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Minister Fajon with SG of the UN Guterres / Author: MFEA

"Slovenia has left an exceptional mark on the Security Council—it has acted responsibly, built trust, and advocated for an equal approach to all conflicts—and it can be extremely proud of this."

António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Slovenia has successfully completed its second term on the UN Security Council. In this issue, we take a look back on our work and how we successfully rose to the challenge of serving on this important body. Credit for this achievement is due above all to our team at the Permanent Mission in New York and to the UN Security Council Task Force at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in Ljubljana. Their high-quality work and principled commitment to upholding the UN Charter and international law deserve recognition. At the same time, this success places Slovenia firmly in the international spotlight and brings with it a responsibility to continue pursuing a principled and consistent foreign policy.

As this month marks the beginning of Slovenia's third term on the Human Rights Council, this issue therefore includes a reflection on this new mandate by the Permanent Representative in Geneva, Ambassador Anita Pipan. We also feature an interview with State Secretary Neva Grašič, who underscores the importance of the European Union and outlines Slovenia's positions on some of the most pressing issues currently facing the EU, including the new budget and enlargement. She also highlights the opportunities and importance of specialised forms of diplomacy, such as economic, science and cultural diplomacy, which employ innovative approaches to enhance Slovenia's international visibility and reputation.

Another successful event reflecting this approach is the Latin America and Caribbean Days, which has evolved from a one-off event into a series of cultural, economic and other activities spanning several weeks. The Embassy in Zagreb has carried out a distinctive project that combines the promotion of Slovenia through cultural diplomacy with support for vulnerable groups: the Croatian translation of the popular Slovenian children's book *Muca Copatarica* (Slipper Keeper Kitty) is now also available to blind and visually impaired readers.

A contribution from the Bled Strategic Forum presents the outcomes of two engaging discussions organised as part of its year-round programme, focusing on the geopolitics of the Middle East and on opportunities for peacebuilding in an increasingly polarised world. At the beginning of the year, the "In the past..." section revisits key moments in our history, as we approach the 35th anniversary of Slovenia's independence.

This year promises to be a special one. May it also be a happy and successful one.

Sabina R. Stadler, Chief Editor

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A VIEW FROM LJUBLJANA: SLOVENIA'S SECOND TERM ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL (2024–2025) COMES TO AN END

On 31 December 2025, Slovenia completed its two-year term on the UN Security Council. As the alphabetical rotation assigned us the second presidency at the very end of our term, we bid farewell in our role as presiding country.

We now have a few weeks to compile figures and data, evaluate our efforts and determine what lessons to carry forward. A comprehensive assessment will be available later, but we can already highlight some important points that marked this four-year journey – from December 2021, when we announced our candidacy, to December 2025, when we crossed out the final day of our membership on the large calendar in the Task Force office.

Team spirit is the first thing that comes to mind. Our membership was "New York-based", so we received proposals for positions and draft statements from the Permanent Mission in New York and responded from Ljubljana. The Mission's leading role was the right choice, as the Security Council is a specific environment with a complex background dynamic. Understanding and anticipating this dynamic is key to taking an active, constructive and realistic approach. Naturally, this meant that most of the work fell on our New York colleagues. Their excellent performance of demanding tasks over a period of two years, during which the pace never slowed, must be emphasised again and again. Put simply, Slovenia did well on the Security Council because its team did well.

However, the Slovenian team extended beyond New York, demonstrating real, effective teamwork. The sectors and directorates contributed their knowledge and expertise on specific issues. The diplomatic missions and consular posts provided valuable information from the field, along with political assessments and forecasts. Although the work related to the Security Council was added to their regular tasks, we always received a response, no matter how short the deadline.

The Task Force operated with a high degree of autonomy, enabling rapid progress on issues that did not require political verification while reducing the burden on decision-making structures. We always knew when such verification was required, and when it was, responses were prompt and constructive. We are truly grateful for the trust placed in us for our regular work, as well as for the clear guidance provided by the leadership on the most challenging issues.

After just a few months, foreign officials at all levels began praising Slovenia's work on the Security Council, and this praise has remained a constant feature of conversations and communications. We are convinced that this praise is sincere and not merely a matter of courtesy. For almost two years, we have consistently heard words of appreciation. We have also learned from foreign colleagues in informal conversations that they wish they could say in their countries' statements what Slovenia was saying.

Certainly, not everyone was satisfied with us, but our positions were never intended to please everyone. They have consistently defended the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and the entire international system based on it. We can be proud that most of our foreign partners have found this stance commendable.

The Security Council's agenda is extensive, unfortunately reflecting the numerous situations where peace and security are under attack or fragile, requiring the engagement of the international community. Some items have been on the agenda for decades. We have dealt with most of these situations before, of course, albeit in different formats, with different emphases and in less detail. This time, however, the issues at hand were the provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the border crossings through which humanitarian aid could reach Sudan, and the small, abandoned settlements in Cyprus that remain points of tension. Furthermore, new situations and crises were constantly emerging. For two years, the Middle East was literally boiling, and the situation in Africa was deteriorating. By the end of our term, we were dealing with the tense situation in the Caribbean, Israel's recognition of Somaliland, and clashes between Cambodia and Thailand.

Anyone who writes speeches and statements knows they cannot be conjured out of thin air. I therefore offer my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in New York who repeatedly addressed the same issues, sometimes several times a month. Despite high frustrations, our statements persisted in "gnawing away" at the issues by highlighting atrocities and civilian suffering, drawing attention to increasingly destructive warfare methods, and underscoring the Security Council's collective responsibility to find solutions, achieve ceasefires and provide humanitarian aid. These were precisely the strongest messages: that we were aware of our responsibilities as a Security Council member, prepared to fulfil them, and expected the same from others.

Slovenia took advantage of new formats of cooperation in the Security Council. We saw an opportunity for a stronger presence among the Council's elected members (E10) and devoted ourselves seriously to this task, raising cooperation to the ministerial level. As early as March 2024, the E10 countries drafted a resolution (on a Slovenian computer), which became the first resolution adopted by the Security Council after 7 October 2023. It called for a ceasefire, the release of hostages and access to humanitarian aid. The E10 served as a mechanism for joint action, meaning greater power.

In 2025, partly in response to the US's changed position, cooperation between the European members strengthened. This brought four EU members – Denmark, France, Greece, and Slovenia – and the post-Brexit United Kingdom onto the same line.

Slovenia entered the Security Council with clearly defined thematic priorities: conflict prevention, protection of civilians in armed conflict, women, peace, and security, and climate, water, peace and security. Although we were unable to bring some issues directly to the Security Council due to real circumstances and relationships, we persistently worked on all thematic priorities in subsidiary bodies and informal expert groups by organising informal discussions and side events. Throughout our time as a member of the Security Council, we made statements at the vast majority of the more than 550 formal meetings. All of our statements consistently reflect the integration of all four thematic priorities into the consideration of individual situations. The draft resolutions and presidential statements prepared remain relevant and may be considered at a later time.

With its geographical and thematic priorities set, Slovenia made good use of the opportunities for additional engagement. Two were anticipated: the presidencies in September 2024 and December 2025. On both occasions, Slovenia successfully carried out all the duties of the presiding country. We organised our signature event and successfully negotiated and adopted presidential statements on Leadership for Peace (2024) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2025).

However, some opportunities arose unexpectedly. One of these was the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review. Slovenia accepted the role of co-facilitator and, together with Egypt, negotiated the text of the twin resolutions with persistence and creativity in a highly polarised multilateral environment. The texts were adopted by 15 votes in the Security Council and by consensus in the General Assembly.

Another unexpected opportunity was the Security Council's trip to Syria and Lebanon in early December 2025. As support for this mission grew, Slovenia, as the presiding country, took the initiative. After lengthy consultations and complex preparations, Slovenia led the visits, which were an important expression of support for both countries amid the difficult circumstances they and the entire region are facing.

It must be noted that this term was very different from Slovenia's first term on the Security Council from 1998 to 1999. Although we felt that "a lot was happening" then, the pace this time was brutal, driven by an extensive agenda and modern communication technologies. Everything is happening right now in real time in different groups on different applications. Because of this pace, the focus on the mission in New York increased, as events often unfolded before dawn in Europe.

Above all, the dynamics within the Security Council itself have changed. There is sharp polarisation and little willingness to seek compromise solutions. Although the Security Council is of course functioning – it adopted 90 resolutions during Slovenia's membership – many processes are moving towards weakening existing mandates. There is also strong pressure to terminate missions and remove previously agreed language. Regrettably, this trend is unlikely to be reversed anytime soon.

However, even in these challenging circumstances, Slovenia has done well. We always give our all to special projects like this one, performing our tasks in a way that exceeds our usual capabilities in international relations. We should never shy away from major stages such as the Security Council. We know how to rise to the challenge.

The Task Force in Ljubljana included Matej Marn, Špela Lajmiš, Andrej Kralj, Zarja Bregant, Nina Činkole, Patrik Bole and Vid Jereb.



Author: MFEA

INTERVIEW WITH STATE SECRETARY NEVA GRAŠIČ

State Secretary Neva Grašič is responsible for European affairs, international law and the protection of interests, and economic diplomacy. We spoke to her about her current priorities and her views on the future challenges and opportunities facing Slovenia.

You assumed the role of State Secretary last summer. How would you summarise the dynamics of your work in this responsible position so far?

In a word: dynamic. My portfolio includes directorates that are directly or indirectly involved in all priority areas of this mandate. My responsibilities include coordinating and representing Slovenia's positions within the European Union. I am also delighted that we are strengthening Slovenia's international visibility through economic, scientific and cultural diplomacy.



State Secretary Neva Grašič / Author: MFEA

Our cooperation with the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation has never been closer or as constructive. Of course, we never ignore our citizens living abroad, whether for tourism, business or other reasons.

The volume of work is extensive, both domestically and internationally, and requires a great deal of operational and political energy. A particularly important highlight of this period was Slovenia's presidency of the MED9 group of Mediterranean countries in autumn 2025. I am proud that we successfully carried out all the planned events during the presidency and that I had the opportunity to chair the meeting of MED9 ministers of European affairs, which contributed to deepening political dialogue and strengthening coordination on current European challenges and EU relations with the Mediterranean region.

Among my regular duties, the monthly EU General Affairs Council meetings in Brussels stand out, as they are particularly demanding due to the launch of discussions on the future multiannual financial framework. EU enlargement is also a topic that is very close to my heart. Notably, I participated in the informal General Affairs Council meeting in Lviv in December, which sent a strong political message of EU support for Ukraine and the enlargement policy as a strategic interest of the Union.

This may be a very general question, but it is also a very topical one: Where is the EU heading? Is it adequately equipped to deal with the global upheavals we are witnessing almost daily?

As it has many times before, the European Union is once again facing a fundamental choice about its future direction at a time of growing global instability. It is confronted with a complex set of global challenges, including geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions, technological developments, climate change and profound social shifts. These processes are also accompanied by attempts to reshape the global order. Over the last thirty years, the international order has evolved towards greater cooperation, rules-based governance and interdependence. However, this trajectory is increasingly giving way to strategic competition, transactional relationships and attempts to undermine the rules-based order.

Is the EU adequately equipped to deal with such global upheavals? The answer is – partly, but it requires further strengthening. As the world's third-largest economy, the EU possesses considerable economic and normative power, and its internal market, regulatory influence and leading role in climate policy remain its principal sources of leverage. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated that member states can respond jointly and swiftly in the face of crises, confirming the Union's adaptability and capacity to learn from experience.

At the heart of European integration remains a socio-economic model founded on democracy, the rule of law, individual freedoms and sustainable development. This model underpins Europe's prosperity and quality of life, and it remains attractive both within and beyond the Union. Young Europeans, in particular, recognise this vision as the kind of future they want: one that is fair, inclusive and sustainable. The EU's key task is to protect this model, which requires strengthening its global competitiveness and security, including by expanding the scope of existing policies.

In an increasingly power-driven world – be it economic, technological or military – there is a growing recognition that economic integration and normative influence alone are no longer sufficient. This has given rise to the concept of 'strategic autonomy', whereby the EU must reduce its dependencies in key areas such as energy, technology and raw materials, and assume greater responsibility for its own security. This is essential to strengthening the Union's ability to defend its interests and values independently.

The EU is therefore walking a tightrope between the need to deepen and broaden integration, and the imperative to accommodate the diverse interests of its member states. This challenge is further compounded by foreign interference and disinformation campaigns that polarise societies and undermine unity and progress. Safeguarding democratic foundations and processes will therefore be crucial to maintaining stability and trust in institutions.

The future of the EU will also depend on its ability to strengthen support for the European project and to integrate future member states effectively, since enlargement remains an important geostrategic tool.

In which area the EU is – or could be – a global power, if this is the case? Could one of its strengths be the values on which it is founded, including respect for international law? Or is there more to it than just principled stance and visibility?

Conflicts and wars in our neighbourhood, rising populism and more and more frequent attacks on democracy and the rule of law are increasingly undermining peace, security and stability in Europe. In such circumstances, we clearly need a stronger, more united European Union – one that will remain a credible guardian of its fundamental values, as well as a staunch defender of the international rules-based order, effective multilateralism and functioning international institutions. This is particularly important for Slovenia, as rules protect everyone, regardless of size.

The European Union's unique strength lies in the values on which it is founded: democracy, the rule of law and human rights. At a time when traditional global alliances are weakening and the free world may be shrinking, the Union is increasingly assuming the role of a defender of democratic principles. In the emerging geopolitical vacuum, this role must remain at the core of its strategic identity, even when it demands political perseverance. It is precisely these actions, grounded in law, predictability and respect for international rules, that enable the EU to build strong alliances and help shape common rules and standards in an increasingly fragmented world.

However, the EU can only project its external influence if it first puts its own house in order. As well as maintaining the economic power and sovereignty that give it weight on the global stage, the Union must also ensure consistent respect for the rule of law within its member states and strengthen internal cohesion. Only then will it be able to translate its values effectively into practice, whether in trade relations, enlargement policy, or responses to violations of international law, without applying double standards.

One of the most pressing issues is the next Multiannual Financial Framework. What are Slovenia's priorities and wishes regarding the next EU budget?

In the context of significant geopolitical and economic shifts, Slovenia views the European Commission's proposal for a larger EU multiannual financial framework, amounting to EUR 1.76 trillion (1.26% of EU GNI) for the period 2028–2034, as an appropriate starting point for negotiations. It supports an ambitious budget that will enable the European Union to finance new priorities, particularly competitiveness and security, while maintaining adequate funding for cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy, both of which remain of key importance to Slovenia. During the negotiations, Slovenia will strive to ensure that these two policies receive at least a comparable level of funding to that in the current period.

The draft budget also allows for greater flexibility through a new three-pillar structure. The first pillar merges traditional funds, including Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policy, into single national envelopes, and bundles them into national and regional partnership plans that introduce a results-based approach. Slovenia points out that the new approach to implementing these plans should in fact lead to greater flexibility and simplified procedures for both member states and beneficiaries of EU budget funds.

The second and third pillars strengthen the EU's competitiveness and global role. Slovenia welcomes the proposed increase in funding for competitiveness by around 130%, emphasising that the focus should be on industrial competitiveness based on research and innovation, as well as providing more effective support for the green industrial transformation. With regard to the Global Europe pillar, Slovenia is striving to ensure that sufficient and visible funding is allocated to the EU's enlargement policy and humanitarian aid, as it considers these to be key elements of the Union's external action.

Our country strongly supports EU enlargement, provided the necessary criteria are met. Could this be the key to the EU's future strength?

Slovenia is deeply engaged with the topic of EU enlargement. It strongly supports the enlargement of the European Union and believes that more members could join by 2030, or even sooner. While this is an ambitious objective, it is achievable, provided that both the candidate countries and the European Union respect the agreed criteria and standards, and that the EU delivers timely political responses to the progress made by candidate countries.

There are grounds for optimism: the 2025 enlargement package confirmed that Montenegro and Albania had made significant progress on their path to EU membership. I believe that other countries can make similar progress. A clear, fair and achievable European perspective remains the strongest incentive for implementing long-term reforms that benefit citizens and strengthen our shared European future. In the current geopolitical situation, enlargement also reduces the scope for destabilising influences from third parties. Slovenia is convinced that enlargement will make the European Union stronger, more resilient and more successful.

At this stage of the enlargement process, political commitment, institutional readiness and public support must align on both sides. It is equally important to communicate clearly to European Union citizens why enlargement matters, because it directly strengthens Europe's security, competitiveness and geopolitical power. Parallel processes of enlargement and internal EU reform play a central role in this regard. Future reviews of EU policies prior to enlargement are an important step in preparing the Union to achieve its strategic objectives.

Slovenia has clearly recognised the importance of economic diplomacy as a dimension of foreign policy. It is complemented by cultural and scientific diplomacy. Does this area present the best niche opportunities for Slovenia?

Slovenia is a small, open and highly internationalised country, which is why economic diplomacy is naturally at the core of its foreign policy activities. The greatest opportunities for Slovenia lie in areas where it can offer high added value, such as green and sustainable technologies, advanced industries, digital solutions, logistics, tourism, and knowledge and innovation.

Our potential lies primarily in solutions to global challenges, where we compete not in terms of volume but in terms of quality, flexibility and specialisation. To be successful in economic diplomacy, we must really have a deep understanding of global trends and be proactive.

Cultural and scientific diplomacy strategically complement this core activity. Culture strengthens recognition and trust, while scientific diplomacy integrates Slovenia into international networks of knowledge, research and innovation – key factors for long-term competitiveness. Slovenia's greatest strength lies in the integration of these three dimensions: when economic interests are supported by the reputation built on culture and science, Slovenia can achieve a greater impact, even with limited resources, and raise its international visibility in the long term.

What else can the Ministry do to promote our work and content further? Perhaps among young people in particular?

The MFEA has recently stepped up its engagement with young people, but there is scope to be even bolder and more innovative. We regularly collaborate with universities to organise roundtables on various foreign policy topics, and we have joined an active citizenship project in which we present the work of the Ministry to high school students. We also bring foreign policy content closer to younger generations by using the social networks they engage with to provide more interactive and explanatory content.

We must seize every opportunity to connect with young people. Not only to share our knowledge and experience with them and perhaps encourage them to consider a career in diplomacy, but also to listen to their opinions, ideas and expectations. Incorporating their worldview and an understanding of the challenges facing the modern international community into our work will help ensure that our policies remain open, inclusive and relevant in the long term.



LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN DAYS 2025

Since 2018, Latin America and Caribbean Days (LAC Days) have promoted cooperation between Slovenia – and the wider European area – and the countries of the LAC region. To ensure that both the content and the programme of events remain attractive to experts and the general public alike, considerable attention is devoted each year to their ongoing development.

Over the years, conference themes have included economic integration, sustainable development, space technologies, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, environmental protection and climate change, water and forest management and gender equality. In designing the programme for Slovenia's only international conference dedicated to the LAC region, the focus is placed on challenges common to both regions; these issues are therefore addressed jointly by participants from the two regions.

This year, the LAC Days 2025 series was once again launched with a seminar organised by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), highlighting opportunities for Slovenian companies and institutions to participate in the Bank's regional projects. This marked the third consecutive year of co-organisation with the Ministry of Finance, the SPIRIT Slovenia Business Development Agency and the IDB's Office in Europe. Cooperation between Slovenian research institutions and partners from LAC countries has been particularly dynamic in the fields of artificial intelligence and digitalisation, notably within the framework of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance dialogues co-created by Slovenia and Brazil. Owing to the large number of activities in this area, the workshop originally scheduled as part of LAC Days has been postponed until next year.

Special emphasis is placed on culture and science as vital bridges between countries, regions and people. This is why the eighth edition of LAC Days, held in 2025, was dedicated to these two fields. Unlike previous years, events were held throughout the year in cooperation with numerous partners, including the Slovenian Cinematheque, the Vodnik Homestead, the Mladinska Knjiga Konzorcij bookstore and the embassies of LAC countries. The programme focused on documentary cinema, particularly films addressing environmental issues and gender equality, as well as on presentations of Latin American literature. These events were complemented by thematic discussions and presentations of traditional cuisines from various countries, prepared by their respective embassies.

In April, as part of the Leap into Latin American Literature series, the programme opened with an exploration of Brazilian literary heritage through a presentation of the work of Machado de Assis at the Vodnik Homestead. This was followed by a screening at the Slovenian Cinematheque of a documentary on the life and work of the renowned Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, accompanied by a contribution from curator Dr Sarival Sosič.

In May, the documentary *Memories of Branka Sušnik*, followed by a discussion moderated by Dr Tanja Roženberger, curator at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, and professors Dr Jaka Repič and Dr Urša Geršak, offered an in-depth insight into the remarkable life of the Slovenian researcher of indigenous communities in Paraguay.



June was dedicated to Mexico, featuring screenings of two documentaries on indigenous women's struggles for equality, alongside a lecture by anthropologist Dr Mojca Terčelj. The Vodnik Homestead also hosted a literary event centred on the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, addressing themes of gender equality.

After the screening of documentaries
Author: MFEA

In the autumn, documentary films from Peru examining the role of women were presented, alongside documentaries from Chile and Cuba addressing the impacts of climate change. These screenings were followed by in-depth discussions with Dr Nika Krajnc, Director of the Slovenian Forestry Institute, on the importance of forests in the context of climate change, and with Professor Helen Jaffe, author of the Cuban documentary, who shared insights into its production and filming. The Vodnik Homestead also hosted a presentation of Argentine literature, including Julio Cortázar's novel *Hopscotch* (*Rayuela*), as well as works by the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector.



In conversation with Ambassador Šmit
Author: MFEA

LAC Days 2025 concluded in December at the Mladinska Knjiga Konzorcij bookstore with an event dedicated to Brazil – the only LAC country with a permanent diplomatic mission in Slovenia – and a presentation of a debut book by Milena Šmit, Slovenia's first resident ambassador to Brazil.

Although this year's edition of LAC Days has just concluded, preparations for LAC Days 2026 are already under way. Scheduled to take place in late March, the event will be co-organised by the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia in Vienna in cooperation with ambassadors of LAC countries accredited in Vienna, Rome, Berlin and Ljubljana.

The programme will focus on fostering cooperation in energy transition projects, showcasing advanced technologies and attracting new logistics partners. The delegation will visit Krško and Koper to learn about the operation of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant and the strategic importance of the Port of Koper. The programme will also include discussions at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs on bilateral relations, as well as a presentation of economic opportunities in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Primorska.

By enhancing connectivity, we are strengthening long-term political and economic partnerships with the LAC region and reinforcing Slovenia's reputation as a reliable and forward-looking partner on the international stage.

SLOVENIA'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL AT A TIME OF EROSION OF THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM: THE INTERPLAY OF RULES, CRISES AND RESPONSIBILITY

Written by Anita Pipan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia to the United Nations Office and other international Organizations in Geneva

In Geneva, as elsewhere in the world, we are witnessing a marked shift away from the international legal order that has, for decades, provided a framework for addressing global challenges collectively. The multilateral system, designed to guard against abuses of power, stratification and violence, is facing a profound crisis. Disregard for international law is unfolding before our very eyes in an increasingly multipolar world. In this emerging order, major powers are openly pursuing national interests within their spheres of influence or immediate neighbourhoods. The language of power is supplanting the language of agreement and principle. Cooperation is giving way to unilateral or bloc-based geopolitical approaches; international institutions are being weakened through disinformation; fundamental freedoms are under attack from political elites in many countries; international humanitarian law is violated with alarming ease in armed conflicts; and the universality of human rights is increasingly contested. In many parts of the world, human rights are dismissed as a “Western construct”, an obstacle to development or even a threat to the “traditional values”. In domestic political rhetoric, rights are reduced to instruments of pressure or tools of confrontation.

Against this challenging backdrop, the UN Human Rights Council remains the world's leading political body for the protection and promotion of human rights. Yet the Council itself is under considerable strain. Its universality is increasingly undermined by restrictions on, or suspension of, cooperation by certain states, by attempts to obstruct the work of its mechanisms and by retaliatory measures against individuals and organisations that engage with the UN human rights system. The severe financial and liquidity crisis facing the UN further compounds these challenges, placing additional pressure on both the Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, limiting their ability to fulfil their mandates. Within the UN system, human rights constitute one of the three pillars that receive by far the smallest share of funding, a situation exacerbated by recent budget cuts.

Having concluded its demanding term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Slovenia has chosen to respond to these complex challenges by reaffirming its commitment to international law and human rights – principles that have been built and upheld collectively for more than 80 years. Without them, there can be no lasting peace, no trust in institutions and no resilient societies.

For both historical and political reasons, Slovenia attaches particular importance to international law, multilateralism and the protection of human dignity. Its own experience of transition, institution-building and integration into the international community lends credibility to its defence of the universality of human rights, free from selectivity or double standards.

This year, Slovenia began a three-year term as a member of the Human Rights Council, marking the third time it has served on the body since its establishment twenty years ago. At the outset of Slovenia's membership, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Tanja Fajon, underlined that “the protection of human rights is the duty of all states and, at the same time, a fundamental guiding principle of Slovenian foreign policy and international relations, one that requires constant attention, courage, solidarity and support”.

Engagement in the Human Rights Council is therefore not “just another” multilateral activity. It reflects an understanding that human rights are far easier to dismantle than to rebuild and must be defended persistently and repeatedly. They cannot be taken for granted. The twentieth century, marked by devastating setbacks and slow, painful returns to respect for human rights, offers a clear lesson. When principled voices fall silent, space inevitably opens for those who seek to assert their interests through the language of power – by relativising universality, applying rights selectively, instrumentalising them politically or even attempting to rewrite them altogether.

Peace and security cannot be achieved without respect for human dignity. The rejection of international humanitarian law leads to mass violations of rights, violence and repression, which in turn fuel conflict, radicalisation and increased migration pressures.

Membership of the Human Rights Council is therefore a strategic, political and moral choice. Slovenia believes it can contribute what is most urgently needed today: credibility, consistency and principled commitment.

As a member of the Council, Slovenia can make meaningful contributions in several key areas. First, it can consistently advocate for the impartiality and independence of the Council’s mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, special procedures and investigative bodies, which together form the backbone of the Council’s credibility and are currently under significant political pressure. Secondly, Slovenia can provide substantive leadership in areas where the human rights framework is evolving in response to global challenges such as climate change, environmental protection, artificial intelligence, demographic change, the rights of older persons and the full implementation of the rights of women and girls.

Thirdly, Slovenia can respond consistently to serious human rights violations in countries and conflict situations, refocusing attention on victims and ensuring that their suffering becomes the starting point for accountability and systemic change. The suffering of civilian populations must neither be dismissed as a collateral consequence of political conflict nor tolerated as an explicit target of military action. Fourthly, Slovenia can actively advocate for the protection of civil society and human rights defenders, whose engagement with the UN system is increasingly met with intimidation and retaliation. Without their participation, human rights risk becoming detached from the lived realities of those they are intended to protect. Finally, Slovenia can serve as a bridge between regions, political groupings, stakeholders and development perspectives, drawing on its tradition of dialogue-based foreign policy to contribute to overcoming divisions and strengthening constructive engagement.

Slovenia understands human rights not as instruments of power but as the foundation of our shared humanity. In doing so, it seeks to reinforce the Council’s normative framework at a time when it is under growing pressure.

At the same time, membership of the Council offers an opportunity to strengthen Slovenia’s own diplomatic and institutional capacities, deepen expertise and expand international networks.

For smaller states such as Slovenia, credibility is closely linked to consistency, respect for the law and commitment to universal rules. The Human Rights Council remains one of the few global forums in which these states can participate on an equal footing and, at times, shape debates decisively. Through principled engagement, they can exercise meaningful influence, often described as “soft power”.

Time for principled and proactive membership

The present moment demands courage, particularly from states that believe in the rule of law. It requires the courage to speak out when others remain silent, to defend rules when others seek exceptions and to stand with victims when political expediency is prioritised over justice.

As Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.”

The Human Rights Council is far from perfect. Yet it remains an indispensable global platform for the protection of human dignity at a time when that dignity is under sustained and systematic attack. Membership of the Council is both a responsibility and a strategic investment in the future – of the international system and of future generations. It helps ensure that power does not supplant international humanitarian and human rights law, and that human rights remain the foundation of human society, rather than a privilege.





BLLED STRATEGIC FORUM: DISCUSSIONS ON “THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST” AND “REDEFINING PEACE LEADERSHIP: WHO BUILDS PEACE IN A DIVIDED WORLD?”

As part of a series of conversations organised in cooperation with the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Bled Strategic Forum hosted two discussions on current foreign policy issues in October and November 2025.

One discussion focused on the geopolitics of the Middle East. Dr Trita Parsi, analyst and Vice President of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, examined the region's role in a changing world order, addressing shifts in its political landscape, alliances, regional conflicts and future trajectories.

The second discussion examined the role of leadership in promoting peace amid rising global tensions, weakened multilateral institutions and shifting power dynamics within the international community. The conversation featured Dr Thant Myint-U, historian, writer and grandson of U Thant, the first non-Western Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Dr Parsi situated his analysis within the framework of the United States' "America First" policy, characterised as transactional in its approach to mediation and security guarantees. This approach, he argued, has contributed to the unilateralisation of international relations and prompted both the Gulf states and the European Union to acknowledge that the United States is no longer willing to provide unconditional security assurances.

He noted that this new reality has driven the Gulf states to move from passive observation to more active regional engagement, encouraging closer mutual cooperation. At the same time, the vacuum left by the reduced role of the United States has also created opportunities for partnerships with other actors, notably China. Another key point to emerge from the discussion was the assertion that Israel, rather than Iran, has become the primary destabilising factor in the Middle East, as the United States has become less willing to constrain Israel's use of military force. Israel's strike on Iran's nuclear programme was described as the culmination of this freedom of action, while Iran's retaliatory response exposed vulnerabilities in Israel's missile defence system. Nevertheless, Dr Parsi stressed that Israel's continued development of its military capabilities makes the prospect of a future Israeli attack on Iran likely, with Iran being weakened but not defeated.

In concluding his remarks, Dr Parsi argued that the European Union should resist pressure to choose between China and the United States and should instead pursue an independent middle course.

BLLED STRATEGIC FORUM



Dr. Thant Myint-U / Author: BSF

Dr Thant Myint-U also presented the origins and central themes of his new book, dedicated to his grandfather, U Thant – the first non-Western UN Secretary-General. He highlighted the many parallels between the United Nations' work in the past and its role today, noting that the international community continues to operate under conditions of uncertainty, much as it did in the past.

He underlined the importance of engagement with smaller states, noting that addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change and artificial intelligence requires broad-based cooperation and a pragmatic approach.

He also argued for the need for institutional reform within the United Nations, which he described as ill-equipped to respond effectively to today's global challenges. With sufficient political will, capable individuals and, crucially, strong leadership or the right leader, decisive progress would be possible.

The next Secretary-General, he concluded, must be a person of integrity and a committed pragmatist, dedicated to the United Nations' core mission of safeguarding peace and security and facilitating effective mediation. The selection process will also depend on proposals and engagement from states, civil society and other stakeholders.

The role of the Secretary-General has long been pivotal in conflict resolution. There is therefore cautious optimism that the appointment of a new Secretary-General will reinvigorate leadership and cooperation in addressing the complex challenges facing the world today.

THREE AND A HALF DECADES SINCE SLOVENIA'S DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In recent European political history, 1989 is known as *Annus Mirabilis* – the miraculous year. The Slovenian May Declaration, published in 1989, bore fruit just two years later in 1991, which proved to be no less miraculous for the people of Slovenia.

The collapse of the global bloc system and the fall of the Berlin Wall created the historical circumstances that allowed the process of Slovenia's independence to unfold. This process was the result of deliberate political action and planning by the opposition parties united in the Demos coalition, as well as broad support from civil society and skilful political manoeuvring. It was quick, clear and consensual: 95 per cent of those who participated in the December 1990 plebiscite supported independence, amounting to the endorsement of 88 per cent of all voters. The way forward was wide open, and 1991 became the year of implementation.

Key projects carried out in 1991 included the adoption of independence legislation based on the plebiscite result, the organisation of an army and the declaration of independence and sovereignty on 25 June (with the adoption and proclamation of the Declaration of Independence and the Basic Constitutional Charter on the Independence and Sovereignty of the Republic of Slovenia). Other milestones included victory in the ten-day War for Slovenia, the adoption of the Brioni Declaration as the first diplomatic document signed by the new state and the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army from Slovenian territory on 25 October. Together, these events established the Republic of Slovenia as a sovereign state. An integral part of this process was the metamorphosis of the former Secretariat for International Cooperation into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

The victorious year of 1991 concluded with the adoption of the Slovenian Constitution, exactly one year after the independence referendum. This was accompanied by the announcement by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Republic of Slovenia's broad international recognition. Slovenia had already been recognised by Croatia on the day of the declaration of independence and sovereignty, as well as by Lithuania, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia, Iceland and the Holy See. The state thus entered the international arena, where it established and asserted itself.

This significant series of state-building actions, unique in their content, structure and pace in the post-Cold War period, was by no means self-evident.

Three and a half decades later, 1991, the year of independence, remains vivid and present, while also anchored in historical memory and imbued with the patina befitting such a moment. Slovenia is today a political, diplomatic and economic actor which, through its membership of the UN, EU, NATO and numerous other international organisations, including the OECD, continues to consolidate its reputation as a reliable and credible partner firmly anchored in international law and fundamental European values and norms. This reputation was further confirmed by Slovenia's recently concluded second two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

BOOK FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED: MACA PAPUČARICA (CROATIAN TRANSLATION OF MUCA COPATARICA) BY ELA PEROCI

As part of a reading project for blind and visually impaired children, the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia, in cooperation with the Typhlological Museum in Zagreb, has produced the first fully adapted picture book for blind and visually impaired children in Croatia. Alongside an enlarged print edition and a Braille version, the book is also available in audio format.

The idea for the project emerged during a visit by the Embassy to Pećine Primary School in Rijeka, which has offered Slovene language classes for many years and has a specialised library and playroom for blind and visually impaired children. During this visit, the need for high-quality, comprehensively adapted books for this particularly vulnerable group of children became evident. The Embassy therefore selected one of the most well-known and significant picture books in Slovenian children's literature – Muca copatarica (Slipper Keeper Kitty) by the Slovenian author Ela Peroci. Published in Croatian under the title Maca papučarica, the story is widely popular in Croatia, yet until now it had not been accessible to blind and visually impaired children.

During the initial phase of the project, the copyright status was verified and all necessary consents were obtained, including those from the publishing house Mladinska knjiga, the Copyright Agency of Slovenia, the author's heirs and the illustrator Ančka Gošnik Godec, as well as from the Croatian publisher Mozaik knjiga. To ensure the project was implemented to a professional standard, the Embassy invited the Typhlological Museum in Zagreb to collaborate. The Museum has extensive experience in the production of tactile and audio books for blind and visually impaired readers.

At the Embassy's initiative, the Typhlological Museum, together with external partners, developed both the concept and the methodological approach for adapting the picture book Maca papučarica. The original illustrations by Ančka Gošnik Godec were retained, while simplified tactile illustrations were created and adapted specifically for blind and visually impaired children. This publication is among the first books for blind readers in which the audio version features multiple voices, including children's voices, rather than a single narrator throughout. The audio recording resembles a radio play and can be accessed via a smartphone by scanning the 2D barcodes printed beneath the text on individual pages.

The project was designed and implemented in two phases, both of which have now been completed. In the first phase, the Typhlological Museum prepared the concept and methodology for producing a tactile picture book. This included graphic adaptations of the tactile illustrations, the production of a professionally recorded multi-voice audio version, the development of a dedicated website and 2D barcodes for accessing the audio content, as well as the preparation of all tactile graphics. The audio version was produced in line with professional audiobook standards, and its quality was additionally verified by a blind reviewer. The second phase involved adapting the text, printing it in Braille and large black print, printing and binding the tactile illustrations and producing 30 copies of the tactile picture book.



Picture book Maca Papučarica
Author: Embassy Zagreb

DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS – IN FOCUS

The final product was presented to the public on 23 April at the Typhlological Museum in Zagreb, as part of World Book Day and Croatian Book Night. Intended for both professionals and the general public, the event highlighted the importance of making literature accessible to blind and visually impaired children. The presentation was led by Slovenian Ambassador Gašper Dovžan, Morana Vouk Nikolić from the Typhlological Museum, Antonija Papić from the Croatian Association of the Blind and Ljubica Letinić from Audio Store Transonica, the company responsible for producing the audiobook. Children from a Zagreb kindergarten and pupils from the Dr Ivan Merz Primary School also took part. After listening to the audiobook, they participated in a tactile workshop, gaining first-hand insight into how blind and visually impaired children perceive the world. The event played a key role in raising awareness of the importance of accessible literature and fostering empathy among children.

The official presentation was followed by further promotional activities. At the initiative of the organisers of the Zagreb festival Knjige u krošnjama (Books in the Trees), held in Ribnjak Park from 14 to 18 May 2025, the picture book was included in the festival programme, with one of the amplified trees dedicated to it. The presentation featured an audiobook reading and a tactile presentation of the content, making the book accessible to a wider audience and further enhancing its social impact.

Copies of the book were donated to numerous specialised institutions for blind and visually impaired children across Croatia, beginning in Zagreb, Osijek and Rijeka, with additional deliveries planned.

During the handover visits, Ambassador Gašper Dovžan and Tamara Plankar, the diplomat responsible for cultural affairs, visited the institutions, learned more about their work and took part in accompanying events and programmes.



Zagreb Festival Books in the Trees
Author: Embassy Zagreb

In addition, five copies of the picture book were delivered to the Slovenian embassies in Sarajevo and Podgorica, which will donate the books to relevant institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, respectively, in cooperation with local partners.

This non-commercial project represents an important contribution by the Slovenian Embassy to the promotion of Slovenian culture, the strengthening of cultural diplomacy and the social inclusion of blind and visually impaired children across the wider region.

The project goes beyond the mere donation of books and is evolving into a platform for long-term cooperation, the exchange of best practices and the meaningful inclusion of vulnerable groups in society. As such, it will continue to develop in the future, further strengthening its social and cultural impact.

Building on these experiences and other collaborations in the field of social integration of vulnerable groups, the Embassy has developed an initiative for an inclusive cultural project under EUNIC Croatia 2026. This project has been selected for co-financing from the EUNIC Cluster Fund.

The initiative aims to enhance the inclusion and acceptance of artists with disabilities within the cultural sphere. Although diversity is one of the fundamental European values, artists with disabilities remain underrepresented in mainstream cultural programmes due to limited accessibility, visibility and opportunities.

The project will continue to promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups and their active participation in society, while improving access to culture and related fields. Particular emphasis will be placed on achieving sustainable outcomes and broader social relevance.

SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED

- 9 October–30 November 2025: Latin America and Caribbean Days 2025
- 25 November 2025: Slovenia's election to the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for the 2026–2028 term
- December 2025: Slovenia's second one-month presidency of the UN Security Council and the end of its non-permanent membership for the 2024–2025 term
- 1 January: Start of Slovenia's UN Human Rights Council 2026–2028 term

IN THE PIPELINE

- March: Latin America and Caribbean Days 2026
- 20 May: World Bee Day
- 22 May: Slovenian Diplomacy Day

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE

"A day without laughter is a day wasted."

Charlie Chaplin

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