

Sinfo

(business culture environment politics sports)

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of Slovenian-Croatian relations

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Veronika Stabej



Dear readers,

this is the first edition of Sinfo in 2009 and the first with the new image. The issue we place before you has not only received a graphic makeover, but more importantly a change in editorial policy. We really want to bring you more information primarily from every field of Slovenian knowledge and expertise, and show you interesting people, places and events.

As we say on the cover, we'll be bringing you **business** news from Slovenia, in this issue presenting two successful and excellent companies, each from a slightly different angle.

We will focus even more on **culture** in the broadest sense of the word; the next thematic issue will be entirely dedicated to this topic. This issue has news from the arts, presenting a successful young musician, and with special stress on the culinary arts, with some specialties from one part of Slovenia.

We talked to the Slovenian Woman of 2008, who is convinced that we can love even if we are three hundred years old. She used to work at our office.

We'll be covering some unique features of Slovenia's **natural and cultural beauties**, as well putting emphasis on **environmental** issues that are of global importance and affect our daily lives. In this issue we present some views on the energy crisis.

We are keeping **politics** as a part of the content, bringing you news and people from Slovenia, but also with an eye on related issues. The Czech Republic took over the presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of this year, so we present views from the respective ambassadors. There is also an article about relations between Slovenia and her neighbour, Croatia.

Sport is also important part of our way of life, so we present two outstanding Slovenian athletes.

At Sinfo magazine, too, we will strive for excellence, and I am sure we we'll continue to make improvements. We would very much appreciate your reactions and suggestions.

Sinfo – Slovenian information

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Sinfo

 Mateja Malnar Štembal

Searching for a compromise

Slovenia entered 2009 with an open issue that has been fully occupying us for several years - the issue of Slovenian and Croatian relations, which are proverbially good, although unfortunately, the issue of the borders between the countries still cannot be resolved.

After Slovenia blocked the advancement of Croatia in eleven chapters in negotiations with the EU at the December negotiating conference due to border prejudgements and other unresolved issues in the accession documents, a way to find satisfactory solutions began again. Croatia was prepared to undertake not no prejudice the border in accession negotiations, but did not agree to undertake not to use documents drawn up after 25 June 1991 in a possible arbitration.

At that time, the Slovenian Primer Minister, Borut Pahor, immediately introduced an initiative to meet with his Croatian counterpart, Ivo Sanader, who rejected the invitation in the middle of January and said he was prepared to meet him only in the presence of EU representatives; at which point it must be noted that Slovenia is already a member of the EU and, as such, no high representative of the EU can oversee Slovenia's position or act as a mediator between the parties.

In January, the Slovenian Prime Minister and other representatives of the Slovenian authorities emphasised several times that Slovenia had chosen to block Croatian negotiations with the EU on order to defend its national interests, and

the Prime Minister repeated that Slovenia would have to act in an identical manner at the following inter-governmental conference if the circumstances had not changed.

Croatian President Mesić additionally stirred up passions by saying that during World War II, Istria up to Trieste was liberated by Croatian partisans, and that Slovenia should be grateful, since it would otherwise "look at the sea from 20 kilometres away".

In respect of the above, the advice of the President of the Republic, Danilo Türk, is all the more justified: he stated that relations between the countries were in a condition that could be described as slight shock, and that in such situations, some time for consideration should be taken to consider new beginnings that would lead to a win-win situation for both countries.



Bordercross

photo: STA

Gas supply troubles

Like the majority of European countries in January, Slovenia was affected by a dispute between Russia and Ukraine over payments for natural. Nevertheless, there were no temporary reductions, since the Geoplin Company, which supplies 95 per cent Slovenia's natural gas activated new purchasing methods and started to access natural gas reservoirs in Austria and Croatia. When, in the middle of January, even after eleven days of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, no appropriate solutions were found, the Slovenian Prime Minister said that Slovenia and other EU Member States could not be judges or hostages of unresolved issues between Russia and Ukraine. The issue of natural gas supply reopened the issue of deciding to provide a South Stream pipeline across our territory (from the Hungarian border to Italy), which was also among the main topics of discussion when the first man of Gazprom, Aleksej Miller visited Slovenia. Negotiations that have been ongoing for several months will intensify and both sides will promote solutions in the best interest of both. The South Stream pipeline would allow Slovenia to increase its energetic and general security, to strengthen its position in Europe, and contribute to energy stability in the region.



Gas pipelines

photo: STA

Helping the Gaza population

Slovenia has also not been unaffected by the issue of the necessary termination of military operations in Gaza. Therefore, the Government decided to provide resources for humanitarian aid amounting to 50,000 EUR for the

population of the Gaza area due to the consequences of military conflicts. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Slovenia, in cooperation with other EU Member States, would examine options and participate in realising the efforts of the international community to restore Gaza, and control border crossings and tunnels on Gaza's borders.

Military operations in Gaza



photo: STA

Steps to mitigate the financial crisis

In January, the efforts of the government continued to help the Slovenian economy. Thus, the Government prepared and in the middle of January, the National Assembly confirmed the proposal of an act for the partial subsidization of full working time with a view to reducing employers' labour costs and preserve jobs. Within the Government itself, measures to mitigate the financial crisis and the envisaged economic recession were also implemented, although there critics have said that reducing ministers' and state secretaries' pay and a pay freeze for senior civil servants would not resolve the key challenges of the coming economic slowdown. The President of the Republic and the National Assembly also restricted the use of public finance. And how do they say – follow the examples...



photo: M. Slavec

Peter Toš, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, photo: STA

SLOVENIAN-CROATIAN RELATIONS

Slovenia must persist in its demands on Croatia

The decision of the Republic of Slovenia not to support the planned continuation of Croatia's EU accession negotiations at the recent accession conference has elicited a vigorous response from Croatia. The reason for such a response is the false assumption that Slovenia, as an EU member state, would not dare to slow down the EU accession process of its neighbour. Croatia is disappointed. Its political anger has been increasingly changing into a nationalist campaign against Slovenia. The course of events demands for a new reflection on the basis of the Slovenian request for a statement and of Croatia's reasons for its opposition.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia rejects the demand for the withdrawal of all controversial positions in the submitted documents (maps, laws, regulations and notes which present, represent and legitimise Croatia's border interests) with the explanation that the border between the countries is not prejudged in the documents. The new Slovenian government has correctly found that the Republic of Croatia intends to achieve international recognition of its regulations, whereby it encroaches upon Slovenian territory. Croatia's intention has been revealed by the recent statement of the Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, who said, "The Republic of Croatia is not willing to buy its EU membership with its territory." The statement reveals Croatia's belief that its measures and regulations have finally defined the border. He also expressed this belief by claiming that the documents in question do not contain incorrect notes about the course of the Slovenian-Croatian border. This is why Croatia does not want to recall these controversial notes with a statement. After years of bitter experience of settling border disputes with Croatia, the government of Borut Pahor decided to put a stop to the current Croatian policy towards Slovenia, which is full of deception, inconsistencies and political games which damage the historically good relations between Slovenia and Croatia. The Croatian Government has managed to redirect attention from numerous internal scandals and the dissatisfaction of Croatian citizens to Slovenia. The Republic of Slovenia was blamed for the unsettled ownership relations of the Krško nuclear power plant; our egoism is believed to be preventing Croatian savers of the defunct LB bank from being paid their foreign currency deposits from the times of the former Yugoslavia, and finally, the Republic of Slovenia is alleged to be using its position as an EU member state to unjustifiably block Croatia's ambitions for territorial expansion. Let's look at the substance of these accusations.

FIRST CASE: Krško nuclear power plant

Following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the nuclear power plant at Krško (NEK) remained on Slovenian territory only. The Republic of Slovenia was not against maintaining the status quo ante, with equal rights and obligations based on joint investment remaining the same. Tensions arose after Croatia's opposition to the urgently needed replacement of evaporators in NEK. This was followed by a measure from Slovenia: temporarily cutting off electricity supply to Croatia, which resulted in charges and demands for unjustifiably high compensation. The unfriendly relations were somewhat improved by new agreements and treaties, which have so far failed to fully protect Slovenia's interests. Croatia still does not provide the envisaged amount of funds for decommissioning of NEK and is not willing to store half of the nuclear waste on its territory. Various Slovenian governments have taken their turn at dealing with these two issues. **The failure to produce solutions poses the risk that Slovenia will become a permanent depository for Croatian nuclear waste, and Slovenian taxpayers will fund its decommissioning.** In this regard, the Republic of Slovenia should make its position stricter under the clear principle: rights have to be respected, but only when obligations are met.

SECOND CASE: LB bank

For years, the Republic of Slovenia has been confronted with the issue of claims for the payment of foreign currency deposits by savers of the Zagreb branch of the defunct LB bank. The rejection of the request from the Croatian Government that the Republic of Slovenia and its Nova LB bank pay out the foreign currency deposits from this branch under the principle of civil liability was followed by accusations about Slovenian theft and egoism, civil actions, and, finally, an appeal before an international court. And what is the truth about the non-payment of Croatian foreign currency deposits? In the former Yugoslavia, the law stipulated that banks transfer foreign currency savings to the National Bank of Yugoslavia, which disbursed them with the equivalent amount of Yugoslav dinars. Under the law, banks and their branches could use funds acquired in such a way only for loans to companies based in the republic where the foreign currency deposits had been collected. Foreign currency deposits were guaranteed by the National Bank of Yugoslavia and not by



Piran bay



Krško nuclear power plant

Principles for a new beginning Slovenian-Croatian relations should be on the basis of three principles: good faith and no unilateral moves; the mutual respect necessary between sovereign states; and the mutual, common benefit of both countries. Achieving an appropriate level of respect is of key importance for settling relations between countries. It is a necessary basis for serious negotiations on serious solutions.

There was no good faith, which includes refraining from unilateral moves and tricking one another, in the relations between the neighbours. Following 1991, Croatia kept surprising Slovenia with unilateral moves which Slovenia was unable to counter. It continually occupying disputed land, behaved as if the border between the countries had been finally defined, and violated bilateral agreements.

Slovenian President Danilo Türk

Slovenia had to protect its vital national interests Ljubljana at first demanded, indeed, that the controversial documents be removed from the negotiating positions, which would be rather demanding, but then proposed a compromise that the documents may stay if Croatia undertook not to use them in a potential arbitration; and this is where we could not come to an agreement. With the agreement signed at Brijuni, the countries agreed that the state on the ground on 25 June 1991 was the basis for determining the border. This is why Slovenia will not use documents created after that day in potential arbitration. The problem is that Croatia has recently adopted a number of laws and executive acts in which it draws the border, primarily at the sea, at places where the border has not been drawn at all. We believe that this means that the border is being prejudged, while Croatia obviously interprets this differently.

Slovenian Foreign Minister, Samuel Žbogar

commercial banks. The creation of new independent countries did not change the previous relations regarding bank guarantees in any way. Instead of taking into account the banking system in the former Yugoslavia, Croatia started accusing Slovenia, closed the Zagreb branch of the LB bank and is continuing with appeals. It accused Slovenians of being fraudsters and thieves instead of informing its public about the amount of loans given to the Croatian companies (in equivalent Yugoslav dinars for foreign currency deposits), which have so far not been returned. The Croatian public did not have the opportunity to hear this explanation, that the insisting on obligations of the LB bank has no legal or monetary grounds. An outline of the legislation of the former Yugoslavia would clarify the possible civil liabilities regarding foreign currency deposits remaining at the National Bank of Yugoslavia, therefore on the implementation of the agreement on material rights and obligations after the disintegration of the former common country, which was signed also by the Republic of Croatia. Because it insists on the complaint against Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia does not want to continue the procedures arising from this agreement.

One may conclude from this that the statement by poorly informed Croatian President, Stipe Mesić, who said at the beginning of the year that “Croatian savers were robbed” should correctly read: “Slovenian taxpayers would be robbed if Croatian savers were repaid from Slovenia’s national budget.”

THIRD CASE:

Border between the countries

The Republic of Slovenia has been dealing with a similar approach from different Croatian governments on the issue of the border between the countries.

The Slovenian people have lost out many times in their history in terms of territory. The last border injustice done to Slovenia happened after the signing of the Treaty of Osimo. The Slovenian political leadership followed the general belief that inter-republic borders in the common country are an unimportant issue. This mistake has narrowed the present

Slovenian national territory in Istria. A brief recap: after the annexation of the Free Territory of Trieste – Zone B going to Yugoslavia (on 27/10/1954), the historical cadastral municipality of Piran was divided and reduced. The cadastral municipality of Savudrija and the cadastral municipality of Kaštel became Croatian territory. Only the cadastral municipality of Sečovlje, including 113 hectares of territory south of the Dragonja River (with the villages of Mlini-Škrile, Škodelin and Bužini, with about 80 Slovenian inhabitants) was included in Slovenian territory. These political decisions to the detriment of Slovenia were an extensive territorial gift to Croatia. Slovenia failed to officially demand a remedy for these injustices in 1954 and after 1991, upon Slovenia’s independence.

Why did we act in this way? The Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia undertook in their founding charters to recognise the border situation on the day of declaration of their independence. The position that the administrative borders between the former Yugoslav republics became state borders with their independence was also confirmed by the European Community with a special declaration. The border needed to be consensually coordinated and marked. A mixed diplomatic commission (the author of this article headed the Slovenian part of the commission as co-chair with Davorin Rudolf and Hrvoje Kačić) was established in order to settle the issues and prepare a draft agreement on the national border.

The diplomatic commission reached an expert consensus on the course of the prevailing part of the land border (the border was divided into 11 sections, plus the maritime border; the course of the national border for 10 sections was coordinated). These expert solutions were examined by the foreign ministers of Slovenia and Croatia of the day, Boris Frlec and Mate Granič. The 11th section of the land border (Slovenian villages south of the Dragonja River -113 hectares – 11th section) remained disputable. Both sides confirmed the disputability of this part of the territory in writing.

Contrary to agreements, the Republic of Croatia started occupying the disputed territory: first, by counterfeiting the cadastral record of the Buje Municipality on the basis of the Piran cadastre, with the illegal construction of a border crossing on the Dragonja River and by introducing police checks on Slovenians who lived there.



NLB Bank



Piran bay

Also, in seeking a consensus to fix the maritime border, the Slovenian side approached with a position harmonised with the former French Minister of Justice, Robert Banditer, regarding the land border. **The Republic of Croatia has been forcibly rejecting Slovenia's historical entitlement to the Gulf of Piran, including a part of the sea on the western side of Istria all the way to the open sea.** The Republic of Slovenia refers to the historical connection between the Slovenian people and the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas, and the fact that fishing has been the fundamental of the economy of Istrian Slovenians for centuries. As with the land border, our position on the maritime border also stemmed from the legal arrangement of the situation in the former common state. The Bay of Piran was under police, environmental and fishery control by the Slovenian state and municipal authorities. The Croatian side rejects these facts and refers to certain selected provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. **Ever since it became an independent state, Croatia has acted contrary to the principles for peacefully settling open issues, also regarding the coast, caused numerous conflicts and adopted unilateral measures** (legal regulations and official maps) in order to confirm its unjustified territorial claims. For example, the creation and expansion of Croatian clam plantations in the protected Bay of Piran, police violence over Slovenian fishermen and tourists if they happen to cross the imaginary border across the middle of the Bay, the problems experienced by a Slovenian citizen who lives close to the illegal border crossing Dragonja, illegal sales of land owned by Slovenians along the Dragonja River, and illegal hunting in the protected stretch of land along the Dragonja, etc. The Republic of Slovenia has rejected these violent actions of its neighbour with protest notes. These notes have been collected into large files of diplomatic notes which will clarify the complete course of the unacceptable actions of the Republic of Croatia in the case of arbitration.

I also wonder why Croatia so resolutely rejects the principle of 'ex aequo et bono' in the case of arbitration of the border disputes involving a third party. The answer is clear. The use of the principle of 'ex aequo et bono' could not disregard the historical acquisitions on the one side and the losses on the other side, and Slovenia's entitlements at the coast over the centuries. How should we name a policy that is afraid of justice?

Even a slight glance at the attempts to settle these three bilateral issues between Slovenia and Croatia implies an important difference in approach. In all three cases, the Republic of Slovenia acted in accordance with the accepted obligations, principles and procedures determined both by international and bilateral agreements. It acted in accordance with its founding charter and the principles of the EU. The actions of Croatia point to inconsistency in meeting the accepted obligations, and violations of the adopted bilateral and international agreements. Its inconsistency and ill intent were also confirmed by the Croats' refusal to sign the requested statement.

The Republic of Croatia states that the Republic of Slovenia, with its blocking of Croatia's EU accession negotiations, is introducing a bilateral issue into the accession procedure by

requesting the signing of the disputed statement. The truth is the exact opposite. **It is Croatia, with its documents, that has introduced the open border issues into the EU, not Slovenia. The Republic of Slovenia demands only that Croatia withdraw these issues from the negotiating process by signing a statement suspending the content of its documents that concern the disputed border issues between the countries.**

The diplomacy of every country is obliged to find ways and procedures for the most effective mediation and persuasion of foreign countries on the grounds and legitimacy of the positions of their countries. This is where the character of the actions of Croatian diplomacy in the latest period is emphasised. It is focused on the explanation of the Croatian 'truth' that the blockade from the Slovenian side is an unacceptable way of settling open bilateral issues. **The inconsistency of the Republic of Croatia in meeting the accepted commitments, its taking of police control over part of the territory of an EU member state and an attempt at legalizing this occupation under international law with the adopted regulations (after 1991) not only justifies our country, but also commits it to insisting on the signing of the statement in question in its interests and in the interests of the EU.** The inconsistency of Croatia's policy goes beyond the limit of admissibility also in relations among EU member states. Slovenia's national interests ask from us also to resolutely reject the attempts of Croatian diplomacy to make the Slovenian NO a dispute between the Republic of Slovenia and the EU. We have to confirm our ability to demonstrate the truth in all European capitals. The demand for a binding statement by the Republic of Croatia is not a demand by the Republic of Slovenia in the bilateral relations with this country. This is a demand by the Republic of Slovenia as an EU member state with the right to veto the EU's future enlargement. This in turn annuls all other relations except the relation of the Republic of Croatia to the EU regarding this demand. Our diplomatic representations abroad must be able to clearly explain Croatia's practices and intentions, and reject all attempts to blemish our country. This diplomatic task is as demanding and important for the Republic of Slovenia as the presidency of the EU in the first half of 2008.

The policy of the governments of the Republic of Slovenia, including the incumbent government, has pushed us into a position which forces us to make unfriendly decisions. This is something that we do not desire, as citizens or as a state. This is why we are looking forward to the announced talks, which will clarify the reasons for the issue in question. The ongoing campaign and unreasonable raising of tensions in the Croatian press is a matter of Croatia's self-image and a consequence of its current policy towards us and the world. The Republic of Croatia cannot count on successful accession to the European Union with the policy and relations it fosters towards the Republic of Slovenia. The Slovenian Government has the full support of the politically aware public to persist in its demands and to defend the truth and justice.

Prof. Peter Novak, VITES, Novo Mesto, photo: STA

ENERGY CRISIS



Windmill

Reliability of energy supply in Slovenia

The latest problems with the supply of Russian gas triggered questions about how good Slovenia's energy supply is. Despite the 15-day halt in delivering Russian gas to European customers, Slovenia experienced no energy reductions. Thanks to Geoplin's good management, Slovenia succeeded in compensating for the gas deficit from its own underground reserves and with adequate purchases on the open market. The problem would, of course, be much more complicated if Slovenia could not use one of those two alternatives. So let us look in more detail at the composition of primary and final energy in Slovenia. (Data was drawn from SURS - Energy Balance of the Republic of Slovenia for 2008, MG) The gross domestic energy needed (the entire primary energy – PE) was **307.28 PJ (7,338 Mtoe)** in 2007. Although the statistics for 2008 are not complete, it is estimated that it climbed to **331.38 PJ (7,913 Mtoe)**. One must underline that our import dependence has been growing, and in 2007 reached **53.3%**. (SURS, 2008). Since the composition has not changed in the last decade, we will use for demonstration the energy balance for 2008 (EB08).

The greatest share (35.6%) is represented by **oil products** that we buy on the open market from various suppliers. In accordance with European legislation, we hold strategic reserves that can last for several months (some at home and some abroad). Since we are not obliged to work with a single supplier, we can adjust to need and demand quickly. Since, viewed globally, we are not big buyers, there is a good chance for us to find smaller quantities of oil sufficient to meet our needs on the

global market. Given that, we can say that the supply reliance of oil products is relatively high, as international shipping routes remain open.

The second largest share is **nuclear**, intended for the production of electricity, with 20.3%. Since there are supplies of fuel in the reactor itself which can last for the entire reaction cycle, this is viewed as a domestic source that is not subject to current market conditions. Yet it is no doubt necessary to have a secure long-term supply of the source. Given the limited number of makers and the current standstill when it comes to building new nuclear power plants, the reliability of the nuclear fuel supply is relatively high.

Solid fuels come third with 20.1%. The coal and coke are partially of domestic origin (78.5) and partly imported. Given the global coal stock, supply is reliable on both sides. Domestic production is highly mechanized and the imported fuel storage is based on long term contracts.

Natural gas has a 13.4% share and is entirely imported. It reaches Slovenia through two pipelines, one from Russia (via Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Austria) comprising two thirds of the natural gas supply. The rest comes from Algeria (via Italy). We lease two underground storehouses, one in Austria and one in Croatia, where we store amounts of natural gas sufficient for three-month use. In this way we are able to level any potential consumption fluctuations.

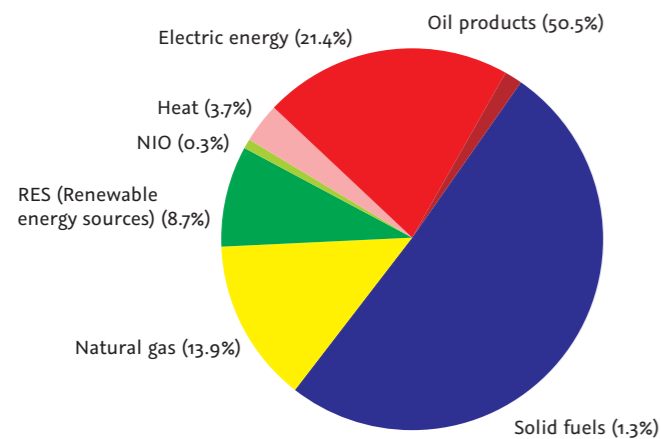
The remaining 10.4% are renewable energy sources: water, biomass and waste energy. In this case, supply reliance lies solely on domestic shoulders. Only when it comes to water accumulation do we depend on the weather and, partly, on Austria (the flow of the River Drava).

Based on the above, we can conclude that the disturbances on the world market can influence only **a small part of primary energy supply**, and that the possibility that this part would be

more than 15% of the entire primary energy supply at the same time is minimal, except in the case of world war. The reason for such high supply reliability is historical. The motto 'Nothing must surprise us' made us take constant care of the dispersal of supply in the days of the former Yugoslavia. Even now, such dispersal of energy sources is adequate, as it makes extortion by suppliers impossible. All countries that are over-reliant on a single source will sooner or later face difficulties with supply.

If we now examine consumption, we can see that the image is somewhat different. Final energy (FE) is 227.9 PJ (5.44 Mtoe). This means that the conversion efficiency of PE into FE is only 0.69%. Most of that is because of conversion losses in the thermal power plants and Krško Nuclear Power plant. The final use of energy is divided into three large domains: industry (33%), transport (35.5%) and other uses (31.5%). In the last group, we combine residential units, services, business and public buildings.

The structure of final energy use in 2008 (MG, EBo8)



The picture gets more and more uneven. One half of all use is comprised of oil products (transport and heating oil); over one fifth (21.4%) is electrical energy. Natural gas is third (13.9%). Renewable energy sources (RES) come fourth (8.7%). Within the RES, the largest share is biomass (wood, with 7.7%). When considering final use, we may therefore conclude that the supply reliance of oil products is very important in transport and not so crucial in other areas, as there least half a season's worth of supplies is always available during the heating season. We believe that when it comes to final use, electricity supply reliance is of key importance because it enables all the information technology that propels industry, banking and commerce to perform its tasks. When there is an electric power cut, everything stops, even oil and gas stop burning, since pumps, burners and regulators all work on electricity.

Because of its importance, it is necessary to assess the reliability of the electricity supply in Slovenia. Until recently, we produced all our own electricity. But by 2008, we were importing as much as 17.7%. Because we are not building new and modernizing old power plants fast enough, and there is also a

working electricity market, we must import part of that energy, since the timetable of consumption and potential production do not match. Until now, there have been no major disruptions to electricity supply, apart from weather damage. Given the stoppage of electricity production in the EU and in Slovenia itself, we should not, at least in the next two years, worry about the supply, as there will be enough electricity on the market. Problems would occur if something happened to our biggest electricity generating facility, Krško Nuclear Power plant, and we would have to substitute that loss for a longer period of time, since the transport paths of long-distance transmission electric mains are limited.

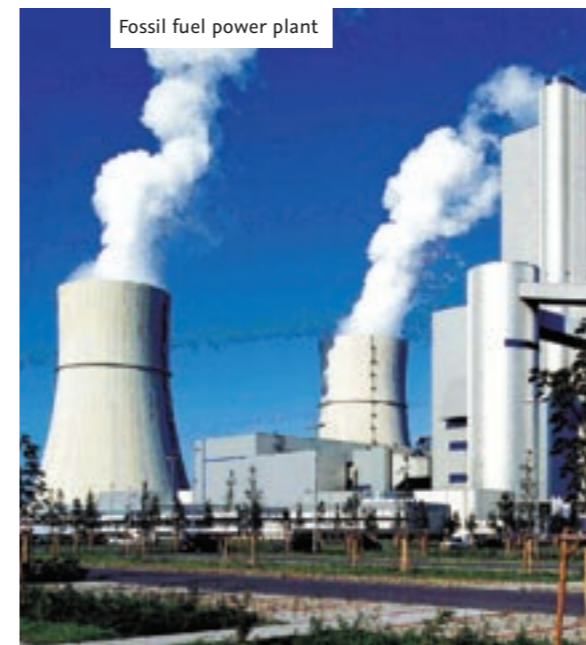
To increase reliance and environment friendly energy supply in Slovenia in the future, we should think about the following:

- building a terrestrial terminal for liquefied natural gas with storage in Slovenia
- modernizing the coal thermal power plants in Šoštanj and Trbovlje by introducing gas-steam process where the CO2 is excreted and oxygen is used for gasification and burning
- building a gas power plant close to coast to minimize transport losses
- the introduction of public buses that run on compressed natural gas
- fast introduction of renewable energy sources (solar, water and wind energy, and biomass energy), which should reach a 25% share before 2010

Efficient energy use, thermal insulation of buildings and the replacement of energetically intensive technologies are obvious obligations we are strongly dedicated to fulfilling and thereby reducing our energy dependence.

We can conclude that Slovenia has a well-developed and well-balanced energy system that, due to the use of older technologies, is less efficient, but very reliable, and managed by competent experts who have proven their value over the years by the fact that we have had no significant energy deficits or experienced any kind of supply shortage of any energy source in recent years.

But the time and the lifespan of facilities is going to end, and this will require new investments, primarily in electricity management, which for decades has not renovated or built a significant facility for transportation or production. But we can be very satisfied that the main gas network is being quietly renovated, offering new possibilities for transporting gas through Slovenia.



Fossil fuel power plant



Solar power plant



Gas pipelines

Miša Čermak, photo: Iztok Dimc

Slovenian Woman of 2008, the poet Neža Maurer

We are able to love even when we are three hundred years old

“Anyone younger than hundred years will understand that some people always remain children!” And anyone who knows Neža Maurer, the poet, who is adored by people who are in love with poetry at least as much as she is, knows that her power is endless, her fragility is only fictitious, her gracefulness woven of the tests of time and life is real, and the curious, bubbly and jovial child inside of her is eternal. Therefore, despite the years she bears without being broken (on 22 December she turned 78), despite the loneliness that can bring her closer to beauty, and despite the wisdom, her wish ‘to be carefree as a child’ has actually been fulfilled. Because some people never really get old.

“First, my daughter was nominated for the award, and a few years later, mother as well. It is a good thing I’ve received it now, when I am still alive,” you said after you were named Slovenian Woman of the Year.

The thing that made me different from the rest of them, all the excellent candidates for the Slovenian woman of the year, is my age (laughs)...The award means a lot to me, also because it is a woman’s award - women do not appreciate themselves enough, and sometimes they ‘pull back’ and stay behind their men. However, other things interest us, such as the army: what would happen if the same thing happened to women, if we followed them? We would die out! Therefore, we have to stay and exist.

Nevertheless, you are still frightfully active: you travel a lot, you read poems to young people, you talk to them, you participate at literary evenings...Do you like it, are you such a restless soul?

Other people feel that I am in such a hurry and that I travel so much - I feel that my

life is quite peaceful: if a day, two or three pass and I can get to Crngrob for a walk, it is already a fairytale. In December or during winter, I used to be at a school every day. That has gone now. However, I do not miss it. Well, maybe I miss the good feeling, feedback that my poems are appreciated, that they are good and alive. However, I am aware that my body is weak and I do not tolerate driving well, which is an effort for me: and then, during performances, I feel like falling down...Simple - the body no longer obeys.

But not your mind and heart.

That is luck. Emotions remain...

When I read your poems, I get the feeling - although in recent years, there is more fear and reason in your reflections, in your poems - your longings and desires are eternal. Emotions remain in people always; they do not grow old.

I feel the same way, too: if we had the power, we would be just the same at a hundred and twenty years or three hundred years as we were at thirty. However, the mind tells you that you cannot do so much. Recently, someone told me I really had become wise, because I considered whether to do something or not. I am not wise, I said, I just do not have the strength. We are able to love even when we are three hundred years old, if we have the strength. However, the world of emotions continues to exist: I am lucky - considering that my body is growing weaker - that I no longer have the same need, the same desire. The spiritual world is perfectly enough for me.

Daydreaming as well?

I do not daydream a lot. I am a rather concrete person (pauses): at most, I renew what is possible, I make plans, or recognitions arise inside me of what is possible and what is not.

What is not possible at your seventy-eight years, if the soul remains young and accepts the limitations of the body? Do you remain a young girl within?

It depends - maybe I am aware of my external appearance too often, although I also catch myself completely forgetting about looks: I see someone I love and I would just shout out with joy - which is absolutely ridiculous - or I say: Oh, good that we have met. Moreover, when I reflect about it, I say to myself that it is a truly weird statement for someone my age (laughs). Nevertheless, it is nice!

Or in the summer, when I was looking at Storžič through the window and I thought I would die if I did not go to the mountains - die! But can you go to the mountains, when the cartilage in your knees is worn out, and who could I tell that wouldn’t think me silly? Then I told Miklavž, my son. He said he understood and that he would try to arrange it. Well, then I did go, I did go (laugh)! No higher than Kofce - the manager there was so good she offered me things I was allowed to eat after my stomach surgery. I was just below the peak ...and the rocks around...Nice!

Where is then the difference between a young girl and wisdom?

I am wise because I consider the options. When a desire to travel arises, to go far away, to Spain - I have been there for three weeks, and I need to go again - there are questions about whether I could bear that. I could not sit on the bus while the others went sightseeing.

But you are so active: you do not sit in front of the television, you do not watch Spanish soap operas, you go for walks, you cycle...

No (laughs), I do not watch television unless my daughter Eva is on the programme,



INTERVIEW

then I go to the neighbours and watch it. These Spanish soap operas seem to me like alcohol addiction: not only stultifying, these old misses living on their own, and ladies who watch them get the feeling that their lives were empty...For me it is a serious delusion to degrade one's own life for some Spanish soap operas. I am sure they had and lived through something nice - if they went through their memories or reflected on how their neighbour or daughter feels bad because she has lost her job or earns poor wages, they would live more in this world. Life itself makes us down-to-earth: watching these serials is a kind of escape from reality - the same as with all drugs.

You do not watch television, but you are still kept informed. Do you read; do you listen to the radio?

I listen to the radio all day long; I get the brochure on cultural programmes on the first radio programme. I asked them to send it to me. I read Književni listi (Literary Papers), which I buy or I read in the library that is fortunately in my vicinity: there, I have all the newspapers available; I read as much as I have time and desire. They have everything!

I have to say that I am seriously concerned about the economy – seriously! I do not know whether it is possible for an expert to come and truly take our country into a tolerable future: a future in which people would not be treated as if they were created by capital, and in which it would not be considered that capital can put them on the streets or erase them. Sometimes it would be more just to erase a man's name (as I read in a science fiction novel) than to put him on the streets, without an apartment, without money, with something to drink, who only has to decide whether to go into the water or not! This is dying by degrees. There are many thefts committed out of need, not only from arrogance.

You want a better world for your grandchildren, although even the world you grew up in, and are living in, was not the easiest: you had to work hard to maintain yourself and your family. Do you have a bad feeling about not spending enough time with your children?

That is the bitterness. I always feel bad when one or the other or both children say:

We almost grew up all by ourselves. At the time, I did not feel guilty, but now, when so much emphasis is put on the importance of being together with a child, I sometimes wonder how my two children grew up by themselves (softly). I could almost call them self-made men...In terms of money, I started from scratch and I cannot imagine this today. Whether today I would receive a scholarship as at the time - I would if I were excellent; whether I could live off it - maybe; then, it was a big thing that we were told in school that we had a job waiting for us, that we were needed! For these words, the tragic was a lot easier to bear...

Yes, it is the hardest thing to live without hope and faith in a good ending.

Indeed. People are strange creatures! I do not know whether cows also have these feelings - because it is terrible to be a chained cow and eat only to gain a few kilos; if cows could think, they would give up all hope. In comparison with cows grazing in the mountains and those that we were caressing as children and about which Levstik was writing - such attitudes to cows no longer exist. But humans feel even worse, because they can feel all this! Once we had faith, we were needed and desired.

Did you remain a person who has deep faith in another person, in yourself, in your children? In values?

Yes! No-one can destroy my values. When it happens that people deceive you, deny you, steal from you (but I do not know why this happens these days), sometimes it happens that my heart physically stands still: oh my, will I survive? I quickly take my heart drops for calming down and I come to myself physically.

However, the spirit is strong, stronger than the body?

You know what is bad? Relationship between the spirit and the body is like rider and horse: the rider is definitely smarter than the horse, he knows the end and everything! But if the horse dies on its way or if it breaks a leg, it cannot walk the distance called life. It is true that faith and hope keep us upright, if people want to live with dignity, as humans: if we want to remain humans and not robots, which are in the world to augment fortune or wealth

and live for it. A person who does not keep faith, hope, dignity and values within, is three-quarters lost – not as a being, but as someone called human. Being a human is more than just being an animal: an animal does not attack others if it is not hungry; a human has free will, has knowledge of his beginning and ending, and this defines his actions; human knows that children are his continuation; he knows that human beings in the world are very different, but have similar feelings and emotions. If this were not so, we could not understand ancient Greek drama or ancient Japanese books - but we feel in a similar manner, so humans have been at the same level for a long, long time.

We still entangle ourselves and take offence at different cultures, religions, environments we live in ...

It is unusual how a sentence comes to hand just when you need one: I am currently reading Vitomil Zupan again, and there is a sentence in the book asking, what would the sea be like if it was always perfectly smooth and lay calmly in front of us? When nature goes wild, stones get sharp; a stormy night gives rise to a beautiful, clear morning! Therefore, there is a need for storms – I cannot explain why - maybe to strengthen us, to make us grow.

Every year I took at least one demanding mountain trip, which means wire ropes and wedges, with one purpose only: when you feel that you might slip at any moment, you can sort out everything that is going on in the world. It is unbelievable how many things just fall away, completely insignificant. A thing which you wanted to eat yourself two days ago becomes unimportant. I do not know why chaff cannot be winnowed from grain without this extreme distress, danger.

What is left on your sieve? Probably children and poems?

In particular, children and poems. Everything else is so-so: it is not so extremely important - if 'he' does not love me, if I am not getting 'there'...

However, there were times when it would have been very bad if 'he' did not love you, were there not?

Yes, immensely, immensely (smiles) bad. In the valley, in everyday life these things are truly bad. Sometimes, it is bad enough when

someone does not call! Nevertheless, a single word is enough and it changes everything. Everything, completely everything - even soup tastes better (laughs).

This cannot happen to you today any more?

Oh yes, it can (laughs).

Does your heart tremble - if I may be a bit poetic?

I am very pleased I have had a woman friend (in Slovenia, one should not speak of woman-woman and man-man friendship) since I was nineteen years old; she called me yesterday and that is great. Also, there is a man we used to be friends with at university, and all our lives, we have written for each other's birthday every year (smile). For me is...not getting birthday mail, well, I do not know what would that be like! It is not about passion, it is the constancy, the faith, something, someone in my life is steady. It is friendship, and friendship is love.

What happens to memories? Do those remain that cheer us up?

Mine do, a lot. However, I believe that miserable people get a filter in old age, which functions in reverse. I have acquaintances from secondary school of whom I have such bad memories from those days that I wonder whether we were really together. Did we live in the same time? I drop the

bad things, and some people drop the good things and bitterly remember bad things. I think this causes great misery. In each life, there are many bad things which could literally suffocate you in old age if you do not have any bright memories. I do not think, though, someone should be blamed for it. People do not decide on this - it is innate.

Being a poet - is that also innate?

I very much believe it is. You know: if you become a poet, ninety-nine per cent is work and one per-cent talent. However, this percentage must be there; it is the beginning of everything.

There is an internal power that makes you write.

Yes, and it is there all the time. When this unpleasant thing happened to me, that I was left outside the "Vse najboljše, Ciciban" book ('Happy Birthday, Ciciban') - there are none of my poems inside - I was completely 'nuts' for four days. I was immensely affected. It had so much influence on my work, I could not breathe. I stepped aside, I physically switched off, which is the hardest thing, and I was just wandering for a week before I calmed down. When you are young, you say to yourself there is still a lot to do, and now I cannot say it any more, as I would be lying to myself and to others. But I will do if I am able.

Which poem would you give yourself or write for your birthday?

I can never choose poems, but the one that seems to me the most intimate in this apartment in Škofja Loka, is 'Zimska Loka' ('Winter Loka'): I was looking at it through the window and it was so beautiful, I wrote: 'I am weeping for the fairness and the loneliness, yours and mine, winter Loka.' But I do not know if I feel lonely - it feels more like I am a medium for poems...I have this feeling I have been in the world several times, but if reincarnation exists, I am the last in line: I will never be born in this world again.

However, the world is still beautiful?

For me, it is. And yet I can understand those who throw bombs...We may have our principles, we may be generous, we may be everything when we are fed, when we are not too cold, when our children are not being tortured. If a child's suffering cannot be helped - I can see that with my two children - it is terrible. That is harder than my own suffering; it affects me a lot more than my own suffering. If it were possible, I would take on their suffering...How many times I have asked: let it happen to me, just not to my child, even if he is already grown up, just not to him. It is now so deep in me, that I cannot take on that suffering (pause), and it lasts a lifetime. This feeling could be called love (her eyes moisten)...



Vesna Bertoncelej Popit, DELO, photo: STA

In times of prosperity, few thought of the possibility of a downturn, much less of the fact that economic activity could change with such speed, as in the last few weeks, although some companies, mostly from the automobile industry, have been recording a decline in orders for the last two years. During the last few months, other companies started to complain about the decline in orders as well. They resorted to shutting down production and minimizing the number of employees employed for a definite period, among them seasonal workers, but mostly young employees, who are usually employed for a fixed term. Companies are also reducing working hours to 36 or even 32 hours per week.

THE GOVERNMENT PROMISED TO SUBSIDIZE THE PAYMENTS OF EMPLOYMENT CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THOSE COMPANIES WHICH DO NOT LAY OFF EMPLOYEES AND DO NOT PAY OUT REWARDS TO BOARD MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF SUPERVISORY BOARDS. THE UNIONS WERE DISAPPOINTED WITH THIS DECISION, BECAUSE THEY EXPECTED THE GOVERNMENT TO SUBSIDIZE THE LOWER WAGES OF EMPLOYEES CAUSED BY THE SHORTER WORKING TIME.

At the same time, some farm enterprises and food processing companies report that the crisis hasn't hit them yet, and they expect to avoid it due to the importance of their economic activity.

But the reactions of the economy and the general public mainly depend on the predictions of how long the crisis will last. Very different predictions have been heard in the last months: some claim that it will all turn for the better in the second half of this year, others that our economy will recover in two years. Some are more pessimistic and claim that we are on the way back to the year 2004, the time before the conjuncture, but the most pessimistic predictions are by Dr Franjo Štiblar, who claims that our economy will take ten years to recover, or those by some others who claim we are returning to the time before the independence, when the Slovenian economy had to face the break-up of the Yugoslav market, as well as the market of the former Soviet Union. But even if the most pessimistic predictions come true, the situation would not be the same – after independence, our development was driven by a strong creative impulse, while today pessimism and resignation prevail. Thus some members of the current and former government have stressed the importance of a more stimulating social environment

that would contribute to the greater commitment of employees and enable better results of companies.

Companies which invested a great deal in previous years or constructed new business buildings and thus funded their current operating activities with loans, have a hard time borrowing more, because it's harder and more expensive for the banks to borrow money abroad, and they have become more careful when granting new loans. Banks, especially NLB Bank, have financed quite a few management buy-outs in the last two years, so the percentage of bad loans in banks has increased again since the taxpayers had to rehabilitate the banks a few years ago. Although the government has demanded that the banks refuse to help tycoons who got into trouble due to the fall of the stock markets, a number of banks, even those owned by the government, allowed them to postpone payments.

One must not forget that companies as well as the general population have been borrowing money extensively during the last few years. According to the Central Bank of Slovenia, the gross external debt of the Republic of Slovenia at the end of last year was more than 40 billion euros, while net debt was close to 9 billion. Last year's net debt reached more than 23 per cent of Slovenian GDP.



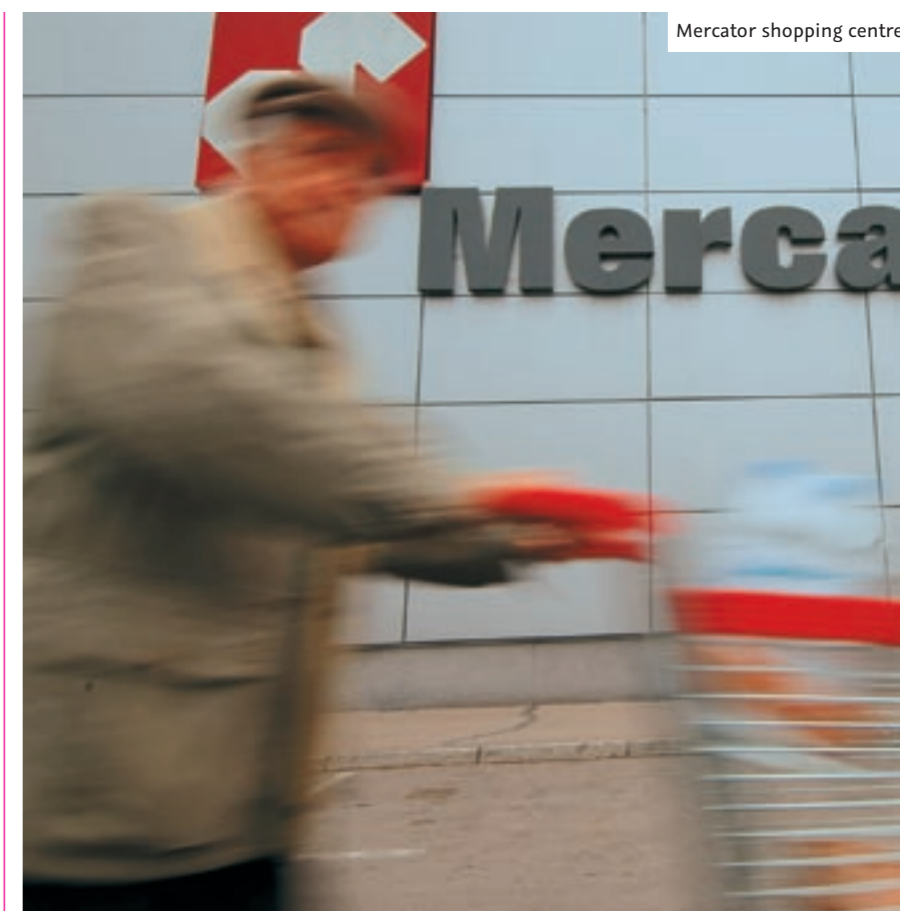
Strike of the Unions

Slovenia's blockade of Croatia's accession negotiations to the European Union has attracted a great deal of attention, especially in Croatia. Our neighbour has placed all the blame for the outcome on Slovenia, despite the fact that Croatia included in its negotiations maps considered disputable to Slovenia, and despite the fact that the EU has clearly listed the things Croatia hasn't achieved, but should have. The result was attempts to blockade the sale of Slovenian goods in Croatia, a tactic known from the days when the former Serbian authorities resorted to the same action. Public and web appeals against Slovenian goods were effective, and in December, when traders record an increase in sales, TV reports showed empty Mercator shopping centres, while those of Croatian traders were full.

Despite the predictions of dire times, the Slovenians stocked up well for Christmas and the holidays. They practically emptied the stores, regardless of the fact that some of them probably took a gloomy look into their empty wallets after the turn of the year. These holidays were also the first when the sale and use of explosive devices, fireworks to be precise, was forbidden by the government. They were used in abundance in previous years and some say the ban really did make a difference. The prohibition was intended to minimize the number of serious injuries from caused by using fireworks, especially by young people.

In the midst of the polar winter Europe and Slovenia have been experiencing in the last weeks, we were left without Russian natural gas which is transferred to Europe via Ukraine. The EU made great efforts to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and finally called on all Member States concerned to take legal action against both countries. Ideas were heard in Slovenia that we should have natural gas deposits here as well, not only in Austria and Croatia, along with ideas to rebuild a refinery in Lendava, which was shut down a few years ago in order to build the second block of the Krško nuclear power plant and another block of the Šoštanj thermal power plant. Not least, if the negotiations with the Russian Gazprom Company were to end successfully, the so-called southern pipe line to Europe would cross Slovenia and thus avoid crossing Ukraine.

On the other hand, considering the decrease



Mercator shopping centre

in oil prices and the predicted decrease in the price of natural gas, some think it meaningless to continue preparations for the production of biodiesel, while others consider it appropriate, if for no other reason than that it is an ecologically pure type of fuel.

IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR THERE WERE 66,233 UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE REGISTERED IN SLOVENIA. THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OF SLOVENIA PREDICTS THAT THIS NUMBER WILL RISE TO 78,000 OR EVEN 80,000 THIS YEAR. AS A COMPARISON, IN THE FIRST YEARS AFTER SLOVENIA'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1993, THERE WERE JUST OVER 129,000 PEOPLE UNEMPLOYED IN SLOVENIA.

The quota for employing foreign workers who require work permits is supposed to be reduced by this year by a quarter to 24,000. There were 900,000 persons in employment at the end of last year in Slovenia. Let's look at some statistical data. December was the second consecutive month with deflation. Consumer prices

fell 0.6 per cent in December, while the yearly inflation rate was 2.1 percent. The average net wage in November of last year was 982 euros, which was also the result of the cost-of-living allowance paid to people with the lowest pensions to alleviate the increase in food prices.

Slovenian exports of goods increased by 3 percent in the first eleven months of last year, of which only 0.8 per cent was exported to the EU. Imports increased faster, by 8 per cent, of which 7 per cent came from the EU. In the first ten months of the year 2008, Slovenia's current account balance was 1,8 billion euros in deficit, which means that that number will increase to more than 2 billion at the end of the year.

According to experience, it takes about six months for good or bad influences from the USA to reach Slovenia. Thus the whole world, including Slovenia, turns to the USA with great attention in the hope that the economic situation will start to normalize, which would give us hope that the situation in the EU will follow, as Slovenia creates the majority of its foreign commercial exchange in the EU.

Ivana Hlavsová, Ambassador of the Czech Republic



This is my fourth and last year in Slovenia, but the time has passed so quickly that I feel I have just come. I arrived to Ljubljana in September 2005 and I immediately felt at home, although I have not been to Slovenia before. The people are very hospitable, Ljubljana is a pleasant city, Slovenia is a beautiful country “on the sunny side of the Alps” (except the fogs in Ljubljana). Czechs and Slovenians are close nations, largely due to our Slavic origins and long common past in the Habsburg monarchy. There are many historical and cultural similarities, but of course some differences, too. We both are located geographically in Central Europe, historically at the crossroads of history, the only difference being that Czechs are north of the Alps and Slovenians south of it. Our languages are related, which made it much easier for me to understand Slovenian. On the other hand the similarity is tricky when you try to speak. Many words sound the same and mean something totally different, which can cause some very funny or very embarrassing situations. Just one example: child - “otrok” means a slave in Czech, so imagine, how would you read the popular sticker “otrok v avtu”. You could be accused of slavery! During the three and a half years I spent in Slovenia, I witnessed some very important moments: the introduction of euro, the entry into the Schengen area, the presidency of the EU. After the developments from the past almost twenty years, I feel that the Czech Republic and Slovenia have come even closer, being together in the NATO, in the EU, having no border checkpoints on the way from Prague to Ljubljana.

Slovenia is a great place to work. Our bilateral relations are excellent, we have no problematic issues between us, we often cooperate in EU and multilateral organizations, the representatives of our two states meet frequently at multilateral as well as bilateral fora. As there are no open questions between us, we mainly discuss the current EU affairs, such as the institutional reform, further enlargement, relations to neighbors of EU, energy and climate issues and lately also the impact of the world financial crisis on our economies. The membership in the EU gave a whole new dimension to our relations.

The first half of last year was marked in Slovenia by the EU Presidency. Slovenia did an excellent job, the Presidency was successful and Slovenia got a well deserved praise for it. For us it was even more interesting to gain experience from the Slovenian

Presidency, as we have just started the EU Presidency on January 1 and we are the second new member state to preside the EU. We were preparing long and intensively and we take it as a huge responsibility and challenge as well as a huge chance. The Czech Republic presides the EU in a year of historical connotations: 5 years after the biggest enlargement, 20 years after the fall of Iron Curtain, 30 years after the first direct elections to the European Parliament, 60 years after the founding of NATO. Our motto is “Europe without Barriers”, reminding us that without the end of the biggest division of Europe, we would not be able to join the EU and NATO. We will contribute to removing the still existing internal barriers within the EU, which prevent the full use of EU potential as well as strive to diminish the external barriers of international trade and enhance cooperation with EU’s neighbors and strategic partners. Our main priorities can be summed as “three Es” – Economy, Energy and Europe in the world.

The economic cooperation between our two countries is very good, business is active, mutual trade keeps growing quite fast, especially after our entry in the EU, which brought the dissolution of all trade barriers. The trade balance has reached 954 million euro in the first eleven months of 2008, its annual growth is 9% and it doubled since we have entered the EU. Slovenian investors are very active, most of the bigger Slovenian companies have invested in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, there is only one Czech investment in Slovenia, the papermill Vipav Videm Krško, so there is definitely some room for improvement.

Slovenia has beautiful and very diverse nature and it is in my opinion a well hidden treasure - good for us, who know about it! I enjoy very much travelling in the country and enjoying the beauty of the countryside. My favourite part of Slovenia is the Soča river valley and surrounding mountains. I went there hiking and rafting and keep going back, as the scenery is fascinating. The harder it is to imagine, that history had marched more than once through this beauty in a tragic way. As is often the case, there is a Czech link too. In the time of the first world war, Czech soldiers were fighting in the Austrian army at the Soča front and tens of thousands had fallen there. Every time I visit this piece of land I have to wonder at the madness and brutality of the battles, which seemed so senseless and which left scars visible even now. But back to the present: there is a growing number of Czechs, who visit Slovenia and especially the Soča river not only for rafting and mountaineering, but to look at the places where their grandfathers fought and many lost their lives. Thanks to the Slovenian government, the municipalities and all the local people, the monuments of the war are being taken care of very well.

My mission in Slovenia will come to the end this year and I will move back to Prague. I am sure I will miss this country, where I have so pleasant conditions for my work. On more personal basis, I will certainly miss nice people, the sea and the mountains, the rich cuisine and wonderful wines. I can assure you, I will keep

Franc But, Ambassador to the Czech Republic



Esteemed reader,

I put these thoughts on paper in Prague, which until the end of June 2009 will be the capital of the European Union, as the Czech Republic took on the responsible task of presiding over the European Council in January this year.

There are very few countries with which Slovenia has more in common than the Czech Republic.

Sadly, there are few in Slovenia who know that Charles the IV, who commissioned the famous Karl’s Bridge in Prague, was our king as well, since the Slavic countries were connected within the Holy Roman Empire, whose secular capital was, at the time, Prague. Those of you who go to high school might know that Prešeren’s friend was Karel Hynek Macha, the greatest Czech poet. Zofka Kvedrova had lived in the Czech capital, and the Slovenian Architect Jože Plečnik marked the architecture of early 20th Century Prague. The city is the final resting place of Matija Majar-Zilski, who was the initiator of the first Slovenian ‘political spring’, and the author of ‘Slovenia United’ in 1948. Very few of those living in Ljubljana know that the inventor of the ship-screw Josef Ressel was a Czech, as was the famous photographer Pelikan. There are many more things we could mention when listing all that has connected the two countries throughout history. What connects us today is fine cooperation in the field of business, Slovenian students at Prague and Brno Universities and, in particular, masses of tourists from Slovenia visiting Prague every year.

The Slovenians and Czechs never took opposite sides in any wars. Today, we are joined by sharing the common EU space that we both entered in 2004. Slovenia did a very good job with its presidency in the first half of 2008. That was followed by numerous contacts between politicians and experts from different ministries, because the two countries agreed to intensify cooperation. When asked, the Czechs like to say that Slovenian experiences are extremely valuable to them, since Slovenia is in many ways similar to the Czech Republic, and the presidency of the EU was for Slovenia as well, its first such experience. I am glad to say there are some experts from Slovenia working in several Czech ministries.

The Czech Republic begins its presidency with many difficulties on the horizon of international politics. In its first days, it had to face two big issues - the boiling conflict in the Gaza strip and the cessation of Russian gas supplies from Ukraine. Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek showed great determination to resolve the complex situation in a rapid and favourable manner. Although both crises are still somewhat present, it is not possible to say that the Czech presidency lacks initiative or a desire to resolve the problem. Given the difficult financial situation, it is safe to say that the period of the Czech presidency will be among the most difficult yet. The priorities of the Czech presidency are safe energy, Europe as a global partner and economic development. Big changes in the economy and turbulent international politics guarantee they will not have an easy job.

To a country of 10.5 million people, proud of its past and its traditions, the presidency is a great challenge. Although there are those who see the Czechs as rather “euro-sceptical”, and although they often have different views of future EU development, I have no doubt their presidency will be successful.

The citizens of the Czech Republic are definitely not against the EU, as they truly do not see their future elsewhere. Like the people of Slovenia, they believe the EU is a project that brought together the nations of Europe for the common goals of achieving peace, stability and economic development. Yet it is true the Czechs want less bureaucracy in Brussels and more direct contact with the people. That is why the Czech president Vaclav Klaus calls himself a “euro-realist” and loudly speaks about EU mistakes, despite often facing criticism because of that.

Every citizen of the Czech Republic values freedom above all, as they saw it being “stolen” from them too many times in the past. This year, they mark 20 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, which put this proud and wealthy state into complete isolation for several decades. During that time, human rights were profoundly violated and this is something the Czechs do not want to forget. From that experience come fear and concern that they might lose those liberties once again. That is one of the reasons why, some days ago, they marked their presidency in Brussels, giving a very brave presentation of member states called Entropa. Regardless of the different feedback, one must admit this was a presentation of some originality, whose basic message is freedom and the ability to see oneself from a perspective and try to be relaxed about that.

The presidency brings many additional obligations to the work of the Slovenian Embassy in the Czech Republic. Yet we embrace them as both a challenge and an opportunity to deepen our already excellent contacts in economy, politics and culture. The difficulties of our challenge are sweetened by a Sunday walk along the streets of the Golden Prague.

Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, photo: STA

SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS CONCERT IN NEW YORK CITY

On the second day of 2009 at the Slovenian church of St. Cyril in New York City a traditional Christmas concert took place to celebrate the first centennial of the first Slovenian mass performed in New York City. Pianist Simon Krečič and cellist Jaka

Stadler performed this year. The first Slovenian mass in New York was held by Fr Kazimir Zakrajšek in what was then a German church. With the help of German priests and mainly with the help of Slovenian immigrants in the United States, the first and only Slovenian church was established in New York. Today, the church of St. Cyril is led by a Franciscan, Martin Krizolog, who

has been responsible for two decades. The Christmas concert is well received by Slovenians living in New York and has since become traditional under the auspices of the Slovenian Embassy in the USA. The embassy in New York City, one of the capitals of Slovenian culture, is very active in financing and supporting such interesting projects.



STORY OF THE THEATRE OF ARGENTINE SLOVENIANS

This story uncovers a small, but not unimportant part of our history and bears witness to the amazing capacity for survival and independent cultural development of a relatively small Slovenian community which found refuge in Argentina after the Second World War.

The theatre was one of the strongest means of preserving and developing their almost new cultural identity, which in its essence remains intertwined with their love for the homeland.

In his book 'The Slovenian Theatre in Argentina' author Marjan Pertot has thoroughly and interestingly reconstructed the role of the theatre in the lives of Argentinean Slovenians over six decades, from their escape from Europe until this day. According to the editor of the book, Francka Slivnik, the author describes in detail the "Argentinean miracle", the fact that the Slovenians managed to preserve the Slovenian spoken word and their national consciousness so far from their homeland. The editor emphasised that Argentine Slovenians managed to preserve their dedication to Slovenian culture

through three generations by organizing theatre performances and casting fellow countrymen of all ages.

Ivo Svetina, the director of the Slovenian Theatre Museum, described the publishing of the book as an important act. "Pertot has shown rare carefulness and love when describing the story of the Slovenian theatre in Argentina."

The book was published as No. 84 of the Documents of the Slovenian Theatre Museum and is the result of cooperation between the Theatre Museum, the Mladika Publishing house of Trieste, and the Dušan Černe Library in Trieste.



SEVEN THOUSAND SEE THE MOVIE "DAR FUR - WAR FOR WATER"

More than 7,000 viewers have seen the Slovenian documentary 'Dar Fur - War for Water' by the directors and screen writers Tomo Križnar and Maja Weis, which is a great success for a documentary. The movie shows the mission of Tomo Križnar, an independent journalist and activist for the rights of indigenous people. Jože Biščak, the director of the GIEDON Agency predicts it will be the most viewed Slovenian movie this year.

COMEDIE-FRANÇAISE AT THE SNT DRAMA LJUBLJANA

At the beginning of January, SNT Drama Ljubljana lent its stage to the Parisian Comedie-Française. One of the oldest and most famous theatre companies in the world is on its longest tour yet, performing both a contemporary and classical play in one night - 'La festa' (A Celebration) by Spiro Scimone, and 'Les Précieuses ridicules' by Molière. SNT Drama Ljubljana takes great pride in hosting the

In the documentary, Tomo Križnar tries to find out what really happened in 2006 in the forbidden, surrounded and besieged territories of Darfur, when he was sent there as a special representative of the former Slovenian president Janez Drnovšek, and when the Sudanese government charged him with espionage and imprisoned him for a month and a half. The film has received extraordinary attention at all the film festivals where it has been screened, among others in Cannes, Amsterdam and Warsaw. In Durban, South Africa, it received a special mention from Amnesty

International. The film was also screened at the festival of documentary films in the Bahamas in December and will participate at the international film festival in Teheran, Iran, in January.

The film was a co-production between the Bela Film production company and TV Slovenia, with the financial help of the Slovenian Film Fund. Like the documentary 'Nuba, Pure People' Križnar's latest documentary is predicted to help achieve peace in Darfur by mobilizing the domestic and foreign politicians, activists, humanitarian organizations and masses.

theatre, as the great Comedie-Française has had an immense influence on generations of Ljubljana's stage directors, art directors and actors.

The Comedie-Française began touring in November last year within the framework of the European Cultural Season, the series of events under the auspices of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. They will visit ten east European countries, new members of the EU. Scimone's play was directed by Dan Jemmet of Great Britain, and Molière's

play by Galin Stoev from Bulgaria. The staging of both plays was very contemporary - the authors wanted to stage a classical play in a contemporary form. The audience was especially surprised by 'Les Précieuses ridicules' as they expected 'a more classical Comedie-Française'. The plays were in French, simultaneously translated, and reports say they were also a great success in Sofia, Bucharest, Warsaw, Bratislava and Budapest.

KOSTJA GATNIK AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Kostja Gatnik, a versatile creator of fine arts and this year's winner of the 'Hinko Smrekar' Award, the highest honour awarded by the Slovenian Biennale of Illustrations, presents his work at two exhibitions: his photographs are exhibited in Cankarjev Dom hall, and the retrospective of his fine art work at the National Gallery.

Being an advocate of new technologies, Gatnik has titled each photographic series according to the name of the camera they were taken with, while individual photographs remain untitled, left to the imagination of the observer. The photograph exhibition was prepared by

Milan Pajk, who chose from among the almost endless photographic archive of the artist. The retrospective exhibition displays about 500 items, and consists of canvas works, original illustrations, posters, books, comics, prints, logotypes, album covers, calendars, photographs and puppets. It was prepared by curators Marja Lorenčak and Andrej Smrekar.

Gatnik's exhibitions are well visited. The author is one of those popular painters who actively participated in the social and artistic transformation of 1968, but Gatnik also knew how to express himself with immense wittiness in the popular media. The baby-boom generation of peacemakers and flower children rightfully remembers this period as one of the most important in their lives.

SLOVENIAN NIGHT IN PRAGUE

On Friday, 6 February, a Slovenian Night will be held in Prague under the auspices of the Slovenian Tourist Board, the Government Communication Office and the Slovenian Embassy in Prague.

The Slovenian companies Mura and Lisca will give a fashion show to economists, journalists and tourist representatives, and the catering industry of Izola will present the cuisine of Slovenian Istria, while musicians Manca Izmajlov and Lado Leskovar will further enliven the evening.

ALEŠ BERGER RECEIVES THE ESASI AWARD FOR THE BEST TRANSLATION FROM SPANISH

The Spanish embassy in Slovenia presented the ESASI award for the best translation from Spanish into Slovenian between 2000 and 2007. The award went to Aleš Berger for his translation of Federico Garcia Lorca's 'Romansero guitano'.

The work, always a challenge for translators into new languages, originates from 1928 and is considered a fundamental work of European poetry from the first half of the 20th century.

The individual poems have already been translated by Alojz Gradnik and Jože Udovič, but according to the jury, the greatness of Berger's translation lies in the fact that "we were given an integral collection of all 18 ballads and later versions, which for the first time has precisely followed the structure of the original."

A call for applications was answered by 14 translated works of Spanish authors, mostly novels, but also collections of short stories, juvenilia and poetry. The main criteria were literary quality, which had to follow the expressive and aesthetic note of the original as closely as possible, as well as linguistic adequacy and accuracy, said the chairman of the jury, the academic Drago Jančar.

KAREL PEČKO RECEIVES THE AUSTRIAN HONORARY CROSS FOR SCIENCE AND ARTS

The Austrian ambassador to Slovenia Valentin Inzko awarded the painter Karel Pečko the Austrian Honorary Cross for Science and Arts. A true legend among Carinthian cultural workers and a great painter, currently living in Slovenj Gradec, received the honour for his contribution to cooperation in the arts between Austria and Slovenia, as well as for his work as director of the gallery in Slovenj Gradec.

The Austrian ambassador emphasised that this is the greatest honour of the Republic of Austria in the field of science and arts. "Pečko was the first to invite Austrian artists to exhibit at the Slovenj Gradec gallery," said the ambassador, mentioning that Pečko gave lectures at several Austrian schools and helped many pupils.



Aleš Berger



Karel Pečko



THE PRIDE OF SLOVENIAN BOOKBINDING

The Janez Vajkard Valvasor Foundation established at the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts in 2001 has recorded a grand achievement in publishing.

In late 2008 it published the 'Iconotheca Valvasoriana', a facsimile of the graphic collection assembled by the chief historian of Kranjska Region, Janez Vajkard Valvaor and member of the Royal Academy, after whom the foundation was named. The

Iconotheca Valvasoriana



original of that collection, known to very few, is kept by the Biblioteca Metropolitana in Zagreb. Valvasoriana comprises 18 books of large format. With 7752 graphics and drawings it is a true printing and bookbinding masterpiece. One hundred prints are available. The Slovenian Ministry of Culture will be purchasing 20. Many will be sent as gifts to various Slovenian libraries. Valvasor started his work on the collection in the mid-17th century. It was shaped by his 14-year long travels through Austria,

Italy, Switzerland, Germany and France. Among its authors are Albrecht Durer, Lucas Cranach, Jacques Calott and many more or less known German, Austrian, Italian, English and Kranjska masters of the 16th and 17th century. The co-founder of the Valvasor Foundation, Jože Gostiša, who was also head of the Valvasoriana project, believes this achievement is of monumental, global significance.

Iconotheca Valvasoriana is seen as the most challenging publishing project in Slovenia.

CONCLUSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOG

European Year of Intercultural Dialog concluded with the end of 2008. Slovenia and its institutions took an active part, and were represented by Marko Peljhan, the European Ambassador of Intercultural Dialogue. In his opinion, the Year of Intercultural Dialogue cannot last only a year, as for him it is a process with no end. The incentive to dedicate a year to intercultural dialogue came after the

observation of civil society that Europe and its institutions were too distant from their citizens and after suggestions that active citizenship should be supported. Therefore, every Member State of the European Union established a national coordination committee, mainly of ministerial representatives and representatives of the cultural institutions which take part in the intercultural dialogue. The intention was to include different segments of civil society, especially young people.

Among the most important events within the framework of the Year of Intercultural Dialog, the Slovenian national coordinator

of the project Sonja Kralj Bervar listed the January opening event at the Cankarjev dom art and congress centre, where a conference entitled 'Intercultural Dialogue as the Fundamental Value of the EU' was held, as well as the conference 'Europe, the World and Humanity in the 21st Century', which took place in April in Ljubljana; the Youth Event 2008 in the town Brdo pri Kranju; the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean University of Piran at the beginning of June, and the national project Europe in School, where 10,000 young and 5,000 of their mentors participated.

Idrija lace



JILTING THE ROBOT IN DEEP SNOW

After compressing two robots with a hydraulic press at the Gorenje factory in May and the ritual burial of a robot at the construction site of a new shopping mall in South Korea, the well-known web artists Igor Štromajer and Brane Zorman performed a new internet guerrilla ballet 'Balletikka Internettikka Norddikka' on

the last day of 2008, five minutes before midnight. The leaving or jilting of a robot on Spitsbergen Island was executed by Nils Are Mohn and Asmund Njos, keepers of the Indian research station at Svalbard, following directions transmitted live from the Control Centre in Ljubljana. Mohn and Njos reached the island's glacier Olav V Land sometime before midnight and exactly at the turning of the year, placed a working remote-

LJUBLJANA CITY MUSEUM THIS YEAR

Ljubljana City Museum has presented its plans for this year. They will begin with an exhibition of typical Slovenian craft bobbin-work in January. The second January exhibition is a treat for all lovers of 20th century art – selected graphics by Marc Chagall entitled 'From Dead Souls to the Circus'. For the first time in Ljubljana more than a hundred original graphics - created between 1923 and 1980 – will be shown, courtesy of the Fetzer Gallery in Germany and their extensive collection. A presentation of the Buddhist Dharmaling congregation will follow in April, as well as ancient temples from Gurina, Carinthia. One of the bigger projects will be the exhibition commemorating the bicentennial of the Illyrian Provinces. And a special exhibition will be dedicated to the Slovenian artist Rihard Jakopič.

LITERARY IDENTITIES OF EUROPE

In the Cankarjev Dom art and congress centre in Ljubljana an interesting project is in preparation. At a series of evenings, writers of the Literary Identities of Europe will present their work. The series includes nine authors whose works are translated in the Euroman collection. The writers will read parts of their translated novels and short stories and talk to translators and the authors of the prefaces, who are experts on national literatures. The audience is, of course, welcome to join the conversation. The purpose of meeting the writers is to learn of their histories, which are all part of a mosaic of identities, ideas, problems and conflicts - the mosaic called the European Union. Nine evenings of literature will present nine human and literary faces of Europe. What connects them is literature and the search for answers to the general questions of humanity: who are we, and where are we going?

controlled Silverlit R/C Robot Program-a-BOT in a hole in the snow at Point Zero (78 degrees North, 17 degrees East), along with a Slovenian national flag thrust into the snow next to the robot. "The act of jilting is one of the most intimate, personal and merciless deeds, which is at the same time purifying, direct and even reconciling," write the authors. The event was broadcast live on the internet and lasted about 10 minutes.

Anja Lorenzetti, photo: Catbriyur archives

Catbriyur, the sky is the limit

The Catbriyur trademark is an extraordinary idea put into practice. It was developed by Mr. and Mrs. Bricman, and in a short time reached the very top of the design world.



The company name indicates that Katja and Jure Bricman are gifted with original ideas, as the name Catbriyur, dating back to their student years, is actually the combination of their full names Katja Jurgec and Jure Bricman. The story of their success begun quite accidentally, as Katja, then a teacher at Mislinje Elementary School, took a ceramics class where she was introduced to porcelain. The affection was immediate and she passed on the enthusiasm to her husband. That is the beginning of the Catbriyur story. Jure is responsible for the basic concept of the collections, the ideas, prototypes, packaging and spatial design, while Katja oversees production and technology, modifications in production, final distribution and orders.

“While global porcelain production is aimed at industrial design, we decided to focus on designing unique, organic forms with ethnological particularities,” Jure Bricman explains.

The Bricman's have, from their home in Kotlje, Koroška, decided to take the bold step of trying themselves in a craft with an ancient tradition in China and a centuries-long presence in Europe. They bought a furnace, installed it in their own woodshed and in 1998 created their first product. The Bricman's took on porcelain making, despite the fact Slovenia has a very limited tradition when it comes to both the origins of the material or an authentic way of making porcelain products. The fact that the Bricman's are fine art teachers helps with both discovering the optimal process for making and introducing

novelties to the design. Through their education, they acquired knowledge of ancient technologies and upgraded it with their original solutions. They began by making cups, small jugs and sugar bowls. Now they design in the world of fashion, furniture and architecture. Katja and Jure make porcelain furniture for their gallery in Paris. The particularity of porcelain furniture created big public interest. They also create porcelain jewellery. The feedback is very good. Their first porcelain necklace was shipped to a buyer in New York. Knowing its fragility and the fact it is bound to fall to pieces if used more than once, they sold it as a part of a boxed-painting, where the owner can put the fragments of the broken necklace back into the box to remind her of the time she wore this unique piece. That idea gave a particular charm to their work, and porcelain admirers began valuing their jewellery so highly that it is now a gift for only very special occasions. In time, they managed to develop lasting products that boost pure natural colours and are painted with gold and silver. They are thinking of combining their jewellery with fine metals and gem stones. Porcelain jewellery will be followed by another novelty: a perfume in small porcelain bottles.

“Some years ago, we realized it was our desire to have a strong trademark with a powerful identity and a global outlook, but at the same time preserve the status of a small family company with prestigious, high-value products,” Jure says proudly.



Their products are of non-linear design, made with original, hand-shaped details, described by those who know and admire porcelain with words such as fine translucence, virtual fragility, fairytale shapes, charm and sensuality. They took Slovenia by storm. Now they are accepted and admired by porcelain lovers around the world. The Bricman's are the winners of many titles both for achievements in design and in business success. Beside Slovenia, they have had exhibitions in Padua, the Ambient Fair in Frankfurt, Vienna, Moscow, and at a jewellery exhibition in Amsterdam. They have presented their work at many Slovenian embassies and consulates, and in 2008 they were invited to work with the famous Lane Crawford agency. That is how they came to Paris and opened their first gallery. It is to be followed by galleries in Rome, London and Vienna. They are already looking for a space to open a gallery in Los Angeles. The Bricman's would like to have as many galleries as possible, because they believe that is the way in which contact with local environment is preserved, which enables them to adapt their products to a certain market. They work with several specialised representatives who help prepare independent shows in foreign markets. Beside Slovenia, they have achieved excellent results on American, Italian, French and Dutch market. Their products are also in demand in Dubai, Germany and Spain. Currently, the Bricman's are setting up their own web shop, which they hope will give them even better sales results around the world.

“Our products are sold in a particular way. We strive to create an adequate environment for them, and also very direct contact with the buyer, and that is what strengthens trust in the trademark,” Jure explains.

The Catbriyur trademark is close to becoming a globally recognized brand. Katja and Jure Bricman create products that, with their particular, non-geometric shapes, original hand-made details and the charm of their appearance, alongside using technical innovations and new design solutions, win the admiration of both the domestic and foreign publics. Jure is aware that their company is proof that globalization offers the

opportunity to offer globally recognized products from even the smallest of villages. The most significant value of their products is their original identity, which won over the Slovenian State Protocol Service and made Catbriyur products the main protocol gift of the Slovenian presidency of the European Union. Slovenia gave Catbriyur products to such visitors as the American First Lady, Laura Bush, Queen Elizabeth II of England and the Dutch princess Máxima.

World porcelain production is aimed at industrial design, which has encouraged the Bricman's to rather focus on designing unique, organic forms with ethnological particularities. Quantities are limited, so the highly valued Catbriyur products are on the very verge of genuine artwork. There is no competition in this field, and plagiarism is virtually impossible, as the work is strongly connected to the identity of the maker, Jure explains convincingly. Such products are not interesting to industrial designers, as they cannot be reproduced industrially and thereby lose their freshness.

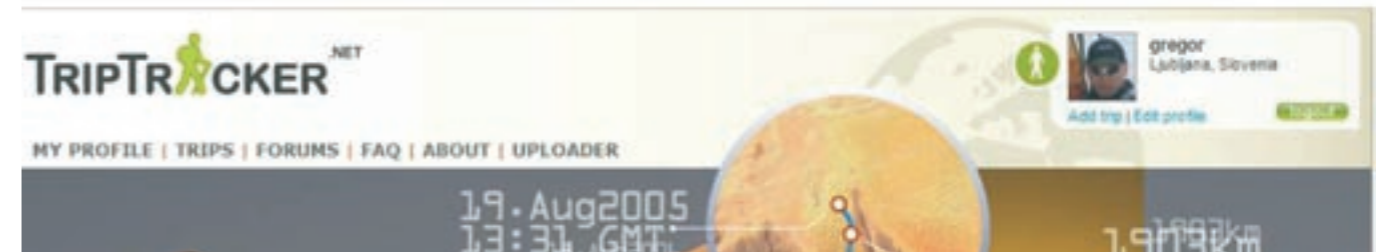
“Taking into account recent trends, individual art production and the planned enlargement of distribution, alongside opening more galleries, we can move to the highest price range,” Katja and Jure believe.

In a very short time Catbriyur went from an amateurish home craft to an internationally recognized company. The Bricman's ten-year goal is to create a strong trademark, with a stable retail network at home and abroad. They want to take Catbriyur to the highest price range, which means small and exclusive quantities of the best quality for connoisseurs. Jure and Katja are well prepared for the future and sure they have made clear plans for any circumstances.

Jure explains, “We have strategies for every possible scenario. The sky is the limit. If we realize just ten per cent of that, it will be a success.”

OUR EXCELLENCE

Polona Prešeren



It never ceases to surprise me just how cleverly worked out some innovations are. One such is The TripTracker. The innovation is the work of the Klika company and was created by A-list names from the IT world. Klika is a company that sets innovation standards in Slovenia and outside its borders.

What is it all about?

TripTracker is a web service that enables its users to create interactive travelogues in a very simple manner. It is based on a platform that automatically organizes and installs multidimensional content onto the satellite images of the Earth. TripTracker therefore helps travellers make their travel stories accessible to friends and family, or simply to show the world the impressions from their travels. The system combines photographs, notes and commentaries and shows them all on the map, at the location where they were created. The user must register, but if you have a GPS device, the TripTracker will draw the path on the satellite map. In this way, we make your voyages accessible to friends around the world.

Who is Klika?

“We like to view Klika as an innovation lab. Klika has global plans and wants to find partners who share the same excitement for innovative ideas,” says Gregor Rebolj, a partner in Klika d.o.o. “We want to

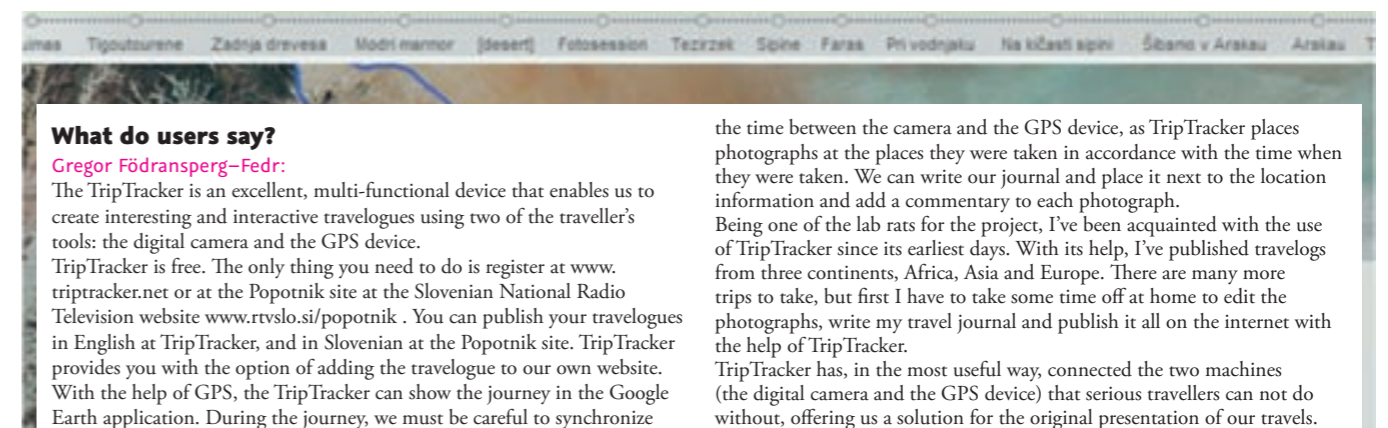
work closely with GPS vendors to ensure compatibility with a wide range of positioning devices. We hope to partner with travel agencies and mobile service providers to incorporate our ideas in the tourism industry and the mobile community,” says Rebolj. Klika has its origins several years ago, when Rebolj and four colleagues who had worked together in a large software development company quit their jobs to establish their own firm of five equal partners. Today, Klika focuses mainly on the search for innovative ideas and the development of software, but also on professional services for high-tech products. According to Rebolj, their main focus is quality. While the TripTracker is not the only Klika product, it is the one on which the partners are placing most emphasis. According to Rebolj, the product has various uses: in social mapping, location-based imaging, GIS-based real estate, fleet management, and even in racing sports.

Upgrading the TripTracker

The system offers numerous possibilities for upgrading, such as connecting it to location bases (shops, restaurants, sights, etc), the footage of a region, Google and Yahoo API access to the base stations' locations. “A somewhat modified TripTracker system is designed for companies, mostly to track the delivery of addressed and non-addressed mail. The system is currently used in the

distribution of newspapers and magazines (Dnevnik, Finance, Mladina, etc) and in distributing the non-addressed mail commercial flyers, catalogues, and the like,” says Rebolj. “The surveillance manager defines the area and quantity of delivered material before each delivery takes place. In cases where addressed mail is delivered, the system itself distributes instruction to deliverers and then follows the entire procedure via a small tracking device. The system allows the manager to check the state of delivery at any given moment and reward deliverers based on their efficiency,” Rebolj explains. The system can survey the state of delivery given either the percentage of delivered material, or based on the house number. The system can easily be applied in another country. “Our company enables other firms to rent the system, paying a monthly fee each time they use it. In that way, they avoid paying the initial expenses,” says Rebolj. “We can put the system to a variety of different uses. One of them is tracking sales staff. They set monthly goals. The system makes the process of achieving those goals traceable. In this way, the sales personnel are not only motivated by the sales goals achieved, but also via tracking the visits they make. This reduces to a minimum the time and effort required to identify problems in the sales network.”

www.klika.si <http://triptracker.net/>



What do users say?

Gregor Födriansperg-Fedr:

The TripTracker is an excellent, multi-functional device that enables us to create interesting and interactive travelogues using two of the traveller's tools: the digital camera and the GPS device. TripTracker is free. The only thing you need to do is register at www.triptracker.net or at the Popotnik site at the Slovenian National Radio Television website www.rtvsl.si/popotnik. You can publish your travelogues in English at TripTracker, and in Slovenian at the Popotnik site. TripTracker provides you with the option of adding the travelogue to our own website. With the help of GPS, the TripTracker can show the journey in the Google Earth application. During the journey, we must be careful to synchronize

the time between the camera and the GPS device, as TripTracker places photographs at the places they were taken in accordance with the time when they were taken. We can write our journal and place it next to the location information and add a commentary to each photograph. Being one of the lab rats for the project, I've been acquainted with the use of TripTracker since its earliest days. With its help, I've published travelogs from three continents, Africa, Asia and Europe. There are many more trips to take, but first I have to take some time off at home to edit the photographs, write my travel journal and publish it all on the internet with the help of TripTracker. TripTracker has, in the most useful way, connected the two machines (the digital camera and the GPS device) that serious travellers can not do without, offering us a solution for the original presentation of our travels.

Kornelija Ajlec, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

Come on Sunday for dumplings!

The traditional cuisine of Dolenjska is comprised of the cuisines of smaller regions, such as Krško polje, the valleys of Miren and Trebnje, the Ribnica valley and regions extending up to Kočevje. If there is most characteristic dish to be found among them, dumplings would certainly be selected, which the ethnologist Vilko Novak says they were invented in Dolenjska. They have been on the table since at least 1589, when the first recipe for tarragon dumplings was recorded. In former times, they were on the table at every family holiday, and the majority of agricultural activities, and the people of Dolenjska still say: "Come on Sunday for dumplings!" Žajnof, a sauce made of home-made mustard and uncooked must goes excellently with them.

Among the very old dishes are groats, both millet, which is the oldest, and barley or buckwheat. Then white mashed potato and potato and buckwheat mash, served with crackling, sweet or sour milk, sour turnip or cabbage, beef broth, clear soup or stew, are characteristic of Dolenjska. Popular old dishes are paps: milk, and corn or buckwheat, rolled or baked. Žlikrofi are also a speciality, and used to be a mandatory dish at wedding feasts.

Among meat culinary specialities, we should mention roast lamb, suckling pig, kid, and roast goose or duck with stewed sauerkraut or red cabbage prepared for St. Martin's Day. Also, when a pig is butchered, there are millet sausages and stuffed leg of pork. With meat dishes go the maize porridge of Suha Krajina, mlinci (pasta tatters), roast leek, stewed sauerkraut or sour turnip.

In the old days, only mushy potica was known in Dolenjska. It was replaced by potica with crackling or bacon, which is still standard fare at Carnival, like potica with nuts at Easter and poprtnik (ceremonial bread richly decorated with ornaments made of dough) at Christmas. Among the oldest pastries are flat cakes, some of them specially designed and decorated, which are associated with religious holidays. The flat cake of Bela krajina is well-known, and no good feast or wine tasting in a vineyard cottage happens without it.



Tarragon dumplings

INGREDIENTS:

Dough:

375g flour
2 tablespoons of oil
2.5dl tepid water
pinch of salt

Stuffing:

500g cottage cheese (pressed, non-fat)
1 sour cream
1 egg
4 tablespoons of sugar
bunch of fresh tarragon
(dry tarragon can also be used)
breadcrumbs, butter for lard

Knead not too tough dough and divide it in two. Let it rest for a while.

Meanwhile, mix cottage cheese, egg and sour cream. Wash the tarragon, strip off the leaves and chop them. Roll the dough out flat and apply the stuffing, then strew with sugar and tarragon. Wrap the dumplings in a cloth, tie with thread and cook in salted water for half an hour. When cooked, unwrap them, cut them into slices and strew them with breadcrumbs that were previously fried in butter. Some sugar can also be sprinkled on top.



Corn pudding

INGREDIENTS:

1.5l milk or boiling water
1.5dl corn meal or corn flour
salt
2 tablespoons of butter or lard

Add corn meal or flour to boiling milk or water while stirring. Season with salt and cook for 20 minutes. Pour into a bowl and add butter, which can also be put into the boiling milk before adding corn meal or flour.



Yellow soup with meat dumplings

INGREDIENTS FOR YELLOW SOUP:

500g soup vegetables (carrot and kohlrabi)
80g flour
salt
50g lard

Fry the vegetables in lard, add flour and some water. When the vegetables are soft, crush them. Add meat dumplings, or fry meat the dumplings separately.

INGREDIENTS FOR MEAT DUMPLINGS:

Filo dough:
500g white flour
1-2 eggs
2 tablespoons of oil
tepid salt water

Stuffing:

400g ground pork
30g lard
0.25l cream
50g onion
3 eggs
green parsley
marjoram
pepper

Make the dough and let it rest. Then stretch it and apply the stuffing, make a roll, wrap it in a cloth and cook it. Unwrap the cooked dumplings, cut them into slices and serve them with the soup. Stuffing: fry the meat together with onion; add egg yolks, cream, whipped egg whites, then season the stuffing.



Potica with crackling

INGREDIENTS:

Dough:

600g white flour
1 teaspoon of salt
3 yolks
60g sugar
approx. 3dl warm milk
80g butter

Leaven (dry yeast can be used too):

40g yeast
warm milk
1 teaspoon of sugar

Crackling stuffing:

700g cracklings
4dl sour cream

Make dough and knead until smooth. Cover the dough and let it rise. Put the dough on floured cloth, flour it and roll it out flat. Strew the warm crackling on the dough and also spread the sour cream.

Roll the dough tightly and put it into a greased cake tin to rise. When risen, prick the dough, spread whipped egg on it, and bake in the oven at 220°C for first 10 minutes, and at 200°C for approximately 75 minutes.

Kornelija Ajlec, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

The Matjaž Household



Matjaž and Marta Pavlin, residents of Paha village above Otočec, bought a house next door 12 years ago. They first planned to pull down the decayed, 150 year-old-house, but as they discovered it is the only one of its like still standing in the area, they decided to save it. Matjaž and Marta asked the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heiritage from Novo mesto to help with the long renovation that would return the house to its original appearance. "We were restoring the foundations meter by meter, using only the natural materials. We even brought craftsmen from Prekmurje to construct the straw roof", say the owners, otherwise admirers of cultural heritage and antiquities.

Today, the Matjaž House proudly bears the title 'House of Tradition', given only to some 15 such houses in Slovenia. For almost two years it has been attracting visitors with 'The story of Cviček wine', and last year it was given the 'Silver Sower' award, given by the Tourist Association of Slovenia to the most innovative tourist product in the country. The Pavlin family holds the award even closer to their heart, knowing that it was never before given to a family company that does not have a larger institution in the background.

"The household was never big. The people who lived here had to go away to earn money. There is a small extension next to the house, where the family kept a goat, perhaps a pig. There was a small field close by, and that was that. Up to twelve people lived in such households. Older guests' memories are often awakened - they say how they used to live in such houses, and how young people of today find that extraordinary", says Marta, the lady of the house. Some of the objects they restored are used on a daily basis. One of those is the 'mentrga', a table that used to be a part of every farmhouse and served the lady of the house for kneading the dough for the bread she was later to bake in an old brick stove. Such tables were used for eating during the day, and at night, served as a bed for children.

The house has some amenities typical of the time, including a chest and table over a century old. The bed, too, is as it used to be - a mattress filled with husks. They did not want to set the house up as a museum, but in a way that can be used for living. Last winter brought many visitors, who stayed between two and three days on average, stirring up memories of their youth. In the other part of the house, the Pavlin's have arranged another bedroom, bathroom, a kitchen and a small sauna, all in accordance to the regulations for the protection of monuments.

At the Matjaž household, they usually host pre-announced organised groups that are welcomed by all five of the Pavlin family members dressed in traditional Dolenjska outfits. They serve traditional dishes like potica with tarragon or potica with crackling and then invite guests to see the house and the cellar. Finally, they take visitors to the wooden floor behind the house, where corn was beaten and stored. This space is now used for showing 'The Story of Cviček Wine', a multi-vision presentation in Slovenian, English and German. The presentation will soon be available in Italian and Russian. The story features Cviček as a person, presenting itself and its relatives at home and abroad. Cviček tells the story wine, from Egyptian, Greek and Roman times to the present. The saint patrons of wine are also presented, as well as the composition of Cviček wine and the process of making it.

One of the most famous Dolenjska musicians, Lojze Slak, arranged music for the presentation. The multi-vision ends with a tasting of the Cviček ingredients accompanied by buckwheat bread with nuts and home-made cheese.

From the household with a house, Slovenian corn-rack "kozolec" and the wooden floor, there is a view of the Otočec castle and the Krka River valley (four kilometers). It takes three kilometers to Šmarješke Toplice health resort, two to Stari grad, ten to Novo mesto, and 70km to either Ljubljana or Zagreb.

Cviček, the giant of Dolenjska



Janez Vajkard Valvasor, the great Slovenian historian, mentioned Marwein, a jolly wine of the Dolenjska region, in his work 'The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola'. When mentioning the localities where Cviček grapes are grown, he lists Bučko, Trška gora and Vinji vrh. The name Marwein was preserved until the end of the 18th century, when the Gorska bukev wine legislation was no more in place. The legislation, valid since 1543, consisted of instructions and rules about growing vines and making wine. When the Illyrian Provinces were founded and the rules ceased to ensure control over the wine making process, the wine louse appeared and decimated Slovenian vineyards. Cviček was a mixture of those varieties that survived the louse, and was made in small quantities. Etymologically, the name is close to the Croatian word *cvič*, meaning whey. The notes of Janez Trdina, a writer, says the name Cviček was used for all varieties of low-quality Dolenjska wine, and was by no means attributed to one single variety. Trdina did not speak highly of the wine. When he was strolling about and stopped at an inn, they poured him a glass of wine of which Trdina noted, "The wine was called Cviček and was such that even the oldest of men did not recall tasting such sorrel."

The excessive sour tones, a consequence of over-early harvesting, bad cellaring and inadequate sorting, were the marks of Cviček up to a hundred years ago. Wishing to improve its quality, an experimental viniculture station was established in 1886 on Grm in Novo mesto that implemented improvements in agriculture. The investment was soon repaid as the quality of Cviček improved. According to data from ethnologist Božo Račič, the godfather of Cviček was the president of the Agricultural Society, Gustav Pirc, who in 1985 first named the reddish wine of Dolenjska. Soon after the turn of the 19th century, Cviček became a type. The winemaker's manual of 1924 states: The name Cviček applies to a bright-red, sourish wine, that can be

a very popular local drink, but has no commercial value outside the locality of its origin and should, therefore, be produced in limited quantities" But the people of Dolenjska did not take that for a fact and decided to make Cviček a trademark whose name will be listed on the wine lists of the world. But there was more to substantiate the optimism than just a belief in the product. Cviček became popular because its sworn admirer was the president of former Yugoslavia Tito. He was said to have loved Cviček because of the oily food he ate, as such food requires sour wine to be digested properly. Whether that was true or not, Cviček was the synonym for Slovenians within Yugoslavia. With the birth of co-operatives, the people of Dolenjska decided Cviček would be their export product. Soon the wine was being exported to Switzerland, England and Brazil. For more than a decade, the name Cviček was on the world wine list. The desire for more money called for a change in production. As high-quality varieties were used, all surpluses of all other varieties were put into Cviček and it once again became a synonym for cheap wine. Thus it was until Slovenia's independence, when the winemakers of Dolenjska decided Cviček would once again be on the wine lists of fine Paris restaurants.

Since 2001, Cviček made only in the Dolenjska wine region is protected with the mark of a recognized traditional denomination (PTP). A consortium of 11 top winemakers, which produces between one and a half and two million liters a year, ensure unified quality and, through self-regulation, certified geographic denomination. Because of that, Cviček's quality and reputation are again at an enviable level. When it comes to its composition, Cviček is one of the most unique wines in Slovenia. Its secret is in blending various reds (modra frankinja, žametna črnina - 70 per cent) with white varieties (kraljevina, laški rizling, rumeni plavec, zeleni silvanec - 30 per cent). Cviček is a dry wine, with low alcohol volume (between 8.5 and 10%) and somewhat higher acidity. It has an attractive, light red colour with a slight ruby cast, and fresh fruity aromas, with an emphasis on red fruits (raspberry, cherry and red currant). It charms with its lightness, ease of drinking and components well-suited to the dynamics of today, and the desire to eat healthily and moderately. Cviček is an everyday wine, while its sparkling variety can be drunk as an aperitif. Besides the Italian Chianti, Cviček is the only wine in the world made of both red and white grapes. It should not be drunk after two years since production, as it becomes an increasingly tired and uninteresting wine that loses its freshness and lively appearance after being matured for too long. Because it contains flavonoids, Cviček is supposed to possess healing qualities. It is recommended for coronary diseases, loss of appetite, anaemia, weight-loss programmes, helping reduce cholesterol levels, as a means to destroy bacteria, when drinking hygienically questionable water, with diabetes and as an anti-aging and anti-blood clot remedy.

Vesna Žarkovič, photo STA

Golden Fox: Tina Maze wins Maribor

The Slovenian alpine skier Tina Maze (2:45.15) won her first giant slalom World Cup contest this season. She was better than the competition at the 45th Golden Fox that took place in Maribor. Denise Carbon of Italy came second (+0.39) and Katrin Holzl of Germany third (0.92)

With the best time of the second run, Maze won the seventh victory of her career, matching the achievement of legendary Slovenian skier Mateja Svet. She won the Maribor giant slalom for the second time, since she was triumphant there in 2005. Another reason to celebrate was the fact that two other Slovenian skiers won World Cup points at Golden Fox 2008. Mateja Robnik came 14th (2.47.58) closely followed by Maruša Ferk in 15th place (2.47.74). Vanja Brodnik also managed to enter the finals, but came 37th, Ana Drev was 46th.

The organizers of the Golden Fox had reason to be pleased even before the competition began. Snow, whose absence created problems at previous competitions, was plentiful this year. The temperatures were low enough and the skies were sunny. The winter wonderland came to life with the name of Slovenian skier Tina Maze written over it, as happened four years ago. The skier from Črna na Koroškem is now 11th in the overall ranking and 6th in the giant slalom. Since Maze had the second best time of the first run, she had to wait for the best in the first run to perform, after she entered the finish arena. Yet Denise Carbon was not fast enough and Maze could celebrate the victory by performing her typical 'bicycle'. A few moments later, she celebrated the victory in the arms of her partner, fitness trainer Andrea Massi, who is in charge of Tina Maze's small team, which also includes a coach and service manager, Andrej Perovšek. Maze has her own team, as she decided to split from Slovenia's alpine skiing representation before the beginning of the season. "I could not have wanted better. It was my desire to reach the top in giant slalom and I did it. Now I need to continue in this way. This competition is a pleasant surprise to my small team and a big reward," Maze said after winning the 52nd World Cup competition in the history of Slovenian alpine skiing. Eighteen Slovenian alpine skiers have won one or more World Cup competitions: Bojan Križaj, Boris Strel, Rok Petrovič, Grega Benedik, Jure Košir, Andrej Miklavc, Matjaž Vrhovnik, Mitja Kunc, Andrej Jerman; Tina Maze, Mateja Svet, Veronika Šarec,



Urška Horvat, Špela Pretnar, Nataša Bokal, Alenka Dovžan, Katja Koren in Mojca Suhadolc. There are 22 victories in the male and 30 in the female competitions.

Maze's victory was received with enthusiasm by viewers in the finish arena. Among them was Prime Minister Borut Pahor with several ministers. Janez Kocjančič, a member of the presidency of The International Ski Federation (FIS) and the president of the Slovenian Olympic Committee was there to give veteran Radio Slovenia journalist Boris Ljubič a special FIS award for lifetime achievement.

Due to its booming tourist infrastructure, Maribor and Pohorje have 8 per cent growth in visitors, a figure high above the Slovenian average. In both the city and on the Pohorje slopes, new, modern and prestigious tourist capacities are being opened. More and more local people depend on tourism. Small private hotels are being opened with great frequency. The city itself is changing. It is becoming tidier, its industrial greyness giving way to livelier colours and smiley faces. New cafes and restaurants catering to the needs of visitors make the streets and squares that used to be empty at the weekend are filled with laughter, music and tourists from all parts of the world. They like to sit outside when the weather is nice and have a glass of wine from the Štajerska region and a bite of food. They may visit a museum, a gallery, stay a night or two and go back home filled with impressions. When asked about Maribor, visitors say that what they like most is the green landscape that surrounds the city.



Polona Prešeren

The Slovenian Sportsman and Sportswoman of 2008 - Primož Kozmus and Sara Isakovič

There are always dilemmas when choosing the person of the year in any category, even when it comes to sportsmen and women whose results have made us proud. But this time, members of the Association of Slovenian Sports Journalists faced no such dilemma. They declared Primož Kozmus and Sara Isakovič Sportsman and Sportswoman of 2008. Their achievements put the name of Slovenia on the list of Olympic medal winners. Kozmus won gold in the men's hammer, and Sara Isakovič won silver in the women's 200m freestyle.

The Sportsman of the Year event had many winners. One of them was a rich tradition, and then sport, and the sportsmen and women themselves. And who were the best in 2008? In male competitions, Primož Kozmus, the Olympic champion in the men's hammer received the prestigious title. Sportswoman of 2007, cross-country skier Petra Majdič was succeeded by Sara Isakovič. Journalists awarded the title of best team of the year to Slovenia's men's four, who at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing were Rok Rozman, Tomaž Pirih, Rok Kolander and Miha Pirih.

The winners received their trophies at an event attended by many prominent names from the world of sport and other walks of public life. Among the participants was the Slovenian president Danilo Turk.

The Association of Slovenian Sport Journalists, alongside awarding the title Sportsman of the Year, awards 'Olympic flames' to Olympic medal winners. Besides Kozmus and Isakovič, they were given to Vasilij Žbogar (silver in Sailing Laser Class men), Rajmond Debevec (bronze in men's 50m rifle 3-position shooting) and Lucija Polavder (bronze in judo – women's over 78kg)

Primož Kozmus made a breakthrough in his career in 2007, when he set his personal record at 82.30m. That breaking point meant doors to the very top were open. After coming second in the world championships in Osaka, he crowned his best year with an Olympic gold in Beijing.

The young swimmer Sara Isakovič, who is a freshman at an American university, is an extraordinarily talented swimmer. Although only 20 years old, her career has been marked by some significant achievements. Back in 2005, when she participated at the world championship in Montreal, Sara Isakovič became the first Slovenian woman swimmer to enter the finals of a world championship. She came fifth. Last year, she won gold at the Eindhoven European championship. She completed a successful year by winning a gold medal in Beijing.

photo: M. Slavec



photo: STA

photo: STA



Miša Čermak, photo: Iztok Dimc

To follow one's dream is to succeed!

Composer Rok Golob

“The composer Rok Golob is a young musical genius. To work with him on *The Story of Laxeno* was a fantastic experience!” said drummer Luis Conte, a Grammy awarded musician, sharing the opinion of most of the musicians, producers, composers and singers the young Slovenian composer has worked with in the USA. After finishing his studies at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, he continued his education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, studying with such master composers of film music as Elmer Bernstein, Christopher Young and David Raksin. A multi-instrumentalist who plays keyboards, violin, drums, bass guitar, percussion, banjo, guitar and other instruments, he won the grand prize at the “Slovenska popevka” Festival with his song ‘Letim’ (I’m Flying) performed by Katrinas, and he is also known for cooperating with Magnifico, Siddharta and Gino Vannelli. But nothing says more about this young musical genius than the music of his last album, ‘The Story of Laxeno’.

The Story of Laxeno is a special album, with wonderful music and lyrics that only exist within you. How did your prolific cooperation with the best US musicians and performers begin? Not to mention the vocals of Oto Pestner.

It all begins with small steps, always. When someone asks how to write a symphony, my college Gino Vannelli answers the same as I would. First, there is an idea, but after this first step there has to be honesty towards oneself, towards one's feelings and there has to be a meaning. Working with world-famous musicians and having their names listed next to yours on the album shouldn't be your first priority! One needs to completely understand these musicians and communicate with them through the music – that's why I work with them! I have enormous respect for the musicians I work with. I once asked myself what would happen if

in a perfect world those musicians I wish to cooperate with would play on my CD – and it happened!

It was so easy? You just wished and it happened?

Well, no, there were a lot of conditions to fulfil. And there were a lot of renunciations and modifications to be made – well, just as a curiosity: at that time in the US I got a fortune cookie that said I should be prepared to adapt my plans (laughter)! Of course, one's vision is one's goal, but how to achieve it can be unpredictable. I have spent three years working on this album, and it wasn't easy. When Gino Vannelli sang for me, he liked it so much that next year I decided to invest in his album. What an experience! I worked with one of the best singers I know, an extraordinary musician and a charismatic persona. I learned how to work in a music studio, how to talk to people, how the music industry works!

What does this global musical legend think of you?

He was thrilled! He said he knows of no other young musician in the US who is as eclectic as a composer as I am, who would be good at so many things and... Well, I don't wish to sing my own praises (laughter). He liked our cooperation very much.

How is your very expressive music created? How do you submerge yourself in your own worlds?

I'm usually not quite there when I write, if you know what I mean: I don't make up the story, it simply exists within me. The important thing is to shut down my mind and the music I invite just comes to me.

And how do you shut down your mind?

(Laughter) Well, my way is to have a glass of a special, exquisite wine, always the same kind, which opens my chakras and stimulates my creativity. Another way is to work late at night, when I'm already tired and on the edge of the alpha state, when my brain is slowly shutting down. This is the time when you can see things that are not there, hear things that are not there – or maybe they are... That is a good time to be creative.

You also dreamed the music of Laxena, isn't that so?

All my classical, orchestral work has a story I can see and am able to explain. But this time it was a bit different: I was more than half way through the creative process when I realized I was



actually working on a story, happening on some other planet, in some other solar system, on a planet which existed before the Earth. Of course, it could just be a product of my imagination, but I am convinced that there is no such thing as imagination. I don't think we are able to imagine anything that hasn't existed before. Yes, we are able to hear only within a certain frequency range, but that doesn't mean that there aren't many other parallel worlds and sounds we are simply unable to perceive. When a person is in a certain state, they can open up to other worlds and stories – they can perceive their future and past. It happened to me with the Laxeno music. Well, I just recently read that they have discovered a planet in some other solar system, which is very much like our Earth (smiles)...

But this music will come alive in this world, as well, thanks to a symphony orchestra?

It will, when it's time. I will write all these stories when it's time for them. They are actually flashbacks and, to be honest, I'm a little afraid to talk about them, because I believe that when it comes to evolution, everything repeats itself. I think we carry these archaic fears within us because they have already happened. Anyway, human kind has to realize that we will destroy this living creature that is our planet if we continue in this way. Otherwise, it will rid itself of us in the same way as we vomit out the poisons we ingest. So my project is supposed to be a great spectacle.

Do the notes go where you want them to go, or do they choose their own way? Where do the ideas come from?

I just surrender myself to music. I let it pass through me. To invent it completely – no. I trust in my own creativity and I respect the fact that ideas come to me. I always say I'm not the only one who creates my music – it already exists in one of the parallel, vibrating worlds. Everything is energy; the melody just appears and then people ask me why a certain note is where it is. I don't know. I just feel it should be there.

But of course, you obey certain musical rules, you use the knowledge you accumulated during the long years of study? They are, as a matter of fact, a prerequisite for creativity.

Absolutely! One has to know how to translate these ideas into the earthly world. When I wrote my first symphony, I said that it wasn't from this world. I had to have an extensive technical knowledge of music in order to make the essence we've talked about earlier come alive. It means I have to know how to write the orchestration. I need technical knowledge. When the search ends, everything ends.

Your father Jani Golob is a well-known composer and you were surrounded by music at a young age – could you say it was destined for you?

I couldn't say a single bad thing about my father. He led me through the musical process in the same way I would want to lead my children – no forcing, no ambitions, only curiosity. I'm able to do a good job because I saw a lot when I was a kid. I visited studios, but no one forced me into music school. It was my decision to go to music school and learn violin, even though it wasn't my passion at the time. The passion came in the third year of primary school, when I started getting ideas at the piano, and I used to give my parents adaptations of 'Happy Birthday' for birthdays. My dad still has the recordings. I was stimulated by their joy – and by my own power to express my creativity.

The secondary music school and the academy of music must have been an obvious choice.

They were a logical choice, because music was what interested me the most. In secondary school, all doors opened for me: I had my own band, I started to perform with the Big Band on keyboards... It seemed that being a musician was it, I was walking on air.

Where did you learn to play all those instruments?

I learned to play banjo when the director Marko Letonja asked me to play it on keyboards. I didn't think that was very cool, so I learned to play it for real. It was at a time when I just decided to stop playing the violin, so this invitation was just right for me. That year, I criss-crossed Europe on tour with the Slovenian Philharmonic as a banjo player, and was accepted in the world youth orchestra without an audition. They called me. I could read the notes, the banjo is tuned in the same way as the violin, and I did alright. I even took my girlfriend Katarina with me and got to meet some amazing people. It was never a big problem for me to learn to play new instruments. I started to learn how to play the guitar and bass guitar in secondary school. I learned by myself. And I have been playing drums for eight years now (once in a music store I just had a flash that I have to play the drums), and percussion also. I was interested in everything, and where there is interest, things develop very fast.

Were there never any pressures that you have to play the violin and finish your studies?

That was my parents wish, because if I had an education, I could play in an orchestra and have secure employment. My father was in a much worse situation when he was young. They were poor, my mother and he had nothing when they started to live together. They had to plan carefully. So my starting point was miles better, because my father introduced me to the musical world. It took him a long time to dare to become a composer. He played in an orchestra, worked for the RTV Slovenia (the national television and radio network); now he teaches at the Academy of Music. It is understandable that he was convinced I wouldn't be able to make a living as a composer.

But despite all that, I had a gut feeling I would be able to make a living as a composer and enjoy it. One has to listen to one's inner sense. I say this to everybody, for a vision is a piece from the future given to us in the present to make our decisions easier. We have to stand by our wishes no matter how bizarre they are and trust our feelings.

Was it because of a vision that you decided to continue your studies in the US?

Exactly. And I went. I had always been attracted to that country. It's special, not at all true to the stereotypes of reality shows and fat people. Americans are very visionary – they live their dreams and they make them come true. They dare to follow their dreams. I left, because Slovenia didn't offer me what I was looking for in the sense of education and open-mindedness. In Slovenia, it was considered strange that I composed pop and serious music, but Americans know how to appreciate it – the more knowledge you have, the more you are valued.

Your musical activity is now spread around the globe.

I visit the US regularly, I cooperate with people there and I would like more – maybe I'll even stay there longer. I feel at home there. As far as music is concerned, my home has no boundaries, I can work anywhere. But Los Angeles is a special place for me.

So Slovenia is restricting you?

To be honest, yes. What bothers me is that people became very nervous, society turned egoistic and capitalistic; everybody's looking out for themselves. What is lacking is courage. Well, the US lack it too, but at least they've grown out of this thing with capitalism, and so they're more relaxed. Slovenians are tense and a bit neurotic.

What message is your musical planet sending you and to us?

It speaks of the inner conflicts between people, between energies, between the visible and the invisible world. The dangers also come from the invisible world, and we can fight the wrong enemy because of our ignorance. What I like most about my music is that it has a strong energy value. I like the fact that people can feel it and know that there something so celestially beautiful exists to make our lives worth living.

“The ideas that come intuitively are priceless. I sing them into my phone, so I don't forget. The music must come to you on its own.”



Jože Prešeren, photo Darinka Mladenovič

160th anniversary of death of Dr France Prešeren

Vrba – a proud Slovenian village

Somewhat unusually, Slovenia celebrates its cultural holiday on the anniversary of death of its greatest poet, Dr France Prešeren. The 8th of February is the day when Slovenia remembers this extraordinary national genius, and is a day dedicated not only to literature, but to Slovenian culture as a whole, which contributed immensely to the emancipation of the Slovenian people throughout their history. To celebrate this day, a number of events take place in most of the bigger towns in Slovenia, with a central ceremony in Ljubljana, where the highest national honours for cultural performance are awarded.

As early as in primary school, every Slovenian child learns the basic information about the life, the poetry and the life philosophy of Dr France Prešeren. But even though they extend their knowledge further in high school, one must say that due to our ever faster way of life there is always a lack of time dedicated to an in-depth study of one of the most important figures in Slovenian cultural history. What about foreigners? Do they even know who the greatest Slovenian poet is? One can say that anybody who takes an

interest in the world around them, not only their own nation, should know something about France Prešeren, for his work has been translated into most of the world's greatest languages. Many are aware that in Slovenia, France Prešeren has as much significance as Goethe in Germany, or Adam Mickiewicz in Poland, or Dante in Italy. Having had a central place in one of the best-known squares in Ljubljana for more than a hundred years, the statute of Prešeren has in recent years become one of the most frequently photographed sights in the city. I'm sure that the majority of tourist guides also mention who France Prešeren was, enabling people to learn about the greatest Slovenian poet.

The village of Vrba in the Gorenjska region

France Prešeren was born on the 3rd of December 1800 in the village Vrba in the Gorenjska region, near the famous town of Bled. Vrba is one of the most visited Slovenian villages, due also to the famous poem by Prešeren dedicated to his home:

*O, Vrba, happy village, my old home -
My father's cottage stands there to this day.¹*

The poet regrets having left his home village in search of knowledge, for he found disappointments in the world. This sonnet was thus incorporated into the 'Sonnets of Unhappiness' (Sonetje nesreče), expressing his inability to endure the strains of life. France Prešeren left his home village at the age of eight, being schooled with the help of his uncles, who were priests. There were many priests among his close relatives on his father's as well as on his mother's side, which points to the fact that education was highly valued in the family. He attended elementary school in the village of Ribnica in the Dolenjska region and continued his studies at the State Gymnasium and Lyceum in Ljubljana. In 1821, he left for the University of Vienna and acquired a law degree in 1828. He returned to Ljubljana the same year and practiced law in several law firms. He passed his legal exams in Klagenfurt (Celovec) in 1832, but due to his free-thinking spirit, it took a long time before he managed to become an independent lawyer, despite his qualities. He finally succeeded in 1846, in the town of Kranj, where he died three years later and where he is buried. Throughout his life the village of Vrba stood as a symbol

of his happiness, which he always loved to revisit, and he immortalized it in his poem. The house where he was born was converted into a museum in 1939. It is a farm building typical of the Gorenjska region. One can tell that it once belonged to a solid, larger farm, because today it hosts a literary museum, as well as a museum of agricultural architecture. The house itself is rather different today from in Prešeren's time, as in 1856 almost the whole village burned down; but it still represents a true image of the house as it once was. The credit for remaking the house as a museum goes mainly to conscious cultural workers from the neighbouring villages, led by the writer Fran S. Finžgar, who established a special committee dedicated to this plan. An interesting side to this story is that the money required to buy the house was contributed by Slovenian schools before the Second World War. They used these contributions to build a substitute house for the relatives who lived in it at the time. Today, it is part of the Gorenjska Museum in Kranj, and one of the most visited Slovenian villages – more than 20,000 people visit it each year. Most of them are Slovenian school children. In the summer, many domestic and foreign tourists who spend time in the nearby tourist centres also visit, among them a lot of Slovenians who live abroad. Many of them consider Vrba a sanctuary of Slovenian culture and take time to visit cultural events where Prešeren's and others' poems are recited. It is well-known that many Slovenians know Prešeren's poems by heart.

Local people usually gather at celebrations at the end of April, on St. Mark's Day; in the local church, also mentioned in the poem, which is dedicated to St. Mark. The village takes pride in its old lime tree, surrounded by sixteen stones, where sixteen village farmers once sat at important meetings. Today, only six or seven farms remain in the village. Another interesting fact is that there is no one with the last name Prešeren left in the village. One of the poet's relatives is Anton Dolar, his great-great-nephew. He traces his lineage to Prešeren's sister, Mina, who married a man named Vovk, ancestor of the later Ljubljana bishop Anton Vovk, who was also born in Prešeren's birth house, in 1900. This lineage is shared by a number of people in Slovenia, all considered great-great-great-nephews of France Prešeren, although none of them has the family name Prešeren. (By the way, this also goes for the author of this article, whose family originates in the village of Zasip near Bled, while my immediate ancestors lived near Novo mesto).

The importance of Prešeren in the Slovenian culture

France Prešeren, in his time, was one of a small number of Slovenian intellectuals who made their democratic ideas heard. He shaped his thoughts and feelings in the Slovenian language at a time when it was still considered the language of uneducated farmers and servants. Despite all that, Prešeren created works of art able to be placed beside any work of his contemporaries in Europe.

His work reflected the social events of his time, and he critically described the situation of the Slovenian people. He condemned the Austrian absolutist tyranny and persistently fought against obscurantism, hypocrisy and backwardness. As a poet, France Prešeren was the first in Slovenian literature to cross the borders of didactic poetry and present poetry as an independent art according to the standards of world literature. He expressed not only emotions in his poems, but also his political beliefs, many of which still hold significance today. The example of this is in "Zdravljica" (A Toast) poem, of which the seventh stanza forms the Slovenian national anthem. The poem was written in 1844, but was removed from the manuscript of his book of poems 'Poezije' (Poetry), which due to state censorship was only book Prešeren published in his life time. It did not see the light of day until 1848, when the hated Metternich regime fell in Austria. The keynote of 'A Toast' is the radical demand for freedom of the Slovenian people, originating in a humanistic vision of equality and friendly coexistence between all nations, as well as the right of every nation to its independence. Because of their message, Prešeren's poems in 'Poetry' remained unrecognized for decades. They began to be appreciated at the end of the 19th century, when the national consciousness of the Slovenian people began to rise. His vision finally came about with the independence of Slovenia in 1991.

¹Translation: Alasdair Mackinnon, Pasadena Publishing house, Ljubljana



Tadej Golob, photo: Rafael Marn

Mr. Freeze from Mojstrana

A story about Pavle, who was given a special ice machine

Had the creators of Batman and Robin tried to find the person who could inspire the character of Mr. Freeze, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, who threatened to eternally freeze Gotham City, then they would have to come to Mojstrana, a small alpine village not far from the known winter sports resort of Kranjska Gora. On the outskirts of Mojstrana, in Mlačce Gorge, four ice waterfalls have been created by the hands of Peter Skumavc.

Peter, 52, who calls himself Fabřčan (after a cement factory, in Slovenian fabrika, that some years ago operated close to Mlačce) is of significantly smaller bodily proportions than Arnie, and he also possesses no ice-making machine. What Peter has is merely a tube that enables him to start cooling the rocks over Mlačca every autumn. Then, as temperatures drop below freezing, he gently starts sprinkling the rocks, so that the drops can create a stream of water that clings to the rock and the wooden construction above it. As the water becomes ice, giant icefalls of forty meters dominate the gorge: Lučka, Lizika, Tonov steber and Palček.

The later two were named after people, the first two in accordance with their shape. Lizika (Slovenian lollypop) is the only icefall that created itself instead of being shaped by Peter's hands. Its shape is like a lollypop, hence the name. "Since we named that one Lizika, we decided to call her neighbour Lučka (another type of lollypop - popsicle)," Pavle explains.

The first artificial icefall in Mojstrana was made in 1993. Two local ice climbers decided they wanted to create a training ground close to home, but were not successful at building one. Pavle, who was working on another ice surface not far away, said to them: buy me a kilo of coffee and I will make it.

It was not as simple as pouring water and waiting for night to perform the ice magic. The stream from where the water was pumped was significantly lower than

the top of the future icefalls, so they often froze as it travelled from the stream to the top of the icefall. When that problem was resolved, the hard work began. Very, very hard work, as Peter soon realised. To bring the water to the top of the cliff is one thing. To aim it correctly and to know the right quantity is a completely different story, Peter soon learned. So, at first, he simply held the tube and sprinkled water over the rocks. A machine would get exhausted, but he did not. Peter succeeded in having all four icefalls ready every season except in 2002, when the winter was far too warm. Each year at Christmas the icefalls help create the image of the only Ice Crib in this part of the Europe, but just a few days before Christmas of 2008, the weather promised nothing good when it came to making the icefalls.

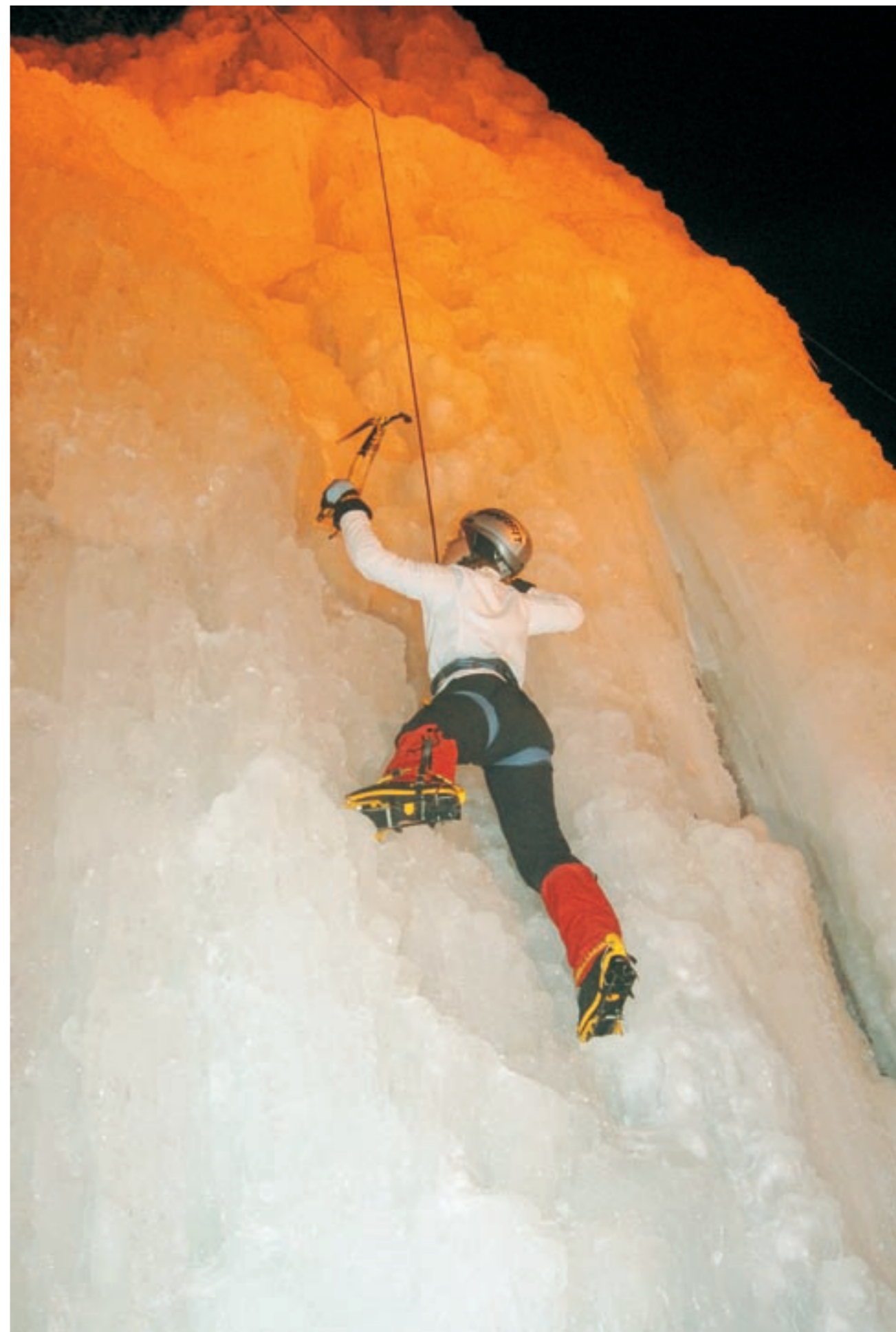
"This time, God will show you that you can not triumph every year, an elderly lady told me on December 21", Pavle says. Four days later, however, the Mlačca was successfully frozen and the nativity story in ice, some thousand miles away from Bethlehem, could begin.

"It is getting more difficult every year, as the water is too warm well into the late autumn and there is less and less true cold. I have to work harder every year to create ice, so that climbers can use it. Yet they always have some problem with it: some find it too hard, others too soft, too wet," Pavle complains. His hard work on Mlačca got him into hospital, where he had to go to have bile duct stones removed. Yet he

insisted he would wait for the operation until spring, so he could continue maintaining the crib and the ice.

Perhaps it is due to such circumstances that Pavle developed a particular sense of humour that makes both climbers and many journalists reporting on this Mojstrana particularity, quite watchful. Pavle likes using them in his jokes whose list is very, very long. Perhaps the most famous is the one about a climber from the Czech Republic who was said to have started climbing on a November day last year, when the ice was still very thin and broke. The climber fell inside and now they have to feed him through a hole in the ice, as Pavle will not allow the icefall to be pulled down. There is also a story of a wheelbarrow and a dustpan Pavle sometimes uses to teach some climbing novice a lesson. "Look how spotless this is. Who do you think should clean the bits that will fall from your climbing? Me? No. Here you go." There is also a story about a course in Finland where he was given a special machine that is supposed to make the ice harder...

At the end of January, Mlačca will host a world championship match in ice climbing, where the world's fastest ice climbers will attempt to break the world record from Busteni in Romania, when it took the best climber a mere 9.5 seconds to climb an icefall of 15 meters. There is little doubt that Pavle will be able to prepare ice that will allow an even faster climb.



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