacy, the economy and art. It also confirms that solutions developed at home can be returned to the national arena in an improved and upgraded form.

VISIT BY SUNITA WILLIAMS, AN ASTRONAUT OF SLOVENIAN DESCENT

Prior to the visit of former astronaut Sunita Williams, the Ministry's Department for North and Latin America and the Caribbean assumed the role of central coordinator for the week-long programme. It worked closely with all relevant departments and offices, external institutions and other units of the Ministry, as well as with the US side, to prepare and deliver the visit from 12 to 18 January 2026. The programme was extensive in scope and successfully executed.



Minister Fajon in conversation with Sunita Williams at the Noordung Center in Vitanje
Author: MFEA

The visit was hosted by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Tanja Fajon, and the Minister for Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and the Autochthonous Slovenian National Community in Neighbouring Countries, and between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians Abroad, Matej Arčon. The choice of hosts underscored the visit's foreign policy and transatlantic dimensions, including the importance of ties with the descendants of Slovenians abroad and their vital role in strengthening bilateral cooperation, facilitating knowledge transfer and contributing to shared prosperity.

Our approach was comprehensive, combining science diplomacy, economic promotion, the advancement of women in science and the strengthening of ties with the Slovenian diaspora. This model of co-operation represents an example of best practice in the implementation of high-level visits with a distinct international dimension.

The visit by one of the most prominent figures in global astronautics provided Slovenia with an important opportunity to consolidate its position as an active member of the European Space Agency and a credible partner in international space initiatives. It also enabled Slovenia to deepen cooperation with the United States in advanced and breakthrough technologies.



Meeting with students from the University of Nova Gorica in Ajdovščina / Author: Ana Šket Daneu, Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Slovenians Abroad

The space sector is a key driver of technological development, bringing together research, innovation, security and economic competitiveness. Engagement with US institutions, research centres and technology companies through structured dialogue and concrete partnerships opens new opportunities for Slovenian stakeholders to participate in global knowledge networks and cutting-edge technological solutions.

Meetings with researchers, students and companies further foster the integration of science and industry, thereby enhancing the international visibility of Slovenian expertise and innovation. The inspiring personal and professional journey of Sunita Williams had a strong motivational impact on young people and significantly promoted STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The visit therefore went beyond symbolism, generating tangible developmental and networking effects for Slovenian science and industry and further strengthening the strategic technological partnership between Slovenia and the United States.



Visit to the Laboratory of Gravitational Physiology at the Planica Nordic Center / Author: Živa Ogrin, Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport

SLOVENIAN FOREIGN POLICY AFTER UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Reflections (inspired by members of the UN Security Council team): Samuel Žbogar, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to the United Nations in New York.

Slovenia's membership of the Security Council has now come to an end. Over the past two years, the world has seen significant change, and Slovenia's foreign policy has been further refined and consolidated.

There is a broad consensus in Slovenia that our work on the Council was successful. During this period, the Slovenian public followed the Council's deliberations closely and encouraged our proactive engagement. Our principled positions in the Security Council enjoyed wide support. All key foreign policy actors – the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the Minister – acted in close concert.

Such unity of purpose and alignment between foreign policy and public opinion has not always been a given. One need only recall the Vilnius Declaration, in which Slovenia judged, despite certain reservations, that maintaining positive relations with the United States was in its best interests. At that time, we risked losing sight of our principles in the name of pragmatism. It took Slovenian diplomacy considerable time to overcome the consequences of that episode; yet I believe that our work on the Security Council has finally enabled us to leave this behind.

The public took pride in our election to the Council, in our resolute positions, in our independent judgement, in the addresses delivered by our leaders, in the recognition of Palestine and in our principled conduct.

Indeed, pride is exactly the right word to be used in this context. Slovenians were proud of their country's foreign policy during its term on the Security Council, just as they are proud when Slovenian athletes, artists or scientists excel internationally. Pride fosters self-confidence, and self-confidence is an essential ingredient of any successful nation. Throughout our membership, the international community confirmed that such confidence was justified – even those who did not always share all our views regarded Slovenia with respect for its consistency and integrity.

A principled policy has opened doors to cooperation, strengthened national self-assurance and reinforced the conviction that “we can”. This capacity to inspire pride should encourage Slovenian diplomacy to avoid retreating into anonymity after the conclusion of its Security Council mandate.

Slovenia has consistently discharged its international responsibilities with distinction: holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on two occasions, chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, presiding over the Council of Europe and serving twice on the Security Council. On each occasion, Slovenia has demonstrated dedication, creativity, organisational skill and an ability to shape outcomes. Yet once these mandates conclude, we too often recede into the background. The Ministry should therefore reflect collectively on how to sustain visibility and influence beyond such milestones.

What lessons have we learned from the Security Council membership?

1.) A principled stance as a hallmark. Slovenia's positions rested upon three pillars: the protection of civilians; respect for international and humanitarian law; and an even-handed approach to all crises. We thought independently and expressed our views with clarity. As one senior Council official observed, “Slovenia is the most principled member of the Security Council.” On this foundation we built recognition and respect, enabling us to act as a catalyst among the elected members (E10), as noted by our Algerian colleague at the last meeting. Over time, our principled approach became our hallmark.

REFLECTIONS

Slovenia's foreign policy has been refined. This reputation must now be sustained, not least during Slovenia's membership of the Human Rights Council. Our engagement there will demonstrate whether our Security Council term was an isolated achievement or the beginning of a sustained trajectory. The same standard must apply to our work within the European Union, the United Nations and other multilateral forums. Consistency – both internationally and at home – is essential, as is ambition.

2.) The strength of small states lies in coalition-building. Within the Security Council, this was exemplified by cooperation among the E10. Non-permanent members represent diverse regional and political groupings and are often overshadowed by divisions among the permanent members. During Slovenia's term, however, the E10 assumed an unusually prominent role – owing to the Council's composition, global developments such as Gaza, polarisation among permanent members and political transition in the United States. As the "southernmost" of the Western members, Slovenia was well placed to act as a bridge – demonstrating genuine engagement with the countries of the south while remaining anchored within the Western alliance. This role required the right degree of courage and determination, but it also showed that global challenges demand trust-building across regional divides. Slovenia has all the prerequisites to continue its role in the wider community through an alliance for peace. The Secretary-General himself encouraged Slovenia to continue on this path.

3.) Slovenia entered the Council with defined priorities – women, the environment and water. These themes were woven into our broader engagement. Yet Council membership also demands responsiveness to unforeseen opportunities. Slovenia played a constructive role in shaping the EU's position on Resolution 2719 concerning African peace operations, initiated discussion on the future of peace operations and was recognised as a consensus-builder during the Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR).

The experience gained during Slovenia's terms on the UN Security Council shows that priorities provide direction; opportunities allow a state to demonstrate credibility, creativity and constructiveness. Together, they shape reputation – how a country is perceived within a multilateral institution.

4.) Good news travels fast.

Political capital acquired during the Security Council membership should provide the basis for deepening partnerships within the international community. The recent high-level visit by a group of Arab states illustrates this potential. Partnerships should also be cultivated systematically with countries such as Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Guyana, India, South Africa, Canada, Mexico, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Singapore and Switzerland. The Ministry might consider appointing a dedicated envoy to maintain and expand these networks. Our alliances, which are based on shared views on multilateralism, should also extend to other areas. Over the next few months, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs could work with the diplomatic and consular network to create an action plan to translate this (multilateral) political capital into tangible bilateral cooperation.

5.) Slovenia has made excellent use of its seat on the Security Council to strengthen its strategic partnerships with international humanitarian organisations and think tanks. This qualitative leap provides an exceptional foundation for its engagement as an increasingly committed and focused donor within the international community.

6.) The Balkans. The dossiers on Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina remain regular items on the Security Council's agenda. However, in discussions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia's engagement demonstrated an ability to reconcile divergent positions, including those of the Russian Federation, the United States and EU member states, thereby contributing to stability. Similar resolve should guide our engagement within the region and the European Union, including encouraging the start of negotiations on the withdrawal of the High Representative and the Office of the High Representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina 30 years after the conflict, and renewed impetus for the European integration of the Western Balkans, using the same fast-track procedure as the deliberations on Ukraine.

7.) Diplomatic success depends upon teamwork. This was a key element contributing to the success of the mission in New York. Trust in individual experts within a group fosters their initiative and creativity. Equally vital was the confidence placed by Ljubljana in its representatives in New York, facilitating initiatives and clarity of position. Close coordination between the capital, the Permanent Mission and the broader diplomatic network projected a coherent and persuasive image of Slovenia. This model should continue to guide our multilateral engagement, including within the Human Rights Council.

Conclusion

For two years, Slovenia observed a world in transition from a front-row seat. In times of turbulence, when established reference points appear uncertain, guidance must come from within – from our values and principles.

In such a world, there is no inherent contradiction between principle and pragmatism; properly understood, principles are pragmatic. Faced with difficult choices, Slovenia consistently upheld its interests within the Security Council, safeguarded its freedom, strengthened institutions of the order that protects us and opened avenues for cooperation.

For small states, a rules-based international order provides essential protection against the arbitrariness of power politics. Alliances and partnerships reinforce that protection. Neither a unipolar world nor a division into rival spheres of influence can substitute for a functioning multilateral order; still less can a system dominated by competing middle powers. History has taught us that such configurations tend towards conflict, which in turn gave rise to the establishment of the United Nations.

Global security and the resolution of global challenges can only be achieved collectively – through responsible states acting within effective international institutions. The principles of the Charter remain valid, even as those institutions require reform.

Just as we would not sacrifice democracy and the rule of law for the sake of greater efficiency in decision-making at home, so too must we resist sacrificing the international order for seemingly pragmatic or illusory solutions to international problems.

Slovenia's term on the UN Security Council was grounded in this conviction, which should therefore continue to guide Slovenian diplomacy in the years ahead.



BLLED STRATEGIC FORUM: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION MARKING THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

To mark the fourth anniversary of Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Bled Strategic Forum, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, organised a panel discussion titled *"Sovereignty under fire: How Ukraine's struggle is shaping power, resilience and the future of European security and democracy"*.



Opening Remarks by Minister Fajon / Author: BSF

The panel was opened by the Ukrainian Ambassador to Slovenia, followed by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Tanja Fajon. In her remarks, Minister Fajon underscored the significance of Ukraine's struggle for the future of Europe as a whole and outlined Slovenia's continued efforts to support Ukraine and its people. Slovenia, she affirmed, will remain a steadfast ally and supporter in Ukraine's pursuit of a just and lasting peace – one that reflects Ukraine's legitimate demands and includes appropriate security guarantees, including EU membership.

The introductory addresses were followed by a roundtable discussion featuring Katja Geršak (Trivelis Institute), Vojko Volk (National Security Adviser), Matic Koširnik (Youth Section of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia) and Oleksiy Melnyk (Razumkov Centre, Kyiv). The discussion was moderated by Peter Grk, Secretary General of the Bled Strategic Forum.

Responding to a question regarding the current situation in Ukraine, Oleksiy Melnyk observed that, despite the immense number of casualties and four years of sustained warfare, Ukrainian morale remains resilient and the population cautiously optimistic about the future. At present, he noted, it is difficult to predict developments in the weeks and months ahead. Although Russia has signalled a willingness to negotiate, these overtures appear largely intended to divert the attention of the United States while military operations against Ukrainian towns and villages continue unabated. From the Ukrainian perspective, Russia does not yet appear prepared to engage in negotiations in good faith, as it continues to believe that its objectives can be secured through military means. As long as this assessment holds, no substantive shift in the position of the Russian political leadership, including President Putin, should be expected. In this context, the continuation – and further strengthening – of sanctions against Russia remains justified. Despite scepticism in some quarters, the sanctions regime is having a tangible impact. Russia faces mounting economic difficulties, incentives for new military recruits are diminishing and its capacity to ensure sufficient rotation of forces on the battlefield is increasingly constrained. While the situation may still be regarded by Moscow as manageable, structural vulnerabilities are becoming visible, and additional pressure could further expose these weaknesses. Nevertheless, such developments will not materialise overnight, given Russia's considerable natural resources and demographic scale.



Panelists and moderator of the discussion Peter Grk / Avtor: BSF

Vojko Volk emphasised the importance of countering disinformation narratives propagated by Russia. He identified three in particular: the claim that the European Union is weak and divided; the assertion that Russia is prevailing in Ukraine; and the suggestion that the EU is unwilling to engage in dialogue with Moscow. In his assessment, the opposite is true. The EU has demonstrated an exceptional degree of unity, with virtually all Member States – save one – providing Ukraine with substantive economic and military assistance. This cohesion constitutes a significant achievement. Russia, he argued, must ultimately be compelled to engage in genuine negotiations. He expressed the view that the current line of demarcation between Ukrainian and Russian forces may form the basis of a future peace settlement, accompanied by robust security guarantees for Ukraine. A reorientation of Russia towards the European sphere, he suggested, would depend upon a substantive change in its policies. He further underscored the strategic importance of EU enlargement, including with regard to Ukraine, noting that substantive discussions are under way within the Union. While multiple scenarios are under consideration, they appear to converge towards eventual EU membership for both Ukraine and the Western Balkan countries.

Katja Geršak built upon these remarks, acknowledging that dialogue and negotiation with Russia will ultimately be necessary. At present, however, such engagement remains highly challenging, given that Russia's actions extend beyond conventional warfare in Ukraine to include hybrid and cyber operations targeting European states. These efforts include attempts to interfere in electoral processes and to undermine confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law. Strengthening the EU's capacity and resilience to counter such influence, she argued, is therefore of paramount importance.

Matic Koširnik observed that the geostrategic landscape in Europe and globally has shifted with unprecedented speed, leaving many young people confronted with the realisation that the present security environment can no longer be taken for granted. A period of heightened geopolitical turbulence and instability is emerging, in which both individual states and the European Union must ensure an adequate level of security in order to safeguard their sovereignty, peace and shared values. It is therefore essential, he concluded, to foster a broad and inclusive debate on the role of security within this new geostrategic reality, without which the European Union's aspiration to act as a credible global actor will remain difficult to realise.

INTERNATIONAL GEOPHYSICAL YEAR (IGY) 1957–1958

Seventy years ago, amid the accelerating arms race between the superpowers, preparations were underway in Europe and the United States for the International Geophysical Year. The geopolitical struggle of the Cold War assumed new dimensions: outer space, the oceans and the Earth's polar regions became arenas of strategic and scientific competition.

At the end of July 1955, the United States announced its intention to launch the first artificial satellite to mark the International Geophysical Year. A few days later, Moscow declared that it too would launch a satellite for the same purpose. In 1956 alone, 69 Soviet and 76 American rockets of varying ranges were launched. In October 1957, Sputnik I, the world's first artificial satellite, was placed into orbit from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, followed in November by Sputnik II, which carried the dog Laika. In response, the United States launched Explorer 1, weighing just 14 kilograms, and subsequently established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Competition intensified, as did investment in both civilian and military space programmes. The desire for ideological triumph was extraordinary and in post-war Europe, it was met with concern and protest.

The International Geophysical Year (1 July 1957–31 December 1958) originated as an initiative of American and Soviet scientists. After careful deliberation, it gradually gained the support of political leaders on both sides of the divide, who recognised the limits of unrestrained rivalry. Alarmed by the stockpiling of nuclear weapons and by reports of weapons testing, civil society, despite official censorship, lent its support to the initiative. Although competitiveness sharpened and investment in science expanded, there remained a growing awareness of the risks of unchecked ambition. Some predicted a new era of colonisation in outer space, similar to earlier expansions into the oceans, the Arctic and the Antarctic.

Against this backdrop, an independent committee – comprising a British mathematician, an American physicist and a Soviet geophysicist – drafted a proposal that ultimately secured the endorsement of more than 30,000 scientists from both blocs. Their objective was to moderate the perilous race through reasoned cooperation, while sustaining research and investment in physics, including civilian nuclear programmes.

The popularisation of geology, physics, the natural sciences and astronomy served several purposes. In the aftermath of war, it sought to emphasise the constructive and humane potential of the technical sciences, including astronomy and nuclear physics. It underscored the exceptional research capacities of the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe and Japan, and aimed to demonstrate to political leaders the collective responsibility scientists bear towards humanity. At the same time, it warned of the potential catastrophe inherent in the Cold War and in senseless competition on Earth and in space. This sobering reflection at the highest levels influenced statesmen, including President Eisenhower and President Khrushchev. Coordinated by UNESCO, the initiative brought together 67 states and their research institutions, including the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana.

The International Geophysical Year also reinforced the importance of multilateralism and public international law. International cooperation in geophysical science contributed to significant and enduring diplomatic achievements, including the establishment of the International Atomic Energy Agency in 1957, the adoption of the Convention on the High Seas in 1958 and the conclusion of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.

THE PTUJ KURENT AT A CARNIVAL PHOTO EXHIBITION IN ARGENTINA

In February 2026, the Slovenian Embassy in Buenos Aires presented its 'Kurenti from Ptuj' exhibition at the 'Carnival from Europe to Latin America – Masks Without Borders' international photography exhibition in Gualeguaychú, a city whose carnival is often compared to Brazil's famous Rio de Janeiro Carnival. This cultural project combines European carnival traditions and one of Argentina's most distinctive celebrations.

The exhibition was organised by the Gualeguaychú House of Culture and the Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus in Argentina. Participating embassies included those of Slovenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Poland and Portugal.

At the opening of the exhibition, Tina Vodnik, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to Argentina, expressed Slovenia's pride in the Ptuj Carnival being featured in the European photography exhibition in Gualeguaychú, a city with a long carnival tradition. Slovenia itself is well known for its rich carnival heritage. The Kurent from Ptuj is one of the most recognisable figures of Slovenia's carnival season, with roots that stretch deep into the country's history and tradition.

The photographs on display offer a contemporary artistic interpretation of the Kurentovanje Carnival, emphasising the expressive power of the traditional carnival figures that are a hallmark of Ptuj's cultural heritage.

Stanko Kozeč, the photographer (source: Visit Ptuj – Public Institute Ptuj), masterfully captured the dynamics, symbolism and energy of the Kurenti, as well as the festive atmosphere, through his distinctive visual language and attention to detail.



Ambassador Tina Vodnik on the sidelines of the event
Author: Embassy in Buenos Aires



By participating in the exhibition, the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Buenos Aires has contributed to raising the international profile of Slovenian cultural heritage and strengthening cultural dialogue between Slovenia and Argentina. The presentation of the Kurenti in Gualeguaychú provided an invaluable opportunity to promote Slovenian traditions across Latin America.

A Presentation of the Kurentovanje Festival from Ptuj
Author: City of Gualeguaychú

IN MEMORIAM



Dr. Boris Frlec / Author: STA

In February, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Dr Boris Frlec passed away at the age of 90.

His life and work were defined by wisdom, dedication and a steadfast commitment to state-building. He left an indelible mark on Slovenian foreign policy and made a significant contribution to the consolidation of Slovenian statehood. Through his vision, composure and integrity, he set the highest professional and ethical standards as both a diplomat and a minister, while always remaining a man of dialogue, trust and exceptional wit.

After many years at the helm of the Jožef Stefan Institute, Dr Boris Frlec entered the diplomatic service in the period prior to Slovenia's independence, serving as Ambassador of the former common state of Yugoslavia to Germany, in Bonn. Following its independence, he was appointed Slovenia's first ambassador to Germany. In this capacity, he played an important role at a pivotal moment in history, when Germany adopted a position that contributed to Slovenia's recognition in early 1992.

From 1997 to early 2000, Dr Frlec served as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

His tenure coincided with a decisive period in Slovenian foreign policy. The country intensified its efforts towards Euro-Atlantic integration and advanced its strategic objectives, ultimately culminating in full integration into the European Union and NATO. During his mandate, Slovenia served for the first time as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (1998–1999). He continued to serve with distinction at the multilateral level, including during the OSCE Chairmanship, heading the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force in 2005 and contributing to the OSCE working group on the reform of international organisations.

In May 2025, Dr Boris Frlec became the first recipient of the Lifetime Achievement in Diplomacy Award, presented by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED

- January: Start of Slovenia's UN Human Rights Council 2026–2028 term
- 22 January: Publication of the 16th issue of the Diplomatic Bulletin
- March – Evacuation of Slovenian citizens from the Gulf states

IN THE PIPELINE

- 20 May: World Bee Day
- 22 May: Slovenian Diplomacy Day
- June 8 and 9: Economic Advisors' Conference
- June – Fifth National Conference on Artificial Intelligence

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE

“There is no easy way from the earth to the stars.”

Seneca

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