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Hans-Gert Pöttering:
Slovenia makes history in the EU - first Slavic country in the driving seat

José Manuel Barroso:
I consider that this Presidency has been for Slovenia a highlight in the impressive list of achievements

EU and Russia
Agree to launch key partnership talks



Janez Janša /Slovene PM/: We have achieved moves towards a better Europe with synergy

Brussels, 24 June - With synergy with the European Commission and the European Parliament, we have in the past six months achieved moves which have made Europe better. These moves prove that Europe is dynamic, that it works and that it is capable of facing difficulties. It was possible to take these steps forward because of good collaboration and synergy between institutions. "Si.nergy for Europe" is the motto that Slovenia chose as a guideline for its first Presidency of the EU.



Graham Watson /Leader of European liberals (ALDE)/: Slovenia made a mark

Brussels, 24 June: "I congratulate the Slovenian Presidency on its achievements. If some had a feeling that it was just a warm-up before the Presidency of the next state, those of us who looked closer saw important progress. Slovenia made a mark. As the most important achievement, I would point out the ratification of the directive on the return of illegal residents, which is the first cornerstone of EU immigration policy. As one of the successes, I would emphasise especially the fifth freedom, the directive on environment protection under criminal law, and postal services, and progress on the Western Balkans. If you were not successful in facing the disappointment of European citizens, it is not your fault - those are bigger issues. We all need to prove together that we are in the service of people, not their masters. If there are problems with the Treaty of Lisbon, which have cast a shadow over the Presidency, it is not your fault.



Brian Crowley /Union for Europe of the nations /: Congratulations to Slovenia on a "fantastic job"

Brussels, 24 June: What a great image, what a great advertisement for the country! Now it's time for Slovenia to be jealous and to protect its achievements, because victory usually has many fathers.



Jelko Kacin (ALDE/LDS): Slovenia as the first among the new Member States successfully survived the biggest responsibility that EU membership entails.

Brussels, 24 June: Now there are no more doubts if I come from Slovenia or Slovakia. The Slovenian team should stay in Brussels for some more time, because it could contribute a lot to the success of the French Presidency.



Žiga Turk / Minister of Development/: Slovenia's EU Presidency contributed some new development ideas

Ljubljana, 23 June: The Slovenian Presidency of the EU equally contributed some new development ideas, which were well received and obtained a right of domicile. Slovenia has, as the first new Member State to take the reins of the European Union, justified the trust. The boat that Slovenia received to manage was not on an 'automatic pilot', but rather, Slovenia could ambitiously correct its direction as the presiding country.

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Anže Logar

WE DID IT!

This editorial does not have to be long. The title itself should be enough to reveal what it refers to. We have concluded the Presidency. After three years of preparation and six months of the demanding leadership of the European Union, the day has come when we can put down our daily agenda for a moment, and remember all the complications and solutions, and hand over the wheel of the Community to the French with optimism at all levels.

The end of the Presidency is a time for making an inventory of the work we did. Every minister of the Slovenian government presented the greatest successes of the Slovenian Presidency in his or her field, which we are also publishing in the magazine. We collected several responses from abroad, but we were especially interested in the opinion of the presidents of the other two European institutions which cooperate with the Council of the EU in co-decision-making processes, regarding the results of the Slovenian Presidency and the future of the European Union.

The conclusion of the Presidency is also a time to thank everyone who participated in the project or contributed in any other way to the success of the Slovenian Presidency. If we started it with the slogan Si.nergy for Europe, let us finish with the words - Si.nergy of success.

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French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner (left) and his Slovenian counterpart Dimitrij Rupel at a ceremony marking Slovenia's handover of the EU Presidency to France.

SLOVENIAN FM HANDS OVER EU PRESIDENCY TO FRENCH COUNTERPART

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel symbolically handed over the EU Presidency to his French counterpart Bernard Kouchner on 30 June, the last day of Slovenia's six-month stint as EU President, at a ceremony in the square joining Slovenia's Nova Gorica and Italy's Gorizia. »Today Slovenians hand over the European Union to the French. I have to say that the EU, in the moment when I hand it over to you, is in good shape,« Rupel told Kouchner. Kouchner said that it was in a medium-good, an average shape, but added Slovenia had done a good job. »It is true that Slovenia is not a large country and that its population is small, but it had done a great job with its foreign minister and his team,« he added. According to Rupel, the Slovenian Presidency might have seemed now as a series of small steps, but when more time passes it will be clear that it had made progress. »Bringing down walls and opening doors and windows of opportunity was and will be a policy of the EU,« he said. Rupel also thanked Kouchner for France's help during the Presidency. According to him, Slovenia is a small country and would not be able to carry out such a task without France's diplomatic help. Kouchner expressed his satisfaction with the cooperation with Rupel, emphasising that there were no small and big countries and that all European countries that joined the EU were important. According to him, the site of today's handover is a »very powerful and important symbol«, situated in a place where two opposing countries and regimes used to border. An exceptional symbol is also that Slovenia, which was in a very different situation only 17 years ago, led the EU and contributed to better harmony in the Balkans.

TÜRK CALLS GENERAL ELECTION FOR 21 SEPTEMBER



President Danilo Türk after signing a decree on the 2008 general election, setting 21 September as the date of the election.

Text: RAMON MIKLUS, Photo: STA

President Danilo Türk signed, on 16 June, a decree on the 2008 general election, setting 21 September as the date of the election. The election will officially be called on 30 June, which will also mark the start of preparations for the vote, Türk said. President Türk told the press after signing the decree that the general election was an important, possibly the most important, instrument of democracy. "Its purpose is to elect the most appropriate representatives, and all of our development in the history of democratic Slovenia is related to this election," Türk said, adding that this would also be the case in the future. The President believes that the period ahead of the election is also "a mirror of the political culture of our society." With this perspective, he hopes that the election campaign will be based on arguments and that the election turnout will be as high as possible. The election campaign ahead of the autumn general election will officially be launched on 22 August, a month before the election Sunday. Candidates have until 27 August to register for the vote. This year's general election will be the fifth since Slovenia's independence. The last election, at which the fourth sitting of the 90-member parliament was elected, was held on 3 October 2004.

PRIME MINISTER EXPRESSES REGRET AFTER IRISH REJECTION OF EU TREATY

"There is firm resolve to proceed, to seek a way out of this situation within the framework set by the Lisbon Treaty," the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia and the then President of the European Union, Janez Janša, said on 13 June in response to the publication of the official outcome of the referendum held in Ireland on ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Speaking in Ljubljana, the Prime Minister said that the news from Ireland was not good, since the majority of Irish voters had rejected the Lisbon Treaty at the referendum. He expressed regret and disappointment at this decision, adding that the democratic will of the Irish voters must, nevertheless, be respected. "In the past hours, I have spoken with my Irish colleague, with my colleagues from a number of other Member States, and also with the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament. I have also spoken with some colleagues in the Member States in which the Lisbon Treaty has not yet been ratified. They are all determined to continue with this process," was the optimistic statement of the Prime Minister, who stressed the resolve of European leaders to find a solution to this situation, in which the Lisbon Treaty has already been ratified by two thirds of the EU Member States, representing a vast majority of EU residents. In the Prime Minister's opinion, the Lisbon Treaty is necessary since it brings greater effectiveness, greater democracy and greater transparency. It is also necessary for continuing the process of deepening the European Union and for the EU's further enlargement. "The Lisbon Treaty, embodying a number of solutions, is indispensable in order for the European Union to effectively tackle, in the years to come, the key



Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša.

global challenges, which are also the key challenges for the citizens of the EU," he maintained, adding that a vote against the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, would not resolve the issues covered by the Treaty. Janša added that the situation within the European Union was changing and that this makes a new and updated reform of the institutional framework for the EU necessary. EU enlargement has brought expansion in both quantity and quality within the EU. A changing world also calls for a constant adaptation of solutions. The Prime Minister said he was convinced that frank and fair discussions at the European Council meeting in the following week would bring about an agreement on how, and in which direction, to plan the search for solutions.

SLOVENIA BEST EU NEWCOMER IN HEALTH INDICATORS

Slovenia is the best EU newcomer regarding life expectancy and several other indicators of health, according to the results of a study on eliminating inequalities in health in the EU presented in Ljubljana on 16 June. Slovenia achieved the best results among the ten 2004 newcomers. While life expectancy at birth stood at 72.6 years in 2002 for men and 80.5 years for women, the figure in the EU stood at 76 years for men and 81.8 years for women. The average for the rest of the 2004 newcomers stood at 69.2 years for men and 77.2 for women. Among men, Swedes live the longest (77.7 years), while Latvia's men die aged 64.7 years, on average. Spanish women take the longevity crown with a life expectancy of 83.2 years, whereas Romanian women die youngest on average, at 74.7 years.

BLLED E-CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR COLLABORATION

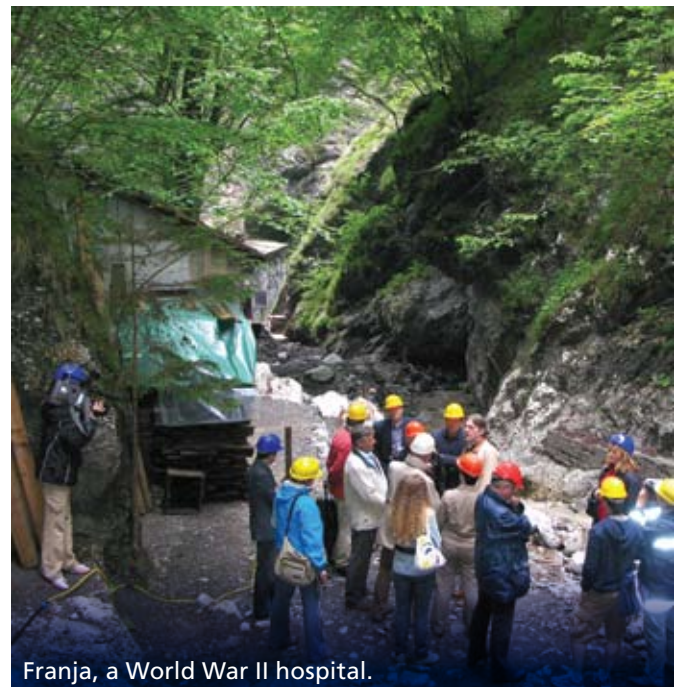
For electronic services to become fully incorporated into society, scientific institutions, service providers, governments and economists need to collaborate, while innovation must be initiated by the users, participants of the 21st Bled E-Conference agreed. The traditional Bled E-Conference, which started on 16 June and is entitled "E-Collaboration: Overcoming Boundaries Through Multi-Channel Interaction", has attracted some 250 participants from 34 countries. The conference, which has been organised by the European Commission, European Parliament and the Slovenian government, aims to support creation of a true e-society, where electronic technology would be available to everyone, said Dean of the Faculty of Organisational Sciences Milan Pagon. J. Felix Hampe, a professor at the University in Koblenz-Landau, in Germany, said that collaboration among institutions resulted in more personal and user-friendly services. He highlighted Slovenia's e-government web portal as an example of best practice. Slovenia was among the most successful of the EU Member States in implementing the service, sharing second spot with Malta and trailing only Austria on a list compiled by the European Commission. According to Slovenian Public Administration Minister Gregor Virant, the portal uses IT to make public administration more accessible, user-friendly, transparent, effective and cost-efficient. European Parliament Vice-President Diana Wallis presented her personal experience with IT services. She highlighted websites and e-mail as particularly useful sources of information when deciding on European legislation. Wallis also pointed to the problem of directing the effects of IT. "There are still some limitations with electronic communication," Hampe agreed, highlighting security as the most critical area. Debate on drawbacks and limitations of IT services have been among the highlights of the Bled E-Conference, which has been billed as a platform for discussion and collaboration among the expert community, industry and government, Hampe said. According to Chair of the E-Centre at the Maribor Faculty of

Organisational Sciences Jože Gričar, "in line with the European Year of Innovation 2009, the Bled E-Conference will initiate and encourage innovative projects."

EDUCATION MINISTER UNDERLINES THE IMPORTANCE OF MOBILITY

Education Minister Milan Zver emphasised on 13 June the importance of mobility in education. "The greater the mobility in education, the more quality there is," Zver said, speaking at the fringe of the "Quality in Mobility within the Lifelong Learning Programme" conference. The conference highlighted the expectations of the European Commission of bringing several million of students and lecturers into lifelong learning activities within the framework of the 2007–2013 EU budget. "This is a large scale project that can also greatly contribute to developing a European approach in the field of education," said Zver. Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism Commissioner Jan Figel labelled the event a positive signal that mobility was becoming an important factor of co-operation among EU Member States. Figel, who believes the EU should set a strategic goal of improving the quality and mobility of education, called on the public and private sectors to contribute to boosting mobility. He said the lifelong learning programme has been earmarked EUR 7bn in the current EU budget, 40% more than in the previous financial perspective. Figel also handed out the European Awards for Quality in Mobility. Latvian and Czech secondary school students were awarded for getting to know each other's culture through translating songs as part of the Comenius programme for exchange and co-operation between schools in different countries. A polytechnic in Portugal's Tomar was meanwhile given the award within the Erasmus programme for its wide spectrum of courses. Institutions from Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, France and the UK received awards within the Gruntvig adult education programme for a project that dealt with training to prevent discrimination. The award in the Leonardo da Vinci training programme was meanwhile given to a project of exchange between firemen and rescue personnel in Denmark and the UK.

WORLD WAR II HOSPITAL TO BE RESTORED BY 2010, SAYS MINISTER



Franja, a World War II hospital.

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Franja, a World War II hospital in a gorge near Cerkno which was almost completely destroyed in flash flooding in September, is undergoing extensive repair and restoration works. Culture Minister Vasko Simoniti was confident on 13 June that the hospital would be open to visitors by 2010. "I have received a comprehensive report that seems promising. Everything is prepared according to rigorous plans and funding has been secured. I am very optimistic," Simoniti told the press at the site of the hospital after he was briefed on the situation by a special task force overseeing the reconstruction. The Culture Ministry has earmarked EUR 4m for reconstruction. Another EUR 137,000 in donations has trickled into a special account opened by the Idrija City Museum, which manages what is one of the most popular World War II sites in Slovenia. The director of the Idrija Museum, Ivana Leskovec, said that only about a quarter of the 800 artefacts housed in 13 wooden shacks that made up the hospital were ever found. The shacks will be reconstructed while Leskovec also addressed an appeal to private collectors to contribute items for the museum collection. Even though reconstruction work has barely started, the secluded gorge where the hospital was hidden from Nazi view will reopen for small groups of visitors at the end of June. The visitors will see the progress of reconstruction and will gain a better understanding of why partisans built the hospital in the gorge, according to Leskovec.

KOZMUS WIN PRAGUE MEET

Slovenian hammer thrower Primož Kozmus won at the Josef Odložil Memorial meet in Prague on 16 June, against the world's best competitors in the event. Kozmus threw the hammer 79.60 metres, edging Slovak athlete Libor Charfreitag (79.25) and Italian Marco Lingua (79.22). Hungarian Krisztian Pars, who holds the best performance of the season, was fourth with 77.55 metres. This is the fourth win of the season for Slovenia's most successful male athlete, the silver medalist from the last World Championships. He managed the first three with throws over 80 metres. It is also a taste of things to come at the Beijing Olympics in less than two months. "I believe that a throw of around my personal best, 82 metres, will be enough for a medal in Beijing," Kozmus said.

SLOVENIA AMONG BEST IN FIGHT ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The US State Department released on 5 June the "2008 Trafficking in Persons Report" which places Slovenia among the 29 most successful countries worldwide in fighting human trafficking. Slovenia was ranked as a Tier 1 country in the fight on human trafficking, according to State Department criteria, which place countries around the world in three tiers. The Slovenian Foreign Ministry responded on 5 June with a press release which says Slovenia's placement among the most successful countries in this field is a result of longstanding co-operation involving government institutions and NGOs. The State Department report for 2007 says Slovenia is a transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked from Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Turkey, Albania, and Montenegro for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour, and also in the construction industry. Slovenia is also a source country, however, to a lesser extent, as Slovenian women are trafficked within the country or to countries in Western Europe for commercial sexual exploitation, the report adds. The State Department recommends that Slovenia provides trafficking awareness training for judges and ensures that the majority of convicted traffickers are imprisoned. According to the report, the authorities conducted six trafficking investigations in 2007, courts prosecuted three trafficking cases and convicted five traffickers, while police provided

anti-trafficking training for 165 police officers. The government earmarked in 2007 over EUR 67,000, some EUR 12,000 more than in 2006, to two NGOs which have provided assistance to 26 victims or potential victims. The number of such victims in 2006 stood at 43. Countries in Tier 1 fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, as defined by the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Slovenia moved up from Tier 2 to Tier 1 last year. Slovenia became actively involved in the fight against human trafficking in 2001, when it established an interdepartmental task force, which focuses on prosecution of traffickers, raising awareness and training those involved in the fight against human trafficking, among others.

EU, SOUTH AFRICA MEETING FOCUSES ON SITUATION IN AFRICA



Relations between the EU and South Africa and assessment of the situation in Africa topped the EU Troika-South Africa meeting at Brdo pri Kranju on 3 June, the chair of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel told the press after the meeting. He said the meeting discussed the situation in South Africa and some other African countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe, China's role in Africa, EU missions and security situation on the continent, and the situation in the Western Balkans and Middle East. Rupel expressed support for the efforts of the South African authorities to curb the recent outburst of violence towards immigrants and said the EU was ready to provide the necessary support in alleviating the suffering of migrant workers and refugees. According to Rupel, his South African counterpart Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma told him that the outburst in the country had also surprised South Africa, as the country's society was usually more tolerant. The meeting also touched on the EU's activities within European defence and safety policy in Africa, especially the EUSEC mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The meeting also talked about the EUFOR mission to Chad and hot spots in Africa, such as Darfur, Zimbabwe, Somalia and Kenya. Rupel told the press that the sides agreed that observers should be sent to Zimbabwe for the second round of the presidential election on 27 June. Turning to China's role in Africa, Rupel told the press that the EU found China's activities on the continent positive and was striving for more co-operation in the field. He added that the European Commission was drafting a communication on starting trilateral talks between China, the African Union and EU regarding co-operation in Africa. Dlamini-Zuma expressed her hope that African countries would be actively involved in these talks. Touching on the Middle East peace process, Rupel said the EU and its partners were doing everything in their power to advance the Annapolis process, however no major progress had been made. The EU and South Africa adopted an action plan in

May 2007 and agreed to develop a lasting relationship based on open and concrete dialogue and to expand co-operation to new areas, according to a press release by the Slovenian Presidency.

BRAZIL, EU UPBEAT ABOUT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP DEAL



Brazilian Minister of External Relations Celso Amorim at the press conference.

The EU and Brazil are upbeat about plans to boost co-operation. The two sides hope to pen a joint action plan at a summit in December, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said, after a meeting with the EU Troika on 6 June. The joint action plan, a follow-up to the strategic partnership that was established at the first EU-Brazil summit in July 2007, is designed to boost co-operation in technology, science, the environment, education and addressing climate change.. "There are no big differences in terms of content...I'm confident that the document will be signed in December," Amorim said after talks with Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel and External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero Waldner. According to Rupel, talks also touched on relations between the EU and regional associations in Latin America such as the Andean Community and Mercosur. Amorim said South America was using the EU model of regional integration, as it is hard to find a better one anywhere in the world. He also touched on the Doha round of world trade talks, denying claims that the group of 20 developing countries, which includes Brazil, was stalling the trade liberalisation talks. "If it was not for Brazil and the G20, the round would have collapsed long ago," Amorim said, adding that such claims were part of negotiating tactics. The Doha round of world trade talks was launched in 2001. Talks have been stalled, mostly due to the inability of developed and developing countries to agree on farm subsidies. According to Amorim, the negotiations are much tougher than the previous round of talks, but agreement may yet be reached. "It will not be simple, but it is possible."

EU TROIKA-CHINA MEETING FOCUSES ON BILATERAL RELATIONS

An EU Troika-China meeting on 9 June in Ljubljana discussed bilateral relations, progress in the negotiations on the partnership and co-operation agreement, the situation in the Taiwan Strait, human rights, climate change and the North Korean nuclear issue. Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel described relations between the sides as good. His Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, said the meeting was used to check the progress in relations made since the November 2007 EU-China Summit. The Chinese minister also called for bolstering the strategic partnership in areas of joint interests, as well as in efforts for international peace, stability and development. Rupel told the press that the sides had found



Working lunch of the EU Troika and China was held in Crystal Salon of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

they could discuss all topics frankly, and that they share positions on numerous issues. He assessed the meeting as interesting and friendly. Stressing that the world was facing numerous challenges, Rupel said that constructive solutions required close co-operation while current challenges "demand a joint response from the EU and China", according to a press release by the Slovenian EU Presidency. Talks on Tibet, meanwhile, focused on the March protests by Tibetans against Chinese rule. Rupel said the EU was monitoring events in the country closely and with some concern. "We issued a clear opinion stating that violent protests were not acceptable. We also stressed the need for substantive and constructive dialogue with regard to the concern expressed by the Tibet people, while taking into consideration the territorial integrity and sovereignty of China," he said. He welcomed China's decision in favour of dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives on all issues related to Tibet except that of sovereignty. "Opening Tibet up to the outside world would increase transparency and thus alleviate international concern," Rupel said. On the topic of human rights, Rupel said the EU agreed with China's wish that human rights should represent a positive component of relations and not a cause of tension. Rupel said the EU had expressed concern regarding restrictions of freedom of expression, which had included enforcement of regulations on foreign journalists, conditions for Chinese journalists and control of the internet. Turning to Korea, Rupel said the EU had repeatedly expressed its firm support for the Six-Party Talks on the denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula and was grateful to China for its constructive role in the process. The two sides then discussed the recent catastrophic cyclone in Myanmar, with Rupel saying that the "European public was shocked that the military junta, despite the large-scale humanitarian disaster, had not cancelled the national referendum immediately." Talks also touched on relations between China and Taiwan, with Yang saying that the delegations from both countries recently agreed to continue with talks. He expressed hope that these talks would further relations on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. According to the press release, Rupel also conveyed, on the EU's behalf, the deepest sympathies to the Chinese delegation following the recent catastrophic earthquake in the province of Sichuan.

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT SIGNED, PM LABELS IT A GOOD COMPROMISE



The signing of collective bargaining agreements for individual branches in the public sector. Public Administration Minister Gregor Virant.

Public sector trade unions signed, on 11 June, 13 collective bargaining agreements and annexes, eliminating the final obstacle to the implementation of the new agreement on wages for 160,000 employees. Prime Minister Janez Janša said the document was a good compromise. "This is a compromise between the options available and the needs...It is a compromise on pay rather than differences in wage brackets," Janša said, after ministers and trades unions signed the documents in Ljubljana. Janša added that Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk, who put his signature on the agreements on Tuesday, knew he was signing something realistic and sustainable from the standpoint of public finances. While many had said Slovenia's pace of development would drop rapidly, the country's economy has proven that this is not the case, Janša said, pointing to the 5.4% growth in the first quarter of this year. Public Administration Minister Gregor Virant said that "we have achieved a unified, regulated, transparent, more fair, more flexible and more stable wage system", which was financially sound and would not cause inflation. The system is fair because it was agreed in talks between all social partners and more flexible because it will reward those who work more, added the head of the government negotiating team. The stability of the system is guaranteed by the provision that any changes that would affect agreed pay differentials would have to be the subject of talks between the government and all trades unions, Virant added. Doro Hvalica, the head of the trade union negotiating team, agreed with Virant, and expressed pleasure over the changes. The old system caused inequalities in pay within the public sector, he said. "Now we have social peace in the public sector and an opportunity to focus our energies on quality and rationalisation," said Virant. However, the teachers' trade union, SVIZ, did not sign the new collective bargaining agreement.

EMBASSY IN US HOSTS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS

The Slovenian Embassy in the US hosted a ceremony to mark Slovenia's National Day on 26 June. The event was attended by some 500 people from all walks of life, including US politicians and diplomats. The ceremony also doubled up as a celebration of Slovenia's Presidency of the EU, and a farewell gathering for



Slovenian Ambassador to the US Samuel Žbogar at a reception marking Slovenia's National Day and the conclusion of Slovenia's Presidency of the EU at the Slovenian Embassy in the US.

outgoing Slovenian Ambassador Samuel Žbogar. In his address at the ceremony, Žbogar spoke of Slovenia's achievements in the 17 years since it declared its independence. He said the country had gained »experience, confidence and pride« in this time. According to him, Slovenia is an active player in Europe and the world, assuming its international obligations dutifully. Among those attending the celebrations were US Congressman James Oberstar (D-Minnesota) and Senator George Voinovich (R-Ohio), who are of Slovenian descent. Oberstar could not hide his delight with the refurbished Slovenian Embassy building. He said the building was now lively, whereas back in Yugoslav times it was drab and depressing.

GOVERNMENT ADOPTS GUIDELINES FOR SLOVENIA'S WORK IN EU

The government adopted on 26 June a declaration on guidelines for Slovenia's work in the EU's institutions and EU Council for the next 18 months, when the EU will be presided by France, Czech Republic and Sweden. The document defined Slovenia's European affairs priorities, and stressed as strategic the issues of the EU's development, the bloc's measures for long-term wellbeing of people, security and the EU's active role in the world. The document lists as priorities the further development of the bloc, the energy-climate package, growth and jobs, macroeconomic issues, competitiveness, research, development and innovations, employment and welfare policies, gender equality and non-discrimination. The priorities moreover include health and consumers, cultural and audiovisual issues, sustainable development, environment, transport, agriculture and fisheries, structural and cohesion policies. Also highlighted in the document are interior affairs, especially security, as well as foreign relations. The document now needs to be confirmed by the National Assembly.

SLOVENIA'S KAYAKER KAUZER WINS WORLD CUP EVENT IN TACEN

Slovenia's top kayaker Peter Kauzer won the slalom World Cup race in Tačen on 29 June. He was followed by Lukas Kubrican of the Czech Republic and Richard Hounslow of the UK. Another Slovenian representative in the finals, Dejan Kralj, finished seventh.



Slovenia makes history in the EU - first Slavic country in the driving seat

The six months of the Slovenian Presidency have come to an end. It is therefore time to take a look back at what was done and achieved during the last six months. This Presidency without doubt is a historical one, in three respects. For the first time one of the accession countries from Central and Eastern Europe has taken over the reins of the European Union; secondly, Slovenia is the first formerly Communist-governed country to perform this role; and, thirdly, this is the first time that a Slavic country has held the Council Presidency. This is a clear illustration of how much the European Union has changed in just the last four years.

The European Parliament has worked closely with the Presidency on a host of issues and enjoyed good cooperation and mutual understanding. However I would like to mention three which I think have defined this Presidency. First was intercultural dialogue,

which is an all European priority throughout 2008. Second was the Western Balkans, which particularly rose in prominence following the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo. Third and final is the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which has made good progress during the Slovenian Presidency. Of course it was a great deception that the majority of the Irish people could not be convinced to vote in favour of the Treaty on the 12th of June. The last Council meeting of the Slovenian Presidency therefore had to deal with this very difficult question. The President of the European Council, Prime Minister Janez Janša did this with great responsibility. Of course it was too early to come up with a solution, but it was a great success and a political sign that the decision was taken to go on with the ratification process in the Member States that have not yet ratified.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

By declaring 2008 the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the European Union has given clear notice of its strong political commitment to making intercultural issues an integral part of all Union policies. After centuries of war and violence, Europe has now experienced peace, reconciliation and tolerance at first hand for a long period. On the basis of that experience, the European Union is setting an example for the world as a whole and fosters dialogue between cultures. The European Parliament has been attaching great significance to this European year of dialogue between cultures. The Slovenian Presidency has paid significant attention to it working closely with us, sharing the commitment that a so-called »Clash of Civilisations« is not at all inevitable. In May young Israeli and Palestinian leaders were invited to the EP for four days of dialogue with young Europeans on the problems of the region. This meeting offered young political leaders a unique occasion to exchange political and individual experiences and establish interpersonal relationships in a neutral environment. In early June the Presidents of the three European Institutions, the President of the European Council and Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, Commission President José Manuel Durao Barroso and myself as President of the European Parliament inaugurated the Euro-Mediterranean University which will be located in the historical Slovenian city of Portorož. This establishment will bring together young people from both sides of the Mediterranean through study programmes specifically aimed at increasing their knowledge and mutual understanding and help to increase the understanding of each other's cultures. Together with the Council and Commission we have been developing dialogue between the European Union and Europe's churches and faiths. In early May the three Presidents of the EU institutions met with 20 European religious leaders. The power of religious authorities to make a significant contribution, through wise leadership, to tackling some of today's major challenges should not be underestimated. Within the European context, the churches have always been strong supporters of the integration project.

WESTERN BALKANS

Bringing the countries of South-East Europe - Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia - closer to accession to the European Union has been a strong Slovenian priority. The European Parliament has been a viable partner on this avenue. However this issue during the passed six months has been dominated by the declaration of independence of Kosovo and its consequences. The Kosovo Assembly proclaimed Kosovo's independence in late February. The decision had been expected and reflects the will of the citizens in Kosovo to take their political destiny and institution-building for independence into their own hands in a peaceful fashion. Over a year ago, following the Ahtisaari report, the European Parliament advocated internationally supervised sovereignty for Kosovo. The EU sees its obligation to encourage those in positions of political responsibility in Kosovo to shoulder their responsibility and establish democratic political institutions which respect the rights and freedoms of all citizens as part of a multiethnic Kosovo that has good neighbourly relations with its neighbours. In late April the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the Interim Agreement were signed by the EU with Serbia. Given the complex situation and early elections in Serbia which were upcoming at that time, the agreement will help pave the way for ever-closer collaboration between the EU and Serbia across a range of issues in the coming future. It would bring tangible benefits for Serbians such as free trade access and better conditions for investment and

job creation. This is one further step to anchoring Serbia firmly in the European family of democracies, which was also confirmed by the results of the parliamentary elections of 11th May. The countries of the western Balkans have a European perspective. They should continue down the road of political and economic reform, reconciliation among peoples. Accession will not be possible in the near future; but each of the countries has that perspective. Accordingly, in the process, we should help people both in Serbia and in Kosovo to overcome their differences from a European integration perspective, as has taken place elsewhere in Europe.

IRISH REFERENDUM ON THE LISBON TREATY

The outcome of the Irish referendum of 12th June on the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was a great disappointment to all those who want to make the European Union's decision-making procedures more democratic, more readily understandable to the public, more effective, more straightforward and more transparent. The biggest losers as a result of the 'No' vote are not so much the institutions of the European Union, nor the governments. Those are, unfortunately, the people of the European Union, who place their hopes in a stronger Union which can, through joint action, overcome the growing challenges linked to globalisation and guarantee everyone in Europe a better future. Just as the outcome of the referendum in Ireland should be respected, which was arrived at by democratic means and in accordance with the Irish Constitution, the same has to be applied to the decisions taken by those 19 Member States which have approved the Lisbon Treaty in accordance with their constitutional rules. The European Parliament is fully committed to the task of overcoming the challenges posed by the vote in Ireland. The EU must continue the ratification process as originally planned and, at the October meeting of the European Council we should lay down a procedure which makes it possible for the Lisbon Treaty to enter into force prior to the European Parliament elections in June 2009. Facilitating that process will now be the task of the incoming French Presidency.

CONCLUSIONS

The outgoing Slovenian Presidency of the EU is an excellent example of the fundamental change that has taken place in Europe over the past two decades. This is an extraordinary achievement, when you consider that less than 20 years ago Slovenia was part of communist Yugoslavia. This remarkable country has led a reinforced and enlarged European Union of 27 Member States for the last six months dealing with all the challenges it was facing. Slovenia has performed an exemplary job given the very complicated situation resulting first with the Kosovo declaration in the early stages of the Presidency and concluded by the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland. I have to congratulate the Prime Minister Janez Janša, his government, officials involved in the Presidency, on the outstanding job they have done during the last six months leading the block. The torch now goes to the hands of France, which I wish every success in the coming six months.

Apology: we apologise for the spelling mistakes in the commentary by David Tasič in the previous issue of Sinfo, which occurred during the computer conversion of the text from upper to lower case letters. We kindly ask for you understanding. Editorial Board.

Source: STA



The EU Summit for continued ratification and with guarantees that the EU functions normally

The EU heads of state and government agreed on 20 June in Brussels that the procedure of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty will be continued despite the Irish “No”, but they did not set deadlines for a solution to the crisis. The current President of the EU Council, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, claimed that in spite of this, the EU is functioning normally, while the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, praised the Slovenian EU Presidency.

At this Summit, the second and last of the Slovenian EU Presidency, the EU leaders gave Ireland time for reflection on solutions for the treaty that the Irish rejected at a referendum, and at the same time emphasised that the ratification process is continuing, with the exception of the Czech Republic, where they are waiting for the ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic on the continuation of the procedure.

Despite the remark referring to the Czech Republic, Janša believes that there is a determination in the EU to continue the implementation of solutions from the Lisbon Treaty, which was signed last December by all Member States. “By signing the treaty, the Czech Republic also promised that it would do everything in its power for the treaty to be ratified and implemented,” he said, adding that “great encouragement came from Great Britain”, which confirmed the treaty. Regarding deadlines, Mr Janša said that there was a good reason why they had not been set. “We all know why we need the solutions from the Lisbon Treaty and why we need them as soon as possible. This is also a reason why it is now wise to take steps which would extend these time limits,” he noted.

At the October Summit under the French Presidency, the EU leaders will return to the problem, and since Ireland is not expected to ensure by then that it will present concrete solutions for the crisis, it was not presented with any deadlines, but it was only emphasised that this was the next opportunity for a debate on the issue.

“Regardless of the situation with the Lisbon Treaty, the European Council discussed the entire envisaged agenda and we are normally solving the current problems, and this will also be the case in the future, said the EU Council chair. We are solving the current problems and there is no time for rest - the World is changing and we cannot afford to lag behind,” he noted.

The EU leaders dedicated the latest summit primarily to rising oil and food prices. They agreed that the EU must show unity in taking measures at home and at the global level. Mr Janša explained that the EU was in the phase of active problem-solving: the first phase involves the immediate mitigation of consequences, whereas the majority of instruments are in the hands of the national policies of EU members, and it is of key importance, he said, that effective structural adjustments are established in the long run.

Both Mr Janša and Commission President Barroso warned that high oil prices are a structural phenomenon which will not disappear over night. They emphasised the necessity of improving energy efficiency and diversity of sources, and of reducing dependency on fossil fuel imports, as well as enhancing research for the development of new technologies.

Also on the agenda were the Western Balkans, one of the priorities of Slovenia’s EU Presidency. The EU leaders confirmed that Macedonia, if it meets all the required conditions, could

WHATMAKESTHENEWS

launch accession talks with the EU as early as this year, and a solution to the naming dispute with Greece was not explicitly mentioned as a condition.

Mr Janša assessed that a great step forward had been taken in the Western Balkans under the Slovenian EU Presidency. The European perspective is no longer a question, because stabilisation and association agreements have been signed with all countries in the region, and there has also been progress in visa policy, he elicited as examples.

The EU leaders endorsed the introduction of the euro in Slovakia as of 1 January 2009, expressing the belief that the Union for the Mediterranean, which will formally be established in July in Paris, will give new momentum to relations between the Union and countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and at the same time they welcomed the proposal on the strengthening of cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe.

The European Council has lifted sanctions on Cuba, which have been in force since 2003, and called on Zimbabwe to hold run-off presidential elections, on 27 June, in accordance with international standards.

The leaders also agreed that the year 2008 should be a turning point in the enhancement of efforts for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, which they believe to be still realisable.

A couple of days before the end of the Slovenian Presidency, the President of the European Commission congratulated Prime Minister Janša and his team on what he believes has been an excellent job. Mr Janša admitted that the Presidency had been a challenge, and at the same time a great experience for Slovenia.

JANŠA: THE EU IS SOLVING CURRENT PROBLEMS NORMALLY, AND THIS WILL ALSO BE THE CASE IN THE FUTURE

We have tackled extremely seriousness problems related to the high prices of food and oil that Europe and the entire world are facing, said Mr Janša. He said that EU leaders tackled the challenge of increasingly high prices of food, which has a major impact on the life of us all. Some 16% of the EU population lives on or under the poverty line, and the most affected are families with low incomes. Over hundred million people in the world live in great poverty, while the price of oil has increased by 500% in recent years.

The reasons for such high prices, according to Mr Janša, are varied and complex. EU policies are not the main causes for the problem, but they can offer solutions or be a part of a solution, the chair of the EU Council is convinced. The leaders agreed that the EU must show unity in taking measures at home and at the global level.

We can say that we are in a phase of active problem-solving: the first phase involves the immediate mitigation of consequences, whereas the majority of instruments are in the hands of the national policies of EU members, Mr Janša said, adding that it was of key importance that effective structural adjustments were established in the long run.

Systematic monitoring of the market situation is necessary because in this way we can prepare ourselves for shocks and reduce systemic risks. A key measure in fighting the high prices of energy is improving energy efficiency and diversity of sources, and reducing dependency on fossil fuel imports, said Mr Janša.

Research and innovation for the development of new technologies should also be enhanced, because it is unrealistic to expect that Europe's dependency on fossil fuels will decrease without them, while sustainable criteria for the production of biofuels should also be determined. Synergies in all areas of policies - agriculture,

energy, environment, science, foreign policy - are necessary, the Prime Minister believes.

Once again we made a commitment that we would do our job related to climate change and the energy-climate package, Janša emphasised.

The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, repeated that he had presented to the countries several proposals for short- and long-term measures. "EU members have numerous opportunities to help the most vulnerable households," he said. He listed a number of proposed measures on the first day of the summit: we have expanded the food aid scheme, we have helped fishermen and also supported the agricultural sector in developing countries; we are promoting better transparency and competitiveness in the oil and natural gas markets.

"We have sent a clear message to all: there is no quick remedy for high oil prices; it is a structural issue," said Barroso, and concluded that the EU must be more energy efficient and promote diversity of energy sources.

BARROSO: SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY HAS DONE AN EXCEPTIONAL JOB

The Slovenian Presidency has done an exceptional job, the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso told the press in Brussels at the end of the last EU Summit under Slovenia's EU Presidency. The then chair of the EU council, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, meanwhile emphasised that Slovenia had gained extremely valuable experience with the Presidency.

"I would like to give my sincere praise to Prime Minister Janša and his team for doing an exceptional job, with commitment, political and intellectual fairness, and patiently and professionally," said Barroso.

The Commission President added that this summit was taking place in a very tense situation because of the Irish "No" at the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty two weeks ago and the soaring prices of food and oil, but that the Presidency had carried out the its tasks with great competence.

Prime Minister Janez Janša meanwhile admitted that the Presidency was a great challenge. "Time will tell about the results, and the successes we have had are not the successes of the Slovenian Presidency, but the joint successes of the entire Union," Janša said.

The Presidency in the last six months has faced numerous challenges, and some of them had not been planned for, added the Prime Minister, among them the events in the Western Balkans, as Kosovo declared its independence during Slovenia's EU Presidency.

As a particularly great success, the Prime Minister pointed out the fact that the EU had proven that despite difficulties, it functions and responds to the problems of its citizens, and that it is a community which brings mutual benefits for those who enter and for those who are already there.

He was also grateful for the support and understanding the Presidency had enjoyed from the European Commission and the offices of the EU Council. Mr Janša believes that the knowledge and experience Slovenia gained during the Presidency were particularly valuable.

Slovenia, which was the first EU President among the countries which joined the bloc in 2004, handed over the Presidency to France on 1 July, and Janez Janša was succeeded by French President Nicolas Sarkozy as the next President of the EU Council.

Source: STA



Politicians praise unity on eve of National Day

Several ceremonies were held on 24 June as the country gears up to celebrate National Day, which marks the day when Slovenia declared independence. Officials praised the unity that the nation showed back in 1991, but pointed to challenges still ahead.

President Danilo Türk, who addressed the central ceremony in front of parliament building, outlined the history of independent Slovenia, evoking the 1991 ten-day war of independence and diplomatic efforts to secure international recognition of the country's sovereignty. He thanked those who carried the biggest burden in the tumultuous times of birth of the new state, including those who fought for independence with guns as well as those who coordinated their activities. The President then praised the country's achievements in the past 17 years, saying that Slovenia was coping well with its responsibilities and was at the moment concluding its successful six-month stint at the helm of the EU. Turning to the future, the President said that rising oil and food prices and global warming presented the biggest challenges and required true development alternatives. Reforms are necessary both globally and in Slovenia, as well as in NATO and the UN. NATO should think about ways to complete its transformation into a collective security organisation and the UN carry out reforms that would allow it to genuinely contribute to human security in all areas. Slovenia should meanwhile do more to harness the intellectual abilities, creativity and the ability to act for the common good. The President also touched upon some internal issues, especially the regarding the general attitude towards the national institutions. The ceremony came after the festive session of the National Assembly at which Speaker France Cukjati said that a state was a continuous project, calling for more justice and the rule of law.

He added though that celebrating a birthday was a family holiday when »quarrels are at least for a moment forgotten and everybody gets that pleasant feeling of belonging to parents«. He said the country was booming, while it was also necessary

to make sure that growth and economy would not solely be in the service of profit but also be used to improve the standard of all employees. He called on the public to be critical as well as to back the projects that deserve its support. He also pointed to the attempts at influencing public opinion by stating things that were not true to facts. Slovenia declared independence 17 years ago on the basis of a December 1990 vote in which 88.2% of all voters opted for breaking away from Yugoslavia. The decision provoked a reaction from the Yugoslav military, which engaged in a ten-day war with the Slovenian Territorial Defence. The hostilities ended with a truce on 7 July 1991. Türk laid a wreath at the memorial honouring those who died in battle then in the main Ljubljana cemetery earlier in the day, accompanied by the defence and interior ministers and the military and police chiefs. Prime Minister Janez Janša meanwhile hosted a reception for the relatives of those killed in battle, praising the sacrifice their loved ones had made for Slovenia to be able to celebrate independence today. Janša compared the situation at that time with the situation in the EU at the moment, saying that »we had not lost hope then, even though the circumstances were much more difficult at the time then a procedural complication in ratification of a treaty« that the EU is faced with at the moment. »The relatives of those killed in the war for Slovenia are aware of that and the country will never forget this,« he emphasised and thanked those who were involved in planning Slovenia's defence and the first Slovenian government, in which he was defence minister. Another ceremony to mark the eve of the bank holiday was a holy mass for the homeland in the Ljubljana cathedral, celebrated by Ljubljana Archbishop and Metropolitan Alojz Uran. Uran said that the mass was celebrated on the day of birth of St. John the Baptist at the time when the »government of Slovenia was completing its six-month Presidency of the Council of Europe«. The mass was also attended by Cukjati, State Prosecutor General Barbara Brezigar, MEP Alojz Peterle, Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk, Education Minister Milan Zver, Environment Minister Janez Podobnik and several MPs.

The achievements of Slovenia's EU Presidency presented to the European Parliament

DRAGUTIN MATE /INTERIOR MINISTER/: SLOVENIA JUSTIFIED CONFIDENCE PLACED IN IT



Slovenia has justified the confidence placed in it during its stint at the helm of the EU. Beside the Presidency itself I will especially remember the time before the Presidency, when together with Portugal, Slovenia played the key role in assuring the Schengen expansion, by building a bridge of trust between the old and new members. I would like to emphasise the adoption of the Return Directive. This

is the first such document on immigration adopted through joint decision-making of the EU Council and the European Parliament. Among the achievements is also the approval of the timetable for the implementation the second-generation Schengen Information System and further enlargement of the Schengen area. In the field of external relations I would like to underline the agreement with the US to continue talks on the visa waiver programme, which allows visa-free travel to the US, and a new approach to police cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans.

IZTOK JARC /AGRICULTURE MINISTER/: THE STINT WAS MARKED BY PROFESSIONAL, HIGHLY-MOTIVATED, DILIGENT AND HONEST PEOPLE



The stint was marked by professional, highly-motivated, diligent and honest people who implemented »almost 100%« of Slovenia's plans. Through its stint at the helm of the EU, Slovenia got to know the bloc's common agricultural policy (CAP) from the inside - meaning how the system really works and how its institutions are being run. Slovenia's integration into the CAP took at least 10

years, Slovenia had been giving the CAP a try at home even before entering the union. By officially entering the CAP in 2004, and by learning how they system works from inside, we have in a way become a mature member of it. Among the priorities there is the CAP reform health check. We are all aware the agricultural policy needs to evolve, but it must develop in a way so that it adapts to global circumstances. After 2004, the negative trend in the number of farms in Slovenia has stopped, the real growth of factor income has increased and the area of land covered in forest, which

has always been a problem in Slovenia. I believe high food prices will become one of the key questions the CAP is to deal with, last year, the policy last reacted successfully by introducing well-timed measures, such as the phasing out of milk quotas and the lowering of customs duties. We regulated the use of pesticides in farming, and the agreements on milk quotas and the wine reform as the achievements of the Slovenian EU Presidency. But in the future, the CAP will need to follow the European model of farming, which hinges on sustainable development.

RADOVAN ŽERJAV /TRANSPORT MINISTER/: SATISFIED WITH PROGRESS



The presiding trio's priorities included the European Galileo satellite navigation programme, the road transport liberalisation package and transport agreement with the Western Balkans. As a trio we were undoubtedly more successful than each of us could have been on their own. The main priority was definitely the Galileo programme. Since the very beginning of the Presidency, it was clear that

an appropriate statutory framework and plan of financing must be set up to keep the project alive and all this has been done. The Slovenian Presidency managed to bring the countries closer in this respect and increase road safety and highlighted the clean vehicles directive as the first directive for greener transport. The European Commission will start negotiations with the region on a transport agreement. The goal of the agreement is to create an integrated market for infrastructure as well as for transport on land, sea and inland waterways. The agreement, which is expected to be signed in 2009, will also prompt the Western Balkan countries to bring their legislation into line with that of the EU.

ANDREJ BAJUK /FINANCE MINISTER/: CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION IMPACTED SLOVENIAN EU PRESIDENCY



»Thecurrenteconomicsituation had a big impact of the work of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU. The EU's economies and the eurozone are facing somewhat lower economic activity rates in 2008, which are mostly the consequence of slower economic growth in the US, uncertainty on financial markets and price pressures from the suppliers, Europe was defying the slowdown in the economic growth rather

well. I emphasise the need to improve market orientation of

agriculture, to assure sustainability of EU biofuels policies, sufficient competition in the food production and supply chain, to increase productivity in agriculture, especially in developing countries and the need to further analyse the factors that contribute to high price increases. During the Presidency there was a progress in four areas: coordination of economic policies, financial services, taxation and international affairs. The Slovenian Presidency paid the most attention to further integration of financial services markets. The progress was made in implementing roadmaps: on responses to current financial market developments, on improved supervision within the financial system and on providing financial stability and crisis management in the EU. Regarding the coordination of economic policies I underline successful launch of the second three-year cycle of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs and the adoption of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines for the period 2008-2010. The Slovenian Presidency had worked very hard to make progress regarding the proposal for technical amendments to the VAT directive, the proposal on VAT taxation of insurance and financial services, and the proposal for a directive on the general arrangement for excise duty.

LOVRO ŠTURM / JUSTICE MINISTER /: ENVIRONMENT DIRECTIVE



Among the achievements I highlight the adoption of the directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law. This is a very important issue and we are glad that we can present this important achievement to MEPs today, as the European Parliament and Slovenia are very interested in the protection of environment. The directive defines as punishable offenses certain kinds of pollution, such

as emissions of dangerous materials into air, water or soil, illegal transport of waste and trade with endangered species. E-justice had always been a priority of the EU presiding trio of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Slovenia continued very intensively in the field, focusing on organisation of video-conferences and establishment of a European e-justice portal. An important step forward is the agreement on maintenance obligations, which will simplify procedures and make directly executable the enforcement of judgments by a court in another EU member. The Presidency contributed in fight against terrorism. A framework decision on the issue was improved and now includes new offenses such as public incitement to commit terrorist acts, and recruiting and training for terrorism.

MOJCA KUCLER DOLINAR / HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MINISTER /: EIT SEAT AGREEMENT PRESIDENCY ACHIEVEMENT

I must specially point to the agreement on the seat of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). In the view of Slovenia's bid to host the seat of the Galileo satellite navigation system, the commitment of all Member States that new members will be given preference in hosting seats of new agencies is very important. I can easily say that we have achieved everything and, in some areas, even more than initially planned. The confirmation of the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen Joint Technology Initiative and the Eurostars



programme aimed at small and medium companies that supports high-risk projects in the area of research and development as achievements of the Slovenian Presidency. The Slovenian Presidency has contributed through the launch of the Ljubljana Process, which represents a commitment of the EU Member States for further development of the ERA.

Other steps leading to a fully implemented ERA included family-friendly employment possibilities, cooperation among regions, the integration of public and private funding for research infrastructure, and the introduction of the »fifth freedom« (related to the movement of researchers). Within one of the priorities - integration of the Western Balkans in the ERA - the Presidency hosted a meeting of the Steering Platform on Research for the Western Balkan Countries and made efforts for the platform's meetings to be consistent. Since the modernisation of R&D infrastructure is a priority for all countries of the Western Balkans and also a prerequisite for their integration in joint research programmes, Slovenia has launched a donation project in this area,« she added.

TOMAŽ JERŠIČ / STATE SECRETARY AT THE MINISTRY FOR ECONOMY /: ENERGY MARKET LIBERALISATION ACHIEVEMENT OF PRESIDENCY



Regarding Slovenia's EU Presidency, I would like to emphasise the »broad agreement regarding the most important elements of the third energy package«. The EU members confirmed that besides decoupling and independent system operator options, there is also a possibility of establishing an independent transfer operator. This agreement opens the doors to a better,

more efficient and more competitive market, which is important for users. This is a major step forward in making transfer operators independent from other, market functions in the energy sector, which will most certainly improve energy supply. Regarding the importance of the decoupling agreement for a possible entry of the Russian energy giant Gazprom in the EU market, I must say that »those who will come or who are already here must play according to the common rules«. The Slovenian Presidency also pushed ahead with the climate-energy package, with an emphasis on the directive on the promotion of electricity from renewable energy sources. »The spring EU summit confirmed the ambitiousness of the package and called for a quick response from the EU members and institutions.« The Slovenian Presidency is especially satisfied that small and medium companies were given one of the main roles within the next cycle of the Lisbon Strategy, because such companies were one of the priorities of the Presidency.



EU and Russia agree to launch key partnership talks

EU and Russia formally endorsed the start of talks on a wide-ranging new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement on 27 June in Khanty-Mansiysk, which will replace the existing, decade-old accord, and is expected to put the weighty relationship on a new footing. Once finalised, the agreement will form the basis of a long-term strategic partnership between the EU and Russia, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told the press. »The future agreement will be an instrument to bring Russia and the EU closer.« The launch of the talks confirms positive expectations for a new beginning, added Slovenian Prime Minister and the then European Council President Janez Janša. He said the agreement must create conditions allowing Russia and the EU to respond to new challenges.

Negotiations started in Brussels on 4 July and the 1997 agreement, which has already been extended, will remain in place until the new document is finalised. The aim of the talks is to »conclude a strategic agreement that will provide a comprehensive network for EU-Russia relations for the foreseeable future and help to develop the potential of our relationship,« reads the joint statement from the summit. Medvedev said the agreement would be concise without any excessive details. The focus will be on the strategic character of cooperation plus on sectoral agreements dealing with economic issues and the environment, freedom, security and justice, external security and research and education. The roadmaps for these areas »will be the most important documents for us in the medium term,« said Medvedev, adding that they would form the bedrock of ties. Energy security was the top priority at the summit, as the EU seeks access to upstream assets in Russia's oil and gas fields, whereas Russian energy companies are eager to increase their foothold downstream, on the EU's distribution market. Medvedev said that Russia would proceed with its plans to build the North Stream and South Stream gas pipelines to Germany and Italy respectively. »Russia remains a key energy supplier for the EU and the EU will remain Russia's most important export market,« European Commission President José Manuel Barroso said, adding that energy security was paramount. Overall, the EU officials underlined that the EU-Russia relationship needed a new framework to better address the challenges that they will face in the future, such as climate change, food security, financial instability, energy stability and the frozen conflicts. »This is a very important document for the future of our very comprehensive relations,« Barroso said. Janša noted that the

main challenges facing Russia and the EU have their origins at the global level. »These demand more than just short-term measures, they require strategic partnership and cooperation,« he said. As part of efforts to tackle global challenges, the two sides also talked about President Medvedev's ideas for a new framework of cooperation spanning the area »from Vancouver to Vladivostok«, which is seen as a call on the EU to reduce its security dependence on the US. »Europe is our common home and all of us are the states who are masters of this home...One cannot outsource the maintenance of one's home to another person,« Medvedev said. Medvedev said that existing organisations such as NATO and the OSCE, which roughly cover this area, were inadequately equipped to face future challenges. »None is capable of resolving these matters to the full extent.«

He called for a summit of European countries plus the US, Canada and relevant regional organisations which are based on »principles that unite us«. He said such a summit could produce a pan-European agreement adequately providing for security. As the Slovenian Prime Minister put it, there are many organisations in Eurasia which are tasked with safeguarding peace and security. They were the right response to the visions of the time when they were set up, but »there are still issues which are not included in the programmes of these organisations, for example the security consequences of climate change.« Janša believes that Medvedev's thesis - that there are three heirs of European culture, the EU, North America and Russia - tackled this debate from the right angle. »Only a security organisation based on values can be permanent, successful and cohesive.« The summit was seen by analysts as a test on whether the new Russian President would prove to be more flexible than his predecessor Vladimir Putin, whose tough stance often aggravated relations with the EU. But the officials were eager to downplay the importance of personae. »Leaders can make a great contribution, but we have to look at long-term strategic relations,« Barroso said. »We are writing a new page. It is very important to look at the future,« added the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana. At a summit where both delegations were chaired by Slavic countries, the officials showered Slovenia with praise for how it navigated its six-month stint at the helm of the EU. The Slovenian Presidency has been extremely successful from Russia's perspective, said Medvedev, who complimented Janša on doing preparatory work that made it possible to launch the talks on the new strategic partnership. The Presidency has been extremely successful and the achievements in Russia are proof of that, added Barroso.

Text: VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: STA



José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission: I consider that this Presidency has been for Slovenia a highlight in the impressive list of achievements

MR BARROSO, WHAT IS YOUR ESTIMATION OF THE SIX-MONTH SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL ON THE DISCHARGE OF ITS MANDATE?

Slovenia has presided the EU in a sober, dialogue minded and effective way through a crucial period. I am particularly satisfied about the excellent collaboration between the Slovenian authorities and the European Commission in implementing a very pragmatic and »results for citizens oriented« agenda. The recent setback in the Treaty ratification process should not overshadow what has been a fruitful and serious Presidency of the EU over the last six months.

I also consider that this Presidency has been for Slovenia a highlight in the impressive list of achievements of this young nation in the path of its European integration, starting with the accession to the EU, followed by the adoption of the Euro last year and more recently its integration in the Schengen area. Slovenia has positioned itself at the centre of the game.

WHAT ARE THE MOST VISIBLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY?

Slovenia has been the first new member state to hold the six month Presidency of the European Union. And I must say that my confidence in Slovenia's abilities to run a successful Presidency has proven to be justified. We already have numerous achievements to show. The successful launch of the new cycle of the Lisbon

Strategy for Growth & Jobs at the March European Council is certainly a major one.

The Slovenian Presidency has done also a very good job in our joint efforts to address the energy and climate change challenges, internally but also externally, pushing systematically our ambitious agenda in the global stage, putting it high in the agenda in all our meetings with partners such the US, China, Russia, Latin America, Japan and India.

I also highly appreciated Slovenia's commitment and work done in furthering the European perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans. We finally can say that the EU is fully taking its responsibilities in this region of Europe. The Slovenian Presidency was very effective in facilitating the EU to reach a common position on Kosovo at the most challenging time.

AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HAGUE CONGRESS, WHICH IS THE FUNDAMENTAL LANDMARK OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE MAY FORUM IN THE HAGUE COMPILED TWO DAYS OF DISCUSSIONS INTO 60 IDEAS ON WHERE THE EU IS HEADING. THE BASIC CONCLUSION IS THAT MORE ENERGY NEEDS TO BE DEDICATED TO HOW TO SUCCEED IN IMPLEMENTING THE

INTERVIEW

OBJECTIVE THAT THE EU WOULD BE MEANINGFUL NOT ONLY TO ELITES, BUT ALSO TO ORDINARY PEOPLE. SO WHERE IS THE EU HEADING?

Exactly there! There is one guiding principle which must drive all our efforts, and this is to serve the 500 million citizens in the EU. I call it the Europe of citizens. Citizens are the reasons to exist of our policies. It is our duty to help Europe's citizens seize the opportunities and meet the challenges of globalisation in the twenty-first century – globalisation of the economy, demographic change, migration, climate change, energy security, sustainable development, and terrorism.

This is the aim. And it is clearly reflected in the agenda of my Commission. In 2008 we are coming forward with important initiatives, for example in the areas of social policy, agriculture and, asylum and migration, small and medium companies... all those initiatives are meaningful for ordinary citizens, not only the elites.

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES THAT THE EU NEEDS TO FACE AFTER THE LISBON TREATY IS THE NEW DEFINITION OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS - NAMELY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL INTERESTS. WE ARE WELL AWARE OF WHAT A NATIONAL INTEREST IS, BUT WHAT IS A EUROPEAN INTEREST? AND HOW DO WE INCLUDE THE VOICE OF SOVEREIGN NATIONS IN THE FORMATION OF A EUROPEAN INTEREST?

There is no contradiction, believe me. In fact, the »European interest« as you say can and should be seen as an extension of the national interest. And your country is probably one of the best examples of this concept put into practice and taken to its most successful consequences. Just look at the recent history of Slovenia, the problems that this region has known (and still does for some of its countries) and then see the benefits for Slovenia of this impressive fast integration in the EU, the Euro area, the Schengen agreements... And the benefits of integrating Slovenia and the other new Member States are equally important for Europe as a whole. It is a win-win process.

In this sense, the Lisbon Treaty is and remains a fair compromise between these two levels of sovereignty, enabling a more democratic, transparent but also effective EU to serve better its citizens.

HAS THE EU CHANGED IN ANY WAY SINCE THE ACCESSION OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN MEMBERS – 55 MILLION SLAVIC CITIZENS?

The EU has indeed changed substantially as a consequence of the enlargement to 12 new Member States but I would not underline this »Slavic« factor in particular. Diversity is bigger than ever in our Union and so is the number of so-called »small Member States«. In other words, the EU can difficultly be dominated by a limited

group of big Member States. Our culture of consensus, based on an exhaustive and inclusive political dialogue, has therefore been reinforced.

THE EU IS FACING CHALLENGES SUCH AS A CRISIS OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND A DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT. WHAT IS YOUR COMMENT ON THAT? AND HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE COMMON EUROPEAN INTEREST?

Those challenges are addressed in the Lisbon Treaty. You mention a »democratic deficit«, well, the Treaty of Lisbon foresees for the first time an important role for the national parliaments, and it reinforces the principle of subsidiarity so that decisions are taken at the level that ensures more effectiveness to the citizens' interest.

On your second question, I think that the central role of the EU in the 21st century is to shape globalisation in line with our core common values of freedom, democracy and solidarity. This can seem very abstract and theoretical, but it's not: it's about how to create jobs, be competitive and ensuring security for our citizens while preserving our core values of solidarity and individual freedoms in a globalized world. These are »European interests«.

THE PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EU ARE: THE LISBON STRATEGY FOR GROWTH AND JOBS, WHICH IS LINKED WITH ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE; IMMIGRATION BASED ON THE CONSENSUS REACHED AT THE LAST EU SUMMIT IN DECEMBER, AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF CONCRETE INITIATIVES, SUCH AS THE BETTER REGULATION INITIATIVE TO REDUCE LEGISLATIVE BURDENS; AND THE SME PACKAGE, WHICH ADDRESSES THE LARGEST JOB CREATION SECTOR IN EUROPE. HOW ARE THE GOALS BEING REALIZED?

We are progressing. The current difficulties for our economies, the high oil and food prices or the turbulences in the financial markets can only encourage us to pursue this positive transformation agenda. Moving smoothly to low carbon economies, leading –politically and materially- the new technological revolution, pushing the climate change agenda globally, strengthening and implementing the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs... that must be at the core of our common agenda. And I insist on the word »common«, because the challenges are so that we better address them as Europeans if we want to prevail.

We are achieving our goals. For instance, when I see how our proposals to reduce CO₂ cars' emissions are gaining support, or how Europe is increasingly seen in the world as leading the process to set responsible industrial and trade standards, I measure the progress made.

GLOBALISATION, COMBATING TERRORISM, SUSTAINABLE ENERGY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND EUROPEANS' PURCHASING POWER ARE ALSO CHALLENGES. THIS MIGHT JUST BE THE STORYLINE OF THE »NEW EUROPEAN STORY« THAT YOU AND YOUR COMMISSION WANT TO PEN BEFORE THE END OF THEIR MANDATE. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS SPHERE?

Globalisation is challenging but I want to see it also as a set of new opportunities. New opportunities for an open, competitive and ambitious Europe. And also for the developing world, because we have a responsibility to contribute to a better functioning, sustainable and balanced world order.

The EU is increasingly perceived in the world stage as an active player which is proposing and often setting the standards in a number of global issues, from climate change to development cooperation, good governance and human rights, social standards, or regulation of financial markets.

The mandate of my Commission is far from being over and I still want to see many things happening. 2009 will be a crucial year in many key areas of our action: international negotiations on climate change and emissions reduction after 2012 are high on the agenda, with a deadline in the UN conference in November in Copenhagen. On our energy agenda, the efforts to go further in the realization of the internal energy market, our energy dialogue with strategic partners, our efforts to diversify both the sources and the providers are more urgent than ever.

ACCORDING TO SOME OPINIONS, WITH 27 MEMBERS AND THE PROSPECT OF FURTHER EXPANSION, THE EU NEEDS A NEW FRAMEWORK WHICH WILL ENABLE NOT ONLY GREATER EFFICIENCY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLITICAL COMPONENT AND A MORE VISIBLE ROLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE, BUT WILL ALSO STRENGTHEN THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITY OF ITS INSTITUTIONS AND EXPAND THE BASIC RIGHTS OF ITS CITIZENS. WOULD YOU AGREE?

Yes. And this is precisely what is addressed by the Lisbon Treaty. The Treaty of Lisbon reinforces Europe's capacity to act more effectively for the benefit of our citizens. And the Treaty makes Europe more democratic, more transparent, and more influential on the world stage. In other words: the new Treaty of Lisbon gives us the means to fully exploit Europe's full potential. It is part of a historic process which began back in Berlin in 1989 and which made us the present of Europe's reunification. In spite of the current difficulties in the ratification process,

following the negative vote in Ireland, we all know that the answer to all the questions and concerns that you mention is »Europe«. The EU is not the problem, I insist, the EU is the answer. And any serious attempt to address these concerns or even fears –as we saw in Ireland- as Europeans would inevitably come to a conclusion that would not be substantially different from the deal that was agreed by all Member States...

WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF THE SOLUTION TO THE KOSOVO ISSUE? ACCORDING TO SOME OPINIONS, THE BALKANS IS THE GREATEST PART OF THE UNFINISHED EU PROJECT.

The Western Balkans have a clear European perspective. They have come closer to the EU over the past two years, both politically and economically and I am convinced that each of the countries can accelerate its integration with the EU this year, and in that sense I commend the efforts made by the Slovenian Presidency. The engines driving them towards the EU are the reforms in the countries concerned. And we are ready to help, we are mobilising all our policy instruments to support the region's progress. For instance, by establishing roadmaps for each country towards visa free travel; by doubling the number of scholarships for the students of WB; by opening up EU programmes in science and research, education, culture and youth; or by negotiating a Transport Community for South-eastern Europe.

The EU's pre-accession assistance to the region amounts to € 800 million yearly. This is by far the highest per capita amount provided by us to any region in the world! On top of that we spend yearly ca. € 150 million for the security in the region, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo, which makes the total input close to 1 billion € a year. This is also to say that we support the people of the region to opt for European values and living standards.

Concerning Kosovo, the EU has taken its responsibilities and we are supporting actively the development of a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful Kosovo. The Commission will continue to use the community instruments at its disposal, in particular to promote democratic reforms, good neighbourly relations and economic progress.





Meeting of the Council of Presidents of Business Europe in Maribor.

JANŠA LAUDS BUSINESSEUROPE FOR ENSURING EU ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Prime Minister Janez Janša took part on 13 June in a meeting of the Council of Presidents of Business Europe, saying after the closed-door conference that the organisation was responsible for the successes of the European economy and, through that, of the EU itself. Janša told the press after coming out of the meeting that the EU grew from the European economic miracle and that all political decisions that upgraded the bloc came from economic success. Such a situation is also likely to endure in the future, Janša told the leading body of BusinessEurope, which has 39 member federations from 33 countries.

Janša labelled the EU a leading economic force in the world, though at the same time very dependent on global trends and greatly co-shaping them. The Prime Minister said one of the key challenges facing the world was the changeover to a low- or no-carbon manufacturing and transport. This process will affect not only the economy, “but our way of life and our habits as well,” said Janša, adding it could not be reversed.

The way in which the economy will tackle this challenge will determine whether the EU will become an exporter of such technologies and be successful in finding the answer to today’s key challenge – climate change.

CABINET ADOPTS MEASURES TO BOOST WINE SECTOR

The cabinet adopted on 26 June a new set of measures to support promotion, education, research and counseling in the wine sector. The measures allow state aid of up to EUR 40,000 per beneficiary in a period of three years. The measures are to boost development and facilitate adjusting to the market and its trends. They are also to give Slovenian winemakers leverage to compete with producers from other EU members. The piece of legislation adopted also defines funding - 70% of total funds are earmarked for larger organisations and organisations of winemakers, while 30% are set aside for other beneficiaries - and encourages cooperation among smaller winemakers to improve competitiveness.

NEW LAWS TO BOLSTER INDEPENDENCE OF FINANCIAL WATCHDOG

The Government adopted on 12 June amendments to two laws in a move that it says will strengthen the independence of the Securities Market Agency and the Insurance Supervision Agency. Even more far-reaching steps may follow soon.

The changes to the act on financial instruments and the insurance act will address the shortcomings in the work and oversight activities of the two agencies, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Finance Žiga Lavrič told the press after the weekly government session. The agencies would have greater independence in hiring new staff, if necessary, and in setting salaries. It was initially planned that the employees would be exempt from the public sector wage system, but Lavrič said the plan was dropped as it could trigger similar demands by other civil servants. The proposal gives the agencies greater scope to request information, and the power to issue a EUR 50,000 fine to companies or organisations failing to comply. It also allows for the option to hire experts for the governing boards of the two watchdogs; until now, all five members of the governing board had to be full-time agency employees. As the Ministry of Finance said in a statement, the independence of the two agencies needs to be bolstered considering some “irreparable consequences in the concentration of ownership and unacceptable co-ordinated actions by individuals in some companies”. Lavrič said, however, that the amendments were not the final solution, as the government would have to consider merging the supervisory authorities, which the majority of EU Member States have already done. That would mean merging the two agencies with the banking oversight division of the central bank. According to Lavrič, this is a process so extensive that it will have to be tackled in the future.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AT 5.4% IN Q1

Slovenia’s economy expanded at an annual rate of 5.4% in the first quarter of this year, boosted by rising investment in construction, the Statistics Office said on 9 June. “Growth was higher than in the last quarter of last year. This means the trend

has not turned down this year, but sharply upwards," Karmen Hren, who is responsible for national accounts at the office, told reporters in Ljubljana. She admitted, however, that Q1 growth was not as high as it had been between the second quarter of 2006 and the third quarter of 2007. This was also highlighted by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (IMAD), a government think-tank, which said growth would slow down. The slowdown is already evident, for example in slower growth in manufacturing and exports, IMAD director Boštjan Vasle said in a statement. Hren singled out robust growth in gross fixed capital formation as the main reason for the growth spurt in the first quarter. Gross capital formation increased by 17.6% year-on-year, contributing 5.4 percentage points to real GDP growth, Hren said, noting that investments had again rated more prominently than exports in the structure of GDP. Gross fixed capital formation rose by 17.1%, mainly on account of the 25.1% rise in investment in buildings and structures. Investment in residential buildings was up 16.3% and investment in non-residential buildings up 28.5%. The growth of investment in machinery and equipment was more modest at 7.5% and on a par with the growth at the end of 2007. Exports, which had been a key factor of economic growth in the past, increased by 6.3%. "Exports continue to grow, but at a somewhat slower pace," Hren said. Imports were up by 9.4%, which is on a par with growth in Q4 of 2007. As imports increased more than exports, this reflected negatively on GDP volume growth (2.3 percentage points). Final consumption showed no major changes, adding 3.4% at the annual level. Expenditure of households and of general government increased by 3.4%, which means growth in general government expenditure rose compared to 2007. Total value added increased by as much as GDP (5.4%). The biggest increase was registered in construction (27.4%), which recovered after a slowdown in the second half of 2007. "Construction contributed 1.5 percentage points to GDP growth on the production side," Hren said. Value added in manufacturing, which has the biggest share in GDP, increased by 1.9%, which Hren said was considerably lower than last year and the lowest on record for the last three years. Employment continued to grow at accelerated rates for the tenth quarter in a row. Q1 employment was 3.1% up year-on-year. Construction recorded the biggest increase (13.5%), followed by transport (6.6%) and the business sector (6.1%). GDP adjusted seasonally and for working days was up 2.2% on the last quarter of 2007 and 5.7% on the first quarter of 2007. Q1 GDP at current prices amounted to EUR 8.5bn and was up 10.7% year-on-year.

PROPERTY REGISTER SET UP

The Surveying and Mapping Authority has set up a property register, a public record of real estate on Slovenian territory that will be accessible to all users free of charge. The data has been collected through a property census, land registry and other public databases. The authority will provide web access to the register by the end of this year, and soon afterwards also enable owners to access the property they own with digital certificates. Franc Ravnihar, the Head of the Real Estate Office, told the press in Ljubljana on 6 June that the authority would also make it possible for owners to submit new data or changes concerning their properties over the Internet. Bernarda Berden, who heads the department responsible for the property register, said that the register would be accessible to all individuals and legal entities free of charge, except when used for commercial purposes. The register contains data on some 6 million properties in Slovenia; 4.6 million entail only land (even when the building on this land

has another owner), 1.1 million are properties entailing the land and building owned by a single owner, while some 250,000 are properties for which the owner of the building is known, while the ownership of the land is unclear. The register is technical, rather than administrative, which means it will contain data on all properties because the registry of new properties will not depend on administrative procedures. This will make the maintenance of the register quite cheap and procedures swift. The register is an open system that can be supplemented by various users, according to Ales Seliskar, General Director of the Surveying and Mapping Authority. He added that the mass valuation of the properties could be implemented next year. Asked about property taxation, he said that the incumbent government had decided to put off the introduction of property tax and that this would be a matter for the new government to tackle. The cost of the property census, launched in 2006, was EUR 10.92m, while an additional EUR 497,000 will be spent on the register.

APRIL TRADE GAP DOWN 20% YEAR-ON-YEAR

In April, Slovenia exported EUR goods worth 1.83bn, while imports amounted to EUR 1.99bn. The trade gap amounted to EUR 163.3m, which was some 20% less than the month before, the Statistics Office said on 9 June. Imports in April went up by 15.7% year-on-year, while exports increased by 18.1%, according to a preliminary report. The export-import ratio went up from 89.2% to 91.8%. In the first four months of 2008, exports went up by 9.2% to EUR 6.84bn, while imports increased by 12.5% to EUR 7.62bn, compared to the same period last year. The export-import ratio amounted to 89.7% for the first third of the year, with the gap topping EUR 784.3m. From January to April, Slovenia imported over EUR 6bn worth of goods from EU members, almost 12% up year-on-year. Imports from other countries increased by 14.7% to EUR 1.61bn. Meanwhile, Slovenia exported EUR 4.85bn of goods to EU members in the first four months of 2008, and almost EUR 2bn to other countries.

GAZPROM SAYS SOUTH STREAM PIPELINE WILL CROSS SLOVENIA

Aleksei Miller, the CEO of Russian energy giant Gazprom, said on 10 June that Gazprom had finally decided on the route of its South Stream gas pipeline, revealing that on the way to Italy the pipeline would also cross Slovenia. Slovenian Minister of the Economy Andrej Vizjak denied that any concrete agreements had been reached on the deal. According to media reports, Miller said at the European business congress in Deauville that the pipeline would run from Russia under the Black Sea to Bulgaria, from where its northwestern route would cross Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia and Austria. The pipeline's southwestern route would reach Italy through Greece. The inclusion of Austria and Slovenia into the project, which is considered as a rival to the EU- and US-backed Nabucco pipeline, is said to have been agreed at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum. Slovenian Minister of the Economy Andrej Vizjak responded to the news later today by saying that Slovenia had not yet reached any concrete agreements with Gazprom on the deal, but added that, in principle, Slovenia was very much interested in taking part in the project. He explained that, before any contracts are signed, certain details need to be resolved. Slovenian representatives discussed these details during Miller's last visit to Slovenia in mid-April, Vizjak

added. The South Stream gas pipeline, which is planned to carry 30bn cubic metres of natural gas annually, is a joint project of Gazprom and Italian energy company Eni. Deliveries through the pipeline, expected to cost between EUR 7bn and EUR 10bn, or by some estimates even twice as much, are scheduled to start by 2013.

RISK ASSESSMENTS TO INCREASE SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the Labour Inspectorate are to join the Europe-wide two-year campaign of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) promoting risk assessments as a means for a healthy workplace. The "Healthy Workplaces: Good for you. Good for business" campaign, with the message that most work-related accidents could be prevented by effective risk assessments, focuses on high-risk sectors, such as construction, health care and agriculture. While regular risk assessments are already obligatory in the EU, the campaign will try to discard the common belief that risk assessments involve complicated bureaucratic procedures, Romana Tomc, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, said. The Ministry will organise practical risk assessment guidelines, while the companies and organisations with the most innovative risk assessment measures are to receive awards.

Borut Brezovar, head of the Labour Inspectorate, said the inspectors will do more checks during the campaign to encourage companies to become more active in the field of safety and health at work. According to EUROSTAT's figures and estimates by the International Labour Organisation, some 5,720 people die in work-related accidents in the EU each year, while 159,500 die of occupational diseases. In Slovenia, some 14,770 work accidents were reported in 2007, in which 29 people died, 17 of them in the construction sector.



State Secretary at the Labour, Family and Social Affairs Ministry Romana Tomc at the launch of the EU-wide Healthy Workplaces Campaign.

COMMISSIONER: EU MUST INCREASE INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH

Europe should invest more in research and development and make better use of public-private partnerships, European Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübnersaid at the European Regional Economy Forum meeting in the border town of Nova Gorica on 6 June. At the meeting, called to discuss the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy on the regional level, and focusing on public-private and private funding of research, development, innovation and education, Hübnerstressed that too little private funds are being invested in research, and that co-operation between ministries, governments and regions is a must. Hübnersaid it was important that Europe's economic development was based on knowledge, and it was therefore essential to support research and development. However, last year funds invested in science amounted to only 1.8% of GDP, which was less than planned. Luc van den Brande, the President of the Committee of the Regions, who also took part in the two-day meeting, was pleased with the forum established by the town of Nova Gorica in 2004, describing it as a bridge between the EU and South Eastern Europe. Van den Brande said that research turned money into knowledge and innovation turned knowledge into money – money produced money. He stressed that the EU and its members must establish an administration encouraging regional development. Minister of Local Government and Regional Policy Ivan Žagar also addressed the forum and stressed that economic growth depended on the active involvement of regions. The forum, which has been dedicated to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy for the last four years, will next year discuss issues related to human resources to work towards a more competitive Europe of regions.

FIRST INTERNET-ONLY BANK LAUNCHED IN SLOVENIA

Austria's Zveza bank, a member of the Raiffeisen group, has launched the first internet-only bank in Slovenia, Diba. The service offers a 3.8% annual interest rate on the checking account, Diba boss Barbara Matelič said at a press conference in Ljubljana on 11 June. To qualify for the 3.8% rate, however, the account holder needs a balance of between EUR 1,000 and EUR 100,000. The bank also provides a free digital certificate to ensure secure authentication of its customers. "Another advantage is that customers need not change their primary bank. They can keep their existing accounts and use only those Diba services that they need," stressed Matelič, who believes the bank will sign up around 3,000 customers by the end of 2008. Josef Lang, the boss of Zveza bank, meanwhile said that Diba was aiming for a 2% market share. "Slovenia is entering the world of online banking, and I hope the Slovenian market will embrace this new service," he said.

GORENJE ACQUIRES DUTCH ATAG FOR EUR 130M

Gorenje, the Velenje-based household appliance maker, has acquired ATAG Europe, a Dutch producer of home appliances. The EUR 130m deal is the largest in Gorenje's history, its chairman Franjo Bobinac told the press in Velenje on 11 June. The deal was signed by Bobinac and Philip Sluiter, the owner and general manager of ATAG. The Dutch company employs 420 workers and generates 90% of EUR 150m in annual revenues

with sales in Benelux, the economic union in Western Europe that includes neighbouring states Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Of its sales in Benelux, three quarters of the products are sold under the premium and high-end ATAG, ETNA and Pelgrim brands. Gorenje intends to pay for a part of the acquisition by taking up extra debt and through a share transaction that will make Dutch firm Home Products Europe a qualified shareholder of the Velenje-based group. Under the contract, approximately 1,000,000 Gorenje shares (7.14% of total issue) will be transferred to Home Products Europe at a price corresponding to Gorenje's six-month average value on the Ljubljana Stock Exchange. According to Bobinac, this amounts to around EUR 37m.

MINISTER OF FINANCE SAYS EU TACKLING ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN WELL

The EU is doing well in general in tackling the global economic slowdown, Minister of Finance Andrej Bajuk has said at the meeting of the G-8 group of the seven most developed countries and Russia. The EU's growth will be lower than planned in 2008 and 2009, but not by much, the Ministry of Finance quoted Bajuk as saying in Osaka on 14 June.

The ministers adopted a declaration at the close of the two-day meeting in which they stressed the insecurity and inflationary pressures that the economy was facing. Higher prices of goods, especially food and oil, present a serious threat to stable growth, they agreed. According to a press release by the Slovenian EU Presidency, the ministers discussed macro-economic prospects, including developments on financial markets, food and crude oil prices, and climate change.

Conditions on the financial markets have improved somewhat recently, but tensions still remain, in particular in financial and credit markets, Bajuk said in presenting the EU position.

The Minister added that "the EU has reacted promptly to the turmoil and adopted measures to increase the resistance capacity of our financial sector. Under Slovenia's Presidency, a series of important decisions have been taken, aiming at financial stability in the EU." "One of the most significant decisions was to sign a memorandum of understanding on co-operation between finance ministries, central banks and supervisory authorities for providing financial stability. The Memorandum was signed by 118 signatories and entered into force on 1 June 2008," the Minister is quoted as saying in the press release. Touching on the growing oil and food prices, Bajuk said that it was of the utmost importance for the EU that inflationary expectations be eased, which required a more co-ordinated global approach to responding to the supply side shocks. Climate change was also on the agenda, with the ministers welcoming and supporting the creation of a new instrument for financing environmental projects, which is to provide money for clean technologies, preventing deforestation and sustainable development of economies in developing countries. "Climate change can be efficiently tackled only at the international level," Bajuk said and pointed to the EU's goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 and increase the use of renewable energy. Bajuk also met his Japanese colleague Fukushima Nukaga for bilateral talks, discussing possibilities for co-operation in renewables and on concluding an agreement on avoiding dual taxation. Bajuk was attending the meeting in his capacity as the chair of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN). He will now travel to South Korea for a meeting of European and Asian finance ministers (ASEM) to take place on Sunday and Monday, according to a statement by the Ministry of Finance.

BAJUK STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF ASEM PARTNERSHIP

Seoul, 15 June (STA) – Minister of Finance and current Ecofin President Andrej Bajuk participated in South Korea in a meeting of finance ministers from Europe and Asia (ASEM). Bajuk took part in a debate on the challenges of the EU-Asia partnership, calling for close ties that go beyond traditional co-operation. Bajuk stressed at the meeting, held on Jeju Island, that Asia has become the main trade partner of the EU, as Europe conducts a third of its trade with Asia, while at the same time pumping a third of its foreign direct investment into the continent, the Finance Ministry said in a press release.

The EU is trying to establish closer ties which go beyond traditional modes of co-operation. Thus, deepening relations with Asia is a priority of EU foreign policy. "We should be proud of the ASEM partnership, which already brings together 43 Member States. Its capabilities are big, as it together accounts for half of the world's GDP, almost 60% of world population and 60% of global trade. In its budget, the EU has earmarked EUR 5.2bn for co-operation with Asia between 2007 and 2013," Bajuk said. He said the ASEM process in itself was a powerful tool of co-operation, which has yielded in 12 years more than 100 different initiatives, including the Jeju initiative on mutual co-operation in public-private partnerships. "ASEM countries have enormous capabilities and Europe is honoured that Asian partners are willing to learn from the EU's experience. This includes past success as well as failure, since it is much cheaper to learn from the mistakes of others," the Minister concluded. On Saturday in Osaka, Bajuk attended the meeting of G-8 finance ministers, and said that Europe was dealing relatively well with the global economic slowdown.

VIENNA BOURSE TO TAKE OVER LJUBLJANA STOCK EXCHANGE

Austria's Wiener Börse can acquire a 81.01% stake in the company that operates the Ljubljana Stock Exchange (LJSE) as the highest bidder in the last round of bidding for Ljubljanska borza, representatives of its owners said on 20 June.

According to the news portal of the public broadcaster TV Slovenija, the Vienna stock exchange offered EUR 1,401 per share, which puts the value of Ljubljanska borza at EUR 47m.

Wiener Börse CEO Heinrich Schaller said in a statement that the new majority owner would invest intensive efforts in the development of the neighbouring stock exchange. According to a press release from Wiener Börse, he said that the Vienna stock exchange was a long-term investor in the Slovenian market and would conduct co-operation primarily at the level of products, exchange of data and indices. With today's move, the Vienna stock exchange boosted its position on the capital market of Central and South Eastern Europe. In the next few weeks it will increase its stake in the Budapest bourse from 12.5% to 37.7%, while it also co-operates with stock markets in Bucharest, Sarajevo and Banja Luka. Apart from Wiener Börse, applying due diligence, the consortium of owners of Ljubljanska borza picked Greek Hellenic Exchanges as the best bidders in April, but then opted for the Vienna stock exchange. The selected bidder will sign contracts with all the companies selling their stake in the stock exchange on Tuesday, said Arkas, the company co-ordinating the sale. Before the ownership transfer, the buyer will have to acquire the go-ahead of the Competition Protection Office.



Agriculture Minister Iztok Jarc at a press conference after the government session.

GOVT ADOPTS CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY FOR AGRICULTURE

The Government adopted on 18 June a strategy on the adaptation of Slovenia's agriculture and forestry to climate change. Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Iztok Jarc told the press that the aim was to mitigate the damaging effects of climate change in a cost-effective manner. The strategy consists of five basic pillars, one of them being education, awareness-raising and provision of advice, Jarc said. The remaining pillars focus on preserving and obtaining new knowledge about climate change; on strengthening the capacity to adapt agriculture and forestry; on measures of agriculture and forestry policy and changes to existing legislation; and on facilitating international co-operation. According to Jarc, the strategy presents a switch from treatment to prevention. The next step will be the drawing up of an action plan for the implementation of the strategy, which will contain specific measures and activities. The plan is expected to be ready by the end of this year. The Government has allocated around EUR 8m for the implementation of the strategy in 2009, EUR 10m for 2010, and EUR 15m in 2011.

EUROSHAREHOLDERS HOLD ASSEMBLY IN LJUBLJANA

Euroshareholders, a confederation of European shareholders associations, held a two-day general assembly on 20 and 21 June, focusing on single- and two-tier governance. Secretary of State at the Ministry of the Economy Tomaž Jeršič labelled Euroshareholders a key association since it joins 34 national shareholders associations from Europe. In a time of globalisation, it is very welcome that individuals and companies join such

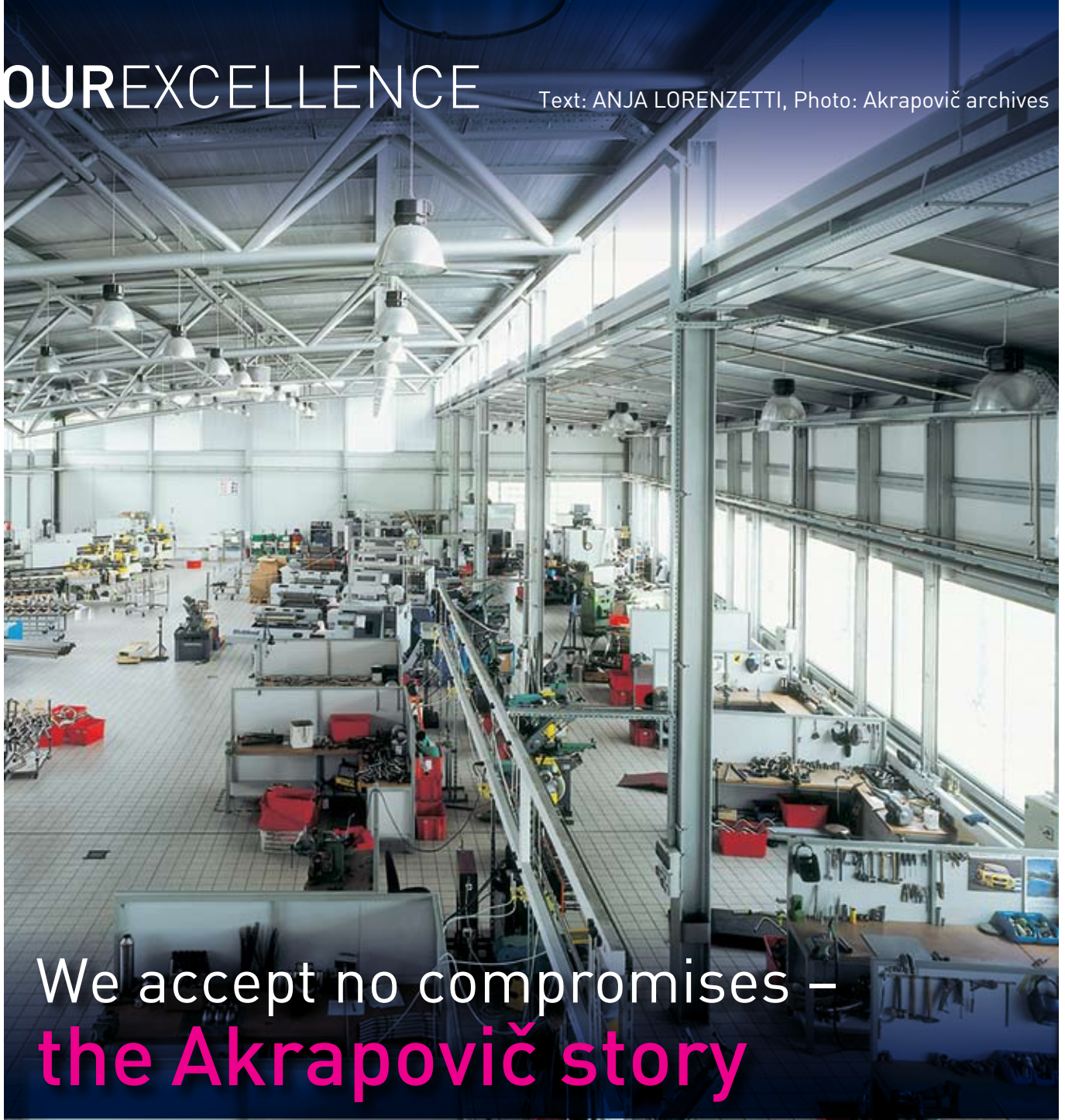
organisations, the official said at the event's opening. Euroshareholders, which represents the interests of EU shareholders, is also one of the key players in the economy of the EU and globally, Jeršič added. The meeting is an excellent opportunity to arrive at the best solutions for the future. "Only by developing our companies will we be able to guarantee the development and competitive ability of the EU's economy," he said. Euroshareholders was established in 1992; the Slovenian Small Shareholders' Association became a member in September 2006. According to Kristijan Verbič, the head of the Slovenian Small Shareholders' Association, the event will be attended by Erhard Busek, special co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for SE Europe, and representatives of several big Slovenian companies. The Euroshareholders' website states that the event will also include a presentation of economy, investment, strategic and development possibilities in the country and the region. It will also give the participants a chance to meet well-known Slovenian and foreign economists and financial experts.

NAJDI.SI SEARCH ENGINE REMAINS SLOVENIA'S NO. 1 WEBSITE

Search engine Najdi.si continues to hold on to the status of Slovenia's most visited website, the spring survey of website popularity revealed. The entire list has seen very little change compared to six months ago, with news portal 24ur.com and Siol.net, the website of the leading Slovenian internet provider, remaining in spots two and three, respectively. Najdi.si recorded 765,595 hits between 31 March and 27 April, 24ur.com was visited 702,746 times, whereas Siol.net had 509,064 hits. Completing the top ten are the public broadcaster's website Rtvsllo.si, car auction site Avto.net, phone register Tis.telekom.si, news portals Delo.si and Zurnal24.si, and multimedia portal Genspot.com. Zurnal24.si is the site that gained most in popularity compared to the autumn survey, with visitor numbers increasing by 116%. The survey, commissioned by the Advertising Chamber and carried out by Aragon, included 96 websites, which recorded a total of 1.89m unique visitors, 29% of which came from abroad. The survey, conducted for the fifth time, is carried out twice a year, in spring and autumn..

PARLIAMENT ENACTS NEW TAX ON DERIVATIVE INSTRUMENTS

The National Assembly passed on 18 June a law introducing a capital gains tax on derivative financial instruments such as options, forward contracts and certificates. A 40% tax on profit will apply if a derivative is sold sooner than one year after acquisition. The tax drops to 20% for periods between 2 and 5 years, 15% for 5–10 years, and 10% for 15–20 years. Such profits will be tax-free only after 20 years. The government says the tax means greater equality for all investors, as derivatives have not been taxed in the same manner as other capital gains. Moreover, the influence of such instruments on prices on the Ljubljana Stock Exchange has been growing and the tax will curb volatility. Yet these arguments have not convinced financial market players, who claim that the regulation would hurt Slovenia's economy and financial markets. Analysts have also pointed out that if the government was really serious about equality, the top tax rate would be 20% as it is for other capital gains. This was also the argument advocated in parliament by the opposition deputy groups of the Liberal Democrats (LDS), Zares and Lipa. Their proposal to cap the tax at 20% was voted down.



We accept no compromises – the Akrapovič story

“The fastest, unique and unattainable” were the watchwords of Igor Akrapovič (pronounced »Ack-rap'-o-vich«), the founder and owner of Akrapovič Exhaust Systems Technology. Akrapovič is a manufacturer of top-quality exhaust systems for motorcycles, sports cars and carbon parts. The company’s vision was clear from the very beginning, ever since 1990, when Akrapovič and a handful of colleagues started their own company in a tiny workshop which is now one of the world’s leaders in the field. His bold vision of being a top exhaust system manufacturer was based on his technical genius. And this was not without basis; the experience which he gained on the track as a racer was seasoned by his technical mastery and commitment to perfectionism. His knowledge comes from his own personal experience and observations, as he himself often tested the results of his work as a motorcycle racer on the track. He capped a successful ten-year career with numerous championship titles in the F1 and Super Bike World Championship (SBK) classes on both the national and international levels, which brings them to all major international motorcycle races in the world. His ceaseless desire to create an exceptional feeling for four-stroke motors, especially racing

motors, has made the Akrapovič name famous throughout the world. What started as a driven, innovative, group of six, is now a modern prominent company of more than 14,000 m² of production and commercial space, with 474 employees, all of whom are aware that they make exhaust systems for customers who simply do not accept mistakes. The racers that use Akrapovič products are surely the most demanding racing teams and riders from around the world. Akrapovič is a synonym for high-quality.

**AS THEY OFTEN SAY IN THE COMPANY:
“ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR
US! BUT THE BEST IS NOT JUST THE
EXCLUSIVE PRIVILEGE OF WORKS TEAMS.
NOW IT IS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE!”**

The nineties were a time of risk, maturation and confirmation of the success of the already established company. The constant



search for solutions and keeping track of state-of-the-art four-stroke technology, which is written in the genes of the Akrapovič company, brought Igor's vision to life on the world's great racetracks. An expanding customer base proved that the company was on the right track. And its excellence was also reflected by the fact that at the end of the nineties, every single Japanese factory team in the World Superbike Championship was using Akrapovič exhaust systems.

FOR AKRAPOVIČ, WHOSE PERFECTIONISM IS WELL-KNOWN, THERE WAS NO CHOICE. HE HAD TO GO INTO THE FIELD OF MANUFACTURING EXHAUST SYSTEMS HIMSELF.

His innovative ideas began to take concrete form. He established new concepts in exhaust system construction: new configurations, new tube diameters and materials. He began to expand the use of crossover tubes and conical headers. High-quality stainless steel completely replaced the ordinary thick-walled steel tubing,

and exotic titanium and carbon-fiber also made their appearance. The first, and by modern standards quite simple pipe bending tool was soon replaced by a large modern pipe bending machine with optional computer control. The 450 m² workshop quickly became too small to contain the growing needs of the company, which was experiencing a meteoric rise. Exceptionally high standards and investment in development led to excellent results. The development and testing department was able to obtain its own dyno bench very early on. The positive feedback from the racetracks was continuously evident in their own measurements of our exhaust systems.

KAWASAKI, YAMAHA, SUZUKI, DUCATI, HONDA THRILLED BY AKRAPOVIČ PRODUCTS

The high quality products attracted the attention of most of the teams competing on the Pro Superbike championship, which at the time was a very high ranking class, just below the Superbike World Championship. In 1993, Kawasaki Deutschland responded to an invitation to test their exhaust systems, which was a huge

breakthrough and the beginning of major cooperation with numerous teams in the Pro Superbike championship (Kawasaki, Yamaha, Suzuki, Ducati, Honda), in which the company enjoyed a string of wins and championship titles in the ensuing years. In 1997, after using the titanium extensively, they purchased a unique titanium forming machine. This allowed them exceptional freedom in constructing tubes, precise quality control over welding, and independence from suppliers. They have finally managed to make titanium exhaust systems available to everybody, and not just the great racetrack virtuosos. They upgraded their production constantly and invested mainly in modernizing their machines and training their workforce. Computers have long been their constant companions in the 3-D planning of configurations, programming of tools, computer-aided manufacture, and as an indispensable accessory in the testing department for the analysis and setting of all possible parameters.

AKRAPOVIČ EXHAUST SYSTEMS HAVE BEEN THE CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS FOR YEARS

The turn of the century was a turning point for Akrapovič as well. Towards the end of the nineties the company had expanded and become much more widely recognized. The brand had become a synonym for high-quality exhaust systems. Championship titles in all types of motorcycle racing categories put the company among the world's best. The crown of a decade of achievement was the company's first World Superbike title in 2000, followed by another in 2002. Entering the most prestigious level of motorcycle racing, MotoGP, gave the Akrapovič company new motivation and incentive.

The results on the track over a decade and a half are proof of high quality. The people at Akrapovič have passion and fire burning in their hearts, and a realistic vision in their minds. They have the knowledge. Their technical design solutions rank them among the very best in the world. And the investment in knowledge



pays off in continuous development. Champions, the idols of the crowds, are born of commitment and a constant search for technical perfection. But without top-flight equipment they cannot win.

"TO REMAIN THE LEADER IN THE EXHAUST SYSTEMS MARKET" IS THEIR CLEAR VISION

They have a clear vision to remain the global number one. Their vision is to guarantee their customers the most up-to-date and best tested products and discoveries which their development department can produce: They will keep abreast of current and future developments and trends in the field of high-tech materials, keep developing modern technologies and production processes, and countering sudden technological developments with the appropriate professional qualifications of their staff, support everything with excellent quality control, the use of the most modern materials and, of course, the performance which their competitors use as a benchmark.

The Akrapovič brand name

The Akrapovič brand name represents a major seal of success. At Akrapovič they are very much aware of that and are not going to let it go.



Text: JOŽE OSTERMAN, Photo: STA



Musical group Jararaja.

SLOVENE FOLK SONG HERITAGE 'SOUNDS OF SLOVENIA' IN BRUSSELS

Want to hear some Slovene music, taste some sweet potica cake and some Slovene wine? Welcome to Brussels. In the year dedicated to intercultural dialogue, and to mark the end of the Slovene Presidency of the Council of the European Union, there was a concert called Sounds of Slovenia on the 17th of June in Brussels. A group of 24 renowned soloists and musicians from several musical groups (Jararaja, Katalena, and Katice, for instance) presented Slovene folk songs in a modern performance, seasoned with a personal note of improvisation in different musical traditions. The concert was organized by the Slovene Government Communication Office and by the office of the Slovene Tourist Board in Brussels. The invitation to the concert read that "Slovene folk songs are a heritage from ancient times, an echo of space, they represent the variety of the Slovene regions", and promised that that evening Slovenia would offer "a musical promenade" of sounds from under the Alpine mountaintops, from the Pannonian lowlands and the lively Adriatic. Approximately 1100 people attended the concert. There were many representatives of European institutions – the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of EU and a large group of journalists - foreign media correspondents.

MUSICALS IN FULL BLOOM ON SLOVENE STAGES

What was once an almost despised form of theatrical performance, the musical, has found its way onto Slovene stages. In the last few years several distinguished theatres and musical groups have successfully presented adaptations of world famous hits. The Slovene version of the legendary Hair was staged last year, and this year, it's time for an even more ambitious adaptation of The Sound of Music (Moje pesmi moje sanje), co-produced by the Musika workshop of Radovljica and the Prešernovo gledališče theatre in Kranj. Most Slovenes will remember the movie, for it

sold more tickets than any other movie ever shown in Slovenia – which is certainly a solid foundation for a commercial success of the show. The organisers are not hiding their attempt to get a hit, giving their best in the preparations.

TIME FOR BRECHT!

Under this title the youngest Slovenian professional theatre, Teater Antona Podbevška from Novo mesto, prepared a real Brechtian marathon on June 10th, dedicated to 110th anniversary of the birth of this famous German writer. As the name of the theatre suggests, their tradition is anchored in the period of engaged art of the first half of the 20th century, to which Brecht contributed a great deal. Also participating was the Studia humanitatis publishing house, the most prominent publisher of world class books in the field of social sciences in Slovenia.

EXHIBITION PRIMUS IN THE CITY MUSEUM OF LJUBLJANA

As part of the celebrations of the fifth centennial of the birth of Primož Trubar (we wrote about the principal celebration in Trubar's birth place in the previous issue) there is an immense exhibition at Ljubljana City Museum entitled Primus (meaning "the first one") about the years Primož Trubar has spend in the city of Ljubljana. "Ljubljana has shown a very ambivalent attitude towards Primož Trubar," said Dr Matjaž Kmecl at the opening, "as he was praised and celebrated as her greatest son at the beginning of his reformation work, but was later cruelly and senselessly exiled and never allowed to return again." In this way the exhibition Primus symbolises Trubar's return to the capital, for he undoubtedly is one of its greatest sons.

Mayors of some of the European cities where Trubar spent his life also gave speeches at the opening - the mayors of Rothenburg and Derendingen (both from Germany) and the mayor of Trieste. The exhibition is open until the end of the year.



THE FESTIVAL OF CHERRIES 2008 ... WHERE THE ROYAL FRUIT RIPENS!

This year again, a festival was organised in Goriška brda dedicated to the queen of Brici – the cherry, or činča, as it is called by the local people. The varied and colourful events that were going on over two weekends, from the end of May until mid-June, attracted visitors from everywhere. The Brici opened the doors of their homes and presented to the world their wine cellars, tourist farms, restaurants and the galleries decorating their homes. The festivities started with a concert by the Big Ben Quartet group and a play in the wonderful medieval village of Šmartno, which is located in the centre of Goriška brda. This little village, decorated by gase (narrow streets) and ganjki (balconies), is surrounded with walls and fortified with seven defensive towers that were built at the beginning of the 15th century as a part of defence system against the Turks. In addition to the opening concert, they also provided for all art lovers, and in the shelter of the ancient Šmartno walls, in deserted traditional houses of Brici, presented art collections which attracted numerous visitors.

In the next week, activity moved to the economic and geographical centre of Goriška brda, to the village of Dobrovo, where there is also a renaissance castle with baroque ornaments from the year 1600. Two final performances took place on the Saturday evening, and a concert of the bands Čuki and Bog Foot Mama. As every year, the most beautiful cherry blossom was selected, and "Miss Cherry Blossom 2008" was crowned. Everybody also awaited the participants of the 13th cycling marathon, sponsored by the Goriška Brda Wine Cellar. Over hundred cyclists rode the 108 kilometres long route from Ljubljana to Dobrovo, which is a truly unique experience.

The peak of the event was on Sunday, with a traditional cart procession, on which are presented the customs of Brici, work on farms and the way of life in times past and today. At the same time, there was wine tasting on in the cellars of Brici, and the Brici women baked delicious frtalje and cherry cakes, which invited visitors to the stalls with home-made delicacies. Just as

every year, the organisers tried to involve as many Brici villages as possible, so they organised a travelling brass band, which was joined by a record 25 bands, amounting to 800 musicians which together played the final performance. For next year, they are aiming at whole 1000.

Because cherries represent the first income of the year for a farmer in Goriška brda, such a festival dedicated to činča is of extreme importance. The organisers have big plans, because for next year, in addition to the existing events – Cycling marathon, March from one to the next cherry tree, selecting Miss Cherry Blossom, old-timers' caravan, procession of farm carts and joint performance of brass bands - they are already preparing many novelties. And everybody agrees and hopes that the reputation of the cherries of Brici will spread even further!

WRITERS FROM THE ITALIAN MINORITY IN SLOVENIA ARE KEEPING THEIR LANGUAGE ALIVE

A symposium was held in the Italian Culture Institute in Ljubljana entitled The Literature of the Italian Minority in Slovenia. Writers living on the Slovene coast and elsewhere in Slovenia are keeping alive the tradition of Italian literature, known to Slovenes through Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Mario Steffe, a literary critic and editor of the bilingual anthology *Versi diversi* of poems by writers of the Italian minority in Slovenia, spoke of the literature of the Italian minority in Istria and presented the surprisingly fertile literary production in Italian in this area. Also interesting was the critical account of Gašper Malej, translator and essayist, who misses the relationship between Italian and Slovene literature – both existing in the same area, but with hardly any noticeable contacts. Two guests, poet and writer Isabella Flego, from the small mining town of Raše in Croatia, and writer Marco Appolonio presented their work and creative motives. The symposium was organised as part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

DR TARAS KERMAUNER DIES

On the threshold of the eight decade of his life, one of the most interesting Slovene philosophers, writers and thinkers, Dr. Taras Kermauner, a full member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, has passed away. He was a member of a group who, a decade after the Second World War, made Slovene history as the first influential group to actively oppose the authoritative social system, successfully softening the dogma of the time and creating the foundations for a transition into a democratic society. Kermauner was a person who instinctively refused to be moulded into formal and other frames of thinking, this being the reason he was searching for a purpose in life in all directions – in extreme leftist individualism, in the search for God in Catholicism, and in the remote attitude of an intellectual, rejecting the trivial values of everyday life and a self-conceited belief in the nation. All of these led him into solitude two decades ago, but in recent years he returned to public life, developing thoughts that are a heartrending criticism of today's delusions. His creativity was extraordinary: he published more than 100 books, not to mention newspaper and magazine articles. Most memorable are his analysis of Slovene drama, titled Reconstructions/Reinterpretations of Slovene Drama (Rekonstrukcije/reinterpretacije slovenske dramatike), where he analysed different phenomena in the history of Slovene society. In drama he saw key elements that influence the Slovene social consciousness of today. In his last book, Cross Meetings (Navzkrižna srečevanja), he analysed the people who influenced him and the colleagues he worked with.



LENT FESTIVAL OPENS WITH FLAG RAISING

Raising of a flag announced on 27 May the beginning of the 16th Lent Festival, the largest music and theatre festival in Slovenia with some novelties, such as an adventure park and an art camp.



The festival officially opened with a concert of the Gypsy Queens and Kings on a floating stage on the Drava river.

The festival, running until 12 July, will feature some 400 concerts, theatre and dance performances, and other cultural events. The organisers expect over 500,000 people to visit the events.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES TWO MORE PORTRAITS BY SLOVENE CLASSICISTS



The donation principle, allowing the acquisition of the most valuable objects of a nation's history, well established in western countries, is taking root in Slovenia. In a previous issue we reported on the precious Slovene impressionist paintings which were donated to the central Slovene museum of older fine arts at the National Gallery by the Canadian/Slovene Dr Urbanc, and now we are able to report another donation. A permanent collection now holds a portrait of Matija Čop by the celebrated Slovene painter Matevž Langus, and a portrait of Andrej Lenče by Mihael Stroj; both painters are renowned Biedermaier portraitists.

The paintings were donated by Matej and Uroš Roesmann, who discussed the donation years ago with the Gallery's director at the time, Dr Andrej Smrekar. Both works come from the USA, and the director of the National Gallery, Barbara Jaki, has emphasised that only a careful and responsible gesture by the donors enabled a great part of Slovene cultural heritage to be a part of the treasury of the National Gallery.

“REZERVNI DELI” ONE OF TEN MOST IMPORTANT MOTION PICTURES OF NEW EUROPE

The British magazine Sight and Sound, published by the British Film Institute, has listed the ten most important films of the so-called New Europe (Eastern Europe since the fall of communism and the new members of the European Union since 2004). Among them is the film “Rezervni deli” by the director Damjan Kozole. Filmed in 2003 and awarded several times, the film was judged one of the most provocative and innovative by British film critics, The Guardian critic even awarded it five stars. The film is still being shown the UK.

THE BIGGEST AIR SHOW IN SLOVENIA'S HISTORY



The second weekend in June was marked by the IAS 08 air show in Maribor. The air show symbolically pointed out that Maribor was a city with an 80-year aviation tradition, as this year marks the 80th anniversary of the Maribor Aviation Centre, which organized the event, while Maribor is also a city with an international airport. The event was also dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Maribor Airport.

“IAS Maribor '08 is the biggest aviation event in Slovenia's history, featuring more than 100 military and civilian airplanes from Slovenia and abroad. This is also one of the key events during the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union in 2008,” the organizers believe. The meeting featured more than 10 military air forces, ultralight aircraft, acrobatic pilots and vintage aircraft, and the sky was also crossed by pilots in F-16 fighter aircraft.

This is why the organisers prepared the air show on the 99th anniversary of the first flight in Slovenia by the cosmopolitan aviator Edvard Rusjan, who was honoured during these days, more precisely on 15 June, with the decision of the Slovenian Government to rename Maribor Airport in his honour.

The main speaker at the meeting was the Transport Minister, Radovan Žerjav, who like the other 20,000 visitors from all over Slovenia attending the show, was amazed by the acrobatics.

LJUBLJANA TO BECOME A WORLD BOOK CAPITAL IN 2010

Ljubljana has filed a candidacy for a title, awarded by UNESCO, and in a tight competition with well-known cities like Vienna, Lisbon, Riga, St. Petersburg, Wellington and Guadalajara, has received the honour of developing reading culture in Slovenia to an even greater extent and to promote Slovene books, as well as others, which she has ambitiously outlined in her cultural programme, which was adopted a few months ago.

The Slovene capital city has shown great ambition, especially after Maribor took over the candidacy for the European Capital of Culture, and began implementing a programme for the candidacy. In the next few years there will be a significant increase in the number of cultural performances, especially those that make Ljubljana a vibrant and open city. Special attention will be placed to the accessibility of culture, to allow a broad range of viewers and visitors to participate, making this a trademark of the city.





Mirko Lebar, a disabled climber, who climbs with his hands

A victory of will, strength and endurance!

"I want to get healthy, get well, so I can get back on my hands again, get strong and maybe climb Ojstrica (smiles)..."

An accident in his childhood years took both his legs. They had to be amputated so high that not even prosthetic legs could give him the appearance of a young man who's not so different from everybody else. But Mirko, being realistic, immediately began to write the next chapter in the book of his life: he focused all his energy on rehabilitation, and when he returned home, engaged himself in society and renewed contacts with his friends. He never suffered from lack of motivation, depression or loneliness, and today he has a lot to be proud of: he began climbing, participating in marathons (in a wheelchair of course!), but his greatest success is reaching the top of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe, on his hands!

FIRST LET ME CONGRATULATE YOU, YOU JUST CELEBRATED YOUR 53RD BIRTHDAY. THE PATH OF YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN A DEMANDING ONE.

And difficult! Life was very hard on me, but I managed it, didn't I, if I'm still here. It could have been different, if it wasn't for the accident. I spent my childhood in Kidričevo, in a working class family, and I enjoyed practicing gymnastics, as I had a coach who trained with Miroslav Cerar on the national team. Yes, it is very popular to be a gymnast, and I have been practicing it for seven years. But then I enrolled in the mining school in Zagorje ob Savi and there was no club or society for gymnastics there, so I stopped training. Well, after finishing school, I returned home, found a job and six months later I fell from the train, under the steps between two coaches, and lost both my legs.

A CRUEL EXPERIENCE FOR SUCH A YOUNG AGE OF EIGHTEEN!

Cruel. But I remember, when I was in hospital, right after I woke up, I remember thinking everything would be all right: I was very optimistic. Well, my life didn't really change that much, did it? I started rehabilitation, stayed there for three years and then my life really began.

YOU MAKE IT SOUND SO EASY, BUT THREE YEARS OF REHABILITATION MEAN YEARS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL HARD WORK, ADJUSTMENTS AND A STRONG WILL.

True: they did make me prosthetic legs, but there wasn't much leg left on me to be able to use them, so I had to start thinking about how to make the wheelchair my friend. And how to start my life again – in a wheelchair if I had to. I'm completely independent, I don't require any help. I can even get up and down the stairs by myself by dragging the wheelchair behind me...

AND YOU NEVER STARTED THINKING HOW DIFFICULT IT IS, YOU NEVER SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION OR LOST MOTIVATION?

(Lively and determined) No, no! I know that life goes on and nobody on the other side of the Earth will cry just because I'm having it bad. I'm very realistic. I don't spend too much thought on my situation, because it is what it is. For me, it's important that I handle things as they come along, that I spend every day positively: I know how to help other disabled people; they call me, even in the middle of the night, when the depression is at its worst, I tell them a joke and they feel better.

I never allowed myself any self-pity: immediately when I came home from rehabilitation I made contact with my friends, and I lived normally like they did: if there was a party, we went; if there was a movie, we went as well – wherever they went, I went! I make friends easily, and if you don't lock yourself inside, you can live with your disability much more easily and better.

WHAT ABOUT WORK, EMPLOYMENT, LOVE?

Three years after the accident, I retired. They couldn't adapt the working environment to my disability. It was terrible in those days: no help for the disabled, no access slopes, no special toilets. Love, well...at the Institute for rehabilitation I met Aleksandra, my future wife, and we have a daughter who is now thirty-three. Yes, we lived together for quite a few years, but accidents happen all the time: at our holiday home she fell over a scarp, damaged her brain, and fell into a coma which lasted for almost seven years. Then she died.

BUT EVEN THEN, YOU DIDN'T GIVE UP – LIFE BROUGHT YOU A NEW FRIENDSHIP.

Yes - Marija. We used to go to school together; we come from the same town; we danced in the same folk dance group, and then we lost touch for quite a few years. But incidentally, because of a book Ivan Sivec wrote about my life, we found each other again. She saw a commercial for a book in a magazine, made the effort to look for the right phone number and called me (laughs). I used to visit my mother in my home town a lot, so I always stopped by at Marija's, and so it began. We have been together for five years now. My life revolves so quickly, everything is happening so quickly, I don't even notice I'm getting old (laughter).

BUT A LOT HAS HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFE DURING ALL THESE YEARS – YOUR CLIMBING AND YOUR SUCCESS.

True! My daughter was ten years old when, after a meeting with my friend Milan Cesar, I decided to start climbing. I knew he was a climber, so I asked him whether I could accompany him on Triglav. He said no problem, we tried, and so it began.

WELL, I'M SURE IT WASN'T THAT EASY: YOU HAD TO BUILD UP STRENGTH, FIND EQUIPMENT...

I had enough strength - I drove my wheelchair everyday. I climbed roofs and set up antennas. I was slating roofs – I did a lot of things as a disabled person. I can still climb a ladder and pick cherries by myself. So, Milan and I decided to make a test expedition on Ojstrica. He said if I could manage Ojstrica, Triglav wouldn't be a problem. Well, ten days after this test (yes, I climbed Ojstrica without any problems) we went on Triglav and returned from the mountain in four days. We immediately made a deal to climb a thousand meters higher next year.

DO YOU NEED ANY SPECIAL EQUIPMENT FOR WALKING ON YOUR HANDS, PROBABLY GLOVES FOR A FIRM GRIP AND TO PREVENT INJURIES TO YOUR HANDS?

Only gloves, because of rocks and stone.

SO SIMPLE? HOW ABOUT CIGARETTES? I CAN SEE THAT YOU SMOKE. DOES DIMINISHED LUNG CAPACITY HAVE ANY EFFECT ON YOUR CLIMBING?

(Smiles). I have a few photographs of really good climbers who light a cigarette on top of every mountain, if only there is enough oxygen for a lighter to work.

AND OXYGEN WAS SOMETIMES IN SHORT SUPPLY WHEN YOU CLIMBED THE HIGHEST MOUNTAINS IN THE WORLD, RIGHT?

True. The following year, after Triglav, we went a thousand meters higher, on Grossglockner. That was some achievement, because there were winter conditions on the mountain, even though we climbed it in the summer: snow, rain, wind. It was cold and foggy, and water was running under the tent when we spent the night under the south side – terrible. That is when I did ask myself what I was doing there...But stubborn as I am, I went to the top. Of course, we immediately decided to go a thousand metres higher next year.

MONT BLANC? I ASSUME YOU HAD BETTER EQUIPMENT AND A BIGGER TEAM?

Yes, a bigger team. I started thinking about better, waterproof equipment in those harsh conditions on Grossglockner – but there wasn't enough money. So I went looking for sponsors and found them.

DID YOU DO ALL THIS WORK BY YOURSELF?

I did everything: logistics, plans, sponsors, administration, not to mention I had to train and prepare myself. Every morning I drove 20 kilometres on my wheelchair, came home, sat in the car and drove to Zabukovica, climbed the little hill at Bukovica (840 metres), came home...Yes, it was all done on hands (smiles). Then the local people found out about me and left me some blueberry brandy on the summit. That was my routine for two months: it's all very easy for me today, really...

WHAT ABOUT MONT BLANC, WAS THAT EASY AS WELL?

Nothing special (determined). We took a rack railway to a certain height, no point in walking on your hands up the road – but from then on, yes! There were some rock overhangs, and I had to try harder to climb them, and we had a storm and some fog, but after two days it cleared up and we continued, reached

the summit and in six hours we were down again. We could've been down sooner, but the guys were thirsty and wanted some water... I received the greatest climbing award in France – I was the first disabled person on the summit.

THERE IS ALSO A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR CLIMB, ISN'T THERE?

The camera man came up a bit later than we did, but the movie was a success all over the world: USA, Spain, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic.

WAS IT DIFFICULT?

It's all forgotten: all the suffering to get to Mont Blanc, when my hands hurt, when everything hurts, when sitting on sharp rocks hurts – I have forgotten everything! Well, it wasn't so bad getting down – you had to be careful, most accidents happen on the descent: guys in boots were literally skiing down behind me, because I almost flew downhill.

AND YOU STILL DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH?

No. South America was next, more preparations, more searching for funds, even though there were half as many of us as on Mont Blanc. In the Andes, we climbed Mt Pisca, a little under six thousand metres. It was nasty. It was far and unfamiliar. We drove a lot - a bus takes you to around three thousand metres. The expedition took three weeks. We had to adapt to the altitude, and we did have some trouble at five thousand metres with the lack of oxygen: we descended a little bit and then climbed again. We didn't have any oxygen with us, so it was hard: people were vomiting. I was too. It was terrible: it snowed almost every night and we kept warm in our sleeping bags. Sometimes I was so cold I felt physical pain...

WAS A NEW, HIGHER MOUNTAIN A CHALLENGE FOR YOU?

It was a new victory, a new achievement. A friend who likes mountaineering suggested we go to Africa – but I decided to stay home. I started doing marathons.

YOU WERE ALSO THE BEARER OF THE OLYMPIC TORCH, RIGHT?

In 1996 I was chosen to be one of the bearers of the Olympic torch – it was the first centennial of the Olympic Games. With a friend who was chosen to carry the Olympic torch for Croatia, we decided to carry it as a symbol of friendship between Slovenia and Croatia: the following year we went from Ljubljana to Zagreb and carried our message of friendship in two stages.

Then I did seven Olympic marathons in seven consecutive days, participated in the project Driver's Tolerance Towards Children from Dravograd to Čatež, and, well, there was a lot of that. I went to Australia for the Sydney-Melbourne marathon: I was invited by the Australians and I drove a thousand kilometres – every day, morning until evening. I did it in 14 days.

IS SPORT STILL THE ESSENCE OF YOUR LIFE? AN ILLNESS A FEW YEARS AGO STOPPED YOU FOR A WHILE.

I had hepatitis, so I had a liver transplant four years ago. It was very hard at the beginning, but now it's fine. Life goes on. I don't

climb anymore, but after four years, I'm back on my hands – not feet. I still drive a car, I work and I'm thinking about getting more active in sports. I have a dog, we go for a walk every morning, I do things around the house, I cook lunch (I always cook, I can cook anything, except potica). I think you have to be active every day. These things became part of my daily routine. I take the discipline I have for granted.

WOULD YOU AGREE THAT THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN YOUR LIFE IS YOU, WITH YOUR STRONG WILL AND DETERMINATION?

Yes (hesitating). Probably because I'm so realistic. I don't care about philosophy. I care about tangible things, things at hand. The most important are those things that are true, that are. Those things that I can see, feel. I live with that. And I wish I could live a long life, because from what I've done so far, I believe I've only come half way.

Podpis: »I want to get healthy, get well, so I can get back on my hands again, get strong and maybe climb Ojstrica (smiles)...«

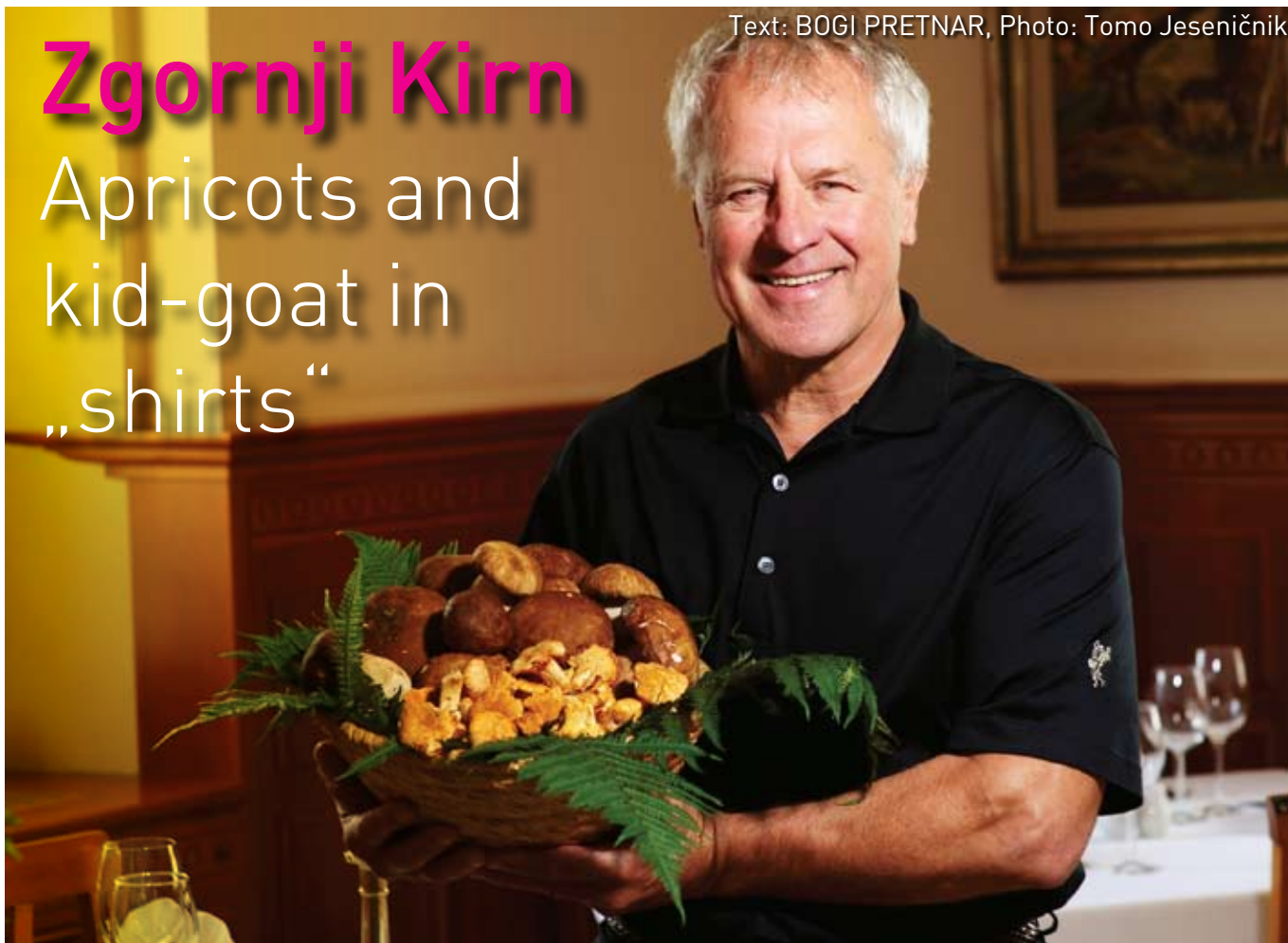


Mirko's friend Marija is a lucky lady: he carries her in his hands and cooks her lunch every day.

Text: BOGI PRETNAR, Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

Zgornji Kirn

Apricots and kid-goat in „shirts“



Janez Kirn

Different shirts exist not only in the clothing industry - there are many very different shirts also in cookery. „Shirts“? Certainly - all kinds of delicious coverings of delicious contents. A juicy peace of a kid-goat, dipped into beaten egg, flour, and home-made bread crumbs, fried in fresh boiling oil, is surely better in its shirt, which keeps it juicy and makes it crispy. A covering of flaky pastry around a ball of home-made curd with crackling and Parmesan, rolled like a snail and baked in the oven, is a heavenly accompaniment to beer, or a wonderful „amuse-gueule“, introductory snack. There are many who can not imagine veal without a cover made of eggs and flour, although they prefer classic fried potatoes with onions to regular fried potatoes as a side dish. Also the famous Slovenian „štrudl“ (strudel) is a kind of shirt, whether the content which the flaky pastry covers is salty or sweet. And a half of Slovenes undoubtedly „die“ for this covering: potato dough, which covers a small, rather sour fruit...

The season of apricots has began, and plums are starting to show violet cheeks- so you must not miss the Slovenian „knedli“ (it is obvious from this popular name that these dumplings rolled into Slovenia a long time ago from our northern Germanic neighbours). And you will not soon have a chance to eat such apricot „knedli“ like the ones Majda Kirn from Kamnik pod Krimom makes. A basic secret of this dish: two thirds of cooked mashed potatoes and one third of white flour (and the potatoes must be old). Young potatoes are too watery, sometimes even glassy, so you can not make smooth dough after butter, eggs and salt are added. The dough is then rolled flat to about 0.5 cm thick, cut into squares, and then an apricot is wrapped in each of

the squares. The dumplings should then be cooked in the salty boiling water; another important fact: they are cooked when they float to the surface. Spread bread crumbs fried in butter over the dumplings, and then the competition can begin as to who can eat the most. But since Slovenes are famous for not being united in anything, our views of these dumplings also vary. Haute cuisine requires that the stone be removed from the apricot, or plum (some recognise only plum „knedli“, and no others), and replaced by a sugar cube. According to another recipe, cinnamon should be added. The third recipe says that prunes should be dry. In the fourth, fruit is replaced by home-made jam. But allow me to tell you my opinion, the opinion of an eater who ate 24 plum dumplings: all additions are unnecessary; the dumpling should have the specific taste of potato dough which should be soft but firm; the fruit should be almost ripe, but still somewhat fresh and sour, and it should contain the stone - how else can you count how many dumplings you've eaten! On the plate, all the dumplings should be cut at the same time into four pieces and sprinkled with sugar, but absolutely not with powdered sugar. The juice of the cut fruit makes a wonderful mixture with the juice of the butter and crumbs...Enjoy!

How to get to Majda and Janez, to the restaurant at Zgornji Kirn? Ljubljana. Vič. The old road to Vrhnika. At the traffic lights in the centre of Brezovica, turn right towards Podpeč and follow the signs to a major road, also when it takes a sharp right turn. Outside Podpeč, you will find yourself surrounded by meadows; drive over a bridge and you will already see a sign directing you to the left, up a slope, towards Kamnik pod Krimom. Then, about



one kilometre further on, on the right, just at the corner, the visitor is welcomed by an old house with the sign Zgornji Kirn. This is surely the only house in the village which does not have a popular name – this is the name which is always completely different from the real surname of the owner and is familiar only to the local people - Kirn people came to this place „too recently“, which is somewhere between the First and the Second World War, when the house was bought by Janez’s grandfather. Majda came through marriage from Bistra, where is the famous technical museum. And soon, with the help of her mother-in-law, books and her own talent, she became privy to a number of culinary secrets. But she still prefers her kitchen to public, and it is impossible to get her in front of a camera. So „public relations“ are the domain of Janez, of whom we took a photograph with a basket of fresh mushrooms – boletus and chanterelles. He knows every bush in the surroundings of the nearby health resort in Rakitna; he had good eyes for mushrooms even in his younger years. He says that he also likes to clean the mushrooms since „only the one who searched for and found a mushroom cleans it with respect, so that no part comes to waste; at the end I wipe it with a moist cloth, and they look like new.“

with cracklings, and veal stew, sour turnip and sauerkraut, „ričet“ (barley porridge), and macaroni. They say that young people do not eat old Slovenian food any more, such as „žganci“, black pudding, sauerkraut and turnip, since it is modern to eat salads and grilled vegetables. And, while we philosophise, the apricot dumplings and apricot strudel, still warm, rapidly disappear from our plates...



Lasagne with spinach and Parmesan.

In the meanwhile, Majda prepares lasagne with spinach and Parmesan, just like that, without any special effort („It must contain just the right quantity of beshamel sauce. And do not keep it in the oven for less than three quarters of an hour.“); she takes from the oven a juicy ham, baked in the company of carrots, potatoes, and onions, and she, in an instant, fills the plates with the famous stuffed breast of veal. The secret of the juicy stuffing is in the bread, baked just right on the butter, and chopped onions, to which Majda adds eggs, parsley, and boiled milk. She wraps the stuffing firmly in the meat and covers it with the transparent foil. Just before the end, after three hours of roasting, she removes the foil and leaves it to get a delicious crust. The kid-goat is also already fried in its breadcrumb „shirt“. The guests have already eaten their soups – mushroom with potatoes and carrots, vegetable; but, of course, mostly beef, with home-made noodles, since this is Slovenia. Many guests order lamb, and recently, say the Kirns, in particular, foal prepared on roket, grilled, or in sauce. And which is the famous dish of the masters? Janez prefers meat and meat once again, and he has a reputation for a good eater; Majda prefers „žganci“ of buckwheat



Stuffed breast of veal.

Text: JOŽE PREŠEREN, Photo: Darinka Mladenovič



Roman Necropolis in Šempeter near Celje

Millenary talk of the Roman stones

For more than half a millennium, the territory of present Slovenia formed part of the antique world that was at first a part of the great Roman Empire, and later a part of the Western Empire. The most important Roman settlement here was Emona (today Ljubljana), other important towns arose near the roads from the Adriatic Sea to Pannonia - Nauportus (Vrhnika), Atrans (Trojane), Celeia (Celje), Poetovia (Ptuj), and from Emona to the east, such as Praetorium Latobiorum (Trebnje) and Neviodunum (Drnovo near Krško). On Slovenian territory, there are around 30 settlements from the Roman era known today.

The Romanisation of the country was almost complete, since the earlier occupants were illiterate, except for some exceptions, and the ancient Celtic people completely assumed Roman culture. Historians and archaeologists occupy themselves with the remains of the Roman Empire here and still collect and document the Roman heritage. So today curiosities are discovered during the building of modern motorways or when digging the foundations of individual larger buildings. The Roman necropolis, the city of the dead in Šempeter near Celje, in the Savinjska Valley, was discovered in a similar way and is today regarded as one of the most beautiful sites from the Roman era in Slovenia.

ANTIQUITY AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SAVINJSKA VALLEY

The fertile Savinjska Valley, known today for hops and the dairy industry if we limit ourselves to agriculture, and also for numerous successful factories and industrial plants, attracted many prehistoric nations in the ancient past, the remainders of whom were completely Romanized in the Roman era. At that time, the centre of the region was Celeia, today Celje, and in the valley, numerous city magnates, principals and high Roman officials had their estates. Therefore, it is no surprise that in Šempeter these magnates also built their burial vaults. The burial site was situated along the northern side of the Emona-Atrans-Celeia road, with the Savinja River on the southern side. It was over a kilometre long, and it has still not been completely excavated due to the continuously built-up residential area.

The Roman necropolis in Šempeter was accidentally discovered in 1952 during earth works in an orchard. First, a statue of a sitting woman was discovered, which delighted the local people

CULTURAL TRAILS

and later archaeologists. The experts continued excavations until 1965 and soon afterwards presented their discoveries to the public. A part of the former riverbed of the Savinja was also examined, where some fragments of the ravaged vaults were lying. Excavations continued in 1964 on the eastern side of the settlement, and another part of the Šempeter necropolis was found there. In addition to the foundations of the vaults and graves built from brick and limestone, others were only lined with stone and some graves were dug into the soil. Vestiges of cremation were discovered in some places. Most grave goods were discovered in the simpler graves and are stored today in Celje Regional Museum.

And when was this great burial place demolished? The Šempeter burial place was completely demolished at the end of the 3rd century, when the Savinjska Valley was affected by a severe flood (similar, but probably less severe floods affect the Valley every few years). The river tore away a large portion of the embankment, together with the road. The monuments near the river fell into the river and were preserved because river sand covered them and much of the stone was used later through the centuries as construction material.

During the excavations the possibility of reconstructing the vaults was being considered. A few years after the excavations, plans were drawn up, and in 1960 an archaeological park with four completely restored vaults and numerous smaller tombstones was opened. In the eastern part of the settlement, part of the Roman road was also restored, with ground plans of the vaults and smaller graves nearby.

Already in the Roman times, there were two large burial places in Šempeter: the earlier one, also known as the Eastern necropolis, which is also exhibited, existed already in the 1st century, and the burial sites from the 3rd and the 4th centuries, known as the Western necropolis, was discovered in Dobrteša vas. The remains of the Eastern necropolis may be seen at two locations, but certainly the most beautiful part is near St Peter's church, where four monumental reconstructed family vaults stand among a number of other monuments. This part of the cemetery is one of those carried away by the Savinja during the floods; however, they were discovered after 1700 years. Altogether, over 600 parts of vaults, stone boundaries and statues were discovered. Today, this all stands where it was found, rearranged into a park.

FOUR NECROPOLISES OF ROMAN FAMILIES

The oldest among the four reconstructed vaults belongs to Vindonius, probably from the second part of the 1st century. It was built by Gaius Vindonius Successus for himself and his wife Julia. Vindonius was an important official in Celeia. What is special about this vault is that it is decorated with a relief from Greek mythology: Heracles guiding Alcestes from the underground, accompanied by a hunter and a satyr.

The special feature of the Spectatius vault is that it is 8.25 m high. Gaius Spectatius Priscianus was a duovir (mayor) of Celeia and the vault was built by another mayor, Gaius Spectatius Finitus. The container for the ashes is decorated with various reliefs – three scenes from the myth of Iphigenia among the Taurians, Dioscures, Castor and Pollux, nymphs and satyrs, four seasons, a man with arms etc.

The Enius vault is one of the most beautiful vaults in Šempeter with regard to composition and execution. It is 6.6 m high, and was constructed by Quintus Enius Liberalus and Enia Opidana for themselves and their children. One of the particularities of the vault is an image of a woman in a characteristic Noric costume,

indicating that the ancient Celtic people preserved their old customs.

The last of the reconstructed vaults is the Secundinus vault, the most recent, since it was built in the 3rd century. As the vault is not richly decorated, it can be assumed that it was unfinished, which might indicate the decline of power of the Celje people at that time.

Some minor tombstones, burial urns and sarcophagi, and fragments of stone statues and reliefs can also be seen in the park. Numerous fragments demonstrate that there were several large vaults similar to the four reconstructed

EXTRAORDINARY DOCUMENTS OF ROMAN ART

Today, Slovenian museums hold thousands of extraordinary examples of Roman art from Slovenian territory. Some artefacts originate from outside the region and were later imported, while a number of them originate here. Some portraits in stone of important personalities of the period have survived, among them Germanicus from Rifnik near Celje, a bust of Hadrian found in Ptuj, and a well-known statue of a citizen of Emona made of gilded bronze.

The majority of the precious items are sculptures and statuary from the Roman necropolis at Šempeter, which are among the most important artefacts from this field. The sculpture is in Noric-Pannonian style, which extended throughout central Slovenia. The execution is exclusively local, and the material is predominantly Pohorje marble. Numerous valuable Roman art works still excite admiration, even though in Slovenian museums they are often preserved only in fragments.



Text: ANJA HREŠČAK, Photo: Darinka Mladenovič



From a shepherds shelter to a tourist attraction

Oval shepherd cottages, which still today, after almost a hundred years, dominate the landscape of the Velika planina plateau, in addition to being used by shepherds, also serve tourists who want to spend their free time far from the madding crowd. During the pasturing season, Velika Planina is full of shepherds, and after the season ends the cottages are rented by tourists, called bajtarji (bajta – Slovenian word for cottage). Such lodgings are especially attractive during the skiing season. This is why Velika Planina is alive in every season. The purpose of the oval cottages is also the aesthetic, as through the years they have become an indispensable part of Velika Planina.

ONCE A MODEST SHELTER FOR SHEPHERDS AND CATTLE

Before the First World War, the traditional cottages, which can be found almost nowhere else, had chiefly a practical purpose – to protect shepherds and their herds from cold and rain. Virtually all the cottages have the same design, which is basically a wooden tent. The original plan was oval with a rectangular core measuring 4 x 4 metres. This was the room for shepherds, who used to find in the cottage a refuge from storms and cold. They used to build an open fire in the middle of the room which warmed both them and the cattle which slept under the same roof. Around this room, a conical roof descends down to the ground to form an oval. Between the central rectangular room, which is intended for shepherds, and the edge of the roof, there was an overhang which was used to shelter sheep. The cottages did not have chimneys.

The tent form provided more privacy for shepherds, and the cottage also indicates the transition from nomadic tents to more solid and essentially fixed dwellings. The building material was of local origin – grey limestone and spruce wood. The design is therefore clearly functional. It has occupied the imaginations of historians, ethnologists and architects for a long time. Some look for its roots in the ancient Illyrian culture, and the

others, who lean on the fact that the plane was first mentioned in the 18th century, are convinced that the cottage is a result of reasonable adjustment to the conditions, independent of time. Meanwhile, others say that the cottage acquired its oval shape from the early Greek house from Old Smyrna. According to this theory, the design of the oval cottage is more than three thousand years old. But there is evidence to support this claim. Another theory says that the form developed in this part of Slovenia, with the cottage first being rectangular, and later reshaped for functional reasons. The first rectangular cottages are believed to have been constructed on Velika Planina in the 15th or 16th century. The fact is that the architecture of Velika Planina, with its oval shepherds cottages, is an element of Slovenian identity, and consequently, priceless national heritage.

ARCHITECTURE ADJUSTED TO FUNCTION

An interesting fact is that the cottages on Velika Planina were burned down immediately after the end of the Second World War. Shepherds then started to reconstruct them, but instead of the traditional shape, the cottages built after 1945 had an open roof and a window on the southern side, which could not be found on the original cottages. The majority of the newly-constructed cottages are also rectangular and not the classic oval, which used to be the main feature of the Velika Planina cottage. Some explain this change with the fact that, after 1930, Velika Planina began to be visited by many more visitors – called bajtarji – than in the earlier periods, and they also brought new ideas and styles. With their help, the shepherds realized that it is far easier to cover such a rectangular cottage with shingle and wooden boards than the oval one. The only remaining classic cottage on Velika Planina is Preskerjeva bajta, which was reconstructed after a fire according to the classic design, as an oval, and without a chimney. Today it serves as a shepherding museum. Nevertheless, the traditional life has been preserved in virtually all the shepherd cottages on Velika Planina, which still serve its original purpose.



**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**