

# Sinfo 01

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The latest from Slovenia

## 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovenia's international recognition: a binding gift



- INTERVIEW: **Danilo Türk** • ART & CULTURE: **Opening of European Capital of Culture**
- OUR EXCELLENCE: **Niko Kralj** • SPORTS: **The best world champions**
- PEOPLE: **Mitja Okorn** • SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS: **Gostilna Slovenija is a trademark**

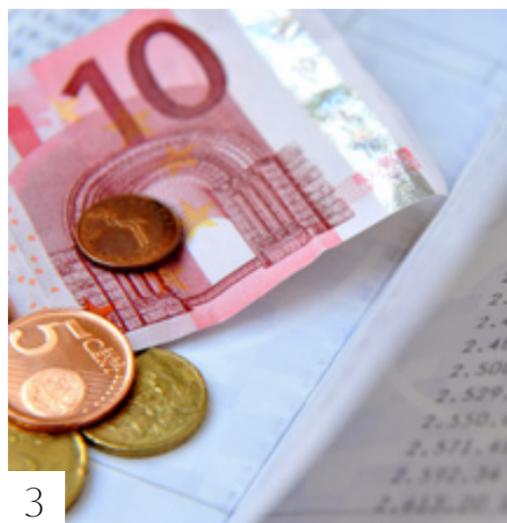
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# editorial



Vesna Žarkovič, Editor

### Let us embark on a journey

A journey through time, on a stage between heaven and earth, from Babylon to Gravity Zero, from Baptism at the Savica to Baptism under Triglav, to Vzarje Vidove with General Maister, and all the way to Northern Lights, which inspired the city of Maribor. In mid-January, Maribor officially became the European Capital of Culture, and the city will be transformed into a setting for shows and exhibitions throughout the year. This is the largest cultural project in the history of independent Slovenia. Thus, the city of Maribor is expanding Slovenian culture and freedom of thought, establishing dialogue with Europe and the world.

Twenty years ago, Slovenia was awarded a certificate with honours by the international community for its maturity and multi-level performance on the global scene. The international recognitions which poured into Slovenia twenty years ago were a decisive historical breakthrough; nations cannot achieve more than sovereignty and statehood. On this occasion, we discuss memories of Slovenia's path to independence and the alternatives in the years ahead with the President of the Republic, Dr Danilo Türk.

With the introduction of its own currency, Slovenia also gained monetary independence, a prerequisite for establishing the young country in the world. The tolar was one of the most important factors in Slovenian statehood. As a reliable and sound currency, it was replaced by the euro on 1 January 2007. Slovenia was the first of the ten countries which joined the EU in 2004 to introduce the euro.

On 8 January, Matevž Lenarčič began his flight around the world, named GreenLight WorldFlight. He set out on his journey in an ultra-light Virus SW 914 aircraft, built by the company Pipistrel. In three months, he will have flown over 60 countries on seven continents. On his 100,000-kilometre journey, he plans to fly over Antarctica and Mount Everest, cross the Equator six times, take photos of the Earth's surface and perform various kinds of research. The Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia, which represents the Government in promoting the country abroad, was in no doubt about supporting the project – the answer was an immediate and absolute YES. From the outset, we recognised in this project a story which symbolises in every way the uniqueness of Slovenia and its people, a story with which it is possible to convey to the international public all that we have always wanted them to know about the country – that we have expert individuals who are able, with a premium product developed with the greatest expertise in the same country – which the Pipistrel aircraft undoubtedly and demonstrably is – on its 20th anniversary and coming of age, to carry into the world the story of a small, but daring country, which is oriented towards development, high technology, and green – including all that this colour has recently come to symbolise. Slovenia integrated green into its 'I feel Slovenia' trademark some time ago. Therefore, we are proud to participate in this project and be part of the above-mentioned remarkable story, which will undoubtedly receive a good deal of attention in the media at home and abroad.

So let us embark on the journey together.



Darijan Košir

# 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovenia's international recognition: a binding gift

In Slovenia's memory and historical books, exactly 20 years ago, the month of January will remain one of the most important months ever. Namely, on 15 January 1992, the newly formed state of Slovenia was recognised by the European Community, today's European Union (EU), which meant that the declaration of the state's independence of 25 June 1991 was also more or less verified according to international law. Soon after, recognition by international superpowers followed (first by USA and Russia, followed by China and others), enabling Slovenia to become a member of the United Nations (UN) on 22 May 1992 as the 178th successive country. Therefore, the recognition of Slovenia by the EU in January 20 years ago was crucial for Slovenia to be able to act as a member of the international community today.

In that period, we used to say that in 1991 and 1992, Slovenia used the only realistic historical opportunity to obtain international recognition or for the international community to acknowledge the breakup of a country like the former Yugoslavia (SFRY); let us not forget that the breakup of Yugoslavia took place simultaneously with the breakup of a considerably larger and more influential emporium we used to call the Soviet Union. In jest, we could say that at the time, the hunt for independence was entirely open, which was an attenuating circumstance for Slovenia. Let us not forget that international recognition could still be obtained later – though it was slightly more difficult – by newly formed states, not only on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and even Kosovo, while Croatia was recognised at the same time as Slovenia, and Serbia “inherited” recognition as an independent state from Yugoslavia, although without part of its former territory), but also by other groups of states (the Czech Republic and Slovakia after the peaceful breakup of the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic). But, although in 1991 and 1992 the “external windows” for Slovenia's independence and international recognition were widely open, this does not change the fact that while our country was gaining its independence, it made exactly the right moves in

a way that was acceptable for everyone, enabling the decision of the international community about recognition of Slovenia to be neither questionable nor controversial, but to be accepted with a rather wide consensus.

The only thing the international community could reproach Slovenia with was that after the referendum was carried out and its results were announced in December 1990, according to which ninety percent of the Slovenian population declared to be in favour of independence from the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia was in a great hurry to declare its independence in June 1991 while the international situation was not yet ripe for such hurried steps; however, after 25 June that year, after independence was declared and Slovenia was consequently attacked by the Yugoslav army, such dilemmas were done away with. During this time, Slovenia won a short-lasting war with the ill-prepared Yugoslav army, which saved its main weapons for later prevention of Croatian and, particularly, Bosnian independence, which it found far more important; after the victory and under the leadership of the first negotiator, the Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek, Slovenia, together with the European Union, negotiated a three-month truce and consequential recognition by the EU, with the ‘Brijuni Agreement’; meanwhile, Slovenia itself negotiated

the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army from our country, and that was carried out by October 1991; in the meantime, we also smoothly introduced our own currency, the Slovenian Tolar; the international situation also changed when the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) gained their independence after the infamously unsuccessful coup d'état attempt in the Soviet Union in August 1991, while in December of the same year, the Soviet Union itself also broke up; and finally, on its way to independence, Slovenia truly carried out numerous negotiations with the international community, within European and global institutions as well as within various commissions, making the final decision on the recognition of our state on already well “consolidated” terrain.

After that, the crucial events in which Germany (or its two leading politicians at the time, the Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher) played a central role in helping Slovenia, unfolded in December 1991, on the sidelines of the Maastricht Summit (where considerably more important issues were being deliberated by EU member state leaders), where Foreign Ministers of the European Union held consultations on how to process the inevitable act, i.e. how to carry out the international recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. Due to various lines of force resulting in recognition still being opposed by a considerable number of European states, Germany (supported by Sweden) decided to act independently: it unilaterally announced the recognition of Slovenia (and Croatia) on 15 January 1992 and called upon other EU Member States to reconsider their positions during this period of less than a month, and to join Germany in this act. So on that crucial day of 15 January 1992, fear that the joint recognition of Slovenia might not come from Brussels still existed – but the fear proved to be unfounded. German's lobbying proved fruitful and on that day, at exactly noon, the message arrived that Slovenia had been recognised by the European Union as a whole. This act was followed by individual recognitions by other EU Member States, which meant that for Slovenia, the tormenting wait to be accepted into the centre of the international community was over; it was clear that the EU recognition will be followed by

other countries' recognitions, which unfolded at a fierce pace until May 1992, when Slovenia hung its flag at the East River in New York to honour its United Nations membership.

From that point on, Slovenia began to build its way into the international community, in which today, 20 years later, it is firmly anchored and is one of its most reliable and firm members. Apart from its membership in the OSCE and the UN, where it has also presided over the Security Council for a year as a non-permanent member, Slovenia has also been a member of the European Union since 1 May 2004 (which it also presided over in the first half of 2008) and NATO, both Euro-Atlantic organisations of utmost importance to us, and has been using European currency (Euro) since the beginning of 2007, while at the turn of 2007/2008 it also became a member of the Schengen area of free movement of persons. Throughout these 20 years, Slovenia has also been the first interlocutor of the international community in discussing the issues of the ‘West Balkans’ and how to integrate other states that were formed on the territory of former Yugoslavia into the European Union. Particularly during the last Government's mandate under the leadership of Prime Minister Borut Pahor, after it closed the last open issue in relations with our neighbours (the border with Croatia), Slovenian diplomacy was able to open its wings and establish partner relations with all existing (USA, Russia, China) and emerging superpowers (India) and anchored its European politics to the ‘Rhine alliance’ (Germany-France).

Its international and diplomatic position is directed in such a way that it enables Slovenia to pursue not only its fundamental political, but also its economic interests. There is almost no part of the world where Slovenia would not be accepted wholeheartedly as an intelligent, reliable and trustworthy partner in dialogue, which – without false modesty – is a legacy that, after only 20 years of independence, is an admirable achievement. This, however, also means great commitments for the future. Slovenian politics, regardless of by whom and how it is shaped, must not allow itself to thoughtlessly waste its so wisely acquired position, but must be sure to further foster, strengthen and upgrade it.

# Crucial turning point in history

Twenty years ago, in January 1992, the DEMOS government achieved diplomatic recognition within a relatively short period of time – after it had restructured essential (internal) political institutions and put its defence capacities to the test.



By 15 January 1992 Slovenia had been recognised by 12 countries (including the Baltic states, Ukraine, Iceland, Sweden, Germany and the Holy See), and by 31 countries in total by the second half of January 1992.

We were especially glad to gain the recognition of the European Union's Member States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and Brazil. The beginning and spring of 1992 saw recognition by Russia (14 February), Ja-

pan (17 March), the United States of America (7 April) and China (27 April). Twenty years ago the international community commended Slovenia on its maturity and ability to operate with versatility in the global arena.

The order in which the recognitions were gained is known, but less is known about the background, personal inclinations and prejudices at play. If we put the efforts made by the independence government, Slovenian diplomats and Slovenians abroad to one side (although these efforts were significant), European conservative and liberal leaders such as Pope John Paul II, Helmut Kohl, Alois Mock and Hans-Dietrich Genscher were instrumental in Slovenia gaining recognition. At first, Europe's socialist leaders were opposed to independence and then the recognition of Slovenia (and Croatia) with arguments that can be summarised in the following three points:

1. The fragmentation and creation of existing and new countries (e.g. on the basis of nationality) is contrary to modern integration tendencies (e.g. European Union).
2. Yugoslavia's dissolution would trigger disintegration processes in other countries, e.g. the Soviet Union, which could result in the irresponsible use of nuclear weapons.
3. Central and Eastern European democratic ('velvet', 'anti-communist', 'spring' etc.) movements represent the negation of the achievements of World War II; therefore, it is no coincidence that they were supported by European conservative parties, Germany ('Fourth Reich') and the Vatican.



Armed with ideological, historical and geographical evidence, we challenged these views throughout 1991. The problem – and the solution – was that European socialism had collapsed by that time. Various national and inter-republic difficulties were characteristic of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, but the general breakdown of communist systems

was crucial. Negativity regarding Slovenia's independence and reservations concerning its recognition were finally and completely exhausted with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991.

When we unravel and explain all these complications and outcomes, the following two fundamental questions emerge:

1. Why did Slovenia only succeed in becoming an internationally recognised state as late as in 1991, and not earlier, for example in 1848, 1867, 1917, or at least in 1945?
  2. How will Slovenia remain a sovereign state and maintain its international reputation in the future?
- It has often been heard or read that, in 1991, Slovenians

had realised their thousand-year, or at least a few hundred-year, dream of national independence and being a sovereign state. Such assumptions turn out to be incorrect when we compare them with empirical facts. Even as late as at the beginning of the twentieth century, our distinguished representatives stated that Slovenians are 'mountain Croats'. At the end of World War I, Slovenians did not discuss independence much, but stated in the May Declaration of 1917, which was not a proposal made by Slovenia but by the Yugoslav Club, that they wished 'to have, together with Croats and Serbs, an independent Yugoslav state within Austria-Hungary'. It is interesting to note that Slovenians referred to Croatian historical law in this proposal. After the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs emerged, but only lasted a few weeks and achieved no international recognition. No different, if not perhaps worse, was the situation for Slovenian independence both during and after World War II. Slovenian leaders, who maybe liked the Independent State of Croatia, were unable to even convince the Germans to occupy the whole of Slovenia instead of sharing it as the spoils of war with the Italians and Hungarians. After the 'liberation' it was considered a





criminal act to even think about an independent state. The majority of Yugoslavia's citizens of Slovenian nationality held great reservations about such ideas, and the few people who were inclined towards them were regarded as weird – even harmful and dangerous. The Yugoslav communist system banished even moderate autonomists such as Stane Kavčič (in 1972). (Not to mention what happened a year earlier to the Croatian nationalists, Tripalo and Savka Dabčević-Kučar.)

In some emigrant circles, particularly in the USA, the Slovenian state was written about, but these writings remained confined within these borders – they were not understood in America and their existence was unknown at home. For Slovenian authors before and after World War II, the notion of a Slovenian nation and a Slovenian state

was 'questionable and problematic'. In 1932 Josip Vidmar wrote *Kulturni problem slovenstva* (The cultural problem of the Slovenian identity); in 1939 Edvard Kardelj published *Razvoj slovenskega narodnega vprašanja* (The development of the Slovenian national question) and, as late as in 1970, Dušan Pirjevec presented similar thoughts in the treatise *Vprašanje naroda* (The nation question). Pirjevec, in fear that Yugoslavia would assume the duties of the Slovenian nation, proposed the separation of nation and state. Somebody else should deal with the state! We Slovenians have not developed and, more importantly, did not propagate the notion of independence, sovereignty and statehood until the 57th issue of *Nova revija* in 1987 or until the second May Declaration in 1989. Before that, we had always relinquished our state-

hood to other nations or strived for it by leaning on other nations or countries or relying on their help. The idea of life in an independent state was a concept that only developed very late in the minds of Slovenians.

This, of course, leads to the question as to what the reasons were for such political restraint.

They probably do not lie solely in some personal human, characteristic or psychological aspect in the Slovenian psychological make up; if this were the case, the reasons for these characteristics should be investigated, as well as the reasons behind the above-mentioned restraint. Historical, geographical, demographic and sociological facts should be provided! We must not forget Prešeren's frank conclusion that 'in these parts, those who give orders speak German; Slovenian is spoken by servants'.

Cankar's angry judgements that Slovenians are 'servants' are also embarrassing.

On one hand, Slovenians were not sufficiently developed and adequately organised for independent life; on the other, their territory was either claimed or seized by large and small neighbouring (dominant, colonial) nations alike. The creation of an independent Slovenian state was prevented by pressures and threats emanating from European multinational and supranational centres, such as Vienna, Belgrade, Hitler's Berlin, Mussolini's Rome, Stalin's Moscow, and even (if only for a short time) from Brussels. Slovenian independence (and that of some other nations) has been opposed owing to ignorance or conflicting interests, but mostly as a result of a fear of instability and – as was seen – the fear of a domino effect or chain



reaction. The American economists, Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, wrote in *The Size of Nations* that particularly favourable conditions for 'political separatism' occurred at the end of the Cold War and with the expansion of free trade because, in their opinion, small countries cannot prosper in a world of self-sufficient economies.<sup>1</sup>

In the past Slovenia lacked an educated and persuasive elite and this paucity was due to the small number of Slovenians and, as a result, the limited number of political, military and diplomatic experts and talents. Here, a reminder is in order of a political storm that broke in 2003 over the initiative to establish a Slovenian diplomatic academy. After all, domestic intrigues and obstacles had caused Slovenia quite a few problems, even during

its presidency of the European Union in 2008. Even today, vigilant guardians of ideological purity reject proposals related to the expansion of sciences and knowledge that contribute to the identity of the State.<sup>2</sup>

Thus we came to the second question – how can Slovenia ensure it enjoys a reliable international status in the future? Many sensitive – mostly emotional and rash – points exist: from various non-governmental initiatives and petitions regarding the abolition of the army or withdrawal from defence alliances, to the growing Yugo-nostalgia and Balkanisation. The years to come will be difficult because of the international financial crises, but mostly because of a phenomenon first cautiously predicted by sociologists<sup>3</sup> in the 1970s. That is the hedonistic mentality, the main slogan of which is

Enjoy now, pay later!

The majority of European democratic systems are unprepared to deal with future challenges for one simple reason – they are controlled by four- to five-year terms of office. Political representatives are most interested in and worried about short-term plans and are indifferent to a future that extends beyond their term of office. Slovenia might also be affected by this problem in relation to the Arbitration Agreement, which in its title (characteristically!) refers not to the state border but to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Government of the Republic of Croatia.<sup>4</sup>

The international recognitions that fell onto Slovenia's lap twenty years ago represent a crucial turning point in history. There is nothing greater for a nation than becoming an inde-

pendent state and that means that such an achievement must be carefully protected. It can also be protected in the European Union, provided that Slovenia retains sovereignty regardless of future amendments to European treaties. This can only be achieved with the inclusion of all Slovenian productive and intellectual capacities, while the exclusion of half of these capacities (which we witnessed in the former communist regime, and to some extent in some more recent times) would definitely bring us closer to the devaluation or even annihilation of Slovenian independence. We would lose the state that was reluctantly – and in some cases with a guilty conscience – granted to us twenty years ago.

<sup>1</sup> Further details are available in the book Dimitrij Rupel, *Slovenija na svetovnem prizorišču*, Ljubljana 2011, pp. 57–78.

<sup>2</sup> Here, I refer to the insurmountable problems encountered at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology in the curriculum proposals made by the European Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Government and European Studies. The proposals were for international and Slovenian studies or 'Slovenology'.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> The official title of the unrealised agreement 'Drnovšek-Račan' of 2001 is the Treaty between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia on the Common State Border. As is generally known, the Arbitration Agreement expressly distinguishes between state border and 'contact' (of Slovenia with the open sea), which, by all appearances, can be explained as an easement.



# Danilo Türk:

## a clear determination of priorities and standpoints

During these uncertain times, when the way forward is unclear and, according to the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, the emergence of viable alternatives is slow and gradual, we must set our priorities with greater sensitivity and a better feeling for further development. The new government will have to deal with new expectations.

**Mr President, what are your hopes for the future?**

There are no clear long-term alternatives – their emergence is slow and gradual. However, certain short-term tasks that need to be carried out by Slovenia are very clear. We first need to balance our budget and bring public spending into line with what we produce. I do not want to say that deep and severe cuts to public spending are necessary; however, the setting of priorities will require greater sensitivity and a better feeling for future development. This is a task that can no longer be delayed. We are currently in the midst of discussions on the establishment of the new Government of the Republic of Slovenia, and tasks such as these will be prioritised.

**How will social relations be regulated in future and what is your vision of the economic and social structure of our country?**

Our macro-economic position is quite positive. Nevertheless, we must reduce the budget deficit and put a stop to the growth of the national debt. These are high priorities. From a strategic point of view, we must open up new perspectives for the productive employment of young people and put more efforts into taking care of elderly people. All the reforms that we discuss, including the reforms of the labour market and pension schemes, are associated with these two strategic orientations.

**This also involves our actions on the international stage. How will Slovenia ensure its statehood and international reputation is maintained going forward?**

When taking the state as a whole into consideration, it must be made clear that foreign policy and the external posi-

tions adopted by the country comprise only one aspect of the state system. What is important is what we do at home. Domestic success will make success on the international stage possible. Certain relevant issues are closely intertwined. The settlement of relations with Croatia has played an important role in our economic development and the stability of our position on the international stage. This involves a national, political and economic dimension on the one hand, and an international aspect on the other. Regarding our initiatives within the European Union and in the wider international environment, it is my desire to see Slovenia define its priorities and profiles more clearly with its own standpoints. So far, much has been heard of the French-German train and of the care that must be taken to ensure that Slovenia remains at the heart of the European Union in the future. This is clearly positive, but will not be sufficient on its own. During this time, we will need to develop our own viewpoints and ensure that we reach a reasoned and considered position.

**An urgent problem is the situation faced by young people and the high level of youth unemployment. Are there any solutions in this regard?**

We are just starting to resolve this problem. The problems faced by the young generation are not just gaining importance now. They have long been present, but we have not yet been able to deal with them. Previous attempts to address the issue have been unsuccessful. I would like to remind you of the efforts made to reform student work, mini jobs and the like. However, the problem has persisted. In our future endeavours to reform the labour market and

the education system, particularly higher education, we will need to find solutions that contribute to better employment opportunities and an increase in youth employment. At this point, I would like to draw special attention to structural unemployment. Unemployment in Slovenia is rather high, particularly amongst young people, but we also have job vacancies that we are unable to fill. This raises the question of how we are going to eliminate such structural unemployment.

**Is there an international agreement in place concerning the establishment of a wider international framework to tackle key future issues effectively and, if so, what is the UN's role in this?**

There has been no such agreement as yet. Countries hold their own positions. The UN is also adjusting to the change in circumstances by considering the will of its members. There were some new developments, an example of which was Millennium Development Goals – a project in which I participated. In the 90s, the UN held a series of conferences that dealt with the various views held on development problems. It began in Rio de Janeiro with a conference on the environment; there were conferences about settlements, women's issues and other social topics, amongst others. In a way, this was a presentation of the development tasks of the time, which were then summarised in a special document – the Millennium Declaration. Some countries, such as China, took this document very seriously, using it as their framework for development, and achieved miracles as a result. Other countries were not so successful. Africa is gradually bridging the gap between it and the more suc-

cessful regions. This is a mobilisation moment that stemmed from such activities. The UN took an important role in the development scene of the last decade. This new development is far from insubstantial; however, it is too modest if we take the need for changes to be made into account. At the institutional level, we have been unable to achieve such innovation. In dealing with climate change issues, the business world should take a more prominent role, while countries – particularly the largest – should assume the more onerous obligations. Unfortunately, this is not happening and time is running out. We can only hope that the recent Durban agreement on accepting new obligations by 2015 will stay in force.

**Twenty years ago, the international community commended Slovenia on its maturity and capability for its ability to carry out comprehensive operations on the international stage. However, the question arises as to why Slovenia only managed to attain internationally accepted statehood in 1991 and not earlier. It could be perceived that Slovenians only developed the concept of independent statehood very late in the day.**

It once held true that Slovenians were behind as a nation. This was understandable, as the occurrence of the conditions necessary for the formation of a country took a long time to develop and much time had passed when they finally started to materialise. The establishment of a country requires the formation of an appropriate territory, the existence of a sufficiently developed political community, the presence of a strong will for the establishment of the country, and appropriate international circumstances. All these conditions finally “came together” in 1991. They had not existed at any other time in our history. The state territory became rounded after 1945 when Slovenia gained the political status of a republic. This took place within the Yugoslav Federation, but in such a way that the establishment of a politi-



cal community was possible in the entire state territory of the presently sovereign Slovenia. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, Slovenia had enough of its own political structure and possessed a sufficiently strong political consciousness to establish its own country. This was possible under the conditions at the end of the Cold War, when three socialist federations broke up: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and, somewhat later, Czechoslovakia.

**In their book 'The Size of Nations', the American economists, Alberto Alesina and Enrico Spolaore, put forward the view that the end of the Cold**

**War and the development of the free market coincided with an explosion of 'political separatism', since, in their opinion, small countries cannot prosper in a world with self-sufficient economies. Would you agree with this statement?**

No, I do not agree with this statement. The basic condition for the formation of sovereign European countries at the end of the twentieth century was the break-up of three socialist federations: Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The federal units were transformed into sovereign countries. The self-determination of nations was thus given new historical impetus and further

confirmation. As for self-sufficient economies, it should be noted that they had not existed before and that no country was completely autarkic. The break-up of Yugoslavia was primarily a result of its strong dependency on international economic relationships and, particularly, its levels of debt. The final throes of the Soviet Union were marked by high oil prices and the economic stagnation that it 'financed' using high oil revenues. The break-up came later, associated with problems that occurred as a result of the falling price of oil. Thus, in my opinion, the thesis put forward regarding self-sufficient economies has no real grounds.

**The international recognitions granted to Slovenia twenty years ago were certainly a major historical break from the past. Independent statehood is the greatest achievement of a country, which means that it should be securely protected. It is also protected in the European Union. Is Slovenia going to retain its sovereignty with no regard for future amendments to the European contract? A question that automatically arises is whether it is possible to lose our country.**

Immediately after the Cold War, some two-dozen new countries were recognised. I do not believe that losing our country, as you put it, is something

that could happen. However, we must be aware that a country is something that requires careful and, in particular, responsible handling, whether domestically or in international relationships. In Slovenia, it is entirely clear that we must empower the institutions of our legal system, enhance the responsibility of political parties and ensure better social dialogue. All these instruments involve the more responsible treatment of the country as our joint mechanism. At the international level, however, we must continue to develop foreign policy that is sufficiently realistic and provides for good relations with our neighbours, while also being sufficiently ambitious. We

must provide Slovenia with an appropriate role in the European Union and in other multilateral institutions.

**It is a fact that a country can gain full inclusion into international relations only on the basis of international recognition. Every newly established country strives for the recognition of the UN Security Council's permanent member states, neighbouring countries, countries with economic power and countries with political strength. How do you recall Slovenia's recognition by the Security Council's member states?**

The recognition process was quite lengthy. Let me remind you



that, after Slovenia became independent, the European Community set up a special conference on peace in Yugoslavia, which was presided over by Lord Carrington. Within the framework of this conference, a plan was formulated that would enable a certain connection between the former Yugoslav republics. On 25 October 1991, Slobodan Milošević firmly rejected this plan. The result was that those who strove for the preservation of Yugoslavia gradually took over the position of recognising the former Yugoslavia's successor states. The opinion of the Badinter Arbitration Committee that Yugoslavia was breaking apart and that its successor countries assert themselves as sovereign countries was crucial in this part of the process. As the author of the Slovenian Memorandum on the Break-up of Yugoslavia and Recognition of Slovenia, I was heartened to see that the Badinter Arbitration Committee had adopted such a favourable position on our arguments. This happened in the arbitration opinion at the end of November 1991, which was followed in December by the political conclusions on recognition, and in the first months of 1992, the acts themselves – namely recognition acts. In this context, I clearly recall the significance of Germany and our neighbouring countries, particularly Austria, which were quick to recognise Slovenia's sovereignty.

**Is it possible that our development model, which was characterised by efforts made for inclusion in Euro-Atlantic structures, has already had its day?**

Inclusion in Euro-Atlantic structures is only one aspect of our development model. This dimension has not run its course, since these connections provide Slovenia with opportunities to realise a significant part of its national identity and receive strong assurances for its existence and success on the international stage. However, what has run its course is our development model, in the narrowest sense of the word, particularly with regard to how the country decides on allocating its funds for investment and further material growth. In the past, we channelled significant funding into the development of the motorway network, other infrastructural projects, and construction in general. Today, this part of our development is no longer relevant. We have also encountered difficulties in setting priorities regarding the future allocation of resources, in determining key projects and development strategies, and in providing for the citing of projects in the space. In these respects, certain changes are necessary. It could be said that our development model has run its course with regard to certain basic aspects of the allocation of funds, and thus requires a thorough overhaul.



## NEW CRISIS ESCALATION

### Opportunities for new development models and green technologies

According to Dr Janez Prašnikar from the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana, only a few economies have experienced a crisis as severe as that in Slovenia. On average, the cash flow of Slovenian companies has fallen by twenty to thirty per cent. Difficulties in financing and obtaining new loans have not helped the situation; however, those export-oriented companies that are not heavily in debt and can afford to invest in development and explore new development models are somewhat better off. Alenka Avberšek from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia says that thriving companies have introduced green technologies, and points to the young entrepre-

neurs who have succeeded on the global market. The situation is more difficult for some labour-intensive sectors, particularly the construction industry, which has endured an almost twenty-year low; more than 25 000 workers have been left without work and another 20 000 jobs are said to be at risk. Many large construction companies have gone bankrupt, while some of the companies that have survived are now offering new and integrated solutions on foreign markets. The forecasts made by the Slovenian business sector for 2012 vary considerably depending on the sector and the development ambitions of the companies concerned.



Dr Janez Prašnikar

## UNEMPLOYMENT

### An increase in the number of job-seekers

According to the National Employment Service, there were 112 754 unemployed persons registered in Slovenia at the end of last year. The number of first-time job-seekers younger than 24 years of age as a percentage of the total unemployed slightly declined, as did the percentage of women and those aged 50 and over. The share of un-

employed in the 25-39 and 40-49 age groups has continued to increase. A rise has also been recorded in the proportion of long-term unemployed and those with lower levels of education. According to some forecasts, a new crisis might prompt a rise in the number of registered unemployed in Slovenia to 130 000 or even higher.



## PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR

### Delo Personality of the Year Award

Every year, the daily newspaper Delo selects Delo's Personality of the Year with the help of its readers; this year, this flattering title was won by Ivo Boscarol, the CEO of Pipistrel, who has won the NASA award for aircraft of the future for the third time. The Pipistrel team earned the prize for creating the Taurus G4 - the first hybrid four-seat aircraft. NASA's chief technologist, Joe Parrish, said that Pipistrel's electric powered aircraft had made fiction a reality. Marjan Batagelj, chair of the board of Postojnska

jama; Aleksander Dobljhar, MD, a physician who treats persons without health insurance; Goran Klemenčič, Head of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption of the Republic of Slovenia; Alen Kobilica, a former model and owner of a centre for blind athletes; Anže Kopitar, hockey star; Leon Meglič, MD, a gynaecologist; Anka Lipušček Miklavčič, Director of Planika Cooperative Dairy; Zorko Dimčič, Academy Member; and Anže Slosar, an astrophysicist, were also among Delo's Personality of the Year nominees.



## ROBOTICS

### Slovenia lags ten years behind developed countries

The Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia carried out a survey on robotics in Slovenia in 2009 and 2010, which showed a considerable increase in the number of robots. They can be found not only in the automotive industry but also in numerous other industrial activities ranging from food to electro-technical and other industries. Experts assess however that Slovenia lags ten years behind the most developed countries. This gap has not reduced in recent years, despite successful craft and tradesmen introducing robotics to their production

lines. The rise in the number of robots has been slower than in the industrial sector because of their high price. Robotics results in a reduction of the number of workers required. Janez Škrlec, the chair of the science and technology committee, explains that automation and robotics contribute strongly to competitive advantages, increased profits, as well as facilitating unhindered manufacturing production and precision. He says we are beyond the point of no return, but that we should strive to achieve synergy between man and machine.



## BUREAUCRACY

### Business friendliness

Slovenia is placed 37th among the 183 countries ranked by the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) on the ease of doing or starting a business. Slovenia scored best, i.e. 24-28, on investor protection, getting electricity and starting a business. Other indicators scored worst - access to credit was ranked as low as in 98th place. For example, there are thirteen different procedures in-

involved in dealing with construction permits in Slovenia and the average time a company needs to complete them is 199 days per year; there are 32 procedures to be followed in the enforcement insolvency procedures, which take more than 1 200 days to complete; compared to some other countries, the time taken up to the conclusion of bankruptcy proceedings is long and takes two years on average.

## REAL ESTATE

### Total value of EUR 139 billion

According to data from the Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia, there are some six million units of real estate in Slovenia worth €139 billion. Land plots represent 41 per cent or almost 9 per cent of the total real estate value. Houses represent seven per cent or EUR 52 billion, while the total value of flats has been assessed at EUR 32 billion. The first real-estate mass valuation was carried out by the Surveying and Mapping Authority. It provided information about the values of real estate to real estate owners and received a deluge of comments in response, the majority of which were taken into account. A building register is envisaged to provide the basis for a property

tax, but there are serious doubts as to whether this register, set up by the Mapping and Surveying Authority by combining records, can serve as a suitable basis. The information commissioner, Nataša Pirc Musar, is opposed to the public access of detailed data on real estate owners, including their age. On her insistence, the Mapping and Surveying Authority withdrew these data; an administrative dispute challenging this decision is expected. The Mapping and Surveying Authority believes that all these data should be made available to the public saying the public curiosity about who owns what should be satisfied as those who have acquired their real estate fairly have nothing to hide.



## PUBLIC FINANCE

### A serious and credible stabilisation programme is needed

The Slovenian financial, banking and economic experts who met at the Parliamentary Committee on Finance and Monetary Policy stressed the need for a firm budget saving approach. The departing finance minister Križanič said that approximately EUR 400 billion should be saved in 2012. According to the governor of the Bank of Slovenia, Marko Kranjec, this year's savings should be much higher, amounting to between EUR 700 million to EUR 1 billion. The chair of the Fiscal Council, Marjan Senjur, took a different view and assessed that, in the event that Slovenia did not exceed the previous year's spending, i.e.

EUR 9.4 billion, no budget savings would be necessary. Senjur also called for a freeze on fiscal expenditure. Governor Kranjec stressed that the global financial crisis was only partly to blame for Slovenia's difficulties and that the situation in the country also played a part; for that reason, a serious and credible stabilisation programme should be prepared. Kranjec said that, according to available data, only one third of companies were able to repay their loans. Kranjec further held that approximately EUR 4 billion euros for recapitalisation were required for the companies to become trustworthy borrowers.

# Twenty years of national currency

On 8 October 1991, Slovenia introduced its own currency and set out on a path of monetary independence. The tolar, its official legal tender at the time, was one of the most important attributes of the Slovenian State. Monetary independence was a precondition in gaining the young country's international recognition. On 1 January 2007, the tolar, our trustworthy and stable currency, was replaced by the euro. Slovenia was the first of the ten countries to have joined the EU in 2004 to adopt the euro.



## A START WITH PROVISIONAL PAYMENT NOTES

Pending the issue of the tolar banknotes and coins, the provisional payment notes issued by the Republic of Slovenia were used as legal tender with a view to preventing a potential intrusion into the monetary system. The conversion from Yugoslav dinars to provisional payment notes commenced in every financial institution throughout the country on 9 October 1991 and was concluded three days later; the former dinar was replaced by provisional payment notes at a rate of 1:1.

## THE TOLAR AS THE FIRST CURRENCY UNIT OF INDEPENDENT SLOVENIA

The country's monetary independence was established upon the expiry of a three-month moratorium on the implementation of the independence-related decisions agreed upon in the Brioni Agreement; the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Monetary Unit of the Republic of Slovenia Act, which introduced Slovenia's own currency, and the Use of the Monetary Unit of the Republic of Slovenia Act, which stated that the tolar was

to be the only legal tender in Slovenia. The name tolar was chosen from among competitive alternatives including klas, krona, karant, lipa, etc., and was brought into the world soon after midnight on 8 October 1991. It was subdivided into 100 cents. The circumstances in which the tolar was born were far from favourable. In addition to political instability, the former Yugoslav state experienced high rates of inflation and general public mistrust – a foreign currency, namely the Deutsche Mark, was the actual store of value. The initial exchange rate was set at 32 tolar for every

Deutsche Mark. The main reasons for the final decision to adopt a floating exchange rate were the insufficient foreign exchange reserves in the Slovenian banking system, the borrowing capacity on the foreign financial markets and a broader social consensus. In several crises that affected some transition countries during the 1990s, this decision was proven to be correct. On 30 September 1992, the Bank of Slovenia put the first tolar banknotes in denominations of 100, 500 and 1 000 tolar into circulation. They were followed by banknotes in other denominations. The largest banknote (10 000 tolar) was dedicated to the author Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), the 5 000-tolar banknote to painter Ivana Kobilca (1861–1926) and the 1 000-tolar banknote featured a portrait of France Prešeren (1800–49), the greatest Slovene poet. The 500-tolar banknote was dedicated to the architect Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), the 200-tolar banknote to the composer Jacobus Gallus (1550–91), and the 100-tolar banknote to the painter Rihard Jakopič (1869–1943). Then came the mathematician Jurij Vega (1754–1802) on the 50-tolar banknote, on the 20-tolar banknote the chronicler Janez Valjvard Valvasor (1641–93) and finally on the 10-tolar banknote the writer of the first book in the Slovene language – the Protestant reformer, Primož Trubar (1508–86).

Slovenian tolar banknotes were designed by Miljenko Licul and featured portraits by the artist, Rudi Španzel. They were printed by a British company, De la Rue. Tolar coins were issued by the Republic of Slovenia in a range of denominations and with a range of motifs. The Bank of Slovenia decided the date the coins would be put into circulation and was responsible for the professional and technical tasks relating to the issuing of the coins. The coins were designed by Miljenko Licul and Zvone Kosovelj, and modelled by the sculptor, Janez Boljka.



### MONEY WAS THE PROJECTION OF THE OUTCOME OF WORK, THE REFLECTION OF NEWLY-CREATED MATERIAL VALUES

The Bank of Slovenia and the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts chose personalities of importance in the history of the Slovene identity. Licul's fundamental idea was that money is the projection of the outcome of work, the reflection of newly-created material values. This was why the personality chosen was always represented as a motif set in the context of the present time, in the actual relationship between creativity and its reward. Each likeness was set in a triangle which included the person who represented an important innovation in a certain sphere, then the field this person worked in, symbolised by certain tools, and the result of the relation between the person and the tool. The triangle person-tool-product

was therefore the basic concept behind the design of the Slovene tolar. The two key ideas – the triangle person-tool-product and an implication of transience, the portrait continuing into a silhouette – were enhanced with colour. The idea of having beautiful and cheerful banknotes for the third millennium was drawn from guilders. The colourful vigour incorporated into the story told by each note was complemented by the tactile features of the paper produced in Radeče. In addition to its pleasant rustle the paper was also very durable. Unlike banknotes that conveyed historical and cultural stories, the coins were characterised by motifs taken from the natural world. The animals depicted were all taken from the ecosystem of this part of the world (e.g. a goldenhorn, swallow, grasshopper, trout and olm).

### THE EURO AS A NATIONAL CURRENCY

The leading role in the adoption of the euro was played by the member state itself. In its accession negotiations and by signing of the Accession Treaty, Slovenia undertook to commit to join the Economic and Monetary Union and introduce the single currency, the euro, subject to meeting the required conditions. The assessment of a country's compliance with the criteria is published every two years (as a rule in October) in a Convergence Report. According to the provisions of the treaty, a member state can ask the European Commission and the European Central Bank to conduct an early assessment of its compliance with the criteria at any time during this two-year period. Slovenia made this move at the beginning of March 2006.

At Slovenia's request, the European Commission and the

European Central Bank provided separate opinions on 16 May 2006, assessing that Slovenia had met the criteria for adopting the euro on 1 January 2007.

The European Council (EU heads of state and government) then adopted a political decision on the euro area enlargement at its meeting on 15 and 16 June 2006 in Brussels; the legal basis for joining the monetary union was approved on 11 July 2006 by the EU Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) composed of the member states' economics and finance ministers. The Bank of Slovenia frontloaded 450 000 euro coin starter kits for the public, 150 000 euro coin starter kits for retailers and 100 000 euro coin collector sets for numismatists and collectors. A total of 296.3 million coins worth €103.9 million with a combined weight of approximately 1 460 tonnes were delivered

to Slovenia through different channels. In all, 94.5 million banknotes worth €2.175 billion with a total weight of 76 tonnes were ordered. The coins, which are owned by the state, were minted by the Mint of Finland, while the euro banknotes were 'borrowed' from the European Central Bank's strategic reserves. From 1 January 2007, Slovenia has been using euro banknotes that share the same design across all countries and they come in seven denominations (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros) and euro coins minted in eight denominations (1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents and 1 and 2 euros), which differ slightly in terms of design from country to country. The coins have a common side and a national side with country-specific motifs. Regardless of the issuing country, all coins can be used as a means of payment anywhere in the euro area.

### EURO BANKNOTES SHARE THE SAME DESIGN ACROSS ALL EURO AREA COUNTRIES

They come in seven denominations: €5, €10, €20, €50, €100, €200 and €500. Each banknote depicts one of the European architectural styles: Classical, Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo, the age of iron and glass and modern twentieth century architecture. The front sides feature windows and gateways symbolising the European spirit of openness and cooperation. The 12 stars of the EU represent the dynamism and harmony of contemporary Europe. The bridges on the back symbolise communication between the peoples of Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. There are currently 16 different or national coins in circulation; they may be used as legal tender anywhere in the euro area. Thirteen EU and euro area member states are responsible for issu-

ing their national euro coins; in addition, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City are also entitled to issue their own euro coins through agreements with the EU. The coins come in eight denominations: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and 1 and 2 euros. Euro area countries may also issue a commemorative 2-euro coin once a year. In March 2007, Slovenia issued 400 000 commemorative 2-euro coins to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. The national side of the coin features the Slovenian text: Rimska pogodba – 50 let, Evropa, Slovenija and 2007; the coin's edge is the same as that of the Slovenian 2-euro coin.

The introduction of the euro brought about many benefits. Trade between member states increased, the euro contributed towards increased operational transparency because FX conversions were no longer needed, consumers were able

to compare prices, the internal market strengthened, inflation was stabilised and interest rates fell. In the first eight years, the euro area enjoyed one of the longest sustained periods of economic growth in the history of European integration. Unfortunately, Europe has recently been grappling with a serious and persistent debt crisis.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Most experts agree that the adoption of the euro was a positive move for Slovenia. They also share the view that the euro should continue despite the current debt crisis in the euro area and some predictions that the monetary union will not survive. A stable euro plays an important role in the economic and political stability of European nations. A stable euro offers Slovenia the prospect of economic development and a promising future.





Werner Burkart, German Ambassador to Slovenia

## The cooperation that covers almost all fields

Last year was without doubt a year of profound change. In North Africa and the Middle East, people began to change their political landscape. Japan was hit by a monstrous tsunami, and the country now has to cope with the devastation of Fukushima. In Europe, we are facing huge financial and economic challenges that will lead to important structural and institutional changes. The European Union needs to move beyond the stage of an economic and monetary union and become a real political union. Exactly ten years ago, the first European countries adopted the euro as a common currency. In Slovenia, the euro was introduced in 2007, less than three years after the country joined the EU. The common currency makes our daily life much easier and strengthens the economies of our countries. However, the economic and financial crises have shown us that Europe will have to grow closer together if it wants to maintain its position as a strong and competitive player in a globalised world. At the last EU Council, on 9 December, the heads of state and government decided to take strong measures in order to strengthen our common currency. The European Union will grow closer together to form a 'Stability Union'. Nearly all of the EU Member States have declared their intentions for better budget control. A stronger European Commission will have more means to intervene if necessary.

As for the German-Slovenian relationship, I believe that the two countries have become close political, economic and cultural partners over the last 20 years. I am a little bit proud that Germany was among the first countries to recognise Slovenia as an independent state in 1991. Our two countries are bound together in the EU, NATO, the OECD and other international organisations. Our cooperation in the Trio Presidency of the European Union in 2007 and 2008 as well as numerous bilateral visits by heads of state and government and other leading politicians have helped to maintain and nourish the relationship – as highlighted last summer by Chancellor Angela Merkel's very successful visit to Ljubljana.

However, our cooperation is much broader and covers almost all fields. Economic relations between our two countries are excellent indeed. I would like to mention that this is first of all a result of the entrepreneurship of German and Slovene business representatives.

The Embassy and the German-Slovene Chamber of Commerce support and promote trade and investment activities in both directions.

Another topic is very important to me: we already enjoy a lively and diverse cultural and academic exchange, which is growing substantially. We have many different exchange programmes for schools, students, young professionals and academics. I would like to mention just a few of these activities, such as the scholarships granted annually by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). These include full university scholarships for excellent high school graduates from Slovenia as well as several scholarships for all kinds of students, for researchers and for summer schools. In 2011, the DAAD provided scholarship support to 27 Slovenians. Another German organisation, the Educational Exchange Service (Pädagogischer Austauschdienst), grants scholarships each year to high school students with very good marks in German language studies.

The Bundestag, Germany's parliament, also offers a scholarship called the 'International Parliaments-Stipendium' (IPS): each year, we select three young Slovenian students to work closely together with a member of the German Bundestag and to study at one of the two major universities in Berlin for five months.

During my time as the German ambassador to Slovenia, I have noticed the high level of German language proficiency in Slovenia. German is the second foreign language in the country and it has come as a positive surprise to me that students learn German not only at school but also through television and other media.

In 2012, I am looking forward to an interesting year in Slovenia and its European Capital of Culture Maribor 2012. Germany and its Goethe-Institut Ljubljana will contribute some activities. The main German project for Maribor 2012 is called 'Zukünftige Sprachen' and will consist of five activities, including exhibitions and workshops.

In conclusion, I would like to say that our relationship and cooperation are excellent. However, being confronted with a difficult financial crisis in Europe, we have to work even harder together and strengthen our ties.



Photo: STA



Mitja Drobnič, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the Federal Republic of Germany

## Europe faces a troubled year

The year of 2011 was special for Slovenia because it marked the twentieth anniversary of its independence. The celebrations organised at home held particular significance for those citizens who were born in the independent state or were still children at the time of its birth. We also celebrated abroad and took advantage of these opportunities to extend our gratitude to those partners who had helped us create our own state. Among them, the Federal Republic of Germany holds a special place, not only because it has been one of our most important partners in international relations, but also because its politicians were actively involved in developments twenty years ago. One of the most eminent was Hans-Dietrich Genscher. For these reasons, the twentieth anniversary celebrations of Slovenian independence formed part of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries last year.

Germany witnessed the crucial events of its recent history two years before Slovenia – first, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, then German reunification. It is difficult to compare historic events, but it would not be an exaggeration to say that the declaration of independence was at least as important for Slovenia as reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall was for Germany.

I would like to make special mention of one of the events organised in Germany to celebrate the anniversary, namely a reception on the occasion of the national holiday, held on 22 June in Berlin, combined with a concert performed by the choir, Perpetuum Jazzile. Eduard Oswald, a vice president of the Bundestag, appeared as guest speaker along with Dr Pavel Gantar, President of the National Assembly, who emphasised in his speech that Slovenia owes a lasting debt of gratitude to Germany for its support in gaining international recognition. In December, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation organised a round table on the implications of the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia on political developments following the break-up of Yugoslavia. Hans-Dietrich Genscher presented his views of that time, bearing in mind the recent signing of Croatia's EU Accession Treaty and the current situation in the Western Balkans.

The visit of Chancellor Angela Merkel in Ljubljana on 30 August was clearly the most important event to have taken place in bilateral relations between the two countries. During the visit, a declaration on enhanced cooperation was signed; the two governments agreed upon the method of cooperation required to address various issues. The declaration has provided a framework for the regular exchange of views and

information and for the coordination of views held at prime ministerial, ministerial and high-level official levels.

This year, we are celebrating another anniversary – twenty years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Slovenia and Germany. This international act marked the beginning of bilateral cooperation between two sovereign and internationally recognised states. This was a very important event which further underlined the undisputed fact that Germany was and continues to be – and this is my own somewhat biased assessment – Slovenia's most important partner in international relations.

In 2010, the Ruhr region was the Cultural Metropolis of Europe; next year, Maribor and other Slovenian cities will hold this title. Germany and Slovenia were linked from a cultural perspective last year in Essen. Slovenia was a guest at and partner in the organisation of the Essen Weeks of Light, which opened on 30 October and will close in mid-January 2012. The light installations in one of this German city's shopping centres represent Slovenian attractions and help engender the Christmas and New Year spirit. I trust that this event will also contribute towards increasing the number of German tourists visiting Slovenia. Latest figures show that visits have increased by ten per cent year-on-year.

The event in Essen was the result of the efforts made by the Embassy in Berlin to develop close cooperation with German Lands. The opening of the Consulate of the Republic of Slovenia in Düsseldorf and the appointment of the Republic of Slovenia's honorary consul, Dr Jan Philipp Reemtsma, in Hamburg also played a part. Dr Reemtsma will join Stefan Messer who has held this position in Frankfurt for several years. In addition, the Slovenian Government has adopted a decision to open a consulate in Dresden and I believe that we will be able to conclude the procedure for its inauguration this year. This consulate will be headed by an honorary consul.

Europe will face a challenging year, particularly with regards to saving the euro, which will also be one of the most important issues in bilateral relations between Slovenia and Germany. The year of 2011 has provided a solid basis for the year upon us and the years to come; some of the results of this cooperation are expected to bear fruit in the future. I would like to take this opportunity to wish SINFO readers a successful and prosperous 2012.

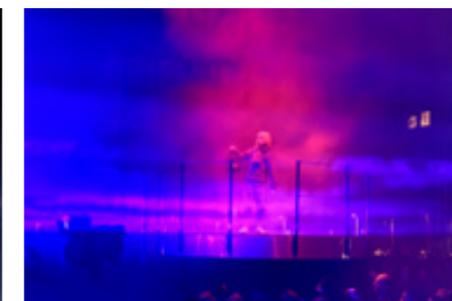
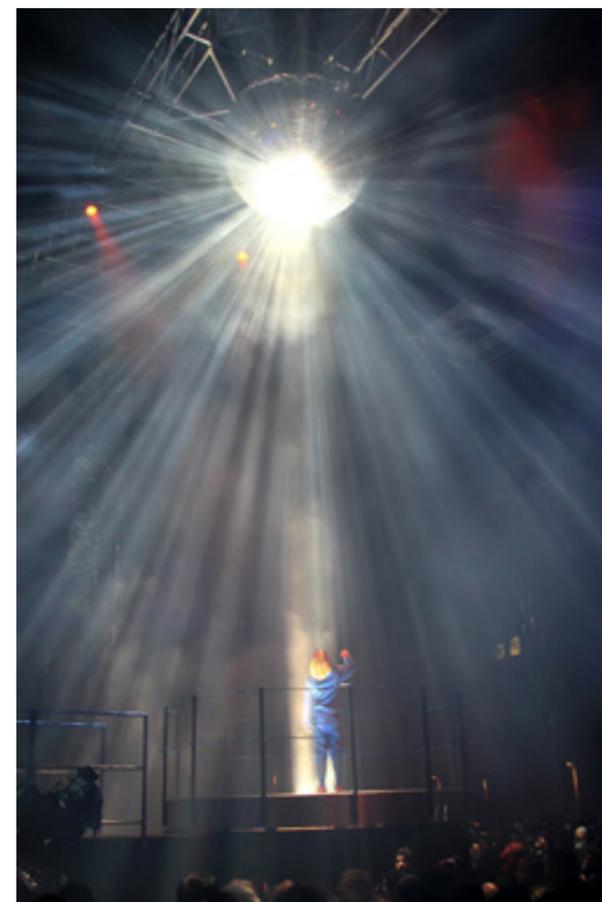


Photo: STA

Jože Osterman, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

# OPENING OF EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

## MARIBOR TAKES ITS SEAT ON THE THRONE OF CULTURE



**Maribor officially became the European Capital of Culture on 14 January. In the coming months, the city will be transformed into one vast stage of diverse performances. This is the largest cultural project to have been undertaken in the history of independent Slovenia.**

Anyone who has been closely following the preparations for the Maribor, European Capital of Culture 2012 project over the last few years has harboured legitimate concerns about what has been going on. The original plan was for the programme to comprise as many as 16 sets – the most out of all the Capitals of Culture – whereby Maribor would deal with anything culturally related; however, the plans were later concluded with a decision to include just four sets. Even more ambitious plans for the city's new cultural infrastructure, including a large new art gallery and a new state-of-the-art stage, not to mention several smaller investments in cultural areas, have stopped for now at a truly magnificent puppet theatre and the renovated medieval Vetrinje Mansion, which is where the puppet theatre is located. But the fate of other construction projects is not yet known. It would seem that both the city and the State are worried about the challenges this project presents. Despite the fact that the young organisational team has got its act together in the last year, it would appear that, on balance, an opportunity has been missed.

However, in the second weekend of January, the official start of

the project has, by and large, acted as a counterbalance to the gloom or even disappointment that might have been felt by the observer. The opening of the cultural embassies of Estonia, Finland and Hungary, which all in a row gave interesting cultural items to the public (e.g. the comics exhibition, the jewellery and textile collections, the excellent dance and music group shows), the representation of the Placebo or Is There One Who Would Not Weep project of one of the most well-known creators in the area of choral singing and multimedia, Karmina Šilec and her Carmina Slovenica choir, and of course also the "dramaturgical" peak of the opening ceremonies. The premiere of Marij Kogoj's opera Black Masks directed by Janez Burger and led by conductor Uroš Lajovic, as well as the solemn opening ceremony itself, in particular, has revitalised the city, the region and the whole of Slovenia, a feeling that has been absent for quite some time here. We could even say that we became aware that Maribor 2012 is a project that can help us regain our self-confidence and pride if we carry it out as planned from the outset.

Now, proof may emerge that the slogan selected by the Maribor organisers for their project "Let's spin together", which was subjected to some silent mockery, could actually be very true. The culture itself, which spilled over the outskirts of the city during the end of the second weekend, has entangled and spun many people in its charming embrace who had previously not paid much heed to

this aspect of life. How else can we explain the smiles etched on the faces of Maribor's teenagers, student couples, elderly people, and Maribor's work-fatigued inhabitants; last but not least, the happiness of well-known cultural faces who, following the solemn opening in Slomšek Square, nodded unanimously as if to say now really something new and great is happening in Maribor. Perhaps our European Capital of Culture will bring us an understanding that will prove to be more important than the majority of what the glamorous capitals in the most developed European countries from France to Germany have brought to our attention – that it is not necessary for culture to appear only in the most beautiful halls, glorious galleries and vast supermodern stadiums, but that anyone touched by culture feels it as a new and astonishing part of his or her being. Will Maribor achieve the European Capital showing its true value and beauty, and its culture as a source of strength from which this beautiful, but on the other hand, also tired and exhausted city has drawn its history? Will a sip of art, to which the inhabitants of Maribor widely opened their city's doors a few days ago, help to make the mental breakthrough this city has eagerly awaited for so long?

The hordes of people who poured into the renovated Slomšek Square onto the large stage, came as quite a surprise for Slovenia. A feeling of unbridled joy consumed the people who, despite the cold January evening, sensed that something great was happening in

Maribor and that joy could not be contained by the Mayor of Maribor, Franc Kangler; the President of the Republic, Dr Danilo Türk; the European Commissioner for Culture, Greece's Androulla Vassiliou; the Slovenian European Commissioner for the Environment, Janez Potočnik; and many representatives from Slovenian political and cultural spheres who might have been, even just a week ago, wary of this project which experienced such difficulties in its conception.

And what about Maribor? It has become a sort of new city which hardly recognises itself in the glow ignited by all this culture. The glow of inscriptions – titles of works of literature by their first cultural worker, the writer Drago Janičar, setting up the lit walls which had marked the former city walls of Maribor and established a new cultural district inside it, the laser and film projections in places not yet touched by the magic of art, the mysterious yard of the Vetrinje Mansion with merrymaking fire dancers from Finland, a giant ball which illuminated Slomšek Square, and thousands for whom culture has left them breathless and charged like electricity, powering the city; all of these are the first, however marvellous, impressions of what it was possible to see in Maribor that night.

**Good luck, Maribor! Let it spin, let it continue!**

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

## NINETY YEARS OF THEATRE



At the national level and perhaps more widely, the Šentjakob Theatre can truly be considered an extraordinary phenomenon. For more than ninety years, it has been hosted by Mestni Dom in Ljubljana, a distinguished building, the construction of which was the result of efforts of industrious townspeople, craftsmen and patriotic intellectuals – early members of the theatrical society. It is the only Slovenian non-professional repertory theatre featuring amateur actors, while the professional team consists of a few people who ensure the effective management of the house and the logistics. Briefly, the Šentjakob Theatre annually prepares a certain number of opening performances with the option of booking season tickets, regularly and successfully tours its shows throughout Slovenia, and functions in a manner typical of any professional theatre company. Anyone who is familiar with the structure of this theatre and the exacting nature of its activity is astonished by the fact that this complex institution has been functioning successfully throughout the past ninety years. Can you imagine the people who first worked their regular job and then made themselves available to the theatre, taking part in rehearsals, shows or guest performances, all of which took an enormous amount of time? Because this is a ‘machine’ that needs to be programmed far in advance, there can be no excuses for any absence. For Šentjakob’s actors and actresses, the theatre is beyond any doubt their biggest and sometimes also the only love.

Established in 1921, i.e. shortly after the First World War, the Šentjakob Theatre was the result of the exceptional patriotism demonstrated by the intellectuals of the time who represented the middle class of Ljubljana. Among the first to become its members was the famous mayor of Ljubljana, Ivan Hribar, who was greatly supported by his successor, the then Mayor Ivan Tavčar. The two mayors, students, civil servants and craftsmen, more or less men of means who were willing, in addition to their time, to give the theatre money, can

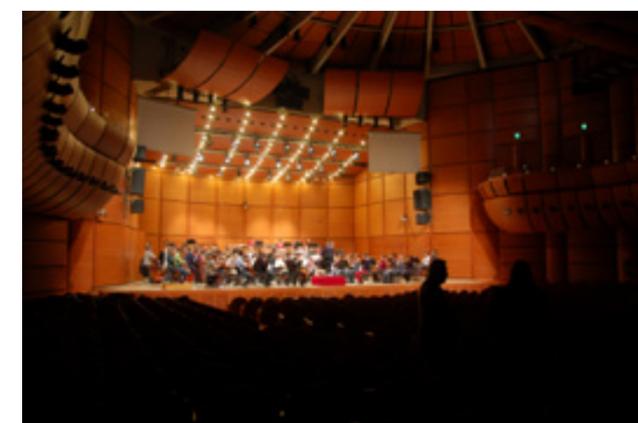
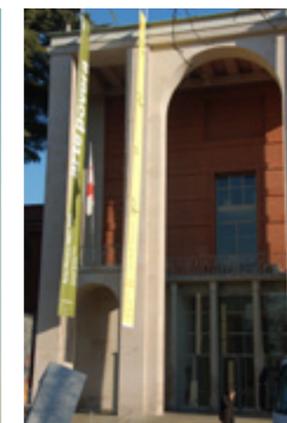
be considered the true predecessors of the present Šentjakob theatre company, the members of which come from similar social classes, some of them as sons and daughters or other close relatives of the former members of the theatre. The Šentjakob Theatre is a theatrical family that has always been a significant source of people dedicated to professional acting. A number of people who later made great careers as actors had, as beginners, been gathering experience on the Šentjakob stage. Moreover, the theatre particularly focused on stage productions including popular Slovenian dramas. Nowadays, the theatre continues to attract many prominent stage managers and to feature talented performers, worthy of attention.

In this context, tribute should be paid to the legends who crossed the threshold of this special theatre: to Vladimir Skrbinšek, Mirko Mahnič, Mile Korun and Fran Žižek. Among today’s members and collaborators there are some prominent actors, such as Gojmir Lešnjak Gojc and Gašper Tič, and stage directors Andrej Rozman Roza, Jaša Jamnik and Jaša Jenull. In relation to five professional theatres – Ljubljana really is a theatrical town! – the Šentjakob Theatre has lost none of its aura.

At various contests and competitions of amateur theatre companies at the national level, it has of course always been awarded highest prizes. In its anniversary season, the theatre staged ‘The Small Dictator’ directed by Tijana Zinajč. The show was based on Chaplin’s ‘The Great Dictator’ and was a big success. The anniversary was also marked by the publication of a splendid and comprehensive monograph on the theatre’s history, whereas new achievements are guaranteed by an attractive repertoire that is already being rehearsed. Among the shows there are also two classical works: Ionesco’s ‘The Bald Soprano’ and an adaptation of Stendhal’s ‘Madame Bovary’.

Jože Osterman, photo: UKOM archive

## SLOVENE DAYS IN ITALY



If the previous issue of Sinfo reported on the great retrospective “Slovene days in Italy” exhibition of Zoran Mušič in Legnano as being the most important art event that took place at that time, the most important activities in February are to be held in Milan and will cover a variety of areas. On 13 February 2012, Slovenia will first present itself and its “I feel Slovenia” brand with a street photo exhibition “I feel green”, comprising 20 large photographs featuring some Slovenian natural sights at Milan’s Vittorio Emanuele promenade. That evening, a Slovenian night will take place in the Principe di Savoia hotel, where a host of Milan’s citizens will enjoy the music of the Sounds of Slovenia group and gastronomic delights. An award for the most interesting article on Slovenia in the Italian media will be presented. The Slovenian prime minister is also expected to appear before the people of Milan. The second day will focus on economic matters and discussions between Slovenian and Italian businessmen as the business forum commences on Slovenia as a destination for foreign investment. In the Chamber of Commerce of Milan, the “Design for the State” exhibition will be opened, presenting the achievements of the late designer, Milenko Licul, in the design of national insignia and currency. In the evening, a large exhibition on modern design in Slovenia, entitled Silent Revolution and

prepared by the Slovenian Museum of Architecture and Design will be opened at La Triennale di Milano. A Pipistrel aeroplane will be put on display in front of the building, and the event will be graced by a performance of the Sounds of Slovenia group. The following day, female designers will meet to discuss issues as Lara Bohinc and Nika Zupanc, proactive young designers who are excelling abroad, will be in attendance.

On the third day, the singers of the Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra’s Slovene Chamber Choir will perform at the LaVerdi Auditorium, and a photo exhibition by Alenka Slavinec on the subject of Lipizzaner horses and their symbolic role for Slovenes will be opened in the hall. The following day, a presentation of Slovene tourism will be staged in a pavilion at the tourist fair in Milan, while the event will continue in June with exhibitions of the work of the designer, Oskar Kogoj, and the architect, Boris Podrecca, as well as with a presentation of Slovenia’s contribution to Central European theatre architecture, where Slovenes have much to show. This holds true for the whole project, as with its design, architecture and other achievements, Slovenia presents itself in a city that has long been regarded as a European capital of aesthetics, fashion and design in general.

Source: STA

## BRINA SVIT WINS MADELEINE ZEPTER PRIZE



The Paris-based Slovenian writer Brina Svit has won the European prize for literature founded by Madeleine Zepter for her latest novel "Une nuit à Reykjavik" (A Night in Reykjavik).

Presented for the 9th year running, Le prix littéraire Européen Madeleine Zepter, along with the prize money of EUR 15,000, is conferred on the author of best novel published in French or translated into this language.

The award was presented to Brina Svit by Madeleine Zepter at Fouquet's, in the presence of the jury and Slovenian Ambassador Veronika Stabej.

Born in Ljubljana, Brina Svit moved to Paris in 1980 after graduating in comparative literature and French language from the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts.

Her first works were translated from Slovenian to French and

published by Gallimard in the collection "Du monde entier", while "Une nuit à Reykjavik" is her fifth novel written in French.

Her latest novel that also came out in Slovenian is "Hvalnica locitvi" (An Eulogy to Break-Up), whose theme is not just a break-up between lovers but also a break-up with the language, home and homeland, friends and daily habits.

Svit won the French Academy's prize for the French language and literature in 2003 for her novel "Moreno", the French literary prize Pellas for "Mort d'une prima donna Slovenne" (Death of a Slovenian Prima Donna) in 2001 and the Maurice Genevoix prize for "Un coeur de trop" (A Heart to Spare) in 2006.

The Madeleine Zepter prize has so far gone to Simonetta Greggio, John Burnside, Ian McEwan, John Banville, Per Petterson, Andres Trapiello, Margaret Mazzantini and Joseph O'Connor.



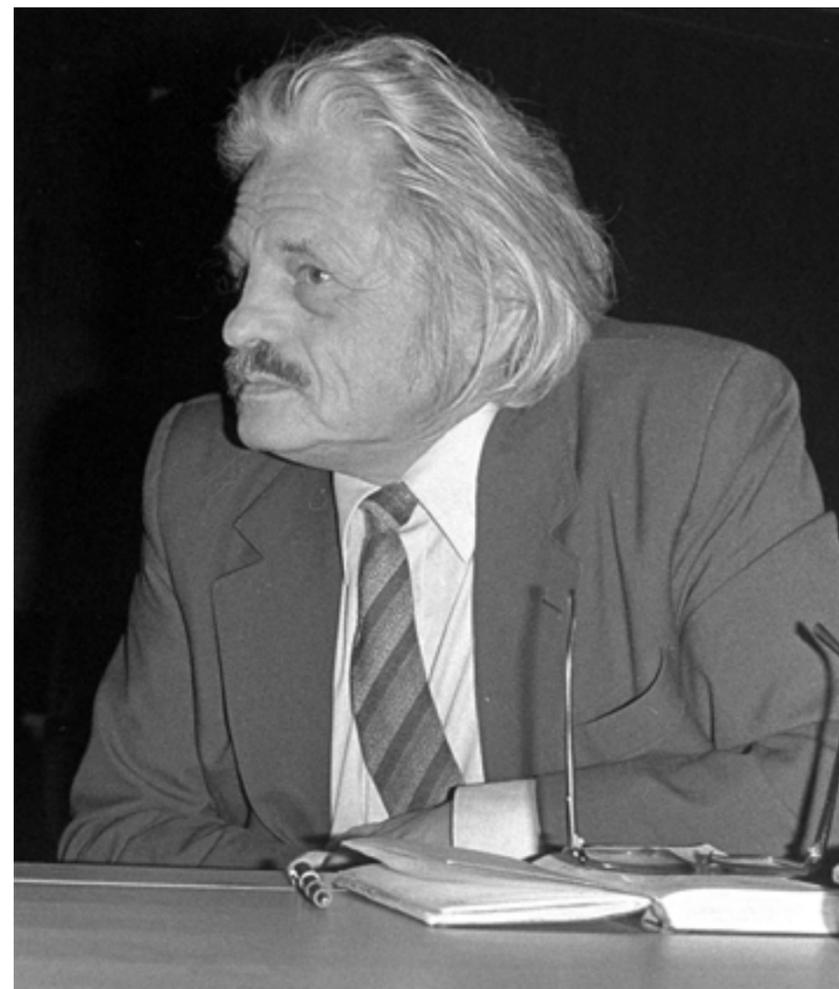
OUR EXCELLENCE



Špela Šubic and Barbara Predan

# Niko Kralj, the unknown famous designer

The exhibition will take place at the Museum of Architecture and Design (MAO) from 4 March 2012, Ljubljana, Pot na Fužine 2



Anthological exhibitions highlighting the lifetime achievements of an individual designer are extremely rare in Slovenia despite the fact that every time we speak about design we are actually speaking about our material culture that we experience on a daily basis and, in many cases, we also identify with. In fact, we speak about the most tangible element of our material culture, which builds our environment and yet, because of its apparent self-evidence, it remains its most ignored aspect. It is for this reason that exhibitions that bring to light the individuals who are responsible for the excellent work that adorns our surroundings and ease our every day life are so precious. And the exhibition of Kralj's achievements aims to draw attention to this particular aspect. Our objective was to highlight the work of a designer whose products were all around us without us knowing who designed them.

Today, when we think of Niko Kralj, we think of his most famous chair – Rex. However, at the same time the fact that Niko Kralj is an extremely creative author and pioneer of Slovenian industrial design is often overlooked. Kralj was born in 1920 at Zavrh pri Trojanah. When looking back over his professional career, it is important to note that his father was a joiner and young Niko spent most of his formative years in a joiner's workshop. After the



Second World War and having played an active role in the national liberation struggle, he decided to study architecture. His professors were Edvard Ravnikar and Edo Mihevc, under whom Niko Kralj also graduated in 1952 in the development of seating furniture. Before defending his diploma and on the recommendation of Prof. Mihevc, he was invited to undergo training at the Stol Kamnik furniture factory, which soon developed into a regular employment relationship. There, Niko Kralj established a department of development and design, the first in the former Yugoslavia, and headed it up until 1960. In 1960, he was invited to become a lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy for a newly established field of study (B). In 1966, he was made head of the Faculty's Institute of Industrial Design where he lectured and was engaged in research and design in the wood industry.

In addition to a carefully chosen collection of his personal works, the exhibition shows, to a greater extent, the result of the research carried out on the Niko Kralj collection housed at the Museum of Architecture and Design. The collection consists of around 60 units of the primary museum material (prototypes and final products) and around 400 units of the secondary museum material (rolls, maps, files, boxes containing plans, sketches, articles, etc.). In researching large quantities of material, a great deal of time has been spent since Niko Kralj kept his professional and personal material in one place. The material has been roughly divided into two large groups that we can also see at the exhibition. They represent two main periods and the aforementioned jobs that Niko Kralj carried out. The first group relates to the Stol Kamnik factory and to the main focus of his work – the chair – while the second group relates to the Institute of Industrial Design at the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana, where he worked until his retirement.

His opus has been divided into a project part and a theoretical part. The latter can be seen in the relationship between the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue. We have established that Niko Kralj was an extremely productive writer on the subject of industrial design. The documents include over forty texts – mostly lectures and speeches – which have never been published. In this context, it is necessary to highlight that Kralj's publishing part needs to be read in conjunction with his practical work. Both parts form the integrity of Kralj's design and at the same time reveal a thus far lesser known aspect of his thought.

The texts help us understand his need for continuous research and the improvement of existing foreign and his own products. While designing, he always had in mind a user to whom he wanted to offer quality designed products at the most attractive price. Furthermore, Niko Kralj was the first professional and industrial designer in Yugoslavia, who already in his first year of activity set his creative mind on designing his most famous chair, the most renowned of his pieces today – the Rex chair. His Lupina chair is also well worth mentioning, as it is a particularly functional and durable piece of furniture and still used in a variety of public settings. As with Kralj's chairs and a number of variations of office furniture,

our memory still keeps the furniture equipment from the seventies. We see it in practically every home. We took the furniture compositions of Savinja, Javor, Dota and others too much for granted to think about the system which was developed for each assembly separately with extreme care.

Obviously, Niko Kralj, with his Rex chair in Slovenia, is one of the few generally recognised designers, but also the 'brains behind many 'anonymous' quality products that we have used or still use on a daily basis without realising who designed them. So here an opportunity presents itself for us to put a name to the product.



Lupina chair, Stol Kamnik, 1955–1959, kept by Museum of Architecture and Design; photo: Domen Pal



Rex armchair, Stol Kamnik, 1953, kept by Museum of Architecture and Design; photo: Domen Pal



Replica of Mosquito chair, Impakta, 2011, private property (the first prototype was made in 1953, but the chair was never mass-produced); photo: Domen Pal

Danaja Kek

# Matevž Lenarčič and his journey around the world



After spending seven years on the solid ground, biologist, pilot and photographer Matevž Lenarčič has once again decided to greet the sky. As part of the project he calls 'GreenLight WorldFlight', he plans to fly solo around the world, this time from East to West. As you read this article, Matevž is probably waving to the world from his small, green ultralight Pipistrel, which is very fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly.

Flying around the world in a small aircraft makes great sense to Matevž Lenarčič: low above the ground and feeling that the planet is rotating beneath the plane, but high enough for the Earth to reveal all its secrets – secrets that he will capture in photographs. Most of the photos will be of water, or the results of its activity. Because of different situations, quality and distribution, almost a third of the human race has limited or even no daily access to healthy sources of drinking water. Matevž is certain that with a little willingness, the right behaviour, sensitivity and solidarity, all of us on this planet can have enough water and food.

The GreenLight WorldFlight presents a series of challenges to both pilot and manufacturer. The aircraft must be able to fly in high temperatures, polar cold and at very high altitudes. In addition, fuel consumption must be very economical, as some legs of the journey are over 4 000 km long, and the amount of fuel on such a small aircraft is very limited. Lenarčič is trying to cover over 90 000 km solo, flying over 60 countries. He will make stops on all seven continents and cross the Equator six times. His route will take him over Everest, Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro and the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans.

In the days prior to taking off, Matjaž was explaining the immense amount of work and effort everyone involved has put in: 'Pipistrel is working hard to complete a unique "Round the World" version of their Virus-SW. Each major modification brings hundreds of small ones, which is extremely time-consuming. But the departure is around the corner and I am a regular visitor in the factory, trying to speed up the impossible. Days are becoming shorter and shorter, and the work is sometimes overwhelming... Sorting out fuel problems, permissions, lack of money, looking for sponsors...'

Despite the immense effort, all will be worth it. The GreenLight WorldFlight project will prove that it is possible to make such a flight differently – with lower fuel consumption and less pollution. In addition, all those involved in the project will be able to show how light aircraft can be used to collect

significant scientific climate data, as the aircraft will be carrying a device developed by the Aerosol company that measures the concentration of atmospheric aerosol (black dust in the air), which has not been done before. The results will contribute to understanding the greenhouse effect. The Jožef Stefan Institute is also involved in the project, studying the effects of extreme temperatures and a hypoxic environment on the body.

Many partners are contributing to the success of the project, mostly volunteers. Because we want the story of small, light and green Slovenia to be heard all around the world, the project is also being supported by the Government Communication Office. Darijan Košir, Director of GCO, said of the project:

*"The Government Communication Office, which I head and which represents the Government in promoting the country abroad, had no doubt about whether to support Matjaž Lenarčič's project GreenLight WorldFlight – the response was an immediate and enthusiastic "Yes!" The decision was not based on whether we should invest money in advertising the national brand on the plane that Matevž Lenarčič plans to fly around the world. Rather from the first moment on, we could see that there is a story in the project that symbolises the exceptionality of Slovenia and its people in all elements, a story through which one can communicate abroad everything about Slovenia we have always wished to: that we have top individuals whose top products, based on top knowledge from the same country (which the Pipistrel aircraft definitely is) who (on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the country's independence) can carry a message to the world about Slovenia as a small, but bold country that is focused on development, advanced technology and green in all the meanings the colour has come to symbolise. Green has long been incorporated into the Slovenian national brand. Therefore, we are very proud that we can participate in the project and that we can be part of this exceptional story, which we believe will attract a lot of attention in in the media at home and abroad.'*

Matevž Lenarčič and his team will keep the public informed of his progress via his blog. The project's website also features photographs and a system that enables live monitoring of the progress of the flight. You can visit their homepage at [www.worldgreenflight.com](http://www.worldgreenflight.com). The SINFO team wishes Matevž a steady and exciting flight and promises to follow his story closely.



Hana Souček Morača, photo: Mitja Okorn's archive

# MITJA OKORN

Creative intellectual and master of eliciting emotion



I was very nervous when I set off for our interview. It is not often one meets someone who has had Christmas every day for the past year. And it happens even less often that this someone is the first Slovenian to make a film in Poland, a film which was to become the fifth most watched film in the last 30 years. In Poland, his feature film, 'Letters to St. Nicholas' (Listy Do M.), was seen by almost two and a half million people, which is a record. In Slovenia, the unique Christmas romantic comedy was also welcomed with standing ovations at the 22nd Liffe international film festival. Among the tens of thousands of viewers of the regular programme, the film in Slovenia always elicits spontaneous and proud applause at the end, when the credits read magnificently on the screen: Directed by Mitja Okorn. In his thirties, our youngest, but most penetrating Slovenian director has difficulties avoiding the deserved superlatives. Drinking tea with him is like waiting with your hands open to feel the first snowflakes fall on you. And you must love Mitja. Sorry, but there is no other way.

#### THE POLES ACCEPTED HIM AS ONE OF THEIR OWN

The public first met Mitja Okorn in 2004 with his low-budget film 'Tu pa tam' (Here And There), which he made

as a teenager. It was shown as a pre-premiere at the Liffe International Film Festival in Ljubljana, and later greeted with enthusiasm at international film festivals in Sunderland, Torun, Bradford, Pecs and Dundee. The feature became the most watched Slovenian film in 2005, for which it received the prestigious Golden Roll award.

Among other things, Mitja attended Berlinale Talent Campus twice, and wrote scripts for and directed more than 30 appealing music videos. He approaches each project in the same way - with the maximum effort. "For me, each project is like losing innocence again. I feel the same fear. I invest the same amount of energy and my whole heart." He does not care about money; he cares about good stories and excellent performances. "When I undertake a project, I think about it every day. I also share it with all people close to me." He shares it to the extent that they ask him to change the subject. They keep asking him, "Don't you even know how to relax?" Mitja responds that film is his great love and he cannot simply switch off. "When you share your work with others, you find out what a project lacks."

In 2007, he was ranked among ten European nominees for the Young Film Entrepreneur of the Year prize awarded by the British Council. Two years later,

the international film journal Screen International placed him among the European directors who look set to achieve international recognition. In the article, noted British producer Sir Duncan Kenworthy compared him to the director of 'Trainspotting', the Scot Danny Boyle, whose film 'Slumdog Millionaire' collected over eighty international film awards.

The self-taught director, who hoped in vain to receive the attention of the guardians of Slovenia's production financing, inspired greater trust abroad. Since at home he had encountered more obstruction than motivation, he moved to Poland. He says he is not split between the two countries. "In Poland, I live as a resident of Poland, and I like to come back to Slovenia as a tourist". In 2007, the Polish television station TVN invited him to direct on the first season of the television series '39 and a Half'. Each Tuesday, the series was watched by around 5 million Poles; so he was asked again in the following year to direct the entire second season, which again saw a record share of viewers. Mitja was also invited to work with a fresh and then still unknown band called Afromental, who became the most popular band in Poland that year because of this series. Mitja also shot two music videos for them. In addition to winning many prizes, one of the videos, 'Rock & Rollin' Love', also

received over 3 million views on Youtube. Since he had proven himself by directing the TV series, TVN entrusted him with a two million euro film, 'Letters to St. Nicholas'. He more than justified their trust.

#### I DO WHAT I LOVE AND I MAKE MONEY AT IT

He is a dictator, a tyrant, according to the people who have worked with him. His impulsiveness originates from perfectionism, he says. He cannot stand mediocrity and incompetence. "I am hard on myself and on the people around me." He tries to get the best out of people, which is why he is surrounded by people like him, who are not satisfied with being average. As he says, he is hard on everything he does. "I do not care whether the people I'm working with dislike me in the short term." When he finally makes a high-quality product and, above all, a successful product, they forget all the difficult moments and simply come to love him.

He has always wanted to be a musician. "When I was six, my father enrolled me in a music school, but the basic Slovenian problem showed itself. Slovenia lacks a sense for finding and stimulating talent." Because his fingers were still too small at the time, they advised him against enrolling. "It does not matter how long your fingers are. What matters is your desire and will, even if you finally have no fingers at all. Where there is a will, there is a way." But Mitja did not give up. Music has been his lifelong companion. As he says, it is his first love. He found an even greater love – film – when he was skating on the streets of Kranj as a teenager and one day decided that the skating stunts should be immortalised. For the first time in his life, he got his hands on a camera and started to film. It was love at first touch. When the material was being edited and he added music, his first love, to the images, he created a perfect 'life combination', as he puts it. "Since then, I have known what I want. I began to live my dreams." That was the moment he realised that everything in life happens for a reason. "If I had not been rejected by the music school, I would probably not be a director today."

Mitja did not want to study at the Slovenian Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television. "The school is too old-fashioned. It was outdated forty years ago." They do not have modern technologies, he says, and underlines that the lecturers at the Slovenian Academy lack the success and experience of the lecturers at Polish film schools. "Slovenia is young and therefore does not have its own film



tradition and culture." As he adds, the biggest problem of the Academy is that it does not teach young film-makers how to raise money for their scripts and films. "At the Academy, our young film-maker gets everything for free. And usually you do not appreciate what you get for free." As he underlines, the recipe for becoming a good film-maker is that one must want to make a film; one must write a good script, and then find money for it. This is how to make a film that is appreciated by its creators, and which will be probably also be good because of the struggle to raise the money.

"I did not know that I would become a director, and that is probably why I had not seen many films," he laughs. "I realised that this is actually a good thing, since I am not burdened with everything that has been made, and instead deal with things I would like to create and also see." Film-makers who have seen a lot of films are often overburdened with thinking that they must make something new and

original. As Mitja says, the result is that they really do make something new and original, but the films are so incomprehensible that they just cannot be watched. "Originality comes by itself. It comes spontaneously. You cannot force it. After all, it is not originality that counts." As he emphasises, the important thing is to put all your energy, heart and love into what you do. "If you invest your heart, the copy will be in one way or the other different from the original and it will actually not be a copy, but a new, sincere vision, full of emotions, of something that has already been made." Therefore, he emphasises, it is not good to be original at all costs. It is better to be sincere and honest to oneself and to work with heart.

#### A LITTLE HERE, A LOT THERE

As the title of his first film prophetically predicted, Mitja's work introduced him as one of the hottest young directors – a little here, in Slovenia, and a lot there, abroad.



He explains that it is possible to succeed outside your home country, but a lot of will, hard work, good ideas, ability to work with people, perseverance and also talent are needed for that to happen.

Finally, art is universal. This is what makes it easier for his profession to cross the borders of the homeland. As he says, the quality of a top film or other art work will meet a response beyond borders as well. He does not classify films as commercial, genre or local, but only as good or bad. "In one way or another, a good film will find its public. When people in Slovenia realise that, then our incomprehensible and unsuccessful original films which fail to find a public in Slovenia and the world can no longer be hidden behind the label of art film." When this happens, he believes, good scripts directed by good directors will be supported. This is the way to make a great film.

Since 2005, Mitja Okorn has been writing the script for his second Slovenian feature film 'Member', based on a

true story, which he will also direct and co-produce. The cast is made up of actors from all over the former Yugoslavia, where the creative and technical team also come from, as well as from Poland.

#### IT IS AN ART TO MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH OR CRY

According to Mitja, everyone in the world is a film critic and director at the same time. "Maybe people do not know how to say what bothers them in a film, but they do react to it. This helps good directors to recognise what works in a film and what should be corrected." Primarily, he makes films for himself. Positive audience reactions are like a drug to him. "Again and again, I feel orgasmic when people laugh and cry while watching my film. There is no better feeling than when your film touches someone emotionally."

He jokes that last year he wrote to Father Christmas asking him to grant his wish to make 'Letters to St. Nicholas' without major problems and to get people

to accept him as one of their own. He also wished for the film to find its public and, above all, make him proud. "This wish came true to a greater extent than I expected. The film became a great hit both in Poland and Slovenia. Obviously, from the next Christmas on, Kevin will not be 'home alone' again, and if he is, he will definitely watch 'Letters to St. Nicholas'. "This year, all I want from Santa is health."

Thanks to his great success, people in Poland are sending him good scripts, but he wants to move on. Where to? He wants good stories to touch as many people as possible all over the world. And the shortest way to achieve this is by making English language films.

I believe he will write to Santa again. Hush. The wish? "Hollywood, obviously," laughs Mitja when we are ending our conversation. It is probably not just a lucky coincidence that almost at the same moment, when day was turning into night, tiny snowflakes began to fall.

Andrej Stare, photo: STA

# THE BEST WORLD CHAMPIONS

The Slovenian Sportspersons of the Year were the Alpine skier, Tina Maze, the white water slalom kayaker, Peter Kauzer, and the award for best team went to the ski jump team, who won bronze at the World Championships in Oslo.



This year, the Slovenian Sports Reporters Association (Društvo slovenskih športnih novinarjev (DŠNS)) selected the Slovenian Sportspersons of the Year for the 44th time. It was a difficult decision as Slovenian sports men and women had achieved numerous excellent results at the World and European Championships, and had also been victorious in the World Cup. In the non-Olympic year of 2011, all the victories were accomplished at World Championship events.

The event took place at Cankar Hall, with the President of Slovenia, Dr Danilo

Türk, and the President of the Slovenian Olympic Committee, Janez Kocjančič, both in attendance.

Besides announcing the best individuals and teams in 2011, two prestigious accolades for life-time achievements in sport were awarded. These two winners, who were entered in the Hall of Fame, are the late three-time Olympic winner, Leon Štukelj, and Miroslav Cerar, who won as many as 30 medals in his sports career, two of which were Olympic gold medals, five World Championship golds and ten European golds. Today, both artistic

gymnasts remain unparalleled in their sports achievements in Slovenia.

#### Voting for best sportswoman 2011:

1. Tina Maze (Alpine skiing): 368 votes
2. Petra Majdič (cross-country skiing): 204 votes
3. Urška Žolnir (judo): 72 votes

#### Voting for best sportsman 2011:

1. Peter Kauzer (whitewater slalom): 287 votes
2. Primož Kozmus (athletics): 186 votes
3. Bojan Tokić (table tennis): 104 votes

**TINA MAZE** became the world champion in giant slalom and earned silver in the Super G at the Garmisch-Partenkirchen World Championships. Following in the footsteps of Mateja Svet (in 1989), she therefore became the second Slovenian woman to earn the title of world champion. In the World Cup, she stepped on to the podium seven times, taking the gold medal twice (Trbiž/Tarvisio – Super G, Lenzerheide – slalom). Tina Maze was overjoyed and provided the following comment on her third title as best Slovenian sportswoman (she previously held the title in 2005 and 2010): "This year I achieved one of my sporting ambitions. To become a world champion is not that simple, as it is achieved by only very few people. I put everything, truly everything, into this project. Many have not had faith in the independent path I have taken, but today every sports fan in Slovenia is convinced I made the right choice. If I remain in good health, my next goal is to win gold at the Olympic Games in Sochi 2014. But there are still two years until then and boldness and prudence will be necessary in order to achieve this new goal. I like to win, but I am aware that victories are not an everyday occurrence. There are few serial winners; however I strive to come out on top as often as possible. The advice I receive from my support team, which includes a psychologist, helps me enormously in my success."

**PETER KAUZER**, the World and European white water slalom competitor showed, through his victory at the World Championships in Bratislava, that he is currently the best sportsman in this Olympic discipline in the world. The 28-year old from Hrastnik has been competing since 1990. He won his first two medals in major competition in 2005, when his team came third at the World Championships in Penrith in the 3 x K1 class and then came second in the same team discipline at the European Championships in Tacen. Two years later, Kauzer repeated his team success at Liptovsky Mikulas in Slovakia. However, the Olympic Games in Beijing were a big disappointment for Kauzer. Despite arriving to China's capital as one of the favourites, he failed to make it through to the final, having got stuck in qualification rounds.

However, as early as in the following year, he was the world's best on two occasions. At the Olympic course in Seu D'Urgell, Spain, he was first crowned slalom world champion, and then also tasted victory in the World Cup at the

end of the season. The way up was pretty much finished, but Kauzer continued in an exceptional champion style. In 2010, he first became the European slalom champion in Cunovo and, at this year's World Championships in Bratislava, won his third "great" gold medal.

After being proclaimed the best sportsman of 2011, he confided to those present that, "London is my great sports goal and I will dedicate the next year of my life to participating at the Olympic Games. It is nice to win European and World Championships, it is nice to be the best at the World Cup, but an Olympic title surpasses everything. I am ready to build upon the success of Andraž Vehovar (who took silver in the white water slalom at the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996) and become Olympic champion. In January I will start preparing for London, and I will go to Australia where training conditions are excellent. The World Cup starts this year in February and I will have to maintain my fitness until August, which is when London will determine the new Olympic winner."

**NATIONAL SKI JUMPING TEAM** won our praise at the World Championships in Oslo where the team, which comprised Robert Kranjec, Peter Prevc, Jurij Tepeš and Jernej Damjan, won bronze in the team competition at the famous Holmenkollbakken ski jump. The competition for team medals was decided relatively early on, as far as gold and silver medals were concerned, and Slovenia expected to rank high. In his last jump, Robert Kranjec flew an exceptional 136 metres and, at the end, Slovenia triumphed

over the German team by 0.7 points. This is an incredibly small difference after eight jumps by each team. This time Slovenia benefited from the unwritten saying that "Good luck accompanies the great!"

Jernej Damjan had the widest smile at the award ceremony, "There was chaos in the landing arena; when I came to our container I heard screaming and singing inside. We were all as happy as children, like boys given a new toy. And we jumped to win a World Championship medal, something that nobody had even dared mention earlier."

"I jumped in Salt Lake City, where we also came third by a fraction of a point over the Germans. Jumps cannot be predicted, especially in team competitions where somebody always makes a mistake. I am satisfied with the season as, among other things, I improved the Slovenian record in jumps – to 232 metres and, in the last competition in Planica, my jump was good enough to take second place. The year of 2012 will offer a new opportunity, mainly ski flying in Vikersund where I will try to increase Slovenia's trove of medals," was added by Robert Kranjec, our best ski jumper of the last few years.

2012 is the year of the London Olympic Games. All sportsmen and women performing in Olympic disciplines will focus their training and energy on the capital of the United Kingdom. Before London, some will undergo demanding tests at World and European championships, but with the sporting spirit and importance the Slovenian nation attributes to sports, it is likely that the medal harvest in 2012 will again be very, very good for Slovenia.





Polona Prešeren, photo: Jezeršek archive

# Gostilna Slovenija is a trademark

In Slovenia, *gostilna* (typical Slovenian restaurant) have always played a special role. They are not only the places where one can experience the local culinary offer, but have always been an important component part of the Slovenian heritage and culinary recognition. From now on, they will also be presented under the new trademark 'Gostilna Slovenija', which is new to the Slovenian hospitality industry.



Since the end of September 2011, *gostilnas* that satisfy the strict rules and criteria of the trademark have been marked with uniform restaurant signs and boards, the mark of the new trademark. But this concerns only those *gostilnas* that satisfy the rules and criteria for obtaining this mark and trademark. They must satisfy the conditions as regards external and internal arrangement of rooms, while in their offer, the food of the house, local and regional dishes prevail, as well as appropriate food and food products of local producers, food with protected appellation of origin, organic food, appropriate music scenery, service methods, and a variety of other components that contribute to the justification of use of the trademark and Gostilna Slovenija brand. The Gostilna Slovenija project was carried out by the Section for Hospitality and Tourism at the Chamber of Craft and Small Business of Slovenia. So far, the right to use the Gostilna Slovenija trademark has been granted to 29 Slovenian *gostilnas*.

## AND WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE FORMATION OF SUCH A TRADEMARK COME FROM?

Martin Jezeršek from the Hiša kulinarike Jezeršek (Jezeršek Culinary House), who wrote the development strategy *Gostilna na Slovenskem* (Gostilna in Slovenia) as a part of his study and thus launched the Gostilna Slovenija project, says that this is a

somewhat comprehensive regulation of the restaurant offer in our country. This has been an idea floating around for a relatively long time. 'The idea for the trademark originated from the desire for a change and regulation of the situation in the catering activity in Slovenia, which was extremely chaotic. It is very usual that *gostilnas* offer everything but Slovenian dishes, while their ambient and architectural arrangements lack any character. In the past, *gostilnas* in Slovenia have lost their identity, which the Gostilna Slovenija project tries to return,' says Jezeršek.

Gostilna Slovenija is thus becoming our regulated and distinguished product. It strictly respects the provisions of sustainable development, and in particular, enables better culinary and gastronomic recognisability of Slovenia on the world map.

The offer of Slovenian restaurants was formed under the influence of the interesting historical development and a variety of tastes at the juncture of the Alps, Mediterranean and Pannonian Plain. Usually, they were developed as characteristic family restaurant activities. In Slovenian, their name '*gostilna*' is associated with the word '*gost*' (guest) and, particularly, hospitality of landlords who invited guests to explore various flavours of their house, local, regional, Slovenian and selected international dishes in association with the wine, mostly from all three Slovenian vine-growing regions.



### GOSTILNA SLOVENIJA TRADEMARK IN PRACTICE

A gostilna that acquires the Gostilna Slovenija title must satisfy clearly set minimum criteria for obtaining the mark. Simply put, a gostilna is on the right path to forming its own identity in accordance with the general identity of a gostilna in Slovenia, offer mostly dishes and beverages of Slovenian origin and reach the quality that is verified by the expert commission, explains Martin Jezeršek. The gostilna that complies with these standards is engaged in a number of promotional activities that provide for its better recognisability in the market and attracts new guests.

Membership in the association also involves numerous obligations and opportunities. 'Gostilnas can take part in various training courses that aim at raising the overall quality of offer of gostilnas in the association. But they must, at the same time, gradually raise their own quality of offer, which must always satisfy the minimum criteria that will be subject to changes and become even more stringent,' explains Jezeršek. But this does not mean that a gostilna that obtained the mark has been awarded a medal that will forever remain on the shelf. The Gostilna Slovenija mark can be withdrawn from a gostilna that no longer satisfies the minimum criteria.

### What does the trademark mean for a guest?

'A guest who visits an English pub knows what he can expect. A guest who visits a restaurant with a Michelin star knows what he can expect. A guest who visits a Chinese restaurant knows what he can expect. But until today, a guest who visited the gostilna did not know what to expect. From a gostilna that prides itself with the Gostilna Slovenija mark and sign, a guest may expect a wholesome experience in Slovenian gastronomy. This includes many traditional and contemporary restaurant and gastronomic elements, such as quality, dishes and beverages of Slovenian origin, seasonalisation of offer, ambient and architectural arrangement, and after all, family management,' explains Jezeršek. The recognisability of the Gostilna Slovenija mark is still at a rather low level, particularly among foreign guests. Therefore, Slovenia has the task of increasing the recognisability of the Gostilna Slovenija mark at home and abroad. The Slovenian Tourist Organisation takes a very active part in this establishment of this trademark.

This trademark could help Slovenia to increase its gastronomic recognisability abroad. The long-term aim of the Gostilna Slovenija project is clear. As every visitor in England knows what a pub is and what it looks like, every visitor of our country should know the meaning of the word gostilna. 'This goal can be achieved, but is still very far away. Gostilnas should first become the most important part of gastronomic recognisability of Slovenia. Promotion of prekmurska gibanica and kranjska klobasa can be of no benefit for us if a guest who visits Slovenia does not know where to taste them,' adds Martin Jezeršek. Gostilnas are the basis of the gastronomic recognisability of Slovenia; therefore, gostilnas and the Gostilna Slovenija project may be the starting point for the presentation of Slovenian gastronomy abroad.

In Slovenia, there are more than 3,000 catering facilities, among which the most are gostilnas. Gostilnas are places for meeting with people and enjoying culinary experiences; they bear the character of their keepers. This all has an influence on the overall quality, which is the basic characteristic of every true and particularly good gostilna. Its characteristics are general arrangement and appropriate internal fitting, traditional hospitality as well as top and variegated culinary offer with wine and other beverages. The offer of Slovenian restaurants reflects our national kitchen, which is a combination of culinary historical memory (heritage) and searches for contemporary culinary directions and methods.



# Jelka Reichman

## Slovenian Woman of the Year

“This year, Jana magazine’s readers chose the lady who managed to entice childhood into eternity.” It was with these words that the editor-in-chief and managing editor of Jana announced the Slovenian Woman of the Year 2011. In the opinion of the magazine’s readers, this woman is Jelka Reichman, a painter and illustrator who has made a lasting mark on Slovenian children’s literature. She has created illustrations for many literary heroes, such as Muri the cat – a legend in the cat world.

“I seek comfort in my work. I am not as carefree and happy as many may think. I take refuge in this world of mine and look for pure beauty and that is why I feel so close to children. I feel like I am a child among children and I will always feel that way,” explained the new Slovenian Woman of the Year. She added that there are many Slovenian heroines, and

that all the other nominees are superwomen without exception. She believes the only difference is that her work is probably more in the public eye.

This year, the choice of Slovenian Woman of the Year was especially poignant as Jana magazine celebrates its fortieth anniversary. It has gone through many highs and lows, most recently

last year when the editing house went into bankruptcy. But as Bernarda Jeklin, the magazine’s first editor and a legend of Slovenian magazine journalism, explained, “Jana has always been a faithful companion, helper, it reflects the zeitgeist, and has always expressed solidarity with its readers.” Jana presents itself with the slogan “our female friend”.

In its 40 years it has certainly accumulated plenty of content, a host of stories about famous and not so famous people – people like us – with all our problems, battles and successes. The magazine’s character took shape and the first issue sold as many as 75,000 copies (an impressive figure considering 2 million represents the total market) and at its peak reached a circulation of well over 100,000 copies. “Women come into their own when they go through particularly tough times, and Jana went through its most difficult moments when the company began to fail. It survived because it is created by good-hearted people,” explained Jeklin in her keynote speech. After her address, the current editor, Melita Berzelak, added that they had also succeeded because of their exceptionally loyal readers, who allowed them to continue putting the magazine together, even in the most demanding conditions.

Jana has something for the whole family – although it has a reputation of being a women’s magazine, men also like to leaf through its pages. So far many female and a few male journalists have worked on Jana’s editorial team. Jana magazine’s readers have been choosing the Slovenian Woman of the Year since 1988, and all the past voting slips have been carefully stored away, preventing any potential manipulation. For this reason the title enjoys a considerable reputation in the country.

All the Slovenian Women of the Year are exceptional women whose work has left an extraordinary mark on soci-

ety. Former women of the year include sportswomen, scientists, doctors, foster mothers, benefactresses and politicians. In case of the latter, things got a little “stuck” as everything always involves a political dimension. Therefore the magazine’s editor, Melita Berzelak, is of the view that they would “think carefully before nominating a female politician again”.

This may be the reason why no female politician featured among the twelve nominees. Twelve extraordinary women competed for the flattering title. The Jana editorial board explained their nominations as mostly being an acknowledgement for what they have already achieved and as a form of encouragement for all that they can achieve with their work and through the example they set to make our lives all the more beautiful and richer.

#### THIS YEAR’S NOMINEES:

**Maja Keuc** – Slovenia’s representative at the Eurovision Song Contest and a girl who sets an example to the youth of today.

**Dragica Kraljič** – headmaster of one of Ljubljana’s kindergartens, a vastly experienced defectologist, and a proponent of the rights of disabled persons.

**Tina Maze** – an eleven-time winner in the World Cup, she is the most successful Slovenian female skier of all time.

**Vilma Novak** – a nurse and midwife at Ljubljana maternity hospital and a volunteer who works with people with mental development disorders.

**Fanči Perdih** – the head of the only Slovenian organic seed producing company, which has been engaged in the production of organic seeds for vegetables and partially herbs since 2007, thereby helping to preserve the heritage of our ancestors.

**Nataša Pirc Musar** – the first information commissioner in Slovenia, currently serving her second term. Her task is to safeguard the privacy of our citizens from abuse.

**Ruth Podgornik Reš** – is the only Slovenian ultra marathon runner. In just the last two years she has run 800 kilometres through the Slovene Mountain Path, a feat only five men have achieved thus far.

**Jelka Reichman** – the illustrator who has, without doubt, introduced the most sweetness, warmth and tenderness in Slovenian children’s books and picture books.

**Majda Struc** – it is thanks to her that the Association of Friends of Youth is the humanitarian organisation most trusted by Slovenians, as confirmed by an international study.

**Vilma Topolšek** – a proud farm housewife who, together with her family, runs one of Slovenia’s first tourist farms.

**Katja Zabukovec Kerin** – Fifteen years ago and after many years of voluntary work in various NGOs, she founded the Association for Non-violent Communication.

**Milena Zupančič** – an actress and, without doubt, the first lady of Slovenian theatre and film.



#### WHO IS JELKA REICHMAN?

She is the illustrator who has introduced the most sweetness, warmth and tenderness in Slovenian children’s books and picture books. Soft children’s faces, playful kittens, fluffy teddy bears, and lush nature – these are only a few of the typical illustrations from her fairy-tale world. Adults also have a nicer day and feel like they have been transported back to their childhood when they see Reichman’s illustrations. They admire her talent, dignity and desire not to lose touch with her inner child. The painter and illustrator Jelka Reichman, born in 1939, has always felt a need to express herself through painting since childhood. To her, drawing is a way of life; she connects anything that falls under her gaze or whatever surrounds her to her work. Naturally, she drew for her two children and later for her grandchildren – and for any child who loves books and the fairy-tale worlds contained within.

Jelka Reichman, is the illustrator who has introduced the most sweetness, warmth and tenderness in Slovenian children’s books and picture books. Over more than 40 years of creativity she has become a cult illustrator, drawing the most gentle, kind and pretty pictures in Slovenian children’s books, picture books, magazines and greeting cards. Her characters, which include Muri the cat, Piki Jakob, a seamstress and her scissors, Kuzma the dwarf and hundreds of others have enriched the childhood of many generations of children and their parents.

Source: [www.slovenkaleta.si](http://www.slovenkaleta.si)





heritage



Jože Ostreman, photo: Marijan Hočevar

# ŠENTJERNEJ

## THE ROOSTER'S PLACE



Magnificent and apparently the best river for fishing in Slovenia, the Krka River covers a distance of approximately 93 kilometres from its source below the village of Krka near Muljava before flowing into the Sava River. Its river basin essentially defines the Dolenjska Region, geographically perhaps the most diverse among all Slovenian regions. In its upper course, the Krka first rushes through a narrow riverbed and small canyons, while somewhere around Soteska, a village near Novo Mesto, it calms down and then idly flows through Novo Mesto, Šentjernej and Kostanjevica, giving all these places their distinctive character.

Quite hilly up to the village of Soteska and covered by thin mixed forests and pastures, which are not very suitable for cultivation, the countryside then turns into a charming, gently undulating plain, where beautiful leaf forests flourish among meadows and fields. Steeper hills remain in the north, while towards the south, the view is restricted by the Gorjanci, a hilly, or perhaps one might even say a mountainous chain with dark pine forests, indicating that we have not yet reached the Pannonian Plain. Once a sleepy provincial town, in recent decades becoming an attractive cultural and a busy commercial centre with some of the most successful industrial enterprises in the country (including Krka, Revoz and Adria Mobil), Novo Mesto has marked this part of the Dolenjska Region as an area of sophisticated urban planning, while leaving its surroundings almost unspoilt: a rural environment, summer residences, quiet,

neat and well-kept little villages nestled in the valleys, and promising vineyards above them, where several exquisite grape varieties are grown, the most popular among them being the source of Cviček wine.

Šentjernej is a part of this less urbanised environment, yet one maintaining much stronger links with nature. Located about halfway between Novo Mesto and Kostanjevica, Šentjernej is the central settlement of a relatively young municipality of about 1400 inhabitants. Built around the church named after St. Jernej (Bartholomew), the town bears the same name. Once a typical rural settlement, rather extensively populated, it has recently obtained several purpose-built buildings, which have indeed increased its urban appearance, but fortunately without spoiling the original architectural layout, since the new buildings delicately blend with the old fabric of the town. If one follows history, looking at

the old picture postcards, it is obvious that the population has traditionally been quite keen that buildings are maintained well and the town kept clean: the former macadam roads along which well-trimmed trees and roadside shrubs had been growing, were of course substituted by solid tarmac, carefully arranged pavements and road greens, all to support the local folk's idea that there is no place more beautiful than Šentjernej and no animal more beautiful than a rooster – the town's famous emblem – an idea also well expressed by the lyrics of a song well-known across Slovenia.

And it was the local people themselves who have successfully promoted their town – so much so that its popularity throughout Slovenia substantially surpasses its size and actual importance. Alongside attractive and traditional horse races, decades ago they decided to organise annual gatherings of Slovenian choral octets, beyond any doubt



The Church of St. Jernej



the most popularly performed form of choral singing, particularly in the past and still today. With the arrival of the octets, as part of the obligatory repertoire, they also performed the Šentjernej anthem to the most beautiful place and animal, a song that the octets then transferred to their local environments, thus making Šentjernej a kind of the national legend: a clever form of promotion, to be sure.

However, the place itself and its hinterland can show much of what justifies the anthem. Alongside the aforementioned horse races and the annual gatherings of the octets, which restarted six years ago after a ten-year break, also worth mentioning are the local fairs taking place at least twice a month, and the interesting pottery craftsmanship that has also been developed. Thanks to the excellent soil and climate, fruit cultivation and arable farming are also flourishing. Horse breeding, which



has been preserved and provides the basis for local horse races, is also a significant local activity.

Considering its size, Šentjernej is indeed an incredibly active community, justifiably proud of itself. After having been abolished as a municipality in 1945 and administratively annexed to Novo Mesto, Šentjernej regained this status in 1995 and has governed itself since then.

**PLETERJE CHARTERHOUSE**

Located a kilometre away from Šentjernej, the most famous edifice in the surroundings is certainly the Pleterje Charterhouse, which has experienced turbulent times throughout its history. As Sinfo has already published an article on this monastery, we should perhaps only review certain basic facts.

At the beginning of the 15th century, Count Herman II of Celje founded the



Pleterje Charterhouse



Pleterje Charterhouse

Pleterje Charterhouse of the Holy Trinity at the location of the former Sicherstein Castle. In the 18th century, the monastery was dissolved. Its fate could have been sealed, had the order not reacquired it at the beginning of the 20th century and built a new magnificent edifice with outbuildings, enabling the order's careful management and even self-sufficiency. The monks who managed everything also ensured the excellent maintenance of complex buildings and, at the same time, were active within the lo-

cale, cooperating in its development and economic growth and of course, in the spiritual life of the area. During the crucial test, i.e. the Slovenian struggle against the Italian and German occupation in the Second World War, they understood the striving of the people they lived with, and actively supported the resistance movement of Slovenian partisans. This was the basis for the development of a high mutual respect between the Pleterje Charterhouse and its environment. Still today, people speak of one

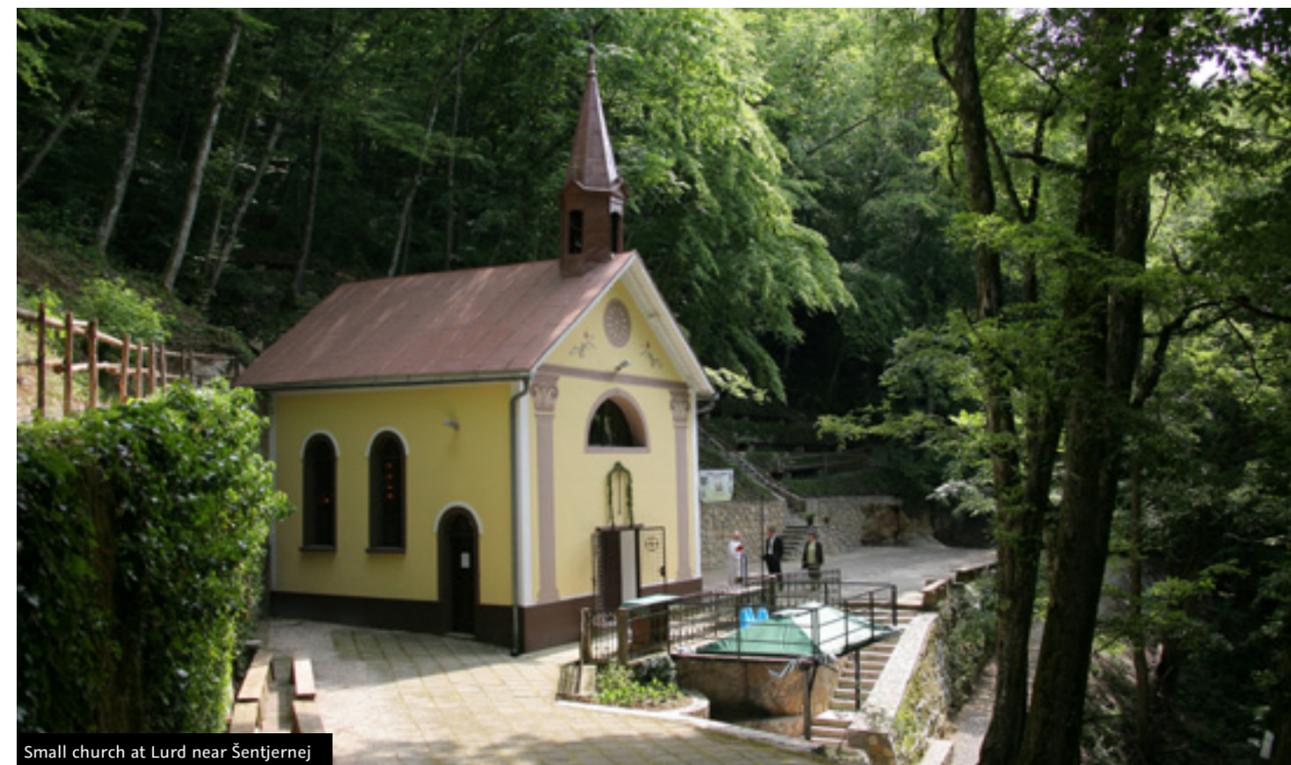
another with great affection, while demonstrating a high degree of mutual trust that should serve as an example to the country as a whole.

The most famous among many beautiful buildings is the Church of Holy Trinity, a unique example of a religious Gothic architecture in Europe.

Four interesting and well-preserved castles are the legacy of the attractive countryside being a popular destination of the wealthy, particularly in hot summer months or even a place of their permanent residence. The 13th century Gracarjev Turn is a well-kept manor surrounded by fields and gardens. Mežek Castle was built by the Counts of Auersperg in the 15th century on the site of an older, 12th century castle, of which there is practically nothing left. Prežek Castle is not in a very good shape, yet remains stable. In contrast, Vrhovo Castle is well-preserved. The chapel attached to it was the place where the most distinguished Slovenian historian, chronicler and polymath of the 17th century, Janez Vajkard Valvasor, married for the second time. Near the road between Novo Mesto and Šentjernej, one can also visit a slightly smaller manor of Volavče. The Šentjernej area is a sort of a corridor between the densely populated Novo Mesto, with several imposing buildings, and Kostanjevica, which also takes pride in several excellent structures.



The castle of Gracarjev turn at Hrastje



Small church at Lurd near Šentjernej



An old cottage by the Jerele's mill (locally known as Fičetov malen)

**NO MEGALOMANIA AND NEVER AT SOMEONE ELSE'S EXPENSE**

Šentjernej excellently manages its ethnological architectural heritage and can serve as an example to others. In the open-air museum near the Pleterje Charterhouse, they systematically collect tools, agricultural machinery and attachments and all other devices that the people of Šentjernej and the neighbouring population used in their everyday lives. The museum is an old homestead built in

1833, and includes a residential building with outbuildings and a yard. This rural building/museum is arranged as a visual display of the former practices and life of typical inhabitants of the time who mostly made their living farming, raising cattle and manufacturing wood craft products.

People working in the museum have not neglected culinary tradition. They still know how to prepare dishes and present all nutrition characteristics of the time that authentically demonstrate the former

living standard of this area.

Visitors leave this small place with good feelings. One might say that it is not easy to find so much vitality in such a small area. Both diligence and personal modesty are those elements that provided the basis for the growth of Šentjernej and its surroundings. No megalomania, but always in accordance with what the local people have created themselves, and above all – never at someone else's expense. A very timely message, indeed!

I FEEL  
SLOVENIA



Maribor  
Photo: Borut Peterlin