

Sinfo



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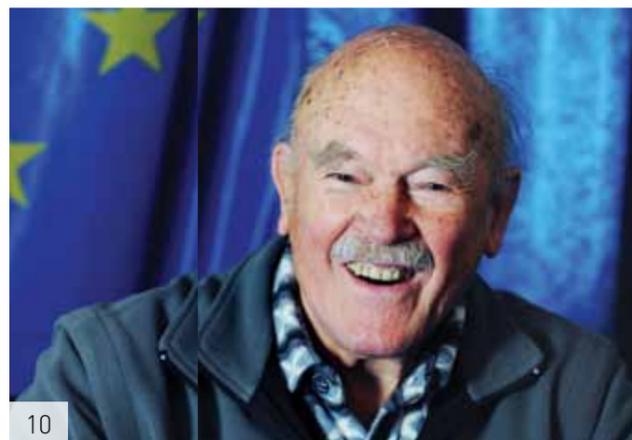
BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

**Slovenia
celebrates
twenty years**



30 DELIGHTS
SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS DISHES

MONTHLY COMMENTARY A course of harmony - not division	04
IN FOCUS Slovenia celebrates twenty years	06
INTERVIEW France Bučar: "At the time of independence, if Slovenia's leading political elite had been scared of the international reaction, they would certainly have never moved to independence in that way"	10
BUSINESS Economic growth and inflation as expected this year	14
LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR Werner Burkart , Mitja Drobnič	16
ART & CULTURE Given to the heart, Andrej Jemec exhibiting in Vienna, Maribor shifts into overdrive, Slovenian galleries at the photographic fair Paris Photo 2010	18
OUR EXCELLENCE Practical and ecological – a folding bike, Text in image	24
SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS Slovenian Christmas dishes	30
PEOPLE Professor Igor Gregorič, a top Slovenian heart surgeon from Houston	33
SPORTS Basketball has happened to Slovenia, A renaissance in Slovenian biathlon?	36
CULTURAL HERITAGE Christmas customs in Slovenia, Symbols of state	38
NATURAL HERITAGE Early snow brings a dose of optimism for the winter season	44



Vesna Žarkovič
Editor

DON'T SLEEP THROUGH LUCK – NOT AT CHRISTMAS OR AT ANY OTHER TIME

On 23 December 1990, after a turnout of 93.2% of eligible voters, around 95% voted for Slovenia to become an independent and sovereign state; the percentage in favour was therefore 88.5%. They voted for an independent and sovereign Slovenia. 'The flame of hope is burning across the homeland, our dreams get closer every day,' were the words one read in the now-yellowing pages of the time. The question being posed now is where that flame of hope is today. We have been looking for answers to these and many other questions; and we will continue to do so in a special column of this magazine throughout 2011.

“
HAVE OUR DREAMS BEEN REALISED? WHAT KIND OF SLOVENIA HAVE WE BUILT? HOW ARE PEOPLE LIVING, AND ARE BRAINS, TALENT AND HARD WORK BEING SUFFICIENTLY VALUED AND REWARDED?
”

Basketball has happened to Slovenia. A few minutes after midday on 5 December, the general secretary of the Basketball Federation of Slovenia, Iztok Rems, stepped out of a room at the Marriott Hotel, where the executive committee of Fiba Europe had been meeting, and lifted his arms in victory. The subsequent cry of 'Yeeeeeess!' told all those present that Slovenia would, at the end of August and beginning of September 2013, host its biggest sporting event so far, the European Basketball Championship. For Slovenia, this will be the biggest sporting event in its history.

In December we celebrate a number of holidays, in addition to Christmas. The Slovenian name for Christmas, božič, means 'little god' and comes from pagan times. The month of December is also called božični mesec (Christmas month) or kolednjak. Christmas Day is 'holy day', the holiest day of the year. It is so holy that whoever dies on this day goes straight to heaven. As the saying goes: On Christmas Eve, there is an angel round every corner. On the evening of Shrove Tuesday, there is a devil behind every corner. A farmer is not supposed to sleep at Christmas. If he sleeps, so will his luck.

So don't sleep through luck – not at Christmas or at any other time. We wish you a Happy New Year and hope that you enjoy the CD by singer Aleksander Mežek, 'Podarjeno srcu', which we are giving away free with this issue of Sinfo.

Vesna Žarkovič

Sinfo - Slovenian information

Editorial Government Communication Office
Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386 1 478 2630, Fax +386 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Director Darijan Košir
Editor-in-Chief Valerija Mencej, Valerija.Mencej@gov.si
Executive Editor: Vesna Žarkovič, Vesna.Zarkovici@gov.si
Editorial Board Mateja Malnar Štembal, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Hana Souček Morača, Nataša Marvin, Manja Kostevc
Photo Editor Veronicca Ditrh
Production Videotop Color Media d.o.o.
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Cover photo Darinka Mladenović



A COURSE OF HARMONY - NOT DIVISION

Photo STA



Darijan Košir

'So what gains can the Slovenian state show, and what does it carry with it into this time of celebration 20 years later?'

THE DECEMBER CELEBRATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE DAY SIGNAL THE START OF Slovenia marking the 20th anniversary of events which led at that time to independence from the former Yugoslavia, and consequently its transformation into an internationally recognised sovereign state. This time around, the Slovenian Government has planned the programme of independence-related activities to span a whole year, running from this year's 20th anniversary of the plebiscite on Slovenian independence (which was held at the end of December 1990) and up until the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the new constitution of independent Slovenia at the end of December the following year; events will peak, of course, on 24 June 2011, when we mark the 20th anniversary of the actual declaration of an independent Slovenian state, which we recall from the turbulent period at the beginning of summer 1991, when Slovenia endured a ten-day war for its statehood.

So what gains can the Slovenian state show, and what does it carry with it into this time of celebration 20 years later? In historical terms, we could say that in the past two decades Slovenia has achieved virtually the impossible: it fundamentally changed its political system from self-management socialism into a normal, multi-party democracy of the Western type; the socialist planned economy was transformed into an almost normally functioning market economy; a system of human rights and freedoms, as well as their protection, was put in place; Slovenia became an internationally recognised country, a member state of the UN, OSCE and other major organisations; just 13 years after independence it was accepted into the European Union

and NATO, later becoming part of what is called the Schengen system of the free flow of people; and three years ago Slovenia adopted the euro as its legal tender, thereby occupying a place in the most respected economic club of Western European countries. At the same time, it managed more or less successfully to settle all the previously unresolved issues with neighbouring countries, and established exemplary relations with all the major countries of the world, something that now qualifies Slovenia as a welcome partner in international relations and allows it to anticipate inclusion in the club of the most rapidly developing countries of Europe.

We could also put the same question from another angle: is it also possible to find in this time things from Slovenia's independence story 20 years ago that have not been well or adequately developed? Are there any areas where we besmirched the dreams of our political predecessors, who fought and won Slovenia's independence? Of course the gravest unfulfilled legacy of this 20th anniversary is the fact that Slovenian political circles and also the entire Slovenia nation, apart from in certain key moments of its recent history – for instance in the referendum on accession to the European Union – could not find the kind of unity that ennobled the then independence-winners at the beginning of the 90s, when the country and its citizens were brought together by common goals that they all fought for, recognised and supported. The fact is, Slovenia today seems completely divided politically into two halves, with Government measures not being judged on their merits, but on their political origin (whether they come from the left or right), so that even on the most critical issues, such as settling the border with Croatia, the Government can win a referendum with only a couple of points difference. Where it involves vital national questions, Slovenia's political leaders can no longer muster the consensus that is an essential precondition for the more rapid development of the country; sadly what is lacking here is that independence-winning impetus that so typified the

beginning of the nineties.

We can discern a similar picture when we talk about the current state of mind in Slovenia in general. It seems that apathy and ennui predominate, as if there was no energy or momentum for new national and developmental ideas that might lead Slovenia to the "lighthouse", as one politician put it. A major factor in this has been the negativism inherent in the

'The mass of events that we can follow through the next year, will be devoted to the people – through meetings, actions, words and images – who at that time made history, and even the main event to celebrate independence this year will be of the people, in the renovated and symbolic square of Kongresni trg.'

economic crisis, which turned all the economic and other indicators downwards into the red. In short, the crisis affected not only the economy, it also affected people's values, and showed where we are today. And the spiritual picture is not optimistic: more of the positive drive that the independence-winners mustered in the most difficult moments of Slovenian history would be welcome medicine for Slovenia as a country.

The Slovenian Government, and within it especially the Ministry of Culture (together with the Committee for State Celebrations) and the Government Communication Office have therefore planned the celebration of the year spanning the 20th anniversary of independence, which will, as mentioned,

run to December of the following year, as an event for the widest possible audience. It should be recalled that it was indeed the people who, on that fateful December day in 1990 exactly 20 years ago, went off to the polling stations and in a showing of more than 90 percent of those who voted, adopted one of the key historic decisions in this country, the decision in favour of independence. The political leadership, which before the plebiscite had doubts about the collective wisdom of the Slovenians, and at certain moments even considered lowering the ballot quorum to validate the plebiscite decision, could thereby entirely open up to the will of the people and carry through the independence project to its completion, right up to the independence of the Slovenian state. For this reason the mass of events that we can follow through the next year, will be devoted to the people – through meetings, actions, words and images – who at that time made history, and even the main event to celebrate independence this year will be of the people, in the renovated and symbolic square of Kongresni trg.

From that we may simply take hope that, as was the case in spring this year marking the 20th anniversary of the first democratically elected Slovenian Government, there will not be any repeat of the political point-scoring over who takes credit for the country's independence, something that has entered Slovenian folklore in recent years. It would be a sad thing if the celebration of all Slovenians, who each and every time demonstrate the described national unity, was overshadowed by the image of politicians of that time and now, attempting to steal the credit for actions that were of course politically extremely courageous, but would have come to naught without the popular support of almost all the inhabitants of Slovenia, who voted not just for national independence, but also defended it at the barricades in the ten-day war for independence. As we have said, only a course of harmony, and not division, can lead Slovenia's development forward, for the better.



SLOVENIA CELEBRATES TWENTY YEARS

Mateja Malnar Štembal Photo Salomon 2000 /UKOM

20
20 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

SOMETIMES WE SIMPLY CANNOT BELIEVE HOW QUICKLY twenty years can pass. The first twenty go pretty quickly, especially for the young. What, then, could one say about a country? Is twenty the age at which it, too, is no longer a teenager?

Who would have dared, twenty years ago, to say that we would, even before the twentieth anniversary of independence, be part of the European and global community? Slovenia can be proud of a number of international successes (membership of the EU, Nato and the OECD, Presidency of the EU, part of the eurozone) and has written itself into the history of the Olympic Games with a series of medals. More and more people around the world now know where Slovenia is, and the Slovenians are, as a nation, more than sufficiently stubborn and persistent to overcome the current global crisis.

In the last twenty years, from the day when, on 23 December 1990, 88.2% of the country voted in a plebiscite to make its own way in the world, Slovenia has travelled a long and successful path.

People believed that they could travel that path. Of course, this would not have happened without the support and leadership of politicians, intellectuals, cultural figures, thinkers, businesspeople and many others.

It is therefore only right that twenty years of statehood and independence are marked in the appropriate manner – not with a single, central celebration but with events throughout the year.

The Slovenian government recently passed a framework proposal for official activities to mark 20 years of independence; these will start on 23 December 2010, the twentieth anniversary of the plebiscite on independence, and conclude on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Slovenian Constitution (23 December 2011).

The basic purpose of the year-long celebrations is to involve as wide a public circle as possible, as well as organisers of various events at home and abroad, in the active marking of the historical events that led to an independent state, and to stir memories of the path along which we, as Slovenian citizens, have travelled together in the last two decades.

The main emphasis will be on the successes of the last twenty years and on strengthening awareness that independence was an achievement of the entire population.

Celebrations will begin on 23 December 2010 with a solemn session of the National Assembly and a solemn meeting of the Academy to mark Independence and Unity Day. Celebrations will continue with an exhibition on the plebiscite, organised by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and other institutions. It will start at Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana and will then tour a number of regional museums.

A thematic website, www.dvajset.si or www.twenty.si, will launch on the day of the twentieth anniversary. It will be the place to find chronological and historical information, as well as an abundance of interactive content (quizzes, games, invitations to our friends to visit Slovenia, online exhibition tours, a Facebook application) aimed at bringing the twentieth anniversary closer to those who are 'younger than the country'.

However, this is only the beginning ... We will have more on the coming events and on the themes and achievements of twenty years of independence in future issues of SINFO in 2011.

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS SLOVENIA'S INDEPENDENCE

Dr Božo Repe Photo Tone Stojko/The National Museum of Contemporary History

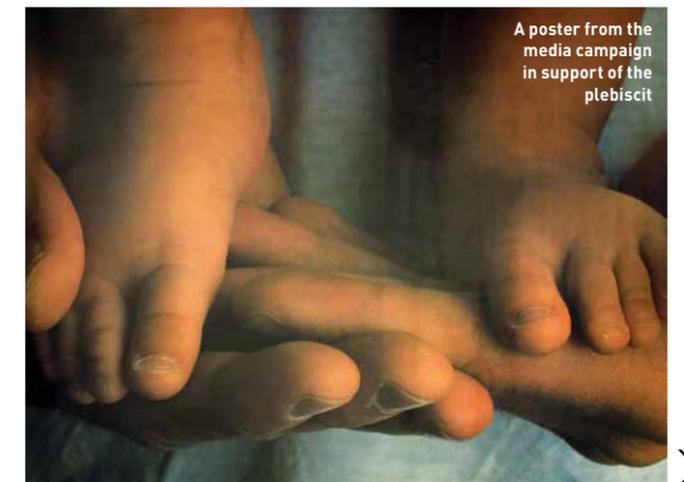
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW AUTHORITY by the Demos Party in the spring of 1990 brought the question of how and/or in what form Slovenia's independence should be constituted to the forefront of the debates on politics and constitutional law.

Efforts to establish a confederate Yugoslavia had been made previously, including during the deliberations over the last Yugoslavian constitution of 1974, but a proposal for independence (genuine autonomy of the republics) did not receive sufficient support in the Yugoslavia of the day, nor did the Slovenian proposals for confederation after the first multi-party elections.

Slovenian sovereignty had received significant reinforcement from the constitutional amendments to the Slovenian Constitution adopted by the socialist parliament in September 1989, owing to which the top brass of the Yugoslav People's Army intended to declare a state of emergency. The confederate concept was also developed by the last socialist government of Dušan Šinigoj just before the end of his term of office in March of 1990. However, all of these concepts still envisaged a reform of the Yugoslav state.

Demos' programme included Slovenia's independence (although it also formally advocated confederation as a possible form). The original plan was to achieve constitutional independence by Slovenia adopting a new constitution, firstly by reaching a two-thirds majority in the parliament (which would have meant a consensus both within Demos and with the opposition), and then the citizens ratifying the constitution in a plebiscite. However, ideological disputes broke out within Demos over the constitution and the legislation associated with it, which concerned various topics, including among others the question of the right to abortion, the definition of the "sanctity of life", the concept of privatization, the question of denationalization, and the restitution of Church property. Furthermore, the adoption of a new constitution would require the holding of new parliamentary elections, and the politicians who had just come into power were not happy about the possibility of losing it again. They therefore attempted to somehow parcel out this bundle of problems, and the parties expressed their support for independence through various resolutions and declarations addressed to the Government. At the parliamentary assembly of 2 July 1990, at a time when Slovenia was neither economically nor militarily prepared for independence, the Declaration of Sovereignty was passed fairly quickly and with no prior consultation (even the presidium didn't know much about it). The Declaration, which radically announced Slovenia's secession, was also conditional, as the

date would be determined by the parliament. All of the parties supported it because of public opinion, but Lojze Peterle's government was not enthusiastic about such an endeavour, since it represented too great a responsibility. These were the circumstances in which a plebiscite was called for, on 4 October 1990, by the Socialist Party (the successor of the former Socialist Alliance of the Working People), but Demos, which considered independence to be essentially its own project, rejected it. Just a little over a month later the plebiscite became acceptable to Demos as well, as Demos' ideologues realized that considering the circumstances it would be smarter to hold the plebiscite first and adopt the constitution later. On 9 and 10 November 1990, the Resolution to hold the plebiscite was adopted by the Demos deputies' club at talks in Poljče (the credit for this goes to numerous politicians of the time). The date was set unilaterally, and was publically announced by Dr Jože Pučnik, the President of Demos, which caused a revolt among the Demos politicians, and an even greater one among the opposition. A huge amount of effort was required in order to achieve firstly a political truce with regard to the plebiscite, and then the alignment of viewpoints (the credit here going particularly to President of the Presidium Milan Kučan, and in the Parliament to Spomenka Hribar). The party representatives discussed the concrete issues partially at meetings organized by Kučan, and partially through deputies' clubs and the constitutional commission in the Parliament, which held four discussions on the plebiscite (the draft act drawn up by the Government): 13 Nov. 1990, 21 Nov. 1990, 23 Nov. 1990 and 6 Dec. 1990, just before the session of all three chambers of Parliament, which then adopted the Plebiscite Act on the same day.





Wavering and doubt among the parties

Wavering and doubt among the parties (and also partially among the governing coalition), and among the public, concerned particularly the following:

- was a plebiscite even necessary (the argument that independence could also be achieved by adopting a constitution or simply by adopting legislation or through the consistent application of already adopted laws on independence);
- if it was necessary, when should it be held (some people thought that the proposed date of 23 December 1990 was too early and demanded that the Government first draw up an analysis of the causes of the plebiscite and all of the consequences of the plebiscite, particularly for Slovenia's economic, military and international status. They emphasized the unfavourable international circumstances, as the preparations for the first CSCE conference were underway in Paris right at that time, and the international factors were particularly unfavourable towards the disintegration of Yugoslavia; Slovenia was also warned against taking unilateral action. The opposition in particular felt that it was necessary to wait for the result of the multi-party elections in the other Yugoslav republics in January of 1991, and then negotiate with them on a future confederate structure for Yugoslavia, and hold a plebiscite only if those negotiations were unsuccessful. Therefore they proposed a later date for the plebiscite – from February on. The President believed that the plebiscite could be postponed at most until the end of January, since at that

time it would already be clear whether Slovenia was capable of reaching a consensus with the other republics, and the representatives of Demos also agreed with this;

- the question of which laws should be adopted before the plebiscite was held (mainly concerning the Citizenship Act, which was supposed to be the basis on which the plebiscite could be held at all. The objection to the law was that the state de facto did not yet in fact exist and that therefore it was not possible to adopt the Citizenship Act "in advance". The plebiscite was therefore held on the basis of the same voting registers as the first democratic elections;
- the deadline for holding the plebiscite (some people advocated not setting a date, as the Government and the Parliament would make the decision on the plebiscite at their own discretion, others believed that this was misleading and unclear, and meant deferring independence, the most radical supported implementation on the day of the plebiscite; there were also proposals for putting the plebiscite into effect through adopting the constitution. Finally the decision was taken to set a definite date for the plebiscite, while independence would be effective six months after the plebiscite;
- what result would suffice for the success of the plebiscite (quite a few politicians believed that only a simple majority of participants in the plebiscite should suffice, while others thought that a simple majority of participants would suffice in the case that the turnout for the voting was in excess of 50%. The opposition and the presidium believed that even this was not convincing enough and that the plebiscite would succeed

only in the case that a majority of all eligible voters voted in favour of it;

- the question arose of what would be written on the ballot: either only the question "Are you in favour of an independent Slovenia", or a more concrete decision, e.g. three questions – "Are you in favour of a federation in the current form, or a confederation, or an independent Slovenia without connection to the other Yugoslav republics.

Plebiscite Act adopted

At the end, after difficult negotiations the parliamentary parties signed an agreement at the last moment, and the Plebiscite Act was adopted immediately thereafter, on 6 November 1990. The question planned to appear on the ballot read: "Should the Republic of Slovenia become an independent state?" The proposers believed that this question left open the possibility for either a confederation with the other Yugoslav republics, complete independence if negotiations on the confederacy were not successful, or any other type of connection, and at the same time gave politicians enough room to manoeuvre so as to be able to implement independence gradually.

At a session of all three chambers of Parliament, at which the Plebiscite Act and the announcement to voters i.e. citizens of the Republic of Slovenia with regard to the plebiscite was adopted on 6 November, the deputies also received a report from the Government entitled "Slovenia's Independence", on the importance and purpose of the plebiscite, individual aspects of independence (the economy, the international aspect, social activities, minorities, national security) and on activities following the plebiscite. The Declaration on Respecting the Fundamental Conventions of the Council of Europe was adopted, through which Slovenia intended to demonstrate that after holding the plebiscite and attaining independence it would respect human rights and that it wanted to become a member of the Council of Europe, as was the Statement of Good Intent, which was proposed by the Presidium of the Republic of Slovenia. In it the Slovenian state guaranteed the Hungarian and Italian minorities and members of all other nations who held permanent residency in Slovenia all of the constitutionally provided rights and the right to comprehensive cultural and linguistic development, and the opportunity to obtain citizenship if they desired. The viewpoint was also expressed that the establishing of an independent country was not directed towards anyone in Yugoslavia and the proposed confederate arrangement, in which Slovenia was supposed to take its share of the responsibilities for democratization and the arrangement of relations throughout the entire territory of Yugoslavia. Another proposal adopted at the parliamentary session was that Slovenia would invite international monitors to the plebiscite, but the attitude of the European Community, the USA and other important countries toward the plebiscite was negative, so the official representatives of international institutions and individual countries did not participate in the plebiscite.

The Plebiscite Act was adopted in the three-chamber, 240-member Parliament with 203 voting in favour, no one against and four abstentions. Before the balloting the individual Demos



'The plebiscite was thus the first and the most important step in the process of Slovenia's gaining its independence.'

deputies, despite the fact that their party had signed the agreement, continued to attempt to adopt a decision that the plebiscite would be adopted if a majority of all of the eligible voters voted in favour of it. They were criticized by the opposition parties, as if by persisting with such excessive demands they were trying to destroy the plebiscite. The plebiscite was also criticized by a deputy from the Yugoslav People's Army (a Serb by birth), who demanded the same status for residents from other republics living in Slovenia as that enjoyed by the Hungarian and Italian minorities. Their proposals were rejected.

The plebiscite was held on 23 December 1990. The voting was participated in by 93.2% of all eligible voters, with 88.2% of the eligible voters voting in favour of independence, including members of other Yugoslav nations. The results of the plebiscite were announced on 26 December 1991.

The plebiscite achieved a crucial consensus of political forces and citizens, without which independence would not have been possible to effect. The governing coalition could have announced it in the Parliament, but if Slovenian politics had not been unified and if it had not had the support of the majority of the citizens, it would not have been able to reach the citizens of Slovenia. It would have existed on paper, but owing to internal disunity it would not have been able to withstand the pressures of Yugoslav and international politicians and the intervention of the Yugoslav People's Army. It was also a unique time, and there would have been no second chance if the opportunity had been missed. The plebiscite was thus the first and the most important step in the process of Slovenia's gaining its independence. •

“At the time of independence, if Slovenia’s leading political elite had been scared of the international reaction, they would certainly have never moved to independence in that way”

FRANCE BUČAR

The first parliament, led by France Bučar, will be remembered for having adopted the independence legislation, for declaring Slovenia’s independence, for adopting the constitution and starting a new path for Slovenians.

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Mateja Jordovič Potočnik

Was Slovenian independence at the beginning of the 1990s the result of some self-evident historical development of the Slovenian nation, or did independence from Yugoslavia involve some kind of revolutionary break?

This was primarily a break with Yugoslavia. The Slovenians did not intend to make a complete break with the former state, but we were united at that time in the fact that we could not live with that kind of Yugoslavia. The authorities in Belgrade were convinced that Yugoslavia could only survive if it was once again centralised, while Ljubljana took the view that the solution was decentralisation and democratisation of the country. Of course we did not see eye to eye, Belgrade insisted on its view, and supported amending the constitution so as to transfer as much jurisdiction as possible to the centre. We all did actually agree that things needed to be set up from scratch again, and that independent countries needed to be made from the nations, even as units in supranational communities. We expected from the former state a country with normal relations and, since this was not to be, we decided to hold the plebiscite. We also talked a great deal with representatives of the Serbian administration about ways of coexisting, but they were unyielding, advocating democracy but with Serbian domination. This put our backs against the wall, about whether to submit to or leave that kind of union. This was the reason for the independent country,

although every major event in history is starting to be interpreted in terms of this being a thousand-year-old dream of the Slovenians and so on. My answer to your question is very pragmatic, it was a response to the very clear circumstances of that time. If I look at that time with the hindsight of EU experiences, and if we had succeeded in our concept of making a Yugoslav commonwealth, things would of course have turned out differently.

What part did Demos play in independence? Was its role vital or would independence have come without Demos, albeit in a different way, or did Demos merely speed up independence?
Demos was the political leadership of a country that broke through to democracy.

“SO THERE WERE A FEW FAVOURABLE INDICATIONS, BUT WE RECEIVED NO DECISIVE SUPPORT FROM ANYONE. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WAS INTERESTED IN PRESERVING THE “VERSAILLES” EUROPE. THEY DID NOT WANT ANY CHANGES.”

It was the agent representing the point of that breakthrough, and without Demos there would have been no breakthrough, although it was not the initiator of the independence movement, only joining it subsequently. The Slovenian Democratic Alliance, Nova revija magazine, the Writers’ Association – these formed the core that provided the intellectual base

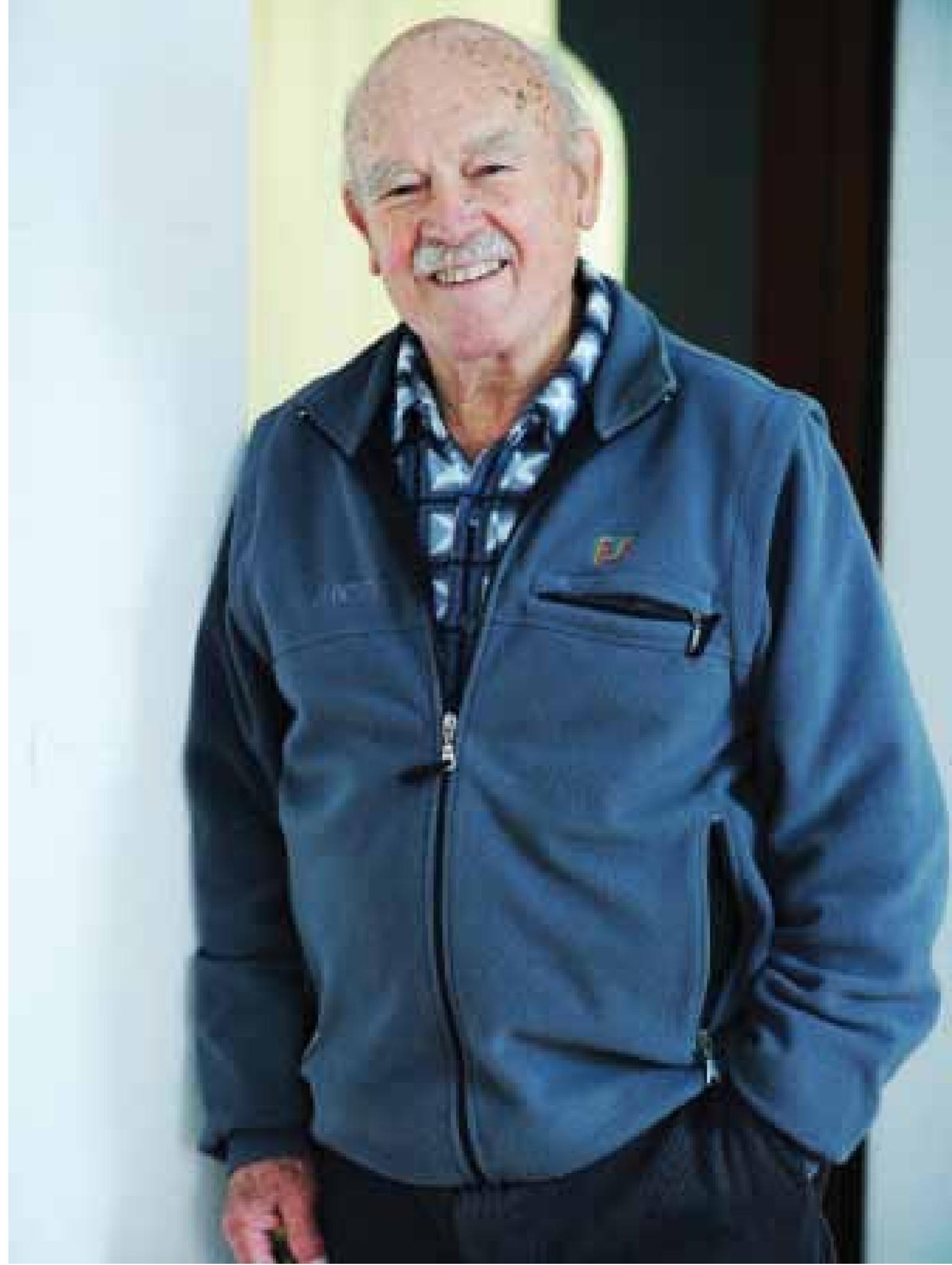
for independence, along with the youth organisation, which was revolutionary.

Would we have still gained independence, or at that time, at the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties, did the Slovenians use the “window of opportunity”, which opened up and which, if we had not used it then, would have closed?

We organised the plebiscite quite early on, and on the surface this was a technical issue, but if we had not carried out the plebiscite in 1990, we would have missed the opportunity. Why? Because up until that time they had not taken us seriously, and we even obtained a list of people who would need to be immediately liquidated.

It was only after the attempt to revive Yugoslavia collapsed, yet while world leaders were still trying to revive it, that I received from abroad a draft of the new order in Yugoslavia, which differed from the state system of that time, whereby a modern state would be made of Yugoslavia, which would be similar to a European country, but still centralised. Once again we would have to yield to the interests of the centre, and it was a close call that we did not fall back into the old system.

The international community was absolutely against us. So now, given the very recent current polemics related to the arbitration agreement, I was quite bothered by this fear of ours that could be perceived, about how those outside Slovenia would react. At the time of independence, if Slovenia’s



leading political elite had been scared of the international reaction, they would certainly have never moved to independence in that way. After all, there was no foreign politician who would have dared before 25 June 1991 to give their clear and vocal support to the independence aspirations of Slovenia and Croatia.

So there were a few favourable indications, but we received no decisive support from anyone. The international community was interested in preserving the "Versailles" Europe. They did not want any changes. As soon as Germany recognised us, they had an interest in getting rid of the Versailles structure imposed on German soil after the First World War, and they were accused of recognising us too soon, thereby triggering an avalanche of other countries recognising us. So this was a one-off opportunity, such as there had been before in history when the lines of force had not taken the course of independence. We therefore need to highlight the international context and the key figures that identified those lines of force in Slovenia and steered them in the right direction.

Was the unity associated with independence a historical fact or merely a myth?

Unity in what? We were united in the fact that such a Yugoslavia was unsustainable. Before the plebiscite all the political parties agreed that we would vote on Slovenian independence. No one can claim greater rights to this, it was a united decision of all parties, and there was unity on this point, actual and formal, although this does not mean that we were united in what kind of future Slovenia should have, and there were differences even then that have remained until today.

There have been accusations that Demos did not have a "clearly thought-out independence strategy".

Of course it didn't, we had a strategy of how to get out of Yugoslavia, but no clear idea of what to do with this country after that and how to do it. Neither Demos nor

the former continuity-based powers had any picture of that. Right up to the present day we have not had a clear picture of what to do, and what kind of economic and social system we want to have. I wonder if we have ever on any level answered the question, why are we joining the EU, is this wise for us, what do we expect, how should we act, what do we even want ... For myself I often say that more Euroscepticism should be developed in Slovenia. Not because we are rejecting Europe, but because we are dependent on it. Indeed we should not be indifferent about how it is developing, so we must be critical towards it, and equally, we should try to influence it.

“THE FEDERAL MILITARY WAS JUST WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT TO HAVE A FORMAL REASON FOR INTERVENTION. FOR THIS REASON I HAD TO HOLD BACK OUR POLITICIANS FROM TRIGGERING A REASON FOR INTERVENTION. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE YUGOSLAV MILITARY HAD THE WHOLE WORLD BEHIND IT.”

What tasks did you take on as president of the first parliament?

I was the one back then who held on to the brakes. You have to know that the majority of the parliament had no idea what kind of danger we were in. When Yugoslavia had already collapsed internally, the question was how would things unravel, and the military was taking upon itself the function of the federal presidency, with the support of the USA and Western Europe. The federal military was just waiting for the right moment to have a formal reason for intervention. For this reason I had to hold back our politicians from triggering a reason for intervention. You have to understand that the Yugoslav military had the whole world behind it. They let us carry out the plebiscite, then make our declaration of independence, and only then did they attack us. The fact is, with that kind of result in the plebiscite, the West could

not act against us, but they intervened in the form of the great democrats of the West dictating to us in the Brioni diktat, what we could and could not do. They demanded the establishing of the situation prior to the declaration of independence, we should release the Yugoslav Army and open the borders. All this was to be done in three months. As you know, they could not even take us out in three months.

If the old state had been sufficiently strong, this of course would not have happened. Yugoslavia would have developed normally, despite the fact that it was an artificial creation made of different nations. We persisted in the principle that it would be difficult to make a single country out of such differences, although today that argument does not stand up, since the present-day EU is even more diverse than Yugoslavia was. At that time the leading Serbian elite could not stomach the fact that they would not be the pre-eminent and most important ones.

Could we say today that what you expected and hoped for then has been fulfilled?

Today it makes no great sense to evoke some kind of nostalgia or sentimentality, we need more urgently a consideration of what the plebiscite led us into, and how far our expectations and hopes of that time have been fulfilled. Undoubtedly they have not been fulfilled, since by their very nature things are never fulfilled in the way people expect and hope them to be. For this reason it is more appropriate to ask whether what we expected has been achieved. We expected an independent country, and we got one. Equally, we expected greater freedom, and we got that. And the majority of other things that we hoped to achieve, have in fact been achieved.

It is true, however, that today we are perhaps not sufficiently aware of it. Indeed it is normal for the things that you gain and with which you can live a normal life, to seem completely normal, while you regard things that are different from your expectations as an achievement. Nevertheless I believe that we have



achieved the majority of things on which we pinned our expectations 20 years ago.

What is Slovenia like today, and who in your opinion is responsible for the crisis?

We ourselves are to blame. There have and always will be crises. Unfortunately we have no answer about how best to manage it. We have no proper parliament, the kind that really decides on things and is independent. This raises the question, who is really deciding in Slovenia, who in truth holds public power in their hands? Sadly I am unable to answer this. In Slovenia, after the fall of communism,

society was not reconstructed, and what was vital for the communist system was that society was atomised. This means that the top and the masses were equally powerless, we were all entirely dependent on the state, and in the independent country we were constrained to continue the communist pattern of state administration, which still applies today. We are still leading the country under the same principle applied by the party.

What is your view on the current economic crisis in Slovenia?

This can be resolved, but soon a new one will appear in a different form.

The economy of the modern world is necessarily condemned to collapse, and the issue is the true purpose of progress and enrichment. Increasing wealth means increasing power. The efforts of the major "industrial magnates" are not about enrichment per se, rather this enrichment is merely a means to subordinate and rule. And this needs to be dealt with. Here I have in mind the tycoons, where I would impose some order. This is the biggest organised theft since denationalisation, but the tycoons are just the tip of the iceberg, they are a caste that was formed irrespective of political affiliation, they exploited an opportunity, they functioned in the same way as the former communist party with its nationalisation, but now they have gathered up all the former assets in all cases where there was no formal legal basis. How did they do this? Where there was not sufficient funds, they did this by buying up companies on credit. And how are they then repaying this credit? They are repaying the debt with the profit from earnings. This is such a perversity, it would be hard to imagine a bigger one! In short, you have in fact stolen a factory, and you are then extracting the profit from it. For this our banks even took loans abroad, and in this way created a deficit for the actual country, meaning a debt for several generations. No one is taking responsibility for this, we are just talking about a credit crunch. We absolutely need to lock up these crooks, although it is not that simple, since it involves a strongly associated caste.

How do you see Slovenia's position on the European and perhaps the world scale? Has the decision to join the EU and NATO turned out to be the right one?

Regarding EU accession, the question cannot be was it right or not, since it was essential. On the other hand, to tell the truth, I am worried about the current difficulties in the EU, and the dangers that threaten. These are dangers that also threaten us. As a country, Slovenia is vitally dependent on Europe. Here of course I am not saying that we are thrilled with everything happening in Europe and are applauding everyone. Far from it. Nevertheless, Europe is very important for Slovenia.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INFLATION AS EXPECTED THIS YEAR

The growth in gross investments and household and central government spending are important reserves for the future growth of the Slovenian economy.

Vesna Bertoneclj Popit, Delo Photo STA



SLOVENIA SAW ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE THIRD quarter this year as well, chiefly as a result of an increase in exports. The national statistical office estimates that economic growth in 2010 will be around 1%, as forecast by the Institute for Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (UMAR), while European Commission forecasts for Slovenia were 1.1%. According to these estimates, GDP should increase next year by 1.9% and by 2.6% in 2012. The last month of the year is also indicating that inflation in Slovenia this year will be, as planned, 1.8%. This is undoubtedly encouraging news, although gross investments in the third quarter again fell, household spending has still not picked up and government spending is stagnating. Here it is possible to see important reserves for future growth.

According to Minister of Finance Franc Križanič, Slovenia is winning the battle against the crisis. Industry is picking up, although problems in the construction sector mean that GDP should continue to be sluggish. The government is drawing up special measures to help that part of the construction industry that is still buoyant and keeping its head above water. The planned measures include an increase in liquidity, demand and exports, regulation of the labour market and legislative changes. The Slovenian government is expected to discuss the proposed measures to help construction by the end of this year. Construction activities fell by 19% last year and by a further 15% this year. Construction, which saw the fastest growth in the EU during the growth period, is not expected to pick up in 2011, with construction companies weak in capital terms, as well as indebted, owing to a fall in sales. In the opinion of Janko Burgar, head of the department for competitiveness and economic policy at the Ministry of the Economy, banks should be encouraged to enter the real estate market, while the state should be more active in providing guarantees for bank borrowing on financial markets.

Construction companies were among the worst at settling their liabilities even during times of growth; in the current climate, with the Slovenian economy emerging piecemeal from the crisis, this has worsened still further. But it is not only the



construction industry that fails to pay on time. According to figures from AJPES, the number of companies delaying payment reached a record high in October of 5,565; the average daily amount of due and unpaid liabilities of EUR 333 million was also a record. According to a survey conducted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS), only a little under a third of invoices were paid within 60 days, with the rest remaining unpaid for longer periods of time. According to figures from AJPES, this led in the first ten months of this year to 360 companies and cooperatives entering bankruptcy proceedings. In the same period, 186 companies were removed from the companies register.

At this year's 5th Slovenian business summit, where around 400 business figures held discussions with Prime Minister Pahor and nine of his ministers, a great deal of attention was focused on the issue of the lack of payment discipline. As Hribar Milič, director general of the GZS, himself pointed out, the participants at the summit represented around half of Slovenian business and 80% of exports, and condensed their demands into 13 points, encompassing issues such as a state based on the rule of law, a modern labour market and sustainable public finances, as well as the responsible use of European funds, environmental protection and ecological efficiency. In addition to current urgent matters, discussions at the 5th Slovenian business summit also formed part of discussions on Slovenia 2020.

At the traditional business forum organised by the IEDC Bled School of Management, discussions were held among other things on the difficulties faced by economies in the crisis, including those currently in need of help from all EU Member States or the eurozone. Žiga Turk, former Minister for Development and Growth and Secretary-General of the

Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, pointed out that Europe will have to radically change its social and economic model, which is currently based on 19th century production models, if it wishes to improve competitiveness. In Turk's opinion, it is not even clear whether Europe wanted to be more competitive, since operating in a more competitive environment also brought uncertainty. Changes to the model would lead to a segmentation of the workforce, employment would no longer be permanent, the boundary between study and work would be erased, along with that between retirement and hobby, he said. Above all, Slovenia will have to make savings in the public sector and freeze pensions in order to become more competitive.

However, discussions on economic reforms are not proceeding smoothly for the government. On the one hand, pension reform, particularly the extension of the period of employment required for a pension, is opposed by the trade unions, who are threatening a referendum; on the other, the government party Desus is opposing the complete two-year freeze on pensions and, as a condition of its support for reform, is insisting that pensions rise at half the growth in wages or inflation, which the government is not prepared to support. The government is therefore trying to pass pension reform without the cooperation of the party of pensioners, of whom there are many more on account of the ageing population. It managed to pass the state budget for 2011 in a similar way, and discussions on the proposed pension reforms in parliament are also proceeding thus. On the other hand, healthcare reform is meant to rationalise hospital capacities in Slovenia and, among other things, merge maternity hospitals.

Slovenia has around 160,000 disabled persons which, given its population of two million, is a high percentage, with every 12th citizen registered as disabled. Through special measures, the government is encouraging the employment of disabled persons and drafting a special law that should, among other things, help disabled persons overcome their communication obstacles.

Over 100 Slovenian business figures and five ministers made up a delegation which, headed by Slovenian President Danilo Türk, visited Russia. This was the strongest delegation yet to Russia. President Türk and Russian president Dimitri Medvedev signed a partner agreement on modernisation, with a number of other economic agreements and memorandums also being signed. Slovenian-Russian business conferences were also convened in Moscow, St Petersburg and Samara.



Samo Hribar Milič
Director general of the
GZS



Žiga Turk
Secretary-General of the
Reflection Group on the
Future of Europe

'According to figures from AJPES, this led in the first ten months of this year to 360 companies and cooperatives entering bankruptcy proceedings. In the same period, 186 companies were removed from the companies register.'

Türk and the OECD Secretary-General, where it was asserted that the level of growth was not the final word when it came to describing a country's level of development. On the other hand, there were opinions expressed at the conference to the effect that GDP is the basis for everything, for without GDP there is nothing to divide and redistribute. Special attention at the conference was also devoted to environmental protection, which demands that companies pay more heed to the environment – this, of course, comes at a price.

The residents of Trbovlje warned the government of precisely how a lack of concern for the environment can affect human health as they protested against the company Lafarge, which is engaged in waste incineration in Trbovlje, for which it obtained government approval. The residents of Trbovlje are convinced that the gases released into the atmosphere are leading to an increase in cancers. This is not the only protest to have shaken Slovenia in recent weeks. The government's aim of merging the two state electricity companies, Holding Slovenske Elektrarne and Gen, has sparked discontent. Employees at Gen are fighting primarily for their jobs. There are complications too in relation to the sixth block of Šoštanj Thermoelectric Plant, since employees fear that, with the replacement of the plant's director, Slovenia will cancel construction at the new block, which is dependent on European money, for which a contract with the European Investment Bank has already been signed. This is not the only major energy project on which Slovenia is counting in the long term, since a new block at Krško Nuclear Plant is also meant to be built. Here the question surrounding the division of waste between the two owners of the old section of the plant is still unresolved, with Croatia, which owns half the plant, still unwilling, after 20 years of operation, to take half the waste produced by the plant.



WERNER BURKART

This is not the time to sit back and be satisfied with past achievements

SOME COLLEAGUES ARGUE THAT WITH THE LISBON TREATY and the creation of the European External Action Service, bilateral diplomacy within the European Union will become obsolete, given that the integration of our societies and economies is so deep that 'foreign' and 'domestic' are almost no longer valid terms of distinctions. While I believe that this reasoning is true to some extent, I am nevertheless convinced that bilateral relations, including diplomatic relations, between member states will remain indispensable for the functioning of the European Union. As EU member states, we are tied together in almost all aspects of life. Our common principles and aspirations form the framework within which bilateral relations are embedded. At the same time, these bilateral relations based on a willingness to cooperate and to compromise as well as on mutual trust form the foundation of a functioning Union. Everything that happens in one member state is of immediate and direct interest to all other member states. We are literally involved in each other's business.

Against this background, I am glad to state that relations between Germany and Slovenia are excellent. I see Germany and Slovenia as close friends. German support for the realization of the right to self-determination by Slovenia laid the basis for the close and harmonious ties between our two countries and our two people, as did the support for Slovenia's accession to the European Union and NATO. Our cooperation in the European Union Trio Presidency in 2007 and 2008 as well as numerous reciprocal visits by heads of state and government and other leading politicians helped to foster and nourish this relationship. However, our cooperation is much broader and covers almost all fields. Let me just mention two of them which seem to me to be of particular importance:

Germany is Slovenia's number one trade partner, accounting for more than one quarter of Slovenia's trade volume. With regard to foreign direct investments, Germany ranks only 5th but this is mainly due to the fact that many investments are made by subsidiary companies based outside Germany. The true champions of our bilateral economic relations, however, are the hundreds of small and medium-sized German companies that have started doing business in Slovenia since its independence. They account for more than 1 billion euro of investment and many jobs. I hope we will see more of them in the future because during the economic crisis it became apparent that these companies are the real backbone of our economies. From our experience in Germany we know that an investment-friendly environment and less state involvement help to unleash the potential of businesses.

However, this is not the time to sit back and be satisfied with past achievements. We need to look to the future and not only seek to

intensify the existing excellent economic relations but also identify new concrete projects. Of course, this is primarily the task of the business community but our governments can help by paving the way and by creating a conducive framework for more bilateral trade and mutual investment. The pharmaceutical company Krka, for example, has invested in a subsidiary plant in northern Germany and only recently the Slovenian IT company Infotehna opened its first branch in Bavaria. For German companies Slovenia was and still is an interesting location for doing business, not only in the country itself but also in the wider region. Slovenia rightfully claims to have the potential to become a business and logistics hub in the region. Slovenian companies have a solid reputation as reliable business partners and German companies with bases in the country especially value the highly skilled workforce, the central geographical location, the modern infrastructure and the quality of life.

Looking into the future, I see renewable energy and energy efficiency as especially promising areas of bilateral cooperation. Long-term global energy trends and climate change are forcing our societies and economies to become more energy-efficient and greener while at the same time remaining internationally competitive. We have to see this not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for more partnership and economic cooperation which will have to involve our industries, science communities and governments.

The other important element in our bilateral relations is the rich and diverse cultural and educational cooperation. Starting with the language, I was pleased to learn that several German universities offer Slovenian language courses, while German is either the first or second foreign language in most Slovenian schools. Germany is also an attractive place to study, with some 300 Slovenian students studying at such prestigious universities as Munich, Heidelberg or Berlin. Germany offers a variety of scholarships for foreign students for German language courses, for doctorates, for young professionals and others. Every year a good number of young Slovenian students make use of this opportunity.

Several German artists visit Slovenia every year and I am proud that among them we had a visit from the German Nobel Laureate Herta Müller, who came to Ljubljana during the last Book Fair. There have also been numerous exhibitions, such as the one on the world famous Bauhaus architecture. Capitals tend to monopolize a country's cultural activities but fortunately this is not the case in Slovenia. I am looking forward to 2012 when Maribor will be the "European Capital of Culture", hosting many cultural events to which we would be happy to contribute as partners. •

Werner Burkart - Ambassador of Federal Republic of Germany in Slovenia



MITJA DROBNIČ

Germany is Slovenia's most important trading partner

THE YEAR 2011 WILL BE A MAJOR ANNIVERSARY, MARKING 20 years since Slovenia's declaration of independence. Germany celebrated its most important anniversaries of recent times in 2009, in connection with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in 2010, marking German reunification. This means that in the coming year, we will be able to join together in looking over the 20-year cooperation of our two countries in new circumstances: Slovenia as an independent country and Member State of the EU and NATO, and Germany as a country made up of 16 federal states, and no longer just the 11 states of the former West Germany. Both the current and historical overviews of mutual cooperation show that Slovenia enjoys the kind of developed relations it has with the Federal Republic of Germany with very few other countries. Relations between a large and small country are always more or less asymmetrical, but this general fact must be placed in context, and we should add that in its short history Slovenia has twice found itself at the centre of global decision-making: during the time when it was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and during its Presidency of the EU, in the first half of 2008. Taking into account these individual situations, we could assess relations between our countries throughout the past 20 years as being on a very high level, and at certain moments we were tied together much more strongly than many would have guessed based on a comparison of size of territory, population numbers or share of world trade.

Germany played a very important part in Slovenia's transformation from a Yugoslav republic into an independent country. Close economic ties with Germany enabled Slovenia to use the German market as a fairly rapid means of getting over the shock of losing the Yugoslav markets on the collapse of the former state. German political leaders were among the first to take the view that Yugoslavia had indeed disintegrated, and were in favour of early recognition for Slovenia and Croatia. This development enabled Slovenia to climb aboard the EU enlargement process along with the countries of central and eastern Europe, becoming a Member State of the EU in 2004.

In the preparations for membership of the EU and NATO, Slovenia was one of the most successful candidates, and we are proud of the fact that we completed the preparations for accession to the Union with a great degree of independence and efficiency. There are numerous examples from that period of cooperation with Germany in adopting and applying EU legislation.

Given its demonstrable success in the pre-accession preparation period, Slovenia was the first of the new Member States to gain the opportunity to hold the EU Presidency. The practice of operating the EU Presidency as a trio of countries was first implemented in 2007, and Slovenia found itself in a group of three countries, with Germany

and Portugal, and the three Member States jointly planned the Presidency. Our cooperation with an experienced Member State such as Germany was very important, since it had a decisive influence on the success of preparations. It was not just during the preparations, but also during the Presidency that Slovenia enjoyed the support and assistance of German know-how and experience in EU administration. Within the scope of the powers and possibilities held by the presiding country, Slovenia took account of German interests.

In 2007 Slovenia adopted the euro. In this way it became one of the group of 16 countries in the eurozone, representing the highest level of cooperation among EU Member States. But just a year after our entry into the eurozone came the world financial crisis, which demanded rapid action. As the biggest economy in the eurozone, Germany has been one of the leading Member States in seeking solutions to the existing problems in protecting the euro and mechanisms to prevent the financial crisis happening again. At this moment, the fact that our two countries are part of the eurozone is what links us together especially strongly.

The Slovenian Government wishes to reflect the real ties between Slovenia and Germany by creating a strategic partnership with that country. The Government sees such a partnership as a framework, not just for current cooperation, but also for joint planning for the future. Germany is Slovenia's most important trading partner, and a partner in the field of technology development and transfer. On numerous issues in the EU and NATO context, as well as in cooperation with non-member states of these organisations, we readily find common interests. Slovenia can offer partnership in the fields of energy, development of transport infrastructure and relating to its experience and possibilities in the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. We offer a beautiful country for German tourists to seek relaxation and cultural exchanges that can enhance the spiritual life of people in both countries. In Germany we see a partner with whom we could cooperate in peace-keeping operations, offering technical and development assistance and in establishing democracy and protecting human rights in the world.

In 2010 Germany's Ruhr region was a European Cultural Capital. At the end of 2011 Slovenia will be a guest of the Lichtwochen event in Essen, which will end at the beginning of January 2012, in other words at the beginning of the year in which Maribor will be European Cultural Capital. Essen shaking hands with Maribor is a fine example of what is going on between our two countries in many areas. Enhanced cooperation between our countries does indeed exist, and a declaration from our two governments would merely confirm this. •

Mitja Drobnič - Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in Federal Republic of Germany

GIVEN TO THE HEART

Hana Souček Morača
Photo Archive



the time Mežek was searching for his identity, so was Slovenia. He translated the Slovenian lyrics into English, in a desire to say who he was and where he came from, and to use his real name, Aleksander Mežek, on the record.

Mežek has now re-issued his vinyl effort in digital form, as a special gift to mark his homeland's 20th birthday. The bilingual CD comes with a booklet containing the lyrics; the cover and inner pages of the booklet were illustrated by Slovenian primary and secondary school children. In search of these illustrations, Mežek visited schools across the country, with the pupils making their creations based on their home region and on music selected from the 'Given to the Heart' project. 'The response of the children was unbelievable. It was particularly fascinating to see how children are able to listen to lyrics and identify with ideas that are timeless.' The CD contains eight songs, dedicated in turn to Slovenia, a mother, a friend, a poet, an old musician, Ljubljana, the sea, with the cycle concluding with a lullaby. As Mežek says, each generation has to confront these relationships and find their own response to it. Some three hundred pupils have so far helped to create the project, with Mežek hoping for another two hundred by the end.

The songs dedicated to Slovenia and Ljubljana – the homeland – were given a lush recording treatment with the help of the London Symphony Orchestra, Consortium Musicum, the Radio Chamber Choir, Slovenski Oktet, Cliff Richard and Rick Wakeman. They work in tandem, presenting Slovenia in a very special way, backed up by the London orchestra.

In a career spanning more than 30 years, Mežek has recorded more than 20 self-penned records, in English and Slovenian, and in the 1970s appeared on Cliff Richard's RV show, which attracted audiences of 20 million in Britain.

Despite the fact that his career has unfolded in two countries, Slovenia and his adopted England, Mežek says: 'I have never changed my country, even though I have been in England for almost 40 years. I know precisely where my home is.'

of the central demonstration in Trg Republike in Ljubljana.

Mežek's rebirth coincided with the birth of Slovenia, since he had, in the mid-80s, fallen prey to a crisis of identity. 'In England my records had come out under the name Aleksander John, but for the Yugoslav market, unfortunately, I was 'Aleksandar' in print and 'Aco' in speech, which brought me to a point where I had to ask myself who I was. So I began creating the 'Given to the Heart' project, without knowing what was going to happen in the political arena.' So, at

ALEKSANDER MEŽEK WAS BORN IN Žirovnica, in the Gorenjska region of Slovenia, but moved to Britain in 1972, where he began making music. He began his ascent to the stars in 1968 in Zagreb and made many appearances in the 1970s in Britain, recording his first album there in 1974, *Days Go By*, under the name Aleksander John.

'Given to the Heart' was a personal project of Mežek's which saw the light of day in vinyl form just before the proclamation of Slovenian independence almost 20 years ago, and became part

ANDREJ JEMEC EXHIBITING IN VIENNA

Jože Osterman Photo STA



ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS Slovenian painters of the second half of the 20th century, and also one of the representatives of the acclaimed Ljubljana Graphics School, Academician Andrej Jemec received major recognition from Austria at the beginning of November in Vienna, in celebration of his upcoming 76th birthday. At the opening of his exhibition in the premises of Knafelj House in Vienna, which is also home to the Slovenian Scientific Institute, he was awarded for the second time the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art first class (he first received it five years ago), and the Institute used his exhibition as a way of marking its own 10th anniversary.

Academy member Andrej Jemec, who studied painting under outstanding professors such as Marij Pregelj, Gabrijel Stupica, Božidar Jakac and Riko Debenjak,

enhanced his brilliant career by also studying in Paris and London, and from 1973 on he taught at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts, of which he was dean twice. Jemec holds Prešeren Fund prizes

and Prešeren Prizes, as well as numerous awards especially from a range of graphic exhibitions in Slovenia and abroad. Since 2001 he has been a member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and he has meanwhile been a prominent champion of the highest quality of teaching work in the fine arts. It was in fact under his leadership that the curriculum of the Fine Arts Academy introduced several decades ago a design course, which represents one of the cornerstones for the outstanding creative achievements of Slovenian designers at home and abroad, moreover his sensitive creative experience let him successfully resist the tendency to subordinate the degree-level courses of art academies excessively to utilitarian criteria, which would undoubtedly jeopardise artistic exploration and experimentation, especially in the fields of painting and sculpture.

DIRECT FLIGHTS BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND ITALY

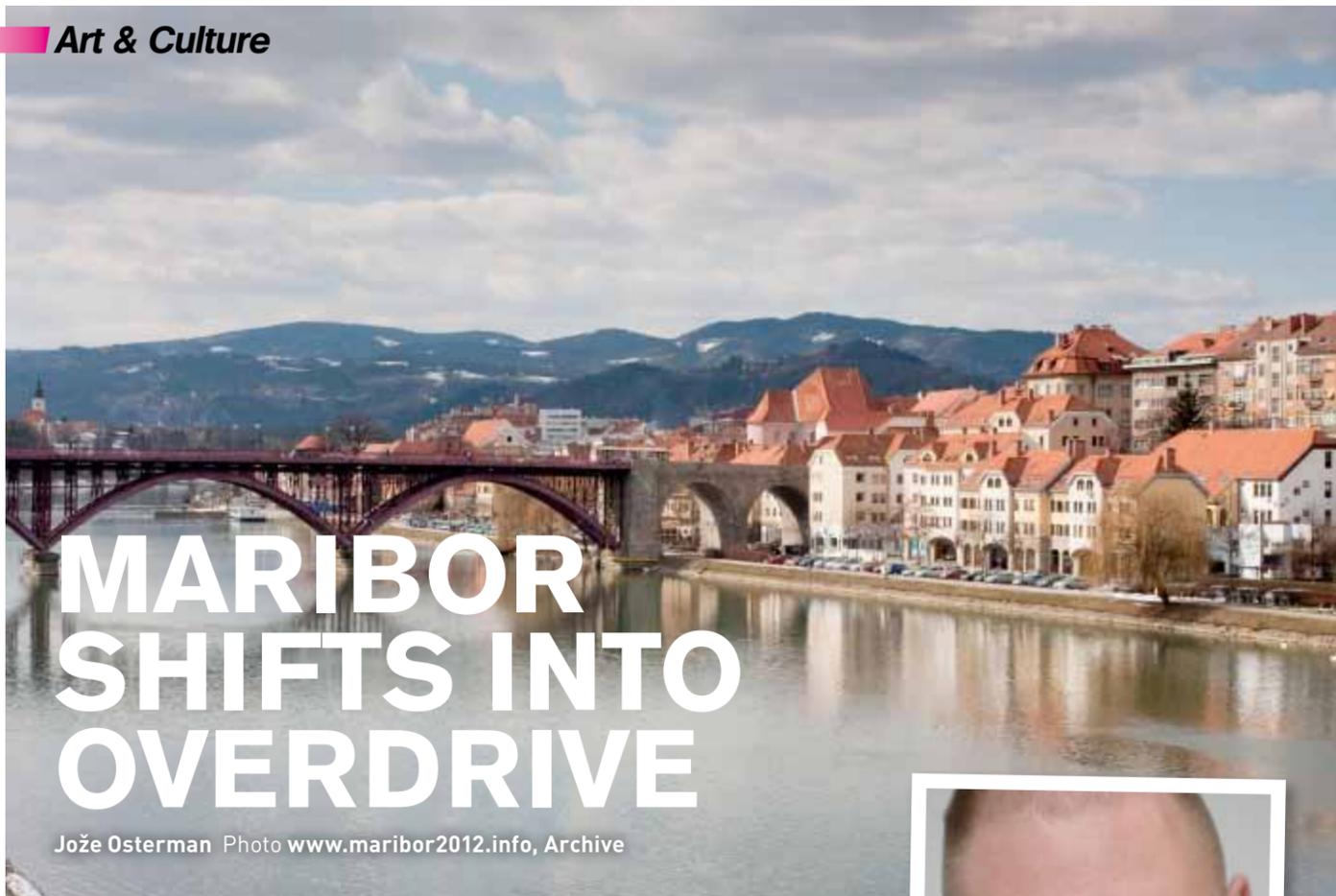
Text and photo Anita Stankovič



ON 2 DECEMBER A NEW AIR SERVICE started operating between Portorož and Rome, involving two flights a week, on Thursday and Sunday, with the price of a return ticket starting

at EUR 170. The Slovenian Ambassador in Rome, Iztok Mirošič, pointed to the importance of opening up direct flights between Slovenia and Italy, both for Slovenian

tourism and for strengthening relations between the two countries. He underlined that Italian guests take first place in number of visitors, with their numbers still growing. And by improving its tourist attractions and services, Slovenia can also become a destination for longer holidays. Representatives of the Portorož Tourist Association and the hotel groups Life-Class and Bernardin took the opportunity to showcase the hotel and tourist facilities on the Slovenian coast (wellness, spas, health tourism, therapy, gaming, cuisine, wine, culture and history) and in the wider coastal-Karst area (Lipica, Postojna Cave).



MARIBOR SHIFTS INTO OVERDRIVE

Jože Osterman Photo www.maribor2012.info, Archive

GIVEN THAT THERE ARE NOW LESS than 400 days to the beginning of 2012, when Maribor is supposed to become European Cultural Capital, a number of anxious voices can now be heard in public opining that the organisers will run out of time and that the project is therefore under threat. For this very reason we were delighted with the brilliant presentation by the entire creative and organisational team and set up by programme director Mitja Čander at the end of November in the mansion of Vetrinjski dvorec, headquarters of the project organiser – the Maribor 2012 Public Institute.

Čander had explained the basic concept of this ambitious project at least a month earlier on his blog entitled Reanimation of the City, which he published on the project website. The concept is certainly quite pleasing and the approach is innovative, and it opens up some fundamental questions regarding the introduction and fulfilment of cultural substance in urban communities such as Maribor and the cities that have joined up to carry out the programme. Čander now adds to the classical role of Slovenian culture,

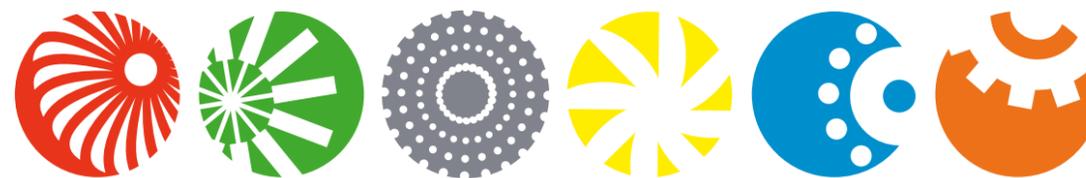
which he believes has been historically one of predominantly ethnic self-defence and identification, some modern social elements: the functioning and influence of culture on the development of the city, the “construction” of the city as a human community with a sufficiently clearly defined and delineated urban area, and the linking of the old and modern into a complete entity that functions both in relation to the wider human community and to each individual. In this sense Čander (and his programme team) does not regard the European Cultural Capital as a template for bashing out numerous cultural events and shows, which take place but later leave no significant trace in the consciousness of ordinary people, but rather as a set of different events borne with equal weight by both the artists and the city’s residents. It is understandable that in such a context a major role is taken on by events that are not classically artistic or cultural, but their essence lies in a human association around some core that brings together and gives sense. Educational processes, sports, even farm work such as grape harvesting, fruit



Mitja Čander



Tomaž Pandur



MARIBOR2012

European Capital of Culture

picking, cleaning the city – all this can acquire a new meaning that cultivates the city space into a new value.

Perhaps owing to this kind of approach in the presentation from the organising team, Čander somewhat disappointed those who expected rough lists of investments and new acquisitions and possibly quite specific outlines of the programmes of cultural events that will take place in 2012, but certainly he sought the approval of others who want 2012 to really change the city of Maribor. Čander’s starting point for reanimating the city has been joined by the Maribor poet Andrej Brvar, who points out that in the 20th century, Maribor’s roots were cut three times and each time it was pushed into a new, arduous search for its own identity. This happened for the first time, says Brvar, backed up by Čander, after the First World War, when a lot of Germans left Maribor and the ethnic composition of the city changed greatly; it happened the second time in the German occupation during the Second World War, when the urban bourgeois character of the city disintegrated, and for the third time with the collapse of socialism or rather communism, when Maribor lost its proletarian and industrial character, and up to the present day the city has still not in fact found its new role. For this reason Čander sees the possibility of establishing a new identity through the European Cultural Capital project, which will be one of the most important and precious components setting the tone in 2012.

In line with such an approach the programme is divided into several programme sections, which for the most

part are headed by younger management experts who have already shown their skills a number of times organising various artistic and other events. The biggest name among them is of course theatre director Tomaž Pandur, who is also chairman of the programme council, and in the team he heads up the Terminal 12/MAKS section, which is tied to a planned new cultural venue, the Maribor Centre for the Performing Arts. MAKS is the new name for this already slightly ill-reputed building, which will supposedly be built in one year in the area of the right bank of the River Drava, where there are currently the abandoned buildings of a former textile and spinning mill, once one of the biggest industrial operations in Maribor. According to preliminary estimates, the municipal authority of Maribor, which will lease the building, will have to pay around 40 million euros for it in the next 20 years, something that has dumbfounded some city residents. But perhaps given the fact that the centre will feature two multi-purpose halls, each with 650 seats, and other rooms that will offer the conditions for artistic production on an entirely new level, this price is not high at all. A symbolic, 25 m high viewing platform with vistas of the city and the new building are, in Pandur’s opinion, symbolic structures “which will attract the gaze of the world and from which can grow other European Cultural Capital programmes”.

Similarly meaningful names are borne by the other two sections, Keys to the City and Urban Furrows, headed by Mateja Rataj and Dr Marta Gregorčič, one of the most ground-breaking experts in urban sociology. Keys to the City is a kind of intellectual manufacture within which

around 400 events of various types will be created, and one of the main centres of gravity here is studying the history of the city and placing the components of that history in its modern life. Urban Furrows will break new ground in cooperation with various institutions, city residents and quarters, and in these milieus it will attempt to create new links and new energy between people. Thus, for instance, one part of this section will focus on local self-sufficiency, a digital seed bank and urban horticulture, which are areas that in the perspective of city life to date have rarely enjoyed any attention from the governing city authorities. All this will be joined by another section named Life at the Touch, which will create a digital dimension of the entire project, and is being headed by writer and journalist Aleš Čar.

The team that has already fixed the specifics of the main criteria under which programme projects will be carried out, has not actually set out any specifics. The most specific of them was in fact Pandur, who has some major and ambitious projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Šerbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Jovanović, and in 2012 he also anticipates hosting theatre companies from London, Madrid, Berlin and New York. The majority of what was said at the presentation has undoubtedly made a good impression, and the team itself seems right for the job. It is true, however, that the pressure of time has already become an issue that might perhaps unnecessarily colour the continued work of preparing what is for Slovenia undoubtedly a historic project. ●

SLOVENIAN GALLERIES AT THE PHOTOGRAPHIC FAIR PARIS PHOTO 2010

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Archive

FROM 18 TO 21 NOVEMBER THE PARIS fairground Le Carrousel du Louvre hosted the photographic fair PARIS PHOTO, one of the biggest photography meetings in the world. The honorary guest of this year's event was Central Europe, which translated directly into the breakthrough of Slovenian photography onto the world art market. Slovenia was represented by the galleries Fotografija, Photon and the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Public Institute.

This year's event, now the 14th in succession, invited Central Europe as honorary guest. A special place was allotted to Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and of course Slovenian galleries, which cover both the historical avant-garde from the twenties and thirties, and modern multimedia practices.

The official selector of this work, entitled Statement, was the Paris-resident

exhibited by a gallery operating in Krakow. Both the Slovenian galleries present at this year's Paris Photo were exhibiting in the Statement section, in which eight galleries from the invited countries presented modern photographic practices.

The Photon gallery of Ljubljana exhibited Tomo Brejc with his fragmentary portrayals of animals, Peter Koštrun with his poetic series Boundary in the Mist and Bojan Salaj with his series of confessionals to natural grandeur. All three expressed enthusiasm at participating in this prestigious fair, with its exceptional selection, since it confirms the high profile they enjoy. Participation finally places us on the photographic map of the world, and serves as a springboard for breaking into the market. Gallery manager Dejan Sluga said that past fair experiences have shown that it is more than just about mere sales,

together with Stojan Kerbler played with Irwin crosses attached to displays as an illustration of the religion of consumerism, Jane Štravs used fashion photography for apocalyptic purposes and Igor Andjelič took the Villa Malaparte using a screenshot from the Godard film Contempt. Professional circles are enthusing about the young graduate of Prague's FAMU, Abram, and the general public and media have picked up on Stojan Kerbler. The latter, with his fine portraits Ljudje iz Halož [People of Haloze], taken between 1970 in 1980, capturing rural people at weddings and confirmations, best match the cliché of Eastern Europe cultivated by the French, so they occupied honorary place in the latest issue of Figaro Magazine. The Fotografija gallery has a large number of books that will be signed by the authors. Gallery manager Barbara Čeferin said



Slovenian curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, who is a specialist in modern art, and in the spring she collaborated on setting up a well-received overview exhibition of modern art from Central Europe of the last 50 years at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Regarding her selection for Statement, she said that emphasis was placed on young artists and hybrid practices that also make use of other media, and go beyond the concept of classical two-dimensional photography, such as Uroš Abram with his series Made in Me, in which he used his own mouth as a camera obscura. She also wanted to emphasise the documentary character of photography, which it has acquired in modern art practices since the 1970s, and the international movement of artists from country to country – the Slovenian Saša Vajd, who lives in Prague, for instance, is

and involves especially the establishing of contacts and making agreements for the future. He pointed out the regional profile of the Photon gallery, which is oriented towards Central and South East Europe, and here he pointed to photographers from neighbouring stands, quite a few of whom had already been hosted by his gallery.

The Fotografija gallery first greeted you with two large prints from the series Transsiberiade by the French-Slovenian photographer Klavdij Sluban, who enjoys great acclaim in France. This fact, at least in the French public, greatly enhances the gallery's credibility, which also presented for view a number of other photographers: alongside the aforementioned Abram and Sluban, there were Tanja Verlak with her series Zoo – a metaphor for limitation and non-freedom – the oddly ancient still-lives of Boris Gaberščik, Roman Uranjek

that she was delighted to participate at this biggest European photography fair, which is also one of the biggest in the world, where all the experts of the world are gathered in one place. Participation of course signifies the breakthrough of Slovenian photography abroad in the best possible context, and gallery managers take advantage of this mainly to establish contacts and for networking.

In the specialised publishing houses section, Slovenia was represented by the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Public Institute, which is a modern art gallery and publishing house in Ljubljana. Representative Uroš Legen said that they had already been in Paris a number of times, at the ABI fair organised by the Centre Georges Pompidou, and participation in Paris Photo meant for them mainly a means of promotion and a good reference. •

CUP OF BOOKS

Jože Osterman Photo Darinka Mladenovič, Videotop Archive

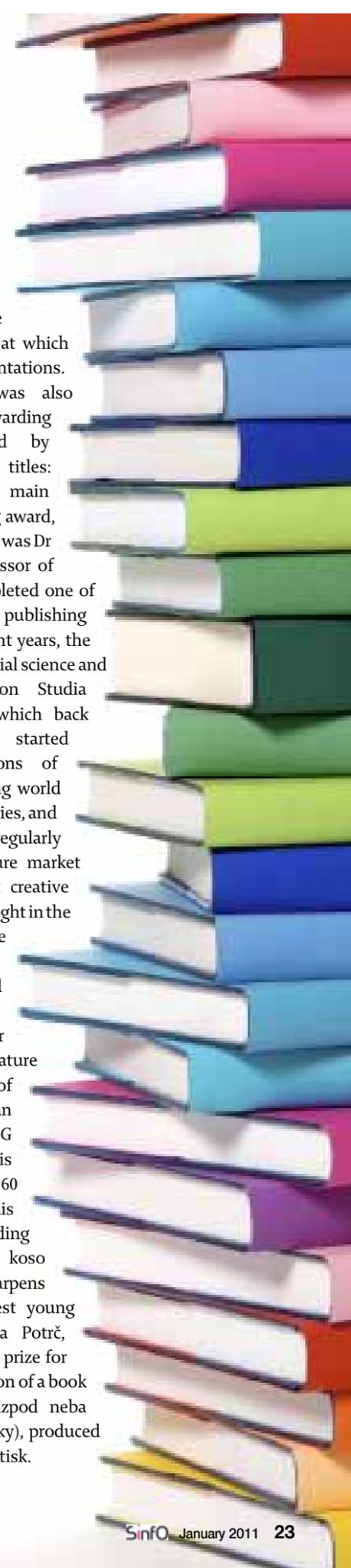
THIS YEAR'S 26TH SLOVENIAN literary fair, whose name makes a clever association with Cankar's cult novella Skodelica kave or Cup of Coffee, was in many respects again a fair of superlatives. An especially noteworthy fact was pointed out by the Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, that by number of titles published per inhabitant, Slovenia (still) holds first place in the world, neither should we neglect the fact that in Slovenia each year we translate five times more titles than the USA. This last point, of course, speaks mostly of how nice it is to be an author writing in English. Still, it is surprising that despite the still entrenched economic crisis, which Slovenia shares with the rest of the world, book production has barely dipped, and a full 88 publishing houses and 23 small publishers had a presence at Cankarjev dom, which hosts the fair. So it might seem a touch boastful to claim that Slovenians would rather give up many other things before books, but there is a grain of truth in it.

The fair is certainly a proper book festival, and while it ran – for just under five days – there were around 120 events associated with it. As part of the fair's visitor forum, there were around 44 presentations of books and their authors, and visitors got to see some youth theatre performances as well as small literary and other workshops. Indeed a veritable procession of visitors, dominated by school children, needs to be served!

Major attention was stimulated by the Debate Café, organised by well-known publisher Luka Novak. It offered as many as 23 different debates and presented topics ranging from the life of the writer to people's attitudes to books and modern electronic reading. A special presentation in honour of his 80th birthday was devoted to the writer, translator and classical philologist Prof. Kajetan Gantar.

The Publishing Academy presented mostly foreign publishers, while in the main reception hall there was a proper "tasting" of literary texts, in the

form of the open stage of the Slovene Writers Association, at which members gave presentations. Of course there was also the obligatory awarding of prizes received by publishers for their titles: the recipient of the main Slovenian publishing award, the Schwentner Prize, was Dr Neda Pagon, a professor of sociology, who completed one of the most important publishing undertakings of recent years, the publication of the social science and humanities collection Studia Humanitatis, with which back in 1985 Slovenians started obtaining translations of the most outstanding world works in the humanities, and which today still regularly bring to the literature market the most important creative achievements of thought in the humanities. The prize for the best literary debut was awarded to Dr Lado Kralj, the well-known professor of comparative literature and former director of the main Slovenian national theatre SNG Drama, who in his lifetime of just over 60 years has published his first, equally outstanding literary work Kosec koso brusi (The Reaper Sharpens the Scythe). The best young translator was Julija Potrč, and the Winged Lion prize for best overall publication of a book went to Slovenija izpod neba (Slovenia from the Sky), produced by printers Gorenjski tisk.





A FOLDING BIKE PRACTICAL AND ECOLOGICAL

Polona Prešeren Photo Studio Moderna Archive



A FOLDING BIKE YOU TAKE ONTO A TRAIN OR BUS? Of course it is possible. And it is even simpler at that, with the bike invented by Slovenian innovator Niko Mihelič, the well-known sports commentator. The bike has been patented worldwide and is the fruit of Slovenian knowledge and creativity.

Under the 'Bigfish' trademark, the bikes are marketed by Studio Moderna. And in September this year they even caught the eye of former American president Bill Clinton. At the 6th annual Clinton Global Initiative conference, which took place in September in New York, the folding bike attracted a great

deal of attention, chiefly in relation to the need to solve mobility-related problems in an ecological way.

In New York the founder of Studio Moderna, Sandi Češko, outlined the company's solution for short distances between a public transport stop and one's destination, whether that destination is home, work or anywhere else. And it is precisely the folding bike that can be the link in the chain that allows public transport to be revived as a mass means of mobility. And so the decision was taken: in the wider Los Angeles area, the intention is to equip 15 centres with 1,000 folding Bigfish bikes that will make people's journey to work easier and accustom them to use more environmentally aware means of transport. This is mostly of relevance to companies in the wider Los Angeles area.

An environmentally friendly way to travel

'Proper use is made of many public means of transport around the world, but while they do have a future, there is something essential missing. The insertion of folding bikes into the public transport system – therefore a solution to the problem of the first and last kilometre – can help to maintain this system in the long,' explained Sandi Češko, adding that they wished to promote an environmentally friendly way to travel: 'Our initiative is an expression of my initial vision of using Bigfish bikes – that they would become a link in the transport chain, driving sustainable mobility from concept to reality.'

As they point out at Studio Moderna, they want their project to provide a template for solutions to the problem of public transport, a problem faced by many of the world's large cities, where overdependence on the car is leading to traffic-choked streets, lower productivity, increased exhaust emissions and unhealthy environments. City residents will be able to use an environmentally friendly form of transport that is accessible to all and simple and handy to use.

Large cities are suffocated by poor air quality and by noise; the question of how to resolve this is becoming more



“ AS THEY POINT OUT AT STUDIO MODERNA, THEY WANT THEIR PROJECT TO PROVIDE A TEMPLATE FOR SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT, A PROBLEM FACED BY MANY OF THE WORLD'S LARGE CITIES, WHERE OVERDEPENDENCE ON THE CAR IS LEADING TO TRAFFIC-CHOKED STREETS, LOWER PRODUCTIVITY, INCREASED EXHAUST EMISSIONS AND UNHEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS. ”

and more important. How do we make cities greener? One sees that 'green mobility' – walking, cycling and public transport – is acquiring more and more support, with city dwellers feeling increasingly more responsible for the urban environment in which they live. A number of different organisations campaigning to change mobility are in the first rank of efforts of this kind. One such organisation is undoubtedly the Clinton Global Initiative, which has signed over 1,400 commitments since 2005; these commitments have an estimated value of more than 46 billion dollars and have had an impact on 200 million people in over 150 countries across the world.

A small 'big' bike

The folding bikes, which were created at Studio Moderna eight years ago and based on an innovation by Niko Mihelič, are simple to use, transport and store. A bike weighs less than 13 kg. It takes only four steps and 12 seconds to fold it to half its size; they are therefore very handy for a journey from a bus or train stop to one's destination.

The Bigfish folding bike is a Slovenian folding bike that, because of its superb 'drive' characteristics, offers an alternative to the city bikes we are used to seeing. They can be taken with you at any time and anywhere. It is quickly and easily foldable, takes up very little space and, given that you can have it with you at all times, is safe from thieves.

Bigfish offers a great many combinations of use, with many of them making life easier. Since it is small and foldable, one can also keep it in the car at all times. When you park, simply unfold it and use it to go about your business. Several bikes can be stored together in the boot, making them ideal for a family outing. And, as the manufacturers point out, lifting and fastening bikes on to a roof rack, an annoying procedure at best, could be a thing of the past with Bigfish.

A folding bike is useful if one wishes to avoid walking, since the bike is easy to assemble and ride to one's train or bus stop; one can then take it onto the bus or train. It is more than useful, too, for holidays in hotels and at campsites, for example. And >>>



what could be better than to take your bike into your office or apartment, or store it in your car boot, tent, caravan or hotel room? This bike needs no special storage space. In its folded state, it takes up very little room. To sum up: the folding bike may be small, but its functionality surpasses that of much bigger bikes.

About Bigfish

'Bigfish bikes support green lifestyles and sustainable development. The concept of the folding of the bike was developed by engineer and innovator Niko Mihelič. It was planned and designed at Studio Moderna and is manufactured in Italy. The frame is made from a single piece and is no smaller than a normal city bike; it therefore offers a ride as comfortable as a normal bike. The 'clip-clap' system allows the bike to be

folded up in a mere 12 seconds into a handy package. The bike, when folded, takes up very little space, enabling it to be carried and stored with ease.

Its superb ride characteristics and high-quality internal Shimano Nexus 3 brake system mean that, despite its smaller wheels, one is justified in comparing it favourably with a normal city bike. Because of the folding method employed, which keeps the frame in one piece, the ride is stable; moreover, the fact that there is optimal distance between the key components of the bike ensures a comfortable body position while riding. Bigfish is folded up quickly and straightforwardly – no tools are required and the operation is completed in a few short seconds. •

For more information: www.bigfishbike.si



Hana Souček Morača Photo Darinka Mladenović

EVEN MORE THAN THE STORIES, PEOPLE REMEMBER THE illustrations – illustrations which instil a love of reading and art into youngsters.

Most of the illustrations are sparkingly witty and supplement the text by stimulating the reader's imagination. Everyone carries within themselves one illustration that brightened up and adorned their childhood.

Illustration has been around since Stone Age cave paintings, reappearing in monastic libraries before the invention of printing, with the monks transcribing texts and furnishing them with illustrations and richly decorated initials. As Tatjana Pregl writes in the book *Slovenska knjižna ilustracija* ('Slovenian Book Illustration'), Slovenian artistic illustration cannot really be said to have begun until 1878 with the publication of *Zvon*, a newspaper started by Josip Stritar. The first illustrations were created in 1877 for the arts supplement of *Zvon* by brothers Janez and Jurij Šubic; the following issue already contained illustrations woven into the text. *Pravljice*, the first Slovenian book of fairytales for children with original Slovenian

illustrations, came out in 1911; it was written by Fran Milčinski and illustrated by Gvidon Birrola and Maksim Gaspari.

Biennale of Illustration

Illustration was first presented as an artistically distinct creative discipline by Cankarjev Dom and the illustration section of the Association of Slovenia Fine Artists Societies in 1993 with the organisation of the first Slovenian Biennale of Illustration. The first lifetime achievement award-winner was Marlenka Stupica; she has since been followed by Ančka Gošnik Godec, Jelka Reichman, Marija Vogelcnik, Milan Bizovičar, Marjanca Jemec Božič and Štefan Planinc. This year the jury decided to make the award to Melita Vovk Štih.

“ **EVERYONE CARRIES WITHIN THEMSELVES ONE ILLUSTRATION THAT BRIGHTENED UP AND ADORNED THEIR CHILDHOOD.** ”

This year, as part of the 9th Biennale, an exhibition of illustrations created over the last two years was opened under the title 'The Image of a Book ... A Book of Images'. According to the head of exhibitions at Cankarjev Dom, Nina Pirnat-Spahič, illustrations by some 55 artists will be on show until February. Some of the artists, such as Alenka Sottler and Zvonko Čoh, »



already have a high profile, but the exhibition also showcases new approaches to illustration in the work of younger, less well-known artists such as Arjan Pregl, Daša Simčič, Damijan Stepančič, Ana Zavadlav and Aleksander Brezlan.

The old guard of fairytale illustration

The essence of illustration is the connection it enjoys with the content as communicated by the text. Slovenian illustrators

have demonstrated their skill in doing this abroad, as shown by the fact that they have received numerous international awards for their work. Slovenian illustrators have always maintained a presence at events abroad, such as the Bratislava Biennale of Illustration and the Belgrade Book Fair, which awards the 'Golden Quill'. They also take part in the Children's Book Fair in Bologna, among others, which features a special section devoted to illustration.



Marlenka Stupica was born on 17 December 1927 in Ljubljana. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1950, and has worked with the Mladinska Knjiga publishing house for over 50 years; in that time she has illustrated and worked on over 100 children's books and picture books, the most recent being *Drevo pravljic* ('Tree of Fairytales'), published this year. She has received a number of awards for her work, including the Belgrade 'Golden Quill' award in 1966 and 1973, the BIB Golden Plaque in Bratislava in 1969, 1971 and 1977, a Prešeren Fund Award in Ljubljana in 1972, and the 'Best Slovenian Children's Book' award in 1993 and 2000. In 1994 she was cited on the IBBY Seville Honour List and received a Levstik lifetime achievement award in 1999.

Milan Bizovičar graduated in 1949 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana and then embarked on studies at Gabrijel Stupica's special painting school. He has received a number of Levstik Awards and received a lifetime achievement award at the 6th Slovenian Biennale of Illustration in 2004.

Štefan Planinc was born on 8 September 1925 in Ljubljana and completed his specialisation in painting in 1965. He later travelled to Paris on a scholarship. He received a Prešeren Fund Award for his work in 1965 and a Jakopič Award in 1984.

Jelka Šubert Reichman was born on 23 August 1939 in Ljubljana. One of her special achievements was having her work appear on a set of Slovenian stamps – one of them, on a Valentine's Day theme, was 'Stamp of the Week' in the USA in 2003. Many of her illustrations have appeared on greetings cards and postcards. She has produced seven cards for UNICEF and occasionally organises exhibitions of her work (over 20 solo exhibitions to date). She has also taken part in international exhibitions.

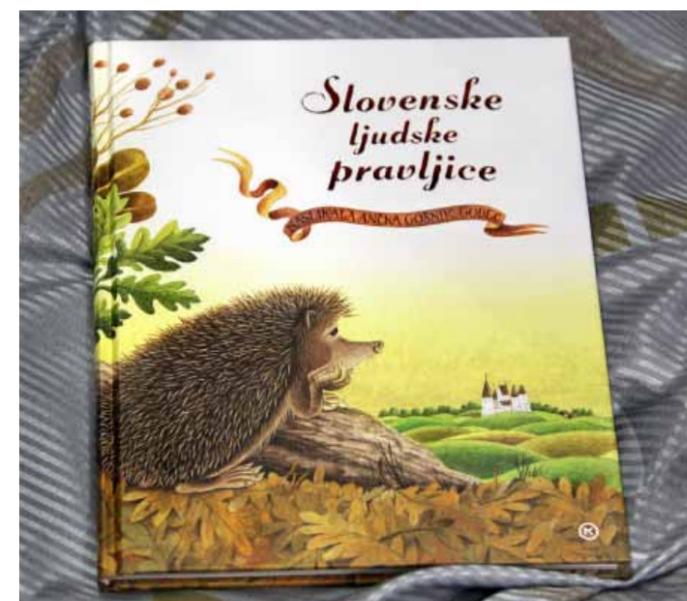
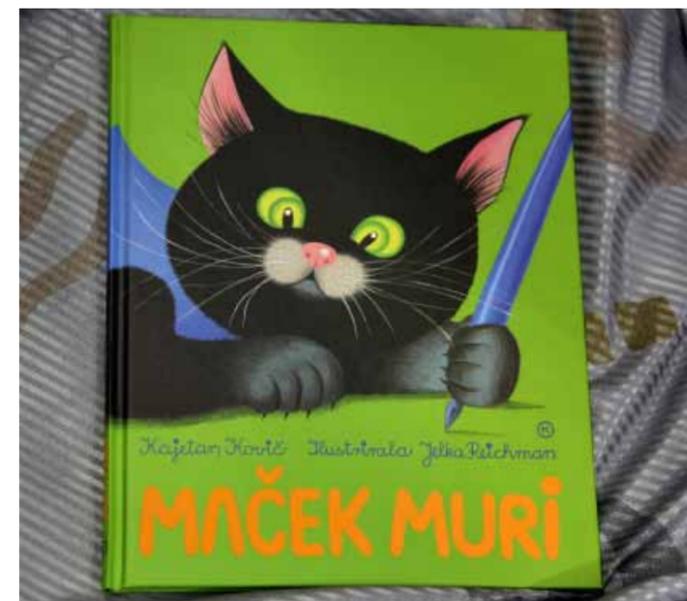
Marjanca Jemec Božič was born on 16 September 1928 in Maribor. After grammar school she enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. She has taken part in many group exhibitions and has also had over 20 exhibitions devoted to her own work. Her awards include the Prix Japon in 1971, an award for her UNICEF 'Children in the Village' greetings card in 1974, the 1981 Kajuh Award and a Levstik lifetime achievement award in 2003.

Ančka Gošnik Godec was born on 5 June 1927 in Celje. In 1948 she was accepted at the Academy of Fine Arts, from which she graduated several years later. She has had over 30 exhibitions at home and abroad and received a number of awards for her work; these include three international Belgrade 'Golden Quill' awards, the Smrekar and Levstik lifetime achievement awards (1997 and 2001), and an international IBBY award in 2002.

Marija Vogelnik was born on 15 October 1914, graduating in architecture in 1939 under Jože Plečnik. She was the only Slovenian illustrator to feature in Bettina Hürlimann's 1965 anthology of modern world children's illustration. She received the 'Young Generation' award in Belgrade in 1958 for her illustrations for young people, a Belgrade 'Golden Quill' award in 1975 and the Smrekar lifetime achievement award in 2004.

Alenka Sottler, was born on 24 October 1958 in Ljubljana. She completed her postgraduate studies in painting at Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts in 1983. She has been recognised four times at the Slovenian Biennale of Illustration and received many other awards, including the Grand Prix from the children's jury at the World Biennale of Illustration Bratislava (BiB) and awards for selection as part of the 'Emperor's New Illustrations' at Bologna Book Fair. Her work has been chosen three times for the National Museum of American Illustration's annual exhibition in New York. This year she received the main award for illustration at the 3rd Croatian Biennale of Illustration for her work on Niko Grafenauer's book *Prividi* ('Visions'); she also received a merit award for the same illustrations from 3x3 Magazine of Contemporary Illustration, New York.

Zvonko Čoh began working as a freelance artist after graduating in painting from Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts and Design in 1980. His major awards include a Belgrade 'Golden Quill' in 1983, a Prešeren Fund Award in 1999 and the Hinko Smrekar Award in 1995, 2006 and 2010. In 2003 he received an award for the most beautiful children's book and made the IBBY Honour List in Cape Town in 2004.



“ THE ESSENCE OF ILLUSTRATION IS THE CONNECTION IT ENJOYS WITH THE CONTENT AS COMMUNICATED BY THE TEXT. SLOVENIAN ILLUSTRATORS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THEIR SKILL IN DOING THIS ABROAD, AS SHOWN BY THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED NUMEROUS INTERNATIONAL AWARDS FOR THEIR WORK.

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SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS DISHES

Damjan J.Ovsec Photo Tomo Jeseničnik

FOR ITS SIZE, SLOVENIA HAS AN exceptional diversity of geography, climate and culture. If we just dwell for a moment on the culture, it should be pointed out that Slovenia is characterised by four main cultural regions, these being the Pannonian, central Slovenian, Alpine and Mediterranean areas. This is of course entirely reflected in Slovenia's cuisine, including holiday fare. For this reason there are a great many Christmas dishes in Slovenia, and this article could not cover them all. These dishes differ from each other not just in terms of region, but also in historical period, a variety of influences and also in whether they pertain to the urban bourgeoisie or rural folk. As far as Christmas dishes and drinks are concerned, the rural circles are especially traditional, archaic and in many

respects ritualised. The old "order" was well-established and pretty simple. For this festival it was obligatory to partake of dishes that included honey, poppy seeds, dried fruit, millet, walnuts, hazelnuts and beans. These dishes were also strongly linked to veneration of the departed, who at this important time of year came to "visit" their kin; the memory of this is still alive in Slovenia. There are also a number of special pre-Christmas fasting dishes, but that is something for another time.

Ancient ritual and traditional foods

The ritual dishes include numerous special kinds of bread, cakes, pies, strudels and most particularly, potica roll cakes. This is an original Slovenian culinary speciality, known throughout Slovenia in various

names and versions (povitica, optica, gubana, gubanca, gobana, pogača), and featuring a wide variety of fillings. Even back in the 19th century we "exported" it to neighbouring countries, and today it is known almost throughout the world. It was first mentioned in 1575. To begin with it was an upper class food, but later spread to the peasant class, too. Originally potica was a ritual Christmas dish, but for a long time it has also been an obligatory Easter blessing food. Traditionally there are around 60 types of potica, but today there are something like 120 recipes for it.

In Koroška (Carinthia), on both the Austrian and Slovenian sides of the border, the ancient ritual dishes are the kolacija with dried fruit and beans, in memory of the meagre supper had by Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and



Potica is a ritual Christmas dish

krapci, bread rolls stuffed with dried pears and hemp seed. Krapci come in a wide variety among the Slovenians. They are similar to dumplings (when not fried) and are of noodle, risen or potato dough with various fillings involving cottage cheese, cream and other ingredients.

Of course a very common Slovenian Christmas food is pork: grilled and boiled sausages (such as the world-famous and protected kranjska klobasa), liver sausage, blood sausage, and a similar Primorska product, mulce, with sweet stuffing, raisins and unusual spices and so forth. This is accompanied by pickled cabbage or pickled turnip that has been pickled in various ways (in Primorska, for instance, in grape skins) and also prepared in various ways.

In Gorenjska Christmas dinner would feature potica, pork dishes, dried meat and biscuits, and in Škofja Loka walnut rolls glazed with honey. For the ceremonial Christmas lunch they would serve beef soup with noodles, sautéed potatoes and roast veal, and in mountain areas they would also serve roast mutton or goat and salad. In Gorenjska towns people would roast a turkey for lunch in the oven of the local baker. Their dinner comprised dried pork and crackling or walnut potica cake. A very typical local potica is the complicated zidana potica, with a whole range of fillings.

In Štajerska they like to celebrate Christmas with pork tenderloin in a net and all manner of other pork. At one time



Slovenia's greatest gourmards include the people of Štajerska

In Prlekija people would eat bosman, decorated milk bread with eggs, potica, white coffee or tea plus wine or spirits for breakfast; for lunch beef or chicken soup with noodles, soup with pork or turkey giblets, poultry, for instance a stuffed chicken, roast goose, roast turkey with stuffing and flat cakes, boiled beef, roast pork, wine sauces, pickled cabbage with flour thickener, sautéed potatoes, rice, horseradish with cream or apples, various salads, compotes and fruit bread (in Haloze, for instance, the specially spiced krljak).

In Prekmurje tables featured the special vrtnik bread and gjenjene (leavened, risen) cakes – walnut and poppy seed potica. During the day they offered the now EU-protected prekmurska gibanica cake, krapci stuffed rolls, bread pastries such as retaši and bibe and cakes such as kuglof or moudla. In that area the special Christmas fruit bread made of apricots, pears, plums, walnuts, hazelnuts, figs and raisins is called pastirski kruh (herdsman's bread). Alongside various soups, such as cream of cep mushroom soup, there were numerous side dishes such as keber, a salad of thick beans doused with pumpkin seed oil, and of course specially stuffed duck. >>>

it was obligatory to have a capon, a solstice symbol, on the table, but now other fowl are used. In general fowl, even before the appearance of the "globalist" turkey, has since the earliest days been an obligatory Christmas dish in a large part of Slovenia: in Gorenjska chicken, along the Sotla and in Bela krajina turkey or turkey pullet, in Prekmurje and Prlekija duck and goose stuffed with sour apples, prunes and chestnuts, and in Dolenjska cockerel (in wine sauce).

In fact the people of Dolenjska are credited with inventing countless varieties of little rolls, at one time also ritual dishes, while the Bela krajina folk boast the fulanka, an especially complicated dish of tripe or smoked pork, bacon, stuffing, spices and other things stuffed into a lower intestinal casing. This festive dish is also known there as fülenki or belokranjski nadev. There is also a local dish called štula, a gruel-based potica with cream topping.

'The ritual dishes include numerous special kinds of bread, cakes, pies, strudels and most particularly, potica roll cakes.'



EU-protected prekmurska gibanica cake



Flat cake

In addition to the krapci, something very typical of Koroška is čisava župa, a sour cream soup with diced lamb, and nabulana prata, a special stuffed roast.

For Christmas in the Loška valley in the Notranjska region they bake carob potica and prepare a fine lunch. They would bake pastries in the shape of tiny doves for little girls and little birds for boys. On Christmas Eve the table would also feature a crackling potica – špehovka or povanca.

A different world in Primorska

Even in the Idrija area žlikrofi, a protected Slovenian food of dough parcels, are something special, but once you get to the neighbouring Primorska region everything is quite different. This is the Mediterranean area, which itself is divided regionally into Goriška and Brda, Vipavska, the coast and Istria, so there are considerable differences in Christmas dishes there, too. Of course in this area for Christmas, apart from guba(nc)a, a different kind of stuffed presnec cake, made from filo dough, and pinca, leavened pastry, traditionally they eat entirely different dishes from those elsewhere in Slovenia. In many parts of that region, gubanca is substituted at Christmas by cheese rolls (there are in fact dozens of varieties in Slovenia) and doughnuts or similar fried, savoury and sardine-filled fancl(j)i, which could also be a sweet Christmas pudding, and similar fritole and kroštoli, which are without filling.



Christmas fruit bread made of apricots, pears, plums, walnuts, hazelnuts, figs and raisins

The festive table in the Kobarid area features certain famous but slightly differently prepared dishes (soup with pork or beef) plus the traditional boiled (and not roast) chicken, boiled mutton, roast local rabbit, pocrt krompir (a special fried potato recipe), sweet cabbage, carrot salad, poštoklja, a “pressed” dish of cabbage, bulja (a stuffing for strudel or roll cakes), flat cakes, pies, sweet bread and, of course, potica.

At Christmas the people of the Goriška area enjoy horseradish, kuglof (a type of cake), buttered bread and raisins and walnut potica. On the day before Christmas their fasting food is štokviž (cod) goulash with polenta. Or mulled wine and biscuits.

An obligatory Christmas dish in

Primorska is bakala na belo (white salt cod) or again štokviž (cod) goulash with polenta. In some areas this is eaten on Christmas Eve, and elsewhere on Christmas Day. A traditional local dish for Christmas lunch is larded noodles and vrzute (boiled or fried Savoy cabbage), and for supper a risotto with kaperocoli (a type of shellfish), beans, cabbage and various salads, as well as various fried fish and crayfish. There are other dishes, too, of course.

I should add to this very rough sketch of Slovenia's traditional Christmas dishes – the drinks we can leave for another time – that we have barely touched on the dishes of the urban well-to-do. That would require a special description and a whole other contribution on the rich and varied Christmas fare in Slovenia. ●



PROFESSOR IGOR GREGORIČ, a top Slovenian heart surgeon from Houston

The doctor's mission is to help his fellow man

Miša Čermak
Photo Šimen Zupančič

KNOWLEDGE COUNTS, THE PATIENTS we help count, relationships count,' says Professor Igor Gregorič, Director of Mechanical Circulatory Support and Associate Chief of the Transplant Service at the Texas Heart Institute. But to this Slovenian, a graduate of Ljubljana Faculty of Medicine who moved to the United States 26 years ago to widen and deepen his knowledge, titles in reality mean very little. If one had asked him, when he made his 'temporary' move from Slovenia ('I wasn't planning to stay'), whether he was prepared to work 12 hours a day – on a voluntary basis at the beginning – or to give up his holidays, or to learn and pass on the fruits of that learning to students, he would not have hesitated to say yes. Today, when he occupies such a top position, his answer is the same: he has not had a holiday for 20 years, and has passed on his knowledge not only to his young American colleagues but also to some 500 young Slovenian doctors. And even more importantly: to at least as many he has tried to communicate and pass on his own principles regarding the correct ethical relationship to the patient.

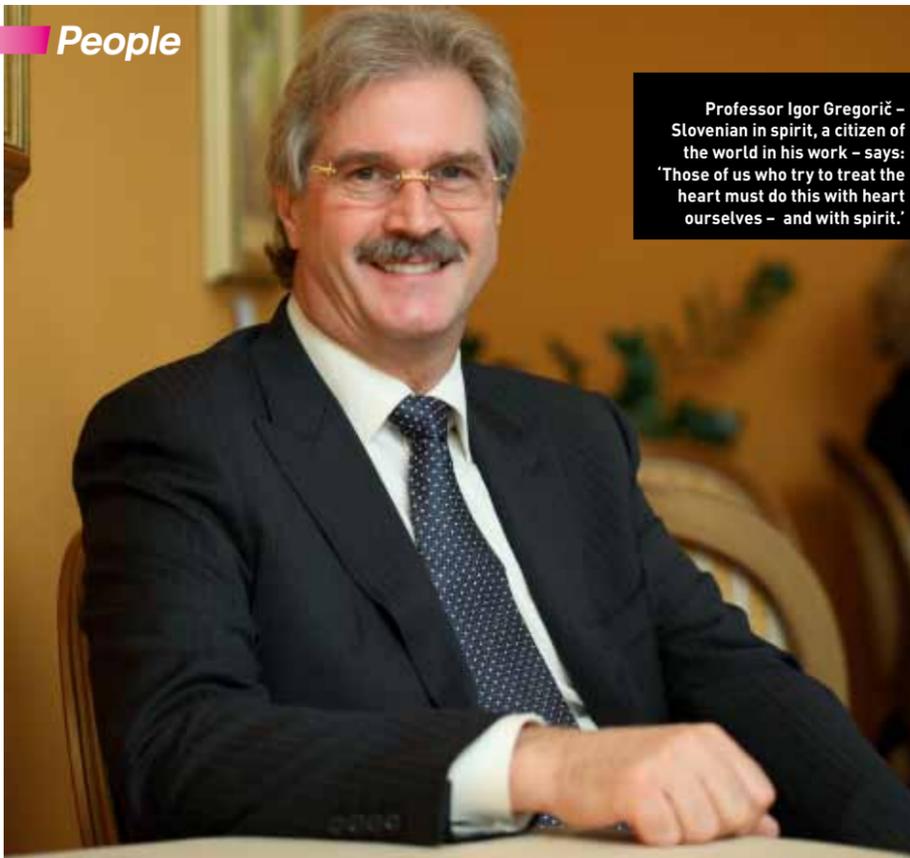
The Texas Heart Institute is a large institution in the American city of Houston operating in the field of

cardiovascular surgery, heart transplants and mechanical support for a weak heart. This world-renowned institution is rated this year as one of the top ten in America, as it has been for the last 20 years, which makes it one of the very best institutions in the world. Prof. Gregorič is Director of Mechanical Circulatory Support and Associate Director of the Transplant Service, as well as a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon concerned with following the development trends of science.

A desire for knowledge

Prof. Gregorič went to the US in the 1980s as a postgraduate without all the glittering titles he holds today. Ten years earlier, before he settled there for good, he had been to the US and seen the methods and opportunities for education and research. 'Yes, it was primarily a desire for knowledge that took me there. The opportunity came up, a convergence of circumstances, and I went. I found out there was the possibility of visiting the Texas Heart Institute. In the 1980s and at the end of the 1970s, heart surgery was still a high-risk type of surgery. Only highly specialised centres performing a high number of heart operations were getting good results – the biggest at that time was the Texas Heart Institute, which

was performing 5,000 operations a year. Since patients from the former Yugoslavia were sent there for operations – I found this out when I was doing my military service in the VMA coronary unit in Belgrade – that is where I decided I wanted to train. Later, when I was doing my specialisation in Nova Gorica, an opportunity arose for me to go there for additional training. I put my hand up – and the rest is history' (smiles). It wasn't easy at the beginning – at that time, he still hadn't decided to stay in the US for good. He only wanted to go for three, four months. 'My ambitions lay in cardiovascular surgery and there were very few posts available in Ljubljana. I reckoned that extra training abroad would give me some good references that would increase my chances of employment as a heart surgeon in Slovenia. After four months, there was the opportunity to extend my stay for another six. After that I had to decide whether to come home, or risk it and stay in America.' The risk was considerable because he had neither a job nor a secure future, but he took that risk because he believed that, without taking a risk, a person cannot expect or achieve anything greater. At the same time he realised that perhaps he would not be able to make it, since he did not have the proper



Professor Igor Gregorič – Slovenian in spirit, a citizen of the world in his work – says: ‘Those of us who try to treat the heart must do this with heart ourselves – and with spirit.’

qualifications for the work he wanted to do in the States. ‘I didn’t have approval for my qualifications because I wasn’t counting on staying. After I took the decision to stay, my qualifications were recognised within two, three years; only then did I also obtain my specialisation, which is also difficult to do. But with hard work and persistence, with desire and motivation, a person can achieve this.’ Hard work meant four years of grind, of gathering knowledge and helping patients – on a voluntary basis. ‘Yes, I worked for four years as a heart surgery assistant at the Institute – on a voluntary basis. This work was unpaid. I managed to survive on my own savings and with the help of my parents, sister and others. It was indeed very difficult at the beginning: I worked every day from 7 o’clock in the morning to midnight. Every day there were four or five operations in each of the ten operating theatres – that’s up to 50 operations a day. I would also do up to six a day. This was an excellent learning period for me. This time was not wasted. I gained experience and knowledge, the perfect capital.’

The desire for even more knowledge and more work, along with ‘ambition’ of course (not the most highly valued word in Slovenia), all paid off. ‘Nothing is achieved without ambition. I know the word

‘ambition’ has a negative connotation in Slovenia, but I cannot agree with that: there are many ambitious, successful people who haven’t trodden on heads to get where they wanted to go. Ambition is a very positive thing. I support the desire of the young Slovenian students that come to us to satisfy their ambition in terms of research and education, a desire to succeed in branches they are interested in – even if that means waiting a year or two for it to happen. Because I know from my own experiences that it is very important to satisfy one’s own desire, since a person is thus able to carry out his profession with pleasure, go to work with pleasure and give so much more.’

The future is in ‘mechanical support’

Prof. Gregorič is a man and a professional who brings a great deal of knowledge to his vocation and spends a great deal of time carrying out research that will benefit patients. ‘In the medium to long term, the future for the treatment of heart disease lies in stem cell treatment, but the research is still at the early stages. They began to build aircraft in the 19th century, but it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that they were made to fly. At that time, everyone was saying it wasn’t possible. Stem cells are, I

believe, at that stage now – these babies have only just started to walk (smiles). In the medium term, however ...’ Then, he says, heart surgery as we know it today will probably no longer exist. ‘We shouldn’t forget that heart surgery has only been around for 50 years. We have therefore seen the ascension, summit and now something of a decline in certain branches of heart surgery. In 50 years’ time, the public and doctors will probably be asking themselves what things were like today; and it would be great to see what things will be like then’ (smiles). Treating the heart means finding new methods of treatment, he says. ‘Technology has advanced greatly and the flow of information is extraordinary. My area is heart disease, which is a very advanced disease, the last stage, and that’s where my main surgical interest lies, in my research and my clinical work. In the next 20 or 30 years, I believe that mechanical support will be used in this particular area of cardiology.’ What about artificial hearts? ‘Mechanical support is only an additional support to the human heart; an artificial heart means replacement of the human heart. I work in both areas, although an artificial heart is used very, very rarely: the technology has advanced, but the results of clinical research (our institute is one of the leading artificial heart centres) have not been positive. The range of patients that would need an artificial heart is very small and the industry, for financial reasons, cannot invest a great deal in it. Mechanical support, on the other hand, is growing rapidly. Five years ago there were around 1,500 auxiliary pumps installed around the world helping patients with a weak heart: The first generation had primitive technology, the second was already more advanced and gave results that were twice as positive. Today, survival using the third generation of pumps is 90% in six months. This means that the results are getting closer to those obtained with transplantation. These pumps are getting smaller and easier to insert into the chest cavity, and the results are getting better. This method is, until other methods are developed, one of the best for patients in the last stage of heart disease. A patient with this disease is confined to bed or at home. It is very difficult to move, breathe, eat...’

However, it does appear that heart

transplants is a slightly better solution and is still the gold standard in dealing with and in the final stage of this disease. ‘The problem lies with donors: there are too few of them. In the last 15 years the highest number of heart transplants worldwide is 3,000 – therefore, it remains constant. However, treatment using pumps is bringing comparably excellent results. In the last five years, the number of pumps implanted worldwide has equalled the number of transplants. It is predicted that up to 10,000 pumps will be implanted worldwide every year.’ In Slovenia around 30,000 patients have problems relating to heart disease, but not all of them are in the final stage of the disease. Prof. Gregorič also works with Slovenian specialists. ‘We work closely with Slovenian cardiologists and heart surgeons, particularly with the heart disease department at Ljubljana University Medical Centre, which is led by Professor Bojan Vrtovec, who spent two years of advanced training with us. Between 40 and 50 top heart disease specialists from around the world recently attended a conference in Portorož. This is the third year in a row that we have organised this conference. Every year it gets better and better, and I hope we can attract even more Slovenian doctors to come and share their experiences and listen to the experiences of others.’

Relationship with the patient the most important thing

But experiences are not only a strictly professional matter – there is also a human dimension: one’s relationship with patients, which in Slovenia is often not as good as it should be, is as good as it could be in the States. ‘I know both systems, the Slovenian and American, and I can say that the American system is different. This is one of the main things we wish to pass on to young Slovenian students when they come to Houston. What is this difference? The approach to the patient must be a friendly one. A sick person is a person in trouble and under pressure. Every patient is, understandable, a little agitated and frightened and one must understand this. If the patient is agitated,

he has to be calmed. Time has to be taken with him – completely unlimited time. If a patient and/or his family needs to talk, one must take the time to do this – even if it’s one hour, two hours if necessary, until all the questions have been answered. The patient and his family must be completely calm before he goes into the operating theatre – and that applies to all branches of medicine. I try to show this to our young students and I want them to take that back home with them to Slovenia.’ But Prof. Gregorič himself had to learn this above all ethical and for the patient essential empathetic relationship, as in America a doctor cannot afford to take a rude approach to his patients. ‘That would spell the beginning of the end of his career!’ he says. Of course, this is because of the mechanisms that prevent rudeness on the part of doctors: if a doctor is rude to a patient, that patient can complain to the medical council, which is responsible for relationships with patients. They send the doctor a letter, summon him for a discussion along with the patient and nurse, and try to establish what took place. In reality, the investigation is a cursory one. If they find that the doctor was unjustifiably rude to a patient, the

‘My aim is not to praise myself – it is to be a good doctor, have good relationships with my colleagues, pass on my knowledge to the young and, best of all, care properly for my patients.’

doctor may be issued with a warning before being struck off, or they can strike him off immediately. If there is a more serious breach of patients’ rights, the case is dealt with by a body similar to the Medical Chamber of Slovenia. The doctor may lose his licence temporarily or indeed permanently. He too makes mistakes, but he does not hide them; as soon as he finds that he has made a mistake, he is as honest as possible. ‘It is human nature to make mistakes – we are not robots. However, the most important thing is one’s approach and conduct when a mistake happens – a doctor must be honest. If a mistake has

occurred, the doctor must be courageous enough to stand before the patient’s family and explain what happened and why. If the mistake has consequences for the patient, this is extremely serious for the family and the patient, and for the doctor as well. However, if a serious mistake occurs that harms the patient and has long-term consequences for him, the worst thing a doctor can do is try to cover the mistake up and lie. He must never cover up mistakes. He must tell the relatives immediately. It is easier for people to understand honesty, openness and confession than disingenuousness, arrogance and lies.’

If he had to list the three human and professional qualities that have brought him to such an important position, they would be persistence, desire and honesty. He does not mention competence, but that is understandable. ‘My aim is not to praise myself – it is to be a good doctor, have good relationships with my colleagues, pass on my knowledge to the young and, best of all, care properly for my patients.’ His daily timetable is a strenuous one, 12 hours long; the professional and ethical level of dedication to the profession and to patients must be really high. ‘In

America a person is expected to be morally and ethically irreproachable, and the same is expected in Slovenia as well, clearly. However, in America a doctor is expected to know when he is tired and to secure rest for himself – he doesn’t operate or doesn’t treat, except in the most serious

situation. If a doctor is very committed and works hard, that does not mean that he is tired after 12 or 14 hours’ work. We work an average of 12, 14 hours a day. Of course that is tough, but from my own experience I know how to decide whether I am capable of working after a being on call for 24 hours. If I am too tired after working in the emergency room, I rest instead of operating. I like to draw a comparison with pilots, who have mandatory rest periods. This rest is prescribed by their association, while doctors have to give themselves the necessary rest. Moral and ethical integrity must be completely irreproachable.’ ●

BASKETBALL HAS HAPPENED TO SLOVENIA

What is the taste of a victory if there was no opponent to beat?

Igor E. Bergant Photo Aleš Fevžar

NOT BAD, BECAUSE there was no loser at all. The sweetness of such a victory was all over the congress rooms of the Munich Marriott on 5 December around noon, when the Board of FIBA Europe, the governing body of European basketball unanimously elected Slovenia to host the



2013 EuroBasket – the European basketball championship for men. The Basketball Federation of Slovenia was the only candidate to host the prestigious event, as in the months before several other bidders, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Germany and, finally, Italy had pulled out. The reason – the number of participating teams was increased by FIBA Europe (to 24), along with the competition fee (to a total of eight million euros).

Nervy weeks followed for the men and women involved, while hard talk was necessary within Slovenia, where Roman Volčič, the Basketball Federation of Slovenia's President, and the heart and soul of the bid, the federation's Secretary General Iztok Rems, also a member of the Board of FIBA Europe, tried to persuade the Government of Slovenia to provide some financial aid and guarantees. The mostly positive response of the public towards the bid was also helpful. The Government, pressed by the need to maintain the strict logic of its cost-cutting policy, finally recognised the promotional opportunity of a possible EuroBasket 2013 in Slovenia. This initiated the final showdown in the form of direct talks between the FIBA Europe Secretary General, Nar Zanolin, with Slovenia's PM, Borut Pahor, and Minister of Education and

Sport, Igor Lukšič. The result: a win-win-situation, as Zanolin described the outcome after the vote of the Board of FIBA Europe in Munich. Slovenia was able to reduce the initial fee to a total of 6.5 M euros and increase the value of marketing services provided by FIBA to a Slovenian sponsor of EuroBasket within this sum to 3.5 M euros.

Only after this deal was sealed by the Board of FIBA Europe, could Mr Volčič and Mr Rems relax and celebrate the occasion with their bidding team. Mr Rems, a former top-class international basketball referee, was particularly overwhelmed with joy. "Five years ago it was an idea, one year ago we submitted the bid, now we have a bit less than three years to make it happen," he explained at a press conference in Munich.

Slovenia is the smallest country ever to bid and to host the EuroBasket tournament, which is the second largest European championship in team sports – after the UEFA European Football Championship. But how can the Slovenians guarantee that they will be ready to meet all the financial and logistic challenges? Regarding the financial outcome, EuroBasket could even be a profitable event, especially due to the potential for large numbers of visitors from some of the 23 guest countries involved. With just an increase of VAT, the Basketball Federation of Slovenia claims, Slovenia would be able to cover the investments. Regarding the venues, the most important, the Stožice Hall for 13,000 spectators, has already been completed. It would stage the second and the final knock-out stage of the tournament, scheduled to take place during

three weeks in September 2013. Provisionally, Maribor, Celje, Novo mesto and Ptuj have been chosen to host the preliminaries, while Celje already has a suitable venue. But other cities in Slovenia could join or replace these candidates. Local authorities in Novo mesto and Ptuj have indicated that they would support and finance the construction of new halls in their respective cities to attract EuroBasket 2013.

Slovenia with its compact size, state-of-the-art motorways, good connections and positive safety record can meet the challenges of such a major event. EuroBasket has also been recognised as a big opportunity for Slovenian tourism with its 100,000 high-quality tourist beds. Beside this, Slovenia has a long tradition and legacy of staging major sporting events and has one of the strongest national teams in Europe. With its 30,000

registered players and around 200,000 people playing basketball almost every weekend, Slovenia has one of the highest ratios of people involved in basketball in the world.

But the main pillar and the strongest argument of the Slovenian bid was the basketball fans, who have become the most recognisable brand of Slovenian basketball. In 2010, some 5,000 organised Slovenian fans travelled to Turkey to watch the Slovenian national team at the FIBA World Championships for men. Slovenian fans, who are noisy but good-spirited, who are lively and enjoy basketball, deserved to be awarded a major basketball tournament in their own country. And if was to them that the bidders dedicated the motto of EuroBasket 2013 "I Feel Basketball". At last, this feeling will be shared in Slovenia with guests from abroad.

A RENAISSANCE IN SLOVENIAN BIATHLON?

Andrej Stare Photo STA

THIS YEAR'S BIATHLON WORLD CUP GOT UNDERWAY at the Oestersund winter sports complex in northern Sweden. The Slovenian team began the 33rd World Cup season with a makeover, headed by Olympic bronze medal winner Jakov Fak, 23, who has switched from the Croatian team. Fak has trained with the Slovenian team for a number of years, so his move was only a matter of time. The top professionals that make up the Slovenian team, along with top-quality training and facilities, were the factors that persuaded Fak to make the move.

Jakov Fak

Born: 1 August 1987

Major successes: 3rd place, 20 km, 2009 World Championships 2009, Pyeongchang Bronze medal, 10 km, 2010 Winter Olympics, Vancouver **World Cup:** 17th place, Anterselva, 2009/10

The first move from the Croatian to the Slovenian biathlon team came a few years ago when Dijana Grudičec (married name Ravnikar) became a 'Slovene' and went on to perform brilliantly for the team.

After Oestersund, the world's best biathletes decamp to Pokljuka for the next round of the World Cup from 14 to 19 December. This is the 14th time Pokljuka has been a World Cup venue, in addition to the three times it has hosted the World Championships. Interestingly, the only podium finishes for the Slovenian team at Pokljuka were in 2007, when they came third in the mass start.

Order of events at the World Cup Pokljuka, 14-19 December 2010

Men: 20 km individual, 10 km sprint

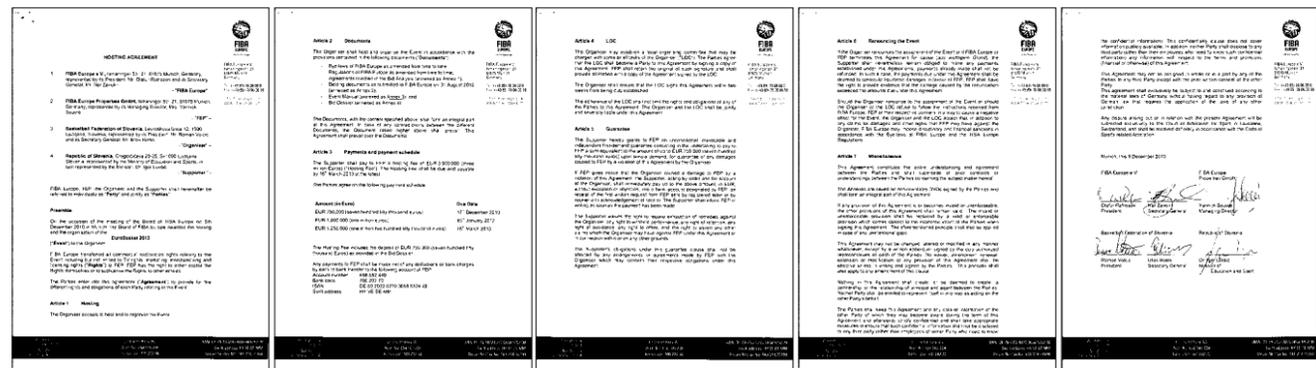
Women: 15 km individual, 7.5 km sprint

Mixed relay: 2 x 7.5 km men, 2 x 6 km women

Most is expected of the men's team, where, in addition to Fak, Janez Marič and Klemen Bauer will be competing for top spot. The women's team, managed by Tomáš Kos, a Czech, also have great

ambitions for the 2010/2011 season. The first lady of the team is the experienced Tea Gregorin, who already has a second place in the World Cup and is hoping for her first victory in this elite competition (she also has a silver medal from the World Championships in South Korea in 2009). Gregorin is predicting a serious challenge for a fifth individual win for the Slovenian biathlon team at the World Cup. Gregorin is joined by Tadeja Brankovič-Likožar, who returns to the team after giving birth, and the excellent shooter Andreja Mali. Both can expect to challenge for top honours in at least some of the races.

The main goal of the Slovenian biathletes is this year's World Championships in Khanty Mansiysk, Russia, which take place between 1 and 13 March 2011. This is the second year in a row that this venue has played host to the world's best biathletes. As a town, Khanty Mansiysk is really very special. It lies in the Urals and is only accessible by air. There are no roads or railways, but wonderful biathlon tracks and hellishly cold temperatures.



CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS IN SLOVENIA

Damjan J. Ovsec Photo Shutterstock

IN SLOVENIA, TOO, THE MOST TYPICAL outward signs of Christmas Eve and Christmas are from the general Indo-European tradition: venerating greenery, fire and water – which is not just therapeutic and cleansing, but on Christmas Eve it also changes into silver and gold – decorations, cribs, fasting, baking special Christmas dishes and pastries, blessing houses, work buildings and fields on Christmas Eve (ritual sprinkling and smoking), communal prayers of the rosary and singing Christmas carols, wandering carol-singers, going to midnight mass, and the celebratory Christmas lunch for which the whole family gathers around a specially laid table, since Christmas is the most popular family holiday. Soothsaying, spells and a mass of folk beliefs are all associated with this.

In the Ptuj area, on Christmas Eve they peel off 12 layers of onion and set them out in sequence, like the months of the year. A little salt is shaken on each piece of peel. Depending on whether the piece of peel is wet or dry the next year, they can judge which will be the rainy and dry months. In Gorenjska, on Christmas Eve girls would go and stare at a stream to see the image of their future bridegroom in the water. The light that burns in a house during midnight mass cannot be put out, otherwise someone will die. A number of items from the Christmas table cure various diseases.

At the main meal on Christmas Eve, you have to keep your feet on items that have previously been placed under the table. The best thing is to rest them on iron, and the master of the house always has his on ploughshare iron. After the evening bells on Christmas Eve, you can no longer pour water across your threshold, otherwise



there will be floods and inundations. Apart from its red colour, iron has special protective powers that drive away disease, demons and witches.

Christmas Eve is the night when treasure buried deep in the earth comes to light. It is otherwise controlled by an evil spirit. Numerous legends and stories full of incredible wizardry relate how you can get to the treasure between 11 o'clock and midnight on Christmas Eve.

During Christmas, unknown supernatural forces are released, and they try to influence the fate of humankind. It is a time when the “world is open”, or when the “sky opens” to everything evil as well as good. The supernatural world that we cannot see opens up for brief moments: we can see into the future, know our fate and even alter it through magic. All these beings are especially dangerous at the time when the sun is lowest, in other words on the winter nights between Christmas and Epiphany. In Slovenia they are called the 12 nights. On those nights the people would listen to the terrible voices of demons and witches, ghosts, goblins and dreadful werewolves, which became woven into the twisting winds of winter rain and snowstorms. Through the skies runs the wild chase, a host of ancestral spirits. And a terrible din signals the raging horde of mysterious beings rampaging through the mountain forests. In the Trenta area, according to the stories, these beings have horses' hooves. In the lore of Gorenjska, the wild chase under the heavens is driven by Zlata baba, the Slavic Golden Dame. Eagles, snakes and diverse unknown animals fly through the air. Meanwhile, anyone who makes a three-legged stool of special wood during midnight mass on Christmas Eve will see witches.

Lighting bonfires and burning the Yule log

Around Christmas people in Slovenia would also burn bonfires outside, using fire to help the sun start rising again, while inside the homesteads they would burn a tree stump, which was given numerous names locally that relate to Christmas, including badnik, badnjak, božič, božičnik and also čok, zglavnik and čuja. This Yule

log was selected earlier in the autumn. Often it was two metres long and weighed more than a hundredweight, so it was dragged to the house, if at all possible, by a team of white oxen. It was hauled into the house with chains, or rolled to the hearth on boards or poles. It was absolutely forbidden to touch it with your hands, for it was supposedly a sacred, living being. The tree stump, which the master of the house procured, was lit in the fireplace on Christmas Eve, thereby according to the old beliefs helping the weakened sun and giving warmth and light to the souls of the returning departed; it supposedly represented a veneration of the deity of the domestic hearth. The stump had to smoulder slowly until the new year or until the Feast of the Magi, and in the meantime it was doused with wine and given gifts of food. This ancient custom of burning was still going up until the First World War, or rather while people still had open fires; celebrating around a winter bonfire has Indo-European roots. Predictions and prophecies were made from the sparks, smoke and flames.

Christmas decorations

An important part of the preparations for Christmas is decorating the house and work buildings with greenery: pinewood, oak branches, juniper, ivy, holly, mistletoe, evergreens, moss and so forth, as well as other decorations that have deep symbolic significance.

The traditional Christmas decoration for the obligatory holy shrine in rural houses was (and is) made of evergreen plants and paper flowers. It had a variety of names: Betlehem, paradž (paradise), nebo, jeruzalem, hojkica (fir). Hung from the ceiling were pine branches with candles or illuminated balls, upside down spruce trees, beautifully carved doves representing the Holy Spirit, “chandeliers” with bouquets of artificial flowers and waxed paper and so forth. Undecorated little spruce trees were placed on fences, land boundaries and in gardens. Christmas trees came here from the German-speaking lands, and first appeared in Ljubljana in 1845. It took a decade for them to move wholesale from the cities to the countryside, but

nowadays we see them everywhere, decorated with electric fairy lights. In the Primorska region they are called brin, or juniper.

Christmas Nativity scenes are also very popular in Slovenia. They have been attested to at least since 1644 among the Ljubljana Jesuits, spreading from the cities to the countryside. The 19th century saw some special developments. There are many types of them, and they are made of a wide variety of materials. Over the last two decades they have experienced a new upsurge everywhere in the country. They have also spawned widespread interest in novel approaches. Recent decades have also seen live Nativity scenes in Slovenia, presented by people in Biblical costumes and with real live animals. They are organised in various Slovenian locations, and the world-famous Postojna Cave is regarded as staging the most attractive one each year, making it a major tourist attraction.

Famous Christmas breads

The Slovenian Christmas table is a singular kind of sacrificial altar, a very old ritual, full of concern for the year to come and for the family, and full of memories of those departed. At the same time it involves wishes for prosperity in the new year. The majority of ritual Christmas breads – in the countryside they usually bake three made of wheat, rye and buckwheat, and now also maize flour, and there can be five different breads or just one – are named after the napkin used to cover them and the table on which they are placed: poprtnik, poprtnjak, postovjek, mižnik, prten kruh, stolnik, and in view of its magical powers, also božičnik (Christmas bread), močen kruh (strong bread), župnik (parish priest) and more. These frequently beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 14 days, in other words for all “three Christmases”. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the crumbs.

In the Dolenjska region, for instance, anyone who tries Christmas bread from nine houses gains exceptional power. >>>

In some places three loaves can also represent the Three Kings.

Outdoor merriment at this time is also provided by the previously mentioned carol-singers, who appear for Christmas, New Year, the Feast of the Magi and at other times. They got their name from the Roman *Kalendae Januariae*, and acquired a new repertoire with Christianity. These ritually wandering carol-singers bring to houses a blessing for the new year, health and good fortune for people and animals. The carol-singers would also wander around cities during Christmas, and were very popular in Ljubljana. A few years ago the custom of carol-singing, especially “Three Kings” carol-singers in the Ljubljana suburbs, enjoyed a revival. Associated with the carol-singers are the *kolednice*, the carols. Slovenians know an extraordinary number of carols. Another common practice used to be *božičnice*, public dramatic performances of Christmas plays with holy themes.

So the Christmas period in Slovenia, with its exceptionally rich symbolism, is not just sacred but magical. In Slovenia, too, the most typical outward signs of Christmas Eve and Christmas are from the general Indo-European tradition: venerating greenery, fire and water – which is not just therapeutic and cleansing, but on Christmas Eve it also changes into silver and gold – decorations, cribs, fasting, baking special Christmas dishes and pastries, blessing houses, work buildings and fields on Christmas Eve (ritual sprinkling and smoking), communal prayers of the rosary and singing Christmas carols, wandering carol-singers, going to midnight mass, and the celebratory Christmas lunch for which the whole family gathers around a specially laid table, since Christmas is the most popular family holiday. Soothsaying, spells and a mass of folk beliefs are all associated with this.

In the Ptuj area, on Christmas Eve they peel off 12 layers of onion and set them out in sequence, like the months of the year. A little salt is shaken on each piece of peel. Depending on whether the piece of peel is wet or dry the next year, they can judge which will be the rainy and dry months. In Gorenjska, on Christmas Eve girls would go and stare at a stream to see the image of their future bridegroom in the water. The

light that burns in a house during midnight mass cannot be put out, otherwise someone will die. A number of items from the Christmas table cure various diseases.

At the main meal on Christmas Eve, you have to keep your feet on items that have previously been placed under the table. The best thing is to rest them on iron, and the master of the house always has his on ploughshare iron. After the evening bells on Christmas Eve, you can no longer pour water across your threshold, otherwise there will be floods and inundations. Apart from its red colour, iron has special protective powers that drive away disease, demons and witches.

Christmas Eve is the night when treasure buried deep in the earth comes to light. It is otherwise controlled by an evil spirit. Numerous legends and stories full of incredible wizardry relate how you can get to the treasure between 11 o'clock and midnight on Christmas Eve.

During Christmas, unknown supernatural forces are released, and they try to influence the fate of humankind. It is a time when the “world is open”, or when the “sky opens” to everything evil as well as good. The supernatural world that we cannot see opens up for brief moments: we can see into the future, know our fate and even alter it through magic. All these beings are especially dangerous at the time when the sun is lowest, in other words on the winter nights between Christmas and Epiphany. In Slovenia they are called the 12 nights.

On those nights the people would listen to the terrible voices of demons and witches, ghosts, goblins and dreadful werewolves, which became woven into the twisting winds of winter rain and snowstorms. Through the skies runs the wild chase, a host of ancestral spirits. And a terrible din signals the raging horde of mysterious beings rampaging through the mountain forests. In the Trenta area, according to the stories, these beings have horses' hooves. In the lore of Gorenjska, the wild chase under the heavens is driven by *Zlata baba*, the Slavic Golden Dame. Eagles, snakes and diverse unknown animals fly through the air. Meanwhile, anyone who makes a three-legged stool of special wood during midnight mass on Christmas Eve will see witches.

Lighting bonfires and burning the Yule log

Around Christmas people in Slovenia would also burn bonfires outside, using fire to help the sun start rising again, while inside the homesteads they would burn a tree stump, which was given numerous names locally that relate to Christmas, including *badnik*, *badnjak*, *božič*, *božičnik* and also *čok*, *zglavnik* and *čuja*. This Yule log was selected earlier in the autumn. Often it was two metres long and weighed more than a hundredweight, so it was dragged to the house, if at all possible, by a team of white oxen. It was hauled into the house with chains, or rolled to the hearth



First World War, or rather while people still had open fires; celebrating around a winter bonfire has Indo-European roots. Predictions and prophecies were made from the sparks, smoke and flames.

Christmas decorations

An important part of the preparations for Christmas is decorating the house and work buildings with greenery: pinewood, oak branches, juniper, ivy, holly, mistletoe, evergreens, moss and so forth, as well as other decorations that have deep symbolic significance.

The traditional Christmas decoration for the obligatory holy shrine in rural houses was (and is) made of evergreen plants and paper flowers. It had a variety of names: *Betlehem*, *paradiž* (paradise), *nebo*, *jeruzalem*, *hojkica* (fir). Hung from the ceiling were pine branches with candles or illuminated balls, upside down spruce trees, beautifully carved doves representing the Holy Spirit, “chandeliers” with bouquets of artificial flowers and waxed paper and so forth. Undecorated little spruce trees were placed on fences, land boundaries and in gardens. Christmas trees came here from the German-speaking lands, and first appeared in Ljubljana in 1845. It took a decade for them to move wholesale from the cities to the countryside, but nowadays we see them everywhere, decorated with electric fairy lights. In the Primorska region they are called *brin*, or juniper.

Christmas Nativity scenes are also very popular in Slovenia. They have been attested to at least since 1644 among the Ljubljana Jesuits, spreading from the cities to the countryside. The 19th century saw some special developments. There are many types of them, and they are made of a wide variety of materials. Over the last two decades they have experienced a new upsurge everywhere in the country. They have also spawned widespread interest in novel approaches. Recent decades have also seen live Nativity scenes in Slovenia, presented by people in Biblical costumes and with real live animals. They are organised in various Slovenian locations, and the world-famous Postojna Cave is regarded as staging the most attractive one each year, making it a major tourist attraction.

Famous Christmas breads

The Slovenian Christmas table is a singular kind of sacrificial altar, a very old ritual, full of concern for the year to come and for the family, and full of memories of those departed. At the same time it involves wishes for prosperity in the new year. The majority of ritual Christmas breads – in the countryside they usually bake three made of wheat, rye and buckwheat, and now also maize flour, and there can be five different breads or just one – are named after the napkin used to cover them and the table on which they are placed: *poprtnik*, *poprtnjak*, *postovjek*, *mižnik*, *prten kruh*, *stolnik*, and in view of its magical powers, also *božičnik* (Christmas bread), *močen kruh* (strong bread), *župnik* (parish priest) and more. These frequently beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 14 days, in other words for all “three Christmases”. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the crumbs.

In the Dolenjska region, for instance, anyone who tries Christmas bread from nine houses gains exceptional power. In some places three loaves can also represent the Three Kings.

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So the Christmas period in Slovenia, with its exceptionally rich symbolism, is not just sacred but magical.

SYMBOLS OF STATE

Stanislav Jesenovec Photo STA



masts, or in the correct ratio, even up to 1:7. After the entry into force of the diktat of 6 January 1929 prohibiting its use in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Slovenians wove it in numerous ways into their work and works of art. During the Second World War, the flag and the symbols were used by all Slovenians that took part in it. After the war, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia, and up until March 1990, the Slovenian national flag was not fixed or designated in any written act; this was despite the fact that the tricolour and star was used as the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia and the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. In Constitutional amendment C passed at the meetings of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia sessions on 24 and 25 June 1991, the coat-of-arms and flag of the Republic of Slovenia were defined. The coat-of-arms was designed by Academy painter Marko Pogačnik. It is very finely placed on the white, blue and red of the Slovenian national flag. The amendment, and later the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia of 1991, provided as follows: 'The coat-of-arms of Slovenia has the form of a shield. In the middle of the shield, on a blue background, is a representation of Mount Triglav in white,

I HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN 15 YEARS of intense study of the symbols of the Slovenian nation and Slovenia, looking closely at the basic components of the identity of nation and state: name, designation in international environments, coat-of-arms, flag and anthem.

The basic symbol is, of course, the coat-of-arms.

One hundred and sixty-two years ago, the Slovenian nation got confirmation that white, blue and red were its colours. In a letter written in 1848, Ministerial President and Interior Minister Baron Anton von Doblhoff-Dier informed the Governor of Illyria, Count von Welsersheimb, that the old provincial colours from before 1463 were the same as those of the coat-of-arms which the emperor had confirmed for the Duchy of Carniola by ordinance of the provincial

office in 1836. Silver/white, blue and red, in that order, are therefore the colours of the Slovenian nation that were used in the coat-of-arms and then, from top to bottom, on the Slovenian flag. We therefore take this date as being the day on which the colours of the Slovenian flag were officially confirmed. It was first unfurled in spring 1848 during the period of revolutionary tumult among Slovenian students in Vienna; in Ljubljana, its first appearance was at the Zlata Riba restaurant on Wolfova Street on 7 April 1848. It was unfurled by businessman and national deputy Lovro Toman and friends. The Slovenian tricolour became popular during the period of national awakening. It was frequently deployed, and one can gather from the innumerable texts of the period that Slovenians and their national figures used it with great joy. They always hung the flag on impeccable flagpoles or

under which there are two undulating blue lines symbolising the sea and rivers and above which there are three golden, six-pointed stars. The shield is bordered in red.' The coat-of-arms is the symbolic link between all Slovenians in their ethnic territory.

When the flag of the Slovenian nation acquired its coat-of-arms, this became the flag of Slovenia, the national flag.

The ratio of 1:2 of width to length had already been set by Constitutional amendment C. It may only be hung horizontally, since the law does not provide for vertical hanging of the flag, which would thus place the coat-of-arms in a heraldically incorrect position. According to the Coat-of-Arms, Flag and Anthem of the Republic of Slovenia and the Flag of the Slovenian Nation Act, which was adopted in 1994 after three years of discussion at the National Assembly, we therefore have two flags in Slovenia. The 'flag of the Slovenian nation' and the 'flag of Slovenia'. Both may be used simultaneously. The first represents Slovenians throughout the world, the second represents the state of Slovenia.

When I think about the coat-of-arms of the Duchy of Carniola, in whose extensive area around 95 per cent of Slovenians lived, the coat-of-arms of Slovenia, the flag of the Slovenian nation and the flag of Slovenia, I do ask myself why we do not have an official anthem of the Slovenian nation, 'Naprej zastava Slave' (Forward, Flag of Glory), in addition to the official anthem of Slovenia. It was set to music on 16 May 1860 and was presented publicly for the first time on 22 October the same year, with great enthusiasm and success.



The music was written by composer Davorin Jenko and the words by poet Simon Jenko.

It has a strong melody and carries an invigorating message to the nation. At the moment, it is only used as the anthem of the Slovenian armed forces. At celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the anthem held at the house in which the composer was born, I proposed that it be officially used as the anthem of the Slovenian nation. The melody of the anthem of Slovenia, the national anthem, was written by composer Stanko Premrl, after a poem by France Prešeren, 'Zdravica – Zdravljica' ('A Toast'). On 27 September 1989, this anthem was defined as the anthem of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia in Constitutional amendment XII passed by all three chambers of the Assembly. The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia from December 1991 also states that the anthem of Slovenia is 'Zdravljica'. The 1994 act referred to above states that when the anthem is sung, with instruments or unaccompanied, only the words of the seventh stanza of Prešeren's poem ('Žive naj vsi narodi ...')



should be used. The melody to be used, when only instruments appear, is always that composed by Stanko Premrl when he was 25 years old.

One further thought on the similarity between the flags of Slovenia, Slovakia and the Russian Federation: the similarity merely resides in the white, blue and red and the fact that the horizontal bands are of equal width. In actual fact, if these flags are cut and furnished correctly, they differ quite considerably. The flag of the Russian Federation has no coat-of-arms and a ratio of 2:3; the flag of Slovakia has a coat-of-arms in the centre and a ratio of 2:3 as well. The flag of the Republic of Slovenia has a coat-of-arms to the left, in the upper half of the flag and its ratio is 1:2. As I have mentioned, the flag of the Republic of Slovenia must never be hung vertically, which would mean that the coat-of-arms was lying on its side.

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EARLY SNOW BRINGS A DOSE OF OPTIMISM FOR THE WINTER SEASON

Slovenian slopes offer alluring white pistes

Sanja Prelević Photo ST0

FAVOURABLE WEATHER CONDITIONS here “on the sunny side of the Alps” – as we like to call Slovenia, after an old tourist slogan – have made it possible to start the winter season at the major ski resorts at the beginning of December, some two weeks earlier than last winter. As the first ski resorts started up, the inspectors gave an assurance that Slovenia’s ski resorts are safe and entirely comparable to all European resorts in every standard. In one winter season, Slovenia’s ski centres are visited by up to two million snow recreation enthusiasts. Visitor numbers have been recorded right from the first weekend in December, when major ski centres such as the Maribor Pohorje, Kranjska

Gora and Krvavec opened up. The bigger crowds at the ski resorts are expected starting from 20 December, during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

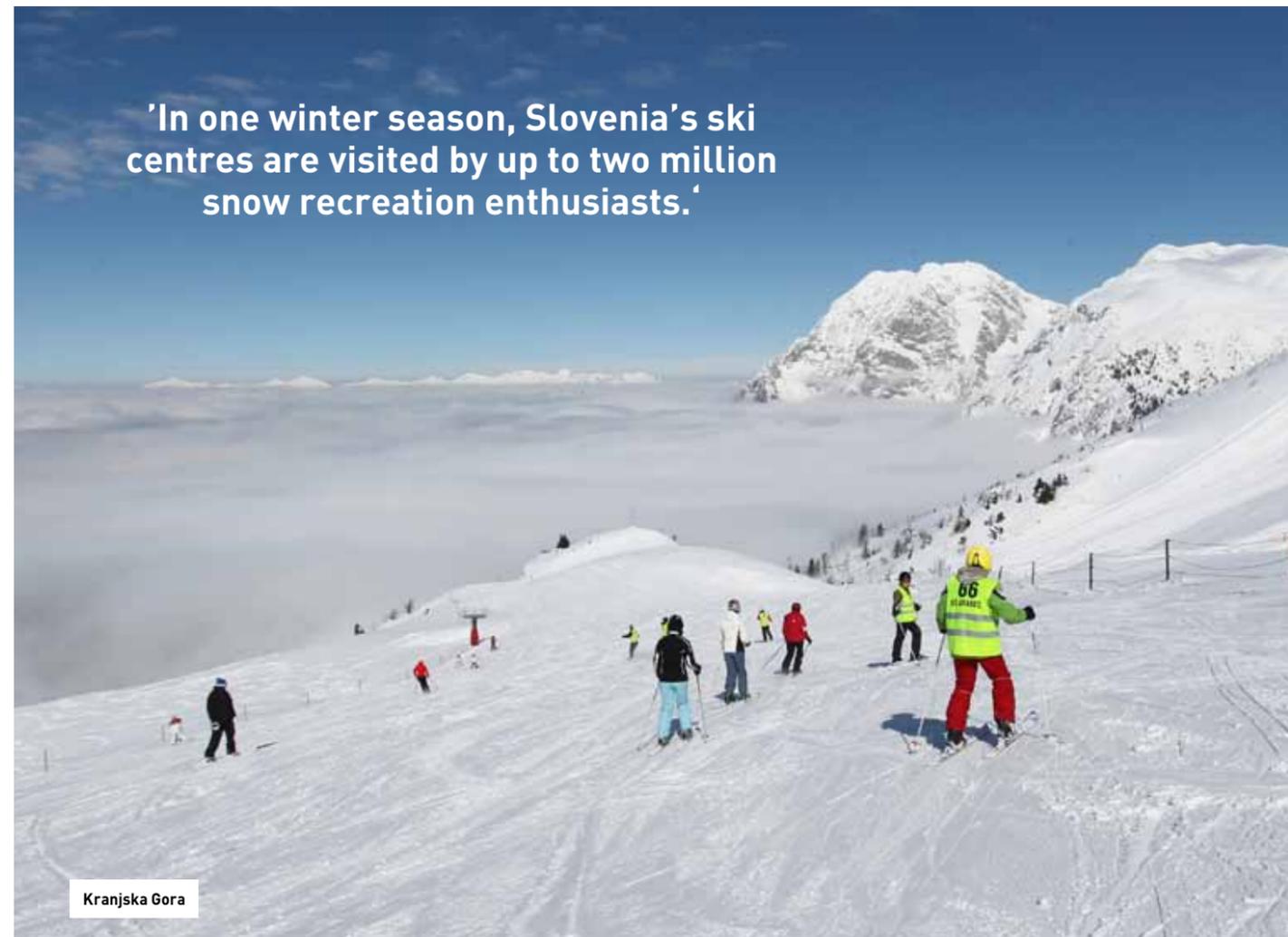
At Krvavec, (1,450 m–1,971 m altitude), the closest ski centre for residents of Ljubljana and Kranj (the resort is just 25 km from the capital, and 17 km from Kranj), the biggest novelty this season is a “ski-cross” park around 600 metres long. Another new feature is night tobogganing, as well as the daily testing of skis from acclaimed world manufacturers. Both Krvavec and Rogla now also offer online pass sales, with passes being sent to your home.

Krvavec offers around 30 kilometres of pistes, and every year up to 220,000

visitors come to enjoy about 150 days of the winter season. This year’s snow and the favourable temperatures for artificial snow-making have made operators extremely happy, since last year the lack of snow at the start of the season forced them to wait until the middle of December. Despite the late start, Krvavec was declared last year to be the “top ski resort” in Slovenia.

A one-day adult ski pass for Krvavec this year costs 29 euros. The Maribor Pohorje, (325 m to 1,327 m altitude), after Krvavec the second biggest ski resort in Slovenia, has acquired a gondola cable car with capacity for eight people, and this can carry up to 2,400 people an hour to the summit, a jump up from

‘In one winter season, Slovenia’s ski centres are visited by up to two million snow recreation enthusiasts.’



the previous 1,000 an hour. This month should see the start up of the new entrance and exit station for the cable car system and a garage for all 64 gondolas. Skiers can reach the top in ten minutes, which is a major enhancement for skiing from the top into the valley and for night skiing. Apart from its fame as the host of the Zlata lisica (Golden Fox) cup, the Maribor Pohorje is famous for another feature: it has the best (closest) access to a ski centre from a city.

Upper Gorenjska

At Kranjska Gora, (810–1,570 m altitude), a fashionable Slovenian ski resort beloved by all – young and old, competitors and day trippers, politicians and celebrities – ticket prices remain the same as last year. New features at Kranjska Gora, which offers 20 km of groomed trails, include the family season ticket, additional snow-making at the Kolovrat cable lift and an additional cable lift for children. This ski centre, the oldest in Slovenia, is

a venue for World Cup competitions. It is no wonder then, that last year Kranjska Gora attracted 182,000 visitors, while over 104 days they notched up 3.5 million cable lift trips. The ski resort of Vogel (1,535 m altitude), which is advertising itself this year with the slogan “Like a fairy-tale”, can justify this slogan, since it lies above the magnificent Lake Bohinj, right in the heart of the unspoilt nature of Triglav National Park. It is famous for its huge quantities of snow. Five or more metres of snow is something quite normal for Vogel. Up on Vogel a magnificent panoramic view opens up towards the Triglav mountain range and all the way to the Kamnik-Savinja Alps and the Karavanke range. The high mountain environment and extraordinary views of the surroundings lend Vogel a special charm. Yet despite the imposing surroundings, the skiing is not difficult. The season here will kick off with an expanded and improved training area for beginners, and a new section of

the restaurant on the upper station of the cable car.

Their plans for the future depend on the national location plan for Triglav National Park, which should be adopted by the end of 2011, and this should make clear what can and cannot be done in future at Vogel. Ski pass prices at Vogel have remained unchanged for three years: An adult ski pass costs 15 euros, and one for a child costs 12 euros.

Of the main ski centres in Upper Gorenjska we might also mention Kobla (540 m–1,480 m), which is the only ski resort in Slovenia that you can get to by train, from Nova Gorica, or from Ljubljana or Jesenice. They hope to lure more skiers with affordable prices. A ski pass for Kobla runs to 22 euros for adults and 16 for children.

Kanin linked to ski resort on Italian side, Golte gains new hotel

At the Kanin ski centre (it lies in the

'At the Kanin ski centre (it lies in the Julian Alps above the tourist resort town of Bovec and the River Soča), the highest centre in Slovenia and the only one lying over 2000 m above sea level, there are no worries about snow, which sticks around long into the spring.'



Kanin

Julian Alps above the tourist resort town of Bovec and the River Soča), the highest centre in Slovenia and the only one lying over 2000 m above sea level, there are no worries about snow, which sticks around long into the spring. The ski season at Kanin runs from December to the Mayday holidays. The main hope of tourism workers is that they will have sufficient fine and stable weather at the ski centre, which is distinguished for its sunny aspect and dry snow. New developments include a modified menu featuring traditional Bovec dishes, plus an amusement park, and children's activities will also once again be provided at the centre.

At the beginning of the year links were established with the ski resort of Sella Nevea on the Italian side of Kanin, and a single pass is valid for both resorts. No doubt many people will be attracted by the five-kilometre descent between Sedlo and the valley at Sella Nevea, with its altitude drop of 1,200 metres. Kanin, which is two hours' drive from

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Ljubljana, is not just popular among Slovenians, but also among skiers from neighbouring Italy and Austria. The ski centre at Golte above Mozirje will start the winter season with an enhanced range of services, based around an entirely new eco-hotel complex. Since last year it has been possible to get to the ski resort by car along the new road via Šmihel. Apart from offering the delights of its snow, in fine weather the ski resort is distinguished by an exceptional

panoramic view of the Savinja Valley, part of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps in which it lies, and the hills of Posavje all the way to the Gorjanci range and Sljeme above Zagreb.

Family outings to Rogla and Cerkno

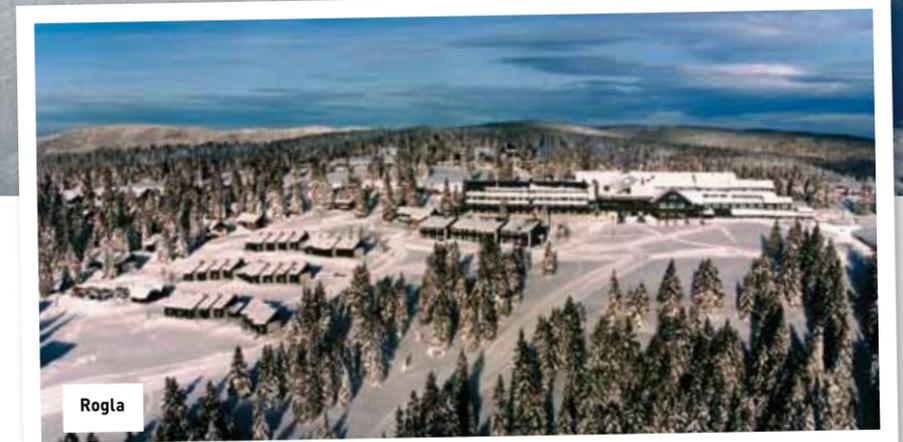
At the Olympic and ski resort of Rogla (1,517 m altitude) on the Zreško Pohorje range, 90 hectares of natural or artificially snow-covered surfaces offer winter delights than can be enjoyed by all the family, as well as by top skiers and boarders, including competitors. Indeed for more than a decade, Rogla has been a venue for FIS and European cup competitions. Before the winter season, which in the words of tourism workers has in recent years been reminiscent once again of the earlier beautiful winters when Rogla would change into a white paradise, they completed construction of an accumulation lake with an artificial snow-making machine. Another new feature is the



Vogel

children's themed ski centre alongside the "Uniorček" drag lift, featuring five theme houses intended for learning and fun. Increasing competition for all the best-known Slovenian ski resorts is being created by the resort of Črni vrh nad Cerknim (1,290 m altitude). Cerkno Ski Centre is a hypermodern family ski resort that in recent years has acquired the status of a Slovenian Kronplatz. The ski centre has outstanding infrastructure, state-of-the-art chair lifts and ample capacity for these lifts, which are no doubt good reasons for visiting the little giant, which is also famed for being visited by large numbers of guests from the Croatian part of Istria. This ski centre, which has some of the most modern facilities in Slovenia, has no particular novelties this year. The snow park has been expanded, and they are now offering attractive family season tickets.

Slovenia's ski resorts, which have big plans for further development,



Rogla

Winter resorts launch early skiing season

Slovenia has dozens of arranged ski areas with cable lift facilities. The best-known ski resorts are at Kranjska Gora, which also host World Cup competitions, and the Maribor Pohorje, which is the annual venue for the Zlata Lisica women's Alpine skiing competition. Favourite destinations for Alpine skiers also include Krvavec, not far from Ljubljana, Rogla on the Zreško Pohorje and Golte above Mozirje. Cerkno Ski Centre is the most modern family ski resort in Slovenia. The bigger ski centres also offer areas for ski touring, tobogganing, boarding and cross-country skiing.

have not entered the new ski season with any particularly novel features, but neither have they put up their ticket prices. For the most part they remain the same as last year. The rules, set in national legislation, also remain the same: children under the age of 14 years must wear helmets. At the same

time experts point out that adults and parents who also wear ski helmets are a good example to young skiers. And one more thing: in Slovenia we only ski on marked and groomed pistes, and your speed should be adjusted to the conditions and the crowds on the slopes. Have fun!

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Rateče
Photo Darinka Mladenovič