

Message by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša on Statehood Day

Dear fellow Slovenians, citizens of Slovenia and Slovenians living in neighbouring countries and around the world, on Statehood Day we look back with profound gratitude on the most momentous decision in the history of the Slovenian nation and on its fulfilment.

Thirty-five years ago, we became masters of our own destiny. A state was born that was not given to us as a gift, but won through the courage of people who believed in Slovenia.

When Slovenian flags were first raised at the border crossings in June 1991, no one could know exactly how or when our dreams would come true. That is why independence still teaches us today that the greatest achievements are not created by circumstances, but by people – people hungry for freedom of spirit and courageous enough to unite, overcome their differences and make their dreams a reality. A nation advances when it recognises a shared goal and is capable of placing it above everyday differences.

Today, we do not face tanks or barricades, nor a pandemic, but that does not mean there are no challenges. After years of poor decisions, Slovenia faces a demanding task. Our public finances are not in a condition that allows for complacency or indifference. Too often, taxpayers' money has been wasted on useless or even harmful purposes. Many opportunities have been squandered, and among working people a sense has taken hold that hard work goes unrewarded, while popularity and ideology matter more than political responsibility. If we are to begin addressing and correcting them, we must not pretend that the consequences of these mistakes do not exist.

After 35 years of living in an independent state, it is only right that we speak frankly. We are facing serious challenges in terms of public finances, as well as public, energy and food security in the face of excessive taxation. To tackle these successfully, we need a realistic approach. We need cooperation that will secure the constitutional majority required to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution. We need stability, both economic and political. To achieve the former, we need a fiscal anchor in the Constitution; to achieve the latter, we need to change the electoral system. We also need decentralisation, and a greater devolution of decision-making powers and resources to the regional and municipal levels.

Today, the picture of where we stand is perfectly clear. And when we ask ourselves how we got to where we are today, the figures and facts before us paint a stark picture. We also have an equally unforgiving comparison covering the past twenty years since we joined the European Union. We are part of European statistics, and we can objectively compare ourselves. This comparison reveals that our development has had two distinct halves. In the first, driven by immense momentum, we advanced rapidly and by 2008 had reached 91% of the European average in terms of purchasing power. However, the second half told a different story. Because of everything that happened during that period, we remain at the same level as in 2008 or even about half a percentage point worse off. Some countries that lagged significantly behind us in 2008 have caught up and even overtaken us. Why? Above all, it is because of the politics of exclusion that has become the political norm in Slovenia after 2008. We have a political camp that never extends a hand of cooperation when it is in power. Indeed, in recent years it has even rejected offers of cooperation when it has been in opposition.

The political camp that excludes has been in power for 15 of the 18 years since 2008. Throughout that period, a politics of exclusion has remained at the forefront, often even accompanied by abuses of the rule of law to settle scores with those who held different views. In this way, it is impossible to make full use of all the country's development potential or to progress at the pace that we are otherwise capable of as a resourceful nation.

Exclusion is not the legacy of Slovenia's independence, nor is it part of the values of the time that united us. It is not a path that can take us forward. When the previous government abolished the Museum of Slovenian Independence in January 2023, all of us who decided in 1990 to establish our own state and defended it in 1991 lost that museum. The younger generations who believe in and love Slovenia lost it, too. Slovenia became the only country in the world whose own government abolished the museum dedicated to its founding. Before this year's Statehood Day, the new government therefore had to establish the Museum of Slovenian Independence once again, for the second time, to correct this historical disgrace.

Historical memory matters because a nation without historical memory begins to believe that freedom, peace and a state of its own are things that can simply be taken for granted. Something that simply exists of its own accord. The Museum of Slovenian Independence will be one of the institutions that preserves that memory. It will not merely house military equipment, tanks, helicopters and uniforms, but will preserve the spirit of the time that united us. The time in which the core values of the Slovenian nation were forged. The time when Slovenians took their destiny into their own hands. The time that brought us together.

Today, Slovenia is an internationally recognised country, a member of the European and Euro-Atlantic communities, and increasingly the homeland of generations who have never known freedom as anything other than something self-evident. Yet a free and democratic society, and the independent state that provides its framework, are not something that, once achieved, can simply endure without investing any effort. Every generation must reaffirm them through its actions and, when necessary, protect and defend them.

It is therefore all the more encouraging that today we can observe signs of a renewed awakening of Slovenian pride. A particular reason for optimism is the younger generation, which upholds and values the fundamental principles of Slovenia's independence. This is a clear sign that an awareness of their roots is growing once again among new generations, along with concern for and responsibility towards the future of our homeland.

On Statehood Day, therefore, we do more than remember the past. It is equally important that we recognise the responsibility we bear towards future generations. We have the responsibility of passing on to them a country that is safe and prosperous, a country in which work, knowledge and integrity once again form the foundation of social progress, and in which future generations will live better than we do today.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude especially to everyone who contributed, in any way, to the birth of an independent Slovenia and the foundations of our free, democratic society, whether that be at home, in neighbouring countries or across the globe. Thank you to the members of the Territorial Defence, the police, and the civil defence. Thank you to all those who defended the democratic choice of the Slovenian nation in those decisive moments. Thank you to all citizens who have contributed to the development of our country through your work. And thank you to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for Slovenia – giving their lives. Their sacrifice, and that of their loved ones, will never be forgotten.

On Statehood Day, may the Slovenian flags that fly in tribute to our homeland across Slovenia and among our compatriots around the world remind us of the courage and unity that marked the defining days of Slovenia's independence. And may they remind us of the simple truth that we must build our shared future on the values of the time that united us.

God bless Slovenia!

Janez Janša