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2008

Sinfo

The Truth about Patria, Part II

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Ljubljana, 3 September: We condemn the attempts to discredit the (Slovenian) government abroad. The first such attempt was the journalists' petition against state pressure on media, while the second was the Finnish documentary accusing Janša of corruption in the Patria deal. Both are ruthless attacks on the entire Slovenia, which weakened the country's international standing and damaged its reputation. It was the current government that confronted lobbies which have had monopoly on various segments of society for decades: the road lobby, big corporations and media. In all of these cases, the government sided with the people, and not the magnates.



Barbara Brezigar /State Prosecutor General/: **No evidence on corruption from Finland**

Ljubljana, September 4th: We have not received any evidence from the Finnish investigators which would confirm the suspicion that anybody has committed a criminal offence in connection with the acquisition of 8x8 armoured infantry vehicles. According to the information I have, there are no longer any persons in custody. Those who were in custody have not been charged. The Slovene prosecutors cooperate with the Finnish criminal investigators all the time and we have great difficulties acquiring information. According to what has been happening since the TV story presented Slovenia as a corrupt and backward country, one must say that the Slovene police and prosecutors have been working on this case for as long as the Finnish. We have conducted a great number of interviews. We have done all that was possible to do. We have asked the Finnish investigators many times to forward us specific data for specific suspicions. They have said themselves that they do not have these suspicions. Don't expect us to lock people up just because someone says they are corrupt. We prosecutors need proof for that.



Karl Erjavec /Minister of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia/: **People have been accusing me for three years already, but still no official body has discovered anything**

I have demanded that Patria is to tell me in writing that the investigation in Finland is not connected with Slovenia. If I do not receive a written answer, I will demand that they come to Slovenia and explain the Patria documents cited in the YLE story mentioning the letter J. If none of the above happens, we will immediately freeze the deal.



Andraž Vehovar /The head of the Slovenian Olympic team/: **Slovenia Successful at Olympics**

Beijing, 25 August - Slovenia's appearance at the Beijing Games was very good. The overall harvest of five medals and only a couple of slips make it an exceptional success for Slovenia.

Maybe there is an expected medal or two missing, for example from rowers Iztok Čop and Luka Špič, but we managed to win some medals we had not predicted, such as bronze by judoka Lucija Polavder. An important thing is that we have made an appearance with such a strong team and that we managed to make up for few mistakes. This team has the right self-esteem.

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Anže Logar

IMAGINE THE UNIMAGINABLE

Can you imagine your Prime Minister being accused on the public TV channel of a member of the European Union that he was receiving bribes in order to secure the acquisition of military equipment for the country? Probably not. This one-of-a-kind scandal has indeed happened. A Finnish journalist, Magnus Berglund, in his half-hour TV story, has accused the Prime Minister of Slovenia of accepting bribes. The journalist did not adduce one single item of evidence; his accusations were only supported with statements from his Slovene interviewees. We discovered later that this was not the only slip of the Finnish television station YLE. Their Council for mass media once discovered a breach of the journalists' code of ethics in a similar programme. Magnus Berglund failed to mention that the people he interviewed either had business relations with a company which lost a deal in an international public tender, or were members of opposition parties. Oh yes, Slovenia is in the middle of an election race. Some people have obviously calculated that the polls are not in their favour, so they sent their propagandists abroad to sully the homeland. Déjà vu. More on this story in 'What's making the news'.

To put all of the above aside, Slovenians are still proud of the great success our athletes achieved in the recent Olympics in Beijing. Number of medals? Five. Well, if not with quantity, we can congratulate ourselves on quality. In terms of the number of medals won per inhabitant, we are at the top of the world's list. And since gold is a rare commodity, especially if sought after in the queen of sports, track and field athletics, we asked our new Olympic champion hammer thrower Primož Kozmus about his feelings when he received his gold medal. In this edition of Sinfo.

Government Communication Office: www.ukom.gov.si
Government Institutions: www.gov.si
Slovenian Tourist Board: www.slovenia.info
Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry: www.gzs.si
Slovenian Chamber of Craft: www.ozs.si
Public Agency of the RS for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments: www.japti.si
Ljubljana Stock Exchange: www.ljse.si
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia: www.stat.si
State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia: <http://e-uprava.gov.si>
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008: www.eu2008.si

THE TRUTH ABOUT PATRIA



On the following pages, you can find the text that the Slovenian Government Communication Office sent to the Finnish National Television YLE after they aired the programme 'The Truth about Patria' on the TV1 channel. Government Communication Office sent the text to Finnish TV in compliance with the right to reply, as defined in the Ethical Guidelines of Finnish Journalists, namely its Articles 21, 22, 23 and 25

... VO: One person appears in the Patria papers as "J". It was Walter Wolf's job to deliver money to "J".

(Graphics: Janša)

VO: J is Janez Janša, prime minister of Slovenia. He was the chairman of the council of ministers of the European Union for the first half of 2008. Also, the prime minister's party was a beneficiary in the Patria deal. In other words: The Finnish state-owned Patria bribed the prime minister of Slovenia...

The above is an excerpt from the transcript of the programme entitled 'Arms Manufacturer Patria Allegedly Bribed Slovenian PM', which was aired on 1 September 2008 on TV1 of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE. In the programme, the journalist Magnus Berglund accused the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša without producing any evidence, of being bribed by the Finnish state-owned company Patria. The journalist stated in the programme that the evidence would be presented during legal proceedings due to begin next year.

Mr Janez Janša is the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia,

the EU Member State which, two months ago, successfully concluded its Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In the Republic of Slovenia, there will be a general election on 21 September 2008. According to public opinion polls, the party led by Mr Janša is ahead of the opposition party of Social Democrats. The programme produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company was thus aired in the middle of the election campaign. The harsh accusations of bribery, which were not substantiated by any evidence whatsoever, is all the more distressing for Mr Janša, as in 1988 he was arrested, imprisoned, accused and convicted by a military court of the former Communist Yugoslav army in the same way without evidence, in a secret trial and without the right to a civilian attorney. After democratisation in Slovenia, the verdict was annulled.

The subject of the TV Finnish programme is connected with the purchase of 8x8 AMVs for the Slovenian Armed Forces. The decision to buy the AMVs was made under the former Government. The current Government, which took office in December 2004, was not the one deciding on the purchase and even less so was the Prime Minister himself.

He was never informed about the purchase contract or the assessments which had been made before the best bidder was selected. Consequently, he did not answer press questions related to the circumstances of the purchase, as he was not familiar with them. After the 2004 election, the new Minister of Defence, Karl Erjavec, issued an international tender for the procurement of military equipment, which was in contrast with the previously established practice of classified contracts. Two companies submitted bids:

the Slovenian company ROTIS d.o.o. as authorized representative of Patria OYJ and the Slovenian company Sistemska tehnika, which is majority-owned by the American company General Dynamics. ROTIS d.o.o.'s bid was deemed more cost effective, so the company was awarded the EUR278m contract. At the Defence Minister's express demand an anti-corruption clause was incorporated in the contract, enabling the rescission of the contract if any corruption is proven.

In the programme aired on TV1, which was intended to disclose illegal activities connected to this contract, the majority of key facts relating to the purchase of Patria's AMVs were not presented. At the same time, however, the programme provided a host of misleading, false and twisted claims:

1. ACCUSATIONS ABOUT BRIBE TAKING

On Tuesday, 2 September, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša firmly rejected such accusations.

Slovenian criminal investigators who interviewed the PM Janša after the programme was aired on the Finnish television have confirmed that their documents relating to the purchase of Patria's AMVs contain no allegations or indications that would in any way implicate Mr Janša as a suspect. The only time any groundless accusations were voiced was in the programme by Magnus Berglund.

2. OBSTRUCTING POLICE INVESTIGATIONS IN SLOVENIA

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša has never instructed the Minister of the Interior to stop police investigations. The accusation in the programme relating to this is not substantiated by a single shred of evidence. What is more, it is based on the presumption of one of the four interviewees, Slovenian citizens, who happens to be a candidate of the opposition party LDS. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior have already announced civil action against that individual.

3. ACQUAINTANCE WITH PERSONS ALLEGEDLY CONNECTED WITH THE PATRIA DEAL

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša has assured both the investigators and the public that he did not know and did not cooperate with Mr Walter Wolf, whom Mr Berglund alleges handed over the bribe to Mr Janša. The Slovenian PM has said that he never met and did not know Mr Wolf, and that he had even never had any indirect contact with him. In a statement for the Slovenian press, Mr Wolf likewise denied any acquaintance or contacts with the Prime Minister.

4. PEOPLE ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED WITH THE PATRIA DEAL CONNECTED WITH THE SLOVENIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The people such as Walter Wolf and Jure Cekuta, whom Mr Berglund alleges to have received bribes, appeared in the Slovenian press in the 1990s, when a disputed issue over the purchase of arms and other military equipment in Israel was investigated. On several occasions, the Slovenian media have presented Mr

Cekuta as a personal acquaintance of the former Slovenian Prime Minister and leader of the LDS party.

5. MANIPULATION OF PICTORIAL MATERIAL IN THE PROGRAMME

As the journalist introduces the businessman Mr Walter Wolf, the camera focuses on the sign denoting Wolfova Street in Ljubljana. Consequently, the viewer is under the impression that Mr Wolf is a businessman of such extraordinary standing that one of the streets in Slovenia's capital has been named after him. The truth of the matter is that the street was named after the 18th century Bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Alojzij Wolf.

Two different sources have apparently led the author of the programme to present the harsh accusations against the Slovenian Prime Minister: the alleged documents from Patria and the selection of contributors from Slovenia.

5.1. DOCUMENTS FROM PATRIA

The documents which Mr Berglund mentions are not presented to the audience, who are left to merely guess at their content. The source itself also compromises the credibility of this alleged evidence: on 4 September, Patria released an unambiguous message to the public saying: "Patria is not aware of any facts that would indicate that the accusations against certain individuals made by the Finnish TV-program MOT would be founded."

5.2. CONTRIBUTORS TO THE PROGRAMME

- The Chairman of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption Drago Kos is a former criminal investigator. His brother was a lawyer of Sistemska tehnika. Sistemska tehnika is the company whose bid at the AMV tender could not compete with that of ROTIS d.o.o., which is why it was not selected.

When he worked as a criminal investigator, Drago Kos illegally acquired a list of telephone conversations made by a journalist on Slovenia's national TV, Tomaž Ranc, a fact which was asserted by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia after a long judicial procedure. Drago Kos's partner is a journalist for POP TV, the TV station which was the first to release the news about YLE's reporting on the affair.

- Milan Švajger is the director of Sistemska tehnika, the company which unsuccessfully competed for the tender. After the said programme was aired on YLE, Milan Švajger and Drago Kos stated that they had no evidence and had only drawn logical conclusions.

- Milan M. Cvikl is a deputy in the Slovenian National Assembly and a candidate of the opposition party, the Social Democrats. He is running for election in the same electoral district as Prime Minister Janša. Mr Cvikl's partner has a history of business relations with Sistemska tehnika.

- Bojan Potočnik is a candidate of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, also an opposition party. In the programme by Mr Berglund, he is presented as a former Director General of the Slovenian Police and current Adviser to the President of the Republic of Slovenia. None of this is true. Mr Potočnik was Acting Director General of Police between April and June 2005, until another candidate was selected in a public procedure. Nor was Mr Potočnik Adviser to the President of the Republic of Slovenia at the time of the interview (12 August). The President's Office had discontinued cooperation with Mr Potočnik before that.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PATRIA

The common denominators of the interviewees in the programme are either business relations with the unsuccessful bidder Sistem-ska tehnika or active engagement in the opposition election campaign.

Assistance to Mr Berglund in the selection of contributors to the programme was provided by journalist Blaž Zgaga, who has also been his guide around Slovenia.

- Blaž Zgaga is known in Slovenia for having drawn up a petition against the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. In a key moment during the preparations for Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the autumn of 2007, he distributed the petition to a number of recipients across Europe and around the world. In the petition he stated that Slovenia's Presidency with Janez Janša at the helm of Slovenia's Government could be a worrying sign for the present, and even more so, for the future of the European Union. A similar message was disseminated at around the same time by the Social Democrats in their document entitled *Slovenija danes & ocena stanja* ('Slovenia Today - Assessment of the Situation'). In Slovenia, 90% of the print media is owned by two media oligarchs, one of whom is a member of the opposition party Liberal Democracy, while the other was until recently a member of the Social Democrats, also an opposition party.

Several facts, all of which can be confirmed, suggest that the news about the alleged corruptive actions of the Slovenian Prime Minister is a predetermined and well coordinated campaign by individuals on both Slovenian and Finnish sides:

- *Nedeljski dnevnik* weekly, which is owned by a member of the opposition party Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, announced as early as 28 August that "everything is ready for the big bang", and that "this will come from Finland", and that some Slovenian politicians were facing "an inevitable encounter with Finnish laws".

- Rok Praprotnik, journalist for the *Dnevnik* daily newspaper, owned by the same person, visited Finland one day before the programme was released, and pre-recorded interviews that would fill the media immediately after the release of the bombastic news of the alleged corruption affair. A few weeks before that, in his appearance for YLE, he had already implicated Mr Janša in the *Patria* affair by saying that this was a very sensitive topic as far as Mr Janša was concerned, and that we should not forget the fact that general elections would be held in Slovenia in September.

- At the very moment when the programme started on Finnish TV1 (20.00 local time), the Slovenian commercial TV station POP TV (19:00 local time) reported breaking news that Finnish television had accused the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša of accepting bribes. This happened less than half an hour before the actual accusation of Mr Janša accepting a bribe was reported in the programme aired on Finnish TV. - In an interview for the Slovenian national television, the journalist Magnus Berglund said that he had designed the show for Finnish viewers, as the topic was very important to Finland. In doing so, he said, "he did not pay any attention to what was happening in Slovenia just ahead of the elections." Judging by the first response by the Finnish public, the programme did not seem upsetting. The Finnish public, however, regained interest in the programme after the magnitude of the unsubstantiated accusations directed at the Prime Minister of an EU Member State had become clear. In Slovenia, the situation was completely different, as the programme immediately met with uproar and has had a major impact on the pre-election period.

The discussion initiated by the programme on channel TV1 continuously stressed freedom of expression. Independent journal-

ism is doubtless the core standard of democracy, to which both Slovenia and Finland must adhere.

This applies also to the international established standards of journalism which, in our view, were severely breached in this case.

Mr Berglund violated the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists. He also breached the principles of conduct adopted by Finnish journalists, particularly Article 12, which says: "Information sources must be approached critically. This is particularly important in controversial issues, since the source of the information may have an intention for personal gain or to damage others." The choice of interviewees and the conclusion of the programme, where the journalist accuses the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia of accepting a bribe, without substantiating this statement, demonstrates the breach of standards.

On 2 September the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia asked the CEO of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, Mikael Jungner, to present proof of the accusations made in the programme *The Truth about Patria* or to apologise to the Finnish and Slovenian public on behalf of his company. The CEO declined to reply himself and referred the matter to TV1's Channel Controller, whose reply, however, did not include either proof or apology.

In view of the magnitude of the accusations and proven unreliability of sources, the Slovenian Government calls on the Finnish broadcaster once again to substantiate its claims with indisputable proof. If it possesses such evidence, YLE has the responsibility to present it to be judged by the Finnish and Slovenian public, just as it presented its accusations.

When the programme was aired on YLE, this completely shocked the Slovenian public. The election campaign immediately shifted from a debate about Slovenia's future to a debate about the bribes. The accused Prime Minister cannot even defend himself properly, as he is not familiar with what exactly he is accused of. The accusations launched from Helsinki in the middle of the election campaign in Slovenia have further divided the Slovenian public. Such division is exceedingly harmful to the country. The reputation Slovenia has been building with great efforts ever since it became independent in 1991 has been blemished. The reputation of Finland is also blemished in the eyes of the Slovenian public. Reports about suspicions of corrupt activity in Finland's state-owned company contradict the impression of high ethical standards in Finland and, of course, in Slovenia. According to the Slovenian Minister of Defence, the contract on the purchase of *Patria*'s 8x8 AMVs will be annulled immediately if even the slightest suspicion of corruption during any stage of the procurement procedure is proven. The airing of serious accusations on a Finnish national broadcaster without providing a shred of proof makes the Slovenian public wonder how it can be possible to blame somebody of a grave criminal offence, while claiming that these allegations won't be substantiated in order to protect one's journalist sources. Sources can be protected in many ways that allow the evidence to be presented to the public.

We expect that this entire statement will be broadcast as soon as possible on TV1 in a similar time slot as the programme *Mot: The Truth about Patria*. We also expect the statement to be published on the YLE website in Finnish and English.

Yours sincerely, Anže Logar Director of the Government Communication Office

Text: RAMÓN MIKLUS, Photo: STA



Prime Minister Janez Janša (second from right) at a meeting with representatives of Slovenian emigrant communities.

PM THANKS SLOVENIANS ABROAD FOR CONTRIBUTION TO EU PRESIDENCY

Prime Minister Janez Janša presented on 7 July the main achievements of Slovenia's EU Presidency to the government council for Slovenians abroad, thanking all Slovenians abroad who had contributed in any way to the organisation of cultural and other events promoting Slovenia during the presidency.

Members of Slovenian emigrant communities from Argentina, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, France, China, Germany, Serbia and the United States congratulated the prime minister on the successful EU presidency. They also thanked Janša for the government's attention and its activities related to Slovenians living abroad and took the opportunity to exchange information on the activities of Slovenian communities around the world. The council members highlighted the social inclusion of young people, proposed measures to boost cooperation with Slovenia and eliminate administrative barriers, and emphasised the need to simplify voting from abroad. Janša thanked them for the proposals and presented activities for further strengthening ties with Slovenians abroad carried out by the government. He pointed out the recent opening of the Centre for Slovenian Studies and the Slovenian Museum and Archives in Cleveland.

MINISTERS CALL FOR MULTIETHNIC KOSOVO WITH EU PROSPECTS



Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (right) hosting his Kosovo counterpart Skender Hyseni.

The need for Kosovo to become a multiethnic society and embark on the path of EU integration was emphasised on 7 July as Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel received his Kosovo counterpart Skender Hyseni in Bled. "As an EU member, Slovenia will continue with efforts aimed at the stability, territorial integrity, social and economic development, and EU prospects of Kosovo," Rupel said before holding a working dinner with Hyseni. This is the first visit by a Kosovo minister since the country declared independence from Serbia in February. Rupel said it was a part of efforts to ensure stability in the Western Balkans. Rupel said the Kosovo government had important tasks in building institutions of the state, including protecting human rights and safeguarding the Serbian minority and its cultural monuments. Hyseni said that the recently adopted constitution provided a broad spectre of minority rights protection. The Kosovo government has pledged to implement the constitution in its entirety, in particular the provisions on the Serbian minority. He also echoed Rupel's hopes that Kosovo would have good relations with neighbouring Macedonia and Montenegro. "Kosovo is committed to close and good relations with all of our neighbours, including Serbia," Hyseni said. The future of the region and Kosovo lies in cooperation and neighbourly relations, not divisions and hatred, he concluded.

SLOVENIA MOURNS BOATING TRAGEDY VICTIMS

On 8 July, Slovenia observed a day of mourning for the victims of the boating accident on the Sava River, which occurred on 3 July. All state institutions marked the day of mourning by lowering their flags to half mast. Organisers of cultural and other events in Slovenia were meanwhile asked to adapt their programmes accordingly. The day of mourning coincided with a remembrance session of parliament held to remember MP Kristjan Janc, one of 13 people killed in the accident.

The number of casualties made it Slovenia's worst accident on water ever. The accident happened at the site of a new hydroelectric plant in Blanca, some 80 km east of Ljubljana, when two canoes tried to navigate over the newly-built dam as part of an expedition organised by Janc. Apart from Janc, several local officials from the town of Sevnica were among the dead. At its 177th session, the Government decided to give special recognition to everyone who took part in rescuing the victims. It commended members of the Slovene police and civil protection forces, particularly those divers, police officers, firemen, rescue workers and local people who offered their help immediately after the accident with a sense of composure, devotion and personal courage. The government has offered the support in a form of financial means to all 13 families which had lost their loved ones in the tragedy.

EMIGRANTS GATHER FOR TRADITIONAL "MEETING IN OUR COUNTRY"

Between 1,000 and 1,500 ethnic Slovenians living abroad convened in Nova Gorica on 6 July for the traditional annual »Meeting in Our Country«. The social gathering, organised by the Slovenian Emigrant Association, was welcomed by State Secretary for Slovenians Abroad Zorko Pelikan. The traditional gatherings are primarily social events. Just like in the past, the guests focused on socialising and fun against a background of performances by choirs, folklore and theatre groups, and presentations of old crafts. Pelikan praised the organisation of the event and thanked the participants for their efforts in preserving



The traditional annual "Meeting in Our Country" gathering of Slovenians living abroad.

the Slovenian identity, Slovene language and connections with Slovenia. The gathering was also attended by other Slovenians who are interested in learning something about other countries from the experience of their compatriots living around the world.

PM JANŠA: CONCRETE PROJECTS OF THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN INCLUDE INAUGURATION OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN UNIVERSITY

Prime Minister Janez Janša attended the Summit for the Mediterranean, held in Paris on 13 July, at which the prime ministers and presidents of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership upgraded the so-called "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean". In so doing, the Member States intended to



French president Nicolas Sarkozy (left) welcomed Prime Minister Janez Janša at the summit inaugurating the Union for the Mediterranean.

emphasise that the new Union represents an upgrade of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership established in 1995.

"Slovenia is a Mediterranean country, and therefore upgrading the Barcelona Process with greater activity, integration and concrete projects will be beneficial for us in a general sense, particularly because these projects include the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean University, which occupied a very prominent position in this summit's joint statement," said Prime Minister Janša. The Euro-Mediterranean University, with its seat in Slovenia, was inaugurated at the beginning of June 2008 during Slovenia's Presidency of the European Union and now represents one of the six central projects within the Barcelona Process. "The young university endeavours to become Slovenia's permanent contribution to integration, exchange and research in our common space. Both students and professors will be able to coexist and cooperate," asserted Janša in his speech at the summit. Prime Minister Janša met towards the end of the summit with Stipe Mesić, president of the Republic of Croatia. On this occasion, Prime Minister Janša supported Croatia in its endeavours to join the European Union. "I believe that from the moment we solved the problem of the protected ecological fishing area, the whole process certainly entered a phase in which we are able to distinguish between the open questions of both states and the Croatian endeavours to enter the European Union," emphasised Janša.

FOREIGN MINISTER RUPEL MEETS CROATIAN COUNTERPART GORDAN JANDROKOVIĆ IN BRDO



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (left) and his Croatian counterpart Gordan Jandroković at a press conference.

Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Gordan Jandroković paid an official visit to Ljubljana on 8 July at the invitation of Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel. The meeting represented the first concrete opportunity for an in-depth analysis of relations between the two countries. The meeting was followed by a press conference, at which Minister Rupel stressed that Slovenia and Croatia shared numerous strategic interests. Besides the obvious fact that there is a Slovene minority in Croatia and that there are numerous Croats living in Slovenia, the inhabitants of both countries are linked by historical friendly and family ties. Good neighbourly relations between the two countries represent a common interest; cooperation in the border area is being developed in favour of both sides, and the inhabitants of both countries have a desire to live in friendship

and cooperation, looking towards the future. With regard to open issues and problems resulting from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the Slovenian minister highlighted the obligation of both countries to develop mutual trust, to avoid incidents and to resolve outstanding issues in line with European norms. Regarding Croatia's drawing closer to Euro-Atlantic integration, Minister Rupel highlighted Slovenia's interest in the stabilisation of the Western Balkans and its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, with the aim of establishing an open European region from Ljubljana to Athens with the extension of the Schengen and euro areas. "Croatia is first in line," added Foreign Minister Rupel. Minister Rupel also addressed economic cooperation by stressing tourism. He explained that Croatia was visited by more than a million Slovenian tourists with 5.6 million overnight stays in the last year. Slovenia's investments exceed EUR 684 million, and there are 140 companies with Slovenian capital active in Croatia; trade in 2007 increased by 15.4%, with exports from Slovenia in 2007 amounting to EUR 1,568 million and imports from Croatia to EUR 849 million. Cooperation in the field of culture is lively as well, with guest performances, translations, various events, exhibitions and numerous initiatives on both sides of the border.

U.S. AMBASSADOR VISITS AMERICAN SLOVENIANS IN CLEVELAND

U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia Yousif Ghafari paid a visit on 24 July to American Slovenians in Cleveland, one of the biggest Slovenian communities outside of Slovenia. Ghafari met around 45 of the most visible representatives of the community at a restaurant serving Slovenian delicacies. In a meeting at the Sterle Country House restaurant, Ghafari described his experience of Slovenia so far, which he said was positive. He particularly praised Slovenia's progress in politics, economics and culture. Ghafari admitted during his Senate hearing in April that he knew little about Slovenia, but members of the Slovenian community in Cleveland established at the meeting that the ambassador had learnt many things since taking up office in late May. At the same hearing, Ghafari promised to George Voinovich, a Republican senator of Slovene descent, that he would visit the Slovenian community in Cleveland. He fulfilled that promise on Tuesday. As part of his visit, Ghafari also stopped by Cleveland State University, which recently launched a centre for Slovenian studies. He also toured the new Slovenian Museum and Archives in the Slovenian National Centre. Before returning to Slovenia, the ambassador also met representatives of the Cleveland Slovenian Business and Professional Association.

LESS CRIME IN SLOVENIA IN FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR

The number of crimes dropped 4.2% in Slovenia in the first half of 2008, and the share of resolved crimes was up almost three percentage points year on year, criminal police Chief Aleksander Jevšek said on 4 August. The police registered 44,500 crimes and 21,274 were resolved, Jevšek said. Jevšek pointed out at the press conference today that the number of resolved crimes rose from 44.9% to 47.8% in the first half on 2008. Crimes against physical integrity were down 11% compared to the same period last year. The number of homicides went from 15 to 8, and all of them were resolved, Jevšek said. The number of serious injuries and attempted murders went up, but all of these criminal acts were resolved. There were also fewer sexual crimes. Crimes against property were down 10.1%, while there was also a drop in the number of robberies and car thefts (52%), arsons (24%),

and breaking and entering into residences. Jevšek attributes the latter to a greater police presence. The level of juvenile crime stayed roughly the same as in the first half of 2007, while the police recorded a 245.7% rise in computer crime. According to Jevšek, drug abuse crimes rose by 28.5%. There were 19.5% more crimes of illegal production of and traffic in explosives. In fighting terrorism, the police had no other work than the exchange of information with foreign security bodies, Jevšek explained, adding that the number of forensic studies also increased. The police put 16 million queries to the Schengen Information System in the first half of 2008, and 107 persons were captured based on the information, 4,276 were denied entry into the country, and 40 missing persons were found, Jevšek explained. Compared to the first half of last year, the number of people who died in car crashes went from 174 to 123, but one in every three responsible for fatal crashes was driving under the influence of alcohol.

EUROBAROMETER: EU PRESIDENCY INCREASED SUPPORT FOR EU POLICIES

The latest Eurobarometer survey for Slovenia has shown that support for EU policies has grown among Slovenians during the country's EU presidency. The survey, which was presented at the European Commission representation in Ljubljana on 16 July, shows 71% of Slovenians believing that EU membership brings a number of benefits. The share is much higher than the EU average (54%) and on par with previous measurements. An important increase has been recorded when it comes to the perception of Slovenia's role in the EU: 73% said that Slovenia's voice counted (up 4 percentage points compared to six months earlier), and 56% believe that Slovenian interests are being considered sufficiently (up 10 percentage points). Slovenians' trust in European institutions also remains above EU average, with 66% saying they trusted the bloc. As many as 92% said they had come across media reports on Slovenia's EU Presidency, whereas only a fifth of other EU citizens were familiar with the fact the Slovenia held the presidency. Four out of five Slovenians believe Slovenia's stint was important. Support to the euro area is meanwhile up four percentage points to 90%, which makes Slovenia the staunchest supporter of the euro in the bloc. Along with Poland, Slovenia is also by far the biggest supporter of further EU enlargement, the share of those in favour standing at 74%. The EU average stands at 47%. While 89% remain satisfied with life, people are less optimistic about the economic situation in the country: 17% believe the situation will improve in the coming 12 months, 42% that it will get worse, and 35% that it will remain unchanged.

PRIME MINISTER JANEZ JANŠA RECEIVES AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN GLOBAL CANCER CONTROL

Last night at the World Cancer Congress 2008 in Geneva, the International Union Against Cancer (UICC) conferred on the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, an award for excellence in global cancer control for his efforts in cancer prevention during Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and as a result of the exceptional support of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in this field. The Outstanding Government Official Award was received on behalf of the Slovenian PM by the Health Minister, Zofija Mazej Kukovič on 28 August. Other award winners include the Brazilian Health Minister, Dr. José Gomes Temporão, Prof. Harald zur Hausen

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(outstanding individual), and the Turkish Association for Cancer Research and Control (outstanding UICC member organisation). The main objectives of the UICC Congress are discussing cancer research, promoting further strategies for cancer control, implementing effective tobacco control, studying the economic effects of cancer control, exchanging good practices and encouraging partnership.

SLOVENIA, MONTENEGRO SIGN AGREEMENT ON SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

Higher Education, Science and Technology Minister Mojca Kucler Dolinar and her Montenegrin counterpart Sreten Škuletić signed an agreement on cooperation in science and technology in Budva on 2 July, the Education Ministry said in a press release. The agreement will boost the already successful cooperation between the countries by promoting joint research projects and more cooperation in EU projects. Kucler Dolinar said that in 2009 both ministries would publish calls for applications for bilateral research projects. So far the cooperation in science and technology between the countries was based on an agreement from 2002. Since 2004 the countries have carried out 16 joint projects. The Slovenian minister highlighted the successful cooperation in the area of information sciences and said that renovation of the national Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services (Cobiss) in Cetinje, Montenegro, which was opened on Tuesday, was also a result of this cooperation. The document was signed on the sidelines of a forum dubbed "Science, Higher Education and Innovation", where Kucler Dolinar presented the country's plans and experience in this field, as well as achievements of the Slovenian Presidency.

BUDGET SURPLUS TO REACH EUR 240M, MINISTER SAYS

Slovenia was expected to end 2008 with a budget surplus of EUR 70m, but Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk revealed on 30 July that the surplus would actually reach EUR 240m, or 0.65% of GDP. "Since the adoption of the supplementary budget [in May] ... we have acquired new data from the Tax Administration regarding personal and corporate income tax. We expect the surplus to reach EUR 240m," the minister said. Bajuk was presenting the achievements of his ministry over the past four years, highlighting reduced public spending, tax reform, the introduction of the euro and the privatisation of NKBM, the No. 2 bank. As part of the tax reform, the government started a phase-out of the payroll tax, increased the general tax relief, reduced the progressivity of tax brackets and cut corporate tax. "The tax reform reduced the tax burden," he said.

Bajuk hailed the introduction of the euro in 2007 as a major achievement. "This turned out to be one of the most important steps," he said. There are also tasks that the ministry has failed to accomplish; Bajuk mentioned an overhaul of legislation on the Court of Audits and acts governing public finances.

SLOVENIA AND KOSOVO TO COOPERATE IN SURVEYING

Slovenian Environment Minister Janez Podobnik signed on 22 August a Slovenian-Kosovo agreement on cooperation in surveying with Kosovo's Minister for the Public Administration

Arsim Bajrami. Under the deal, the two countries will exchange experience in this area and launch joint projects. Podobnik and Bajrami also discussed the launch of a joint project to exchange best practice in surveying. Podobnik pointed out that Slovenia's mapping and surveying institute, Geodetski zavod, is a leading institution in this area in the region and is well equipped to pass on experience to Kosovo's institutions. The Slovenian official used the opportunity to present Bajrami with the workings of Geodetski zavod, Slovenia's real estate registry, the functioning of the census of Slovenian business infrastructure and the creation of a modern national topographical database. Podobnik stressed that the Slovenian mapping institute had in recent years also managed to set up two other important registers: the register of public utility infrastructure and the register of the real estate market. »Most of these data on real estate and public utility infrastructure can be accessed online, allowing quick and easy access,« said Podobnik. Slovenia's minister added that the keeping of accurate registers on real estate and infrastructure and a topographical database was crucial for ensuring order in a country.

SLOVENIAN, HUNGARIAN PMS OPEN KEY MOTORWAY SECTIONS

Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša and his Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Gyurcsány launched on 19 August two key motorway sections on each side of the border that connect the two countries by motorway for the first time. The pair used the occasion for talks on bilateral relations, which both said were good. The sections between the NE town of Lendava and the Pince border crossing, and the Pince-Tornyiszentmiklós section in Hungary, connect the motorway networks of the two countries. Only a 20-kilometre section is missing to complete the entire east-west motorway axis through Slovenia. The completion of the final stretch of motorway in the eastern region of Prekmurje next month will be a landmark, as Budapest will have a modern motorway connection to the Adriatic Sea for the first time, Janša said after talks with Gyurcsány. He said this would be a model for further cooperation, in particular in infrastructure. The two countries want to link up the power grids, gas pipelines and rail network. Janša said the talks the two governments started last autumn with a joint session on both sides of the border would continue. According to Gyurcsány, Hungary's motorway link with the Adriatic is a historic step and creates new opportunities for coming generations. The Slovenian prime minister further noted that the volume of bilateral trade had gone up by 30% in 2007 and was on track to increase 20% this year. This shows that untapped opportunities discussed last year have been discovered and are being exploited, the Hungarian prime minister said.



Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša and his Hungarian counterpart Ferenc Gyurcsány



Journalistic credibility takes a side step

The most direct corruption accusation since Slovenia's independence has stirred up a lot of dust in the country. A journalist working for the Finnish national television YLE, Magnus Berglund, finished his story on bribes being given and taken in connection with the acquisition of Patria armoured vehicles by claiming:

"The Finnish state-owned Patria bribed the prime minister of Slovenia." The story was run on TV 1, one of four Finnish television channels, on September 1st, during the run-up to the Slovene parliamentary elections. The journalist describes how Patria supposedly earmarked 21 million euros as a bribe for Slovene officials in order to secure a 278 million euro sale of 135 armoured vehicles. The transfers of money supposedly followed a track from an Austrian businessman Riedl to an Austrian-Canadian-Slovene businessman Walter Wolf, and to painter Jure Cekuta. As Berglund claims, Wolf was assigned to transfer the bribes further to Slovene politicians, while Jure Cekuta's involvement was to transfer the bribes to certain employees at the Slovene Ministry of Defence. One of the employees mentioned was Dragan Bavčar, brother of Igor Bavčar, CEO of the company Istrabenz. The only person who has admitted the acceptance of an undisclosed sum of money from Patria is a Slovene businessman, Rudolf Leban, who had signed two contracts with the Finnish company in connection with this acquisition for arrangement of counter-deliveries. According to Mr Berglund, the list of recipients of the money includes several dozen names, including J, or, as the journalist claims, the Slovene Prime Minister, Janez Janša. When accusing the Slovenian Prime Minister of accepting a bribe the journalist fails to use the classical journalistic techniques, such as "is supposed to", "as our sources claim", "according to experts",... instead he uses the affirmative form. These are the most severe accusations made by a Slovene or foreign journalist against any Slovene Prime Minister since Slovenia's independence. Which is why it's even more surprising that Berglund hasn't delivered a single piece of evidence, document or signature. As he says, he does have documents, but he will never disclose them, because he is protecting his sources. These documents are supposed to become public when the Finnish police deliver them to the prosecutor and court proceedings begin, which should happen at the beginning of next year. Interestingly enough, the Finnish journalist says his claims are even double-checked, but he does not offer a single piece of evidence for them: "This is called traditional journalism. I'm doing my job." Of course, his traditional journalism is a complete devaluation of the work of journalists, who take care to disclose documents or at least testimony supporting their accusations, especially when reporting on the criminal offences of individuals. By

Photo: Primož Lavre

conducting his work in the way he does, Berglund is in serious violation of the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists. Article 3 of the Declaration states that a journalist shall report only in accordance with the facts of which he/she knows the origin and not suppress any essential information or falsify documents. The Slovene Penal Code demands a penalty of eight years in prison for an official who accepts a bribe. Accusations of such a severe criminal offence without disclosing documents or evidence are despicable for a journalist. After the story was aired Prime Minister Janša called a press conference and claimed the allegations on corruption as absurd, a total lie and a fabrication. He emphasized that he does not know Jure Cekuta, Walter Wolf or Wolfgang Riedl, who were mentioned in the story as "messengers". He is convinced that this fabrication did not coincidentally emerge a few weeks short of parliamentary elections, and added that he would demand that the Minister of Defence use the anti-corruption clause in the contract and nullify the deal if any suspicions of corruption regarding the acquisition of armoured vehicles are confirmed. Magnus Berglund, when interviewed for Slovene television, refused to disclose who his "guide" around Slovenia had been - who led him to the people, interviewed in his story. Among the Slovenians interviewed were Milan M. Cvikl, member of parliament and the opposition Social Democrats (SD); Drago Kos, president of the Slovene anti-corruption committee, also known for his illegal intrusion in the communications privacy of a journalist, Tomaž Ranc; his brother, lawyer Miran Kos, is conducting business with the company 'Sistemska tehnika', which lost the deal to Patria in a public tender to sell armoured vehicles to Slovenia. Also interviewed were Milan Švajger, director of the company 'Sistemska tehnika', and Bojan Potočnik, a former Director-General of the Slovene Police and today a parliamentary candidate for the LDS party. On the next day, two of the interviewees, Kos and Švajger, said that a former journalist of the Večer newspaper, Blaž Zgaga, brought Berglund to them. Blaž Zgaga is known as a co-author of a petition "against censorship and political pressure on journalists in the Republic of Slovenia", signed by 572 Slovene journalists (including politicians!), which accused Janez Janša of obstructing media freedom in Slovenia. Švajger doesn't know why Zgaga chose him as an interviewee for the Finnish journalist, but he presumes it was because "he's in this business". In an interview for Finnish television, he stated that the decision to sign a deal with Patria was not made by the Minister of Defence, but was made behind the scenes, "very close to the Prime Minister". His evidence for his claim is that the Prime Minister was Minister of Defence in 1991!? Brigadier Bavčar, who has categorically rejected the accusations of accepting a bribe, has decided to file an action against the Finnish YLE television station. Also, the Government has filed a suit against them and the journalist Berglund, after the director of the Finnish television company failed to disclose documents which would support their claims, or apologize for their claims. In the meantime, a group of 34 coalition members of parliament from SDS, NSi, SLS and DeSUS parties has filed a request to call an extraordinary parliamentary session about the claims of corruption in the Patria deal. The police have conducted a briefing with a member of parliament, Milan M. Cvikl, to confirm the allegations of the Finnish and Slovene media about the existence of evidence of corruption in this matter. Criminal investigators were interested in the contents of the documents the parliamentary commission of inquiry has sent to the prosecutor's office. Both Slovene journalists' organisations have issued press releases. The Association of Journalists and Publicists has called attention to the contestability of the Finnish television's sources and the concealment of evidence alleged to support the story. It is their opinion that such journalistic work, where the journalist does not disclose evidence for his claims, is usually printed in the tabloids. Surprisingly, though, the Slovene Association of Journalists, led by Grega Repovž, have defended the unprofessional and unethical conduct of the Finnish journalist. Obviously, for some people evidence or documents are not relevant when it comes to journalism.

WHATMAKESTHENEWS

The achievements of the Ministries

in the 2004-2008 term

EDUCATION MINISTRY EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS, SAYS MINISTER



The Ministry of Education has exceeded expectations and goals in the 2004–2008 term, believes Education Minister Milan Zver, who said on 5 August that his ministry's key achievement was to make Slovenian students competitive knowledge-wise at the global scale. "We can't yet compare the knowledge of current generations with previous generations, but we can

be proud of our students, who are among the best in the world in science and mother tongue competence," Zver said as he presented the achievements of his ministry over the past four years. Free kindergarten for second and subsequent children, and a halving by 2014 of kindergarten fees for children aged 3–5, were meanwhile labelled by the minister as the added value of the set goals. Cheaper kindergarten has and will have an impact on demographics, he said. Another achievement that Zver highlighted is warm meals for secondary school students, which will be fully implemented as of the next school year. The relevant law, which was passed by the parliament in April, provides one free warm meal for students each school day. There was also headway in reaffirming patriotism, including with a reform of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education increased spending for schools and kindergartens, with maintenance funds increasing more than four-fold during the course of this term. Zver also highlighted the laws adopted in this term, saying they provided for "flexibility, independence and accountability of all stakeholders in the educational system". Slovenia has a "favourable set of circumstances that define the Slovenian school as good", he said.

INTERIOR MINISTER STRESSES RISE IN RESOLUTION RATE



Interior Minister Dragutin Mate highlighted positive crime resolution rate statistics, as he presented on 6 August his ministry's achievements in this term. On the other hand, Mate said that cooperation between the police and local communities could be better. One of the ministry's main goals was to stop the trend from the 2002-2004 period, when the resolution rate was

dropping, Mate told the press. According to him, the drop almost stopped in 2005 and since then the rate has been increasing by around 2 percentage points yearly. The number of offences against public order has dropped from 62,000 in 2003 to 59,000 in 2004, 53,000 in 2005, and has stayed at some 48,000 in the last few years. Mate added that the ministry also managed to cut the number of people killed and injured in traffic accidents. In July 2008, 18 people died on Slovenian roads, while the number stood at 38 last year, he said. The road death toll in the first half of the year was meanwhile

Source: STA

30% down compared to 2007. The police have also recorded a fall in the number of illegal immigrants. The number decreased from 5,600 in 2004 to less than 2,500 in the last couple of years. The minister attributes this to legislative changes and organised work of the police. In the last four years, the police acquired additional vehicles, while 35 police stations have been renovated and DNA laboratories have been upgraded. Surveys show that people's trust into the police is quite high, at 96%, Mate noted, adding that this is the share of respondents who marked the work of the police with 3 to 5 on a one-to-five scale. Furthermore, Slovenia introduced biometric passports and will soon get plastic driver's licences. Changes to legislation also brought the simplification of procedures for reporting stolen or lost documents.

ERJAVEC SATISFIED WITH DEFENCE MINISTRY'S WORK IN THIS TERM



Defence Minister Karl Erjavec said at a press conference held in Novo Mesto on 29 July that he was extremely satisfied with the ministry's work in the 2004–2008 term. He believes that in the last four years standards have been set that will also be valid in the future. According to the minister, many steps forward have been made in this term in the development of the

Slovenian Armed Forces and the Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, he said. The ministry has successfully carried out the project of integrating the Slovenian Army into NATO, fulfilled Slovenia's obligations regarding participation in international operations and increased the army's operative capacities, Erjavec said. Erjavec highlighted participation in peacekeeping missions as one of biggest successes of the Slovenian Armed Forces. He noted that there were no casualties among Slovenian troops in these missions, "even though from the statistical point of view there could have been". This implies that the training and equipment of soldiers are at a very high level, Erjavec added. Among the ministry's achievements, the minister also listed the sale of real estate that the army does not use, establishment of a registry of army living quarters and good response in cases of natural disasters.

PODOBNIK: BALANCE BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT INTACT



Environment and Spatial Planning Minister Janez Podobnik looked back at the work of his department in the 2004–2008 term on 11 August, telling the press in Ljubljana that in a "dynamic period of intensive economic growth", the ministry had managed to preserve a balance between development and the environment. NGOs begged to differ, though. Podobnik said that the work

of the ministry was about finding a way to please the development ambitions of the state, while maintaining a responsible attitude towards the environment. "If I found myself in a dilemma, I always decided in favour of the environment," he added. Highlighting achievements in spatial planning, Podobnik pointed among other things to important changes in construction standards, while adding that there was still room for improvement in incentives for renovation

and energy efficiency. He moreover labelled as successful the boosting of subsidies for families renovating or buying a house, while also pointing out that waiting periods for complaints in construction-related affairs were brought down from one year to four months. As regards the environment, the minister highlighted an expansion in the number of treatment plants. There are 190 such facilities in the country now, with budget funding having increased from EUR 16m in 2004 to EUR 50m in 2008. The Environmental Fund granted EUR 100m worth of favourable loans in the past four years, 60% of which were used for projects that curbed greenhouse gas emissions. According to the fund, this resulted in CO2 emissions decreasing by 48,000 tonnes. Podobnik is moreover proud of the ministry's work in the areas of watercourse maintenance, nature reserves, drinking water supply, waste disposal and local environmental protection schemes.

VIRANT PRAISES ACHIEVEMENTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MINISTRY



Public Administration Minister Gregor Virant presented on 14 August the achievements of his ministry in the 2004–2008 term, saying that the term had been eventful and dynamic and that the ministry had done a lot. He stressed that it was also up to the users of public administration services to assess the work performed. Virant stressed as the main achievement of

the four-year term of the new ministry an increase in the quality of public administration and its democratisation. The goal of the establishment of the Ministry of Public Administration was to gather all services responsible for public administration under one roof and give political emphasis to public administration, said Virant. Among the measures that improved the quality of public administration, the minister emphasised the opening of offices every first Saturday in the month. This proved to be a good step, with 45,000 clients having made use of this opportunity within a year, according to Virant. He also pointed to the elimination of numerous administrative obstacles, including the abolition of territorial jurisdiction and of the car registration sticker, the possibility to verify signatures in administrative units, and the abolishment of income tax returns. Virant is also proud of the one-stop-shop system for the registration of sole proprietors and companies. According to him, procedures are fast and free of charge, there are no forms to fill out, and there are also fewer difficulties with incomplete applications. The minister believes that the government's programme for cutting red tape has been a great success. He emphasised savings in public procurement for the entire public administration, which stood at EUR 9m at the annual level, while simplifications in the area of personal data protection for small and medium-sized companies saved EUR 36m.

MINISTER COTMAN HIGHLIGHTS TALKS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AS BIGGEST SUCCESS



Presenting on 1 August the achievements of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs in this government's term, Minister Marjeta Cotman highlighted talks with civil society as the biggest success. "I find this the biggest success, but it was also the hardest part," she said. Cotman pointed to the decline in unemployment, saying it is at its lowest point since Slovenia gained

independence. At the beginning of the government's term almost 91,000 people were unemployed, while the number currently stands at some 60,000, Cotman noted. Between December 2005 and May 2005, the number of long-term unemployed people fell by over 30%, while the number of unemployed under 25 years of age has decreased by almost 13,000 to 6,700, Cotman said. Cotman also noted that the introduction of quotas has improved employment prospects for the handicapped. Yearly, between 1,750 and 1,930 handicapped persons get jobs now, while the number stood between 800 and 1,000 before. The passage of amendments to the employment relationships act meanwhile brought more flexibility to the labour market, while at the same time retaining the level of social security, Cotman said. Among the achievements, the minister also listed the signing of the 2007–2009 social agreement, more scholarships and a long-term system of subsidies for students' meals. According to Cotman, the number of people receiving welfare benefits dropped by 37% to some 39,200 between December 2004 and June 2008. She believes this to be the consequence of the changes to the act on social security and employment. She added that the monthly social relief amounted to almost EUR 222 this July. Furthermore, the changes to the pensions act benefited pensioners, since the pensions are being adjusted to wages more consistently since 2005, she added. The government also did not introduce any stricter criteria for retiring. The number of beds in nursing homes has increased by 3,000, and a tender that would bring 750 new beds to Ljubljana and Maribor is currently underway, Cotman added. Cotman also underlined measures for increasing the birth rate, such as higher child benefits and benefits for large families. She noted that in 2006 and 2007 more children were born than in the previous years.

SLOVENIA BETTER OFF THAN FOUR YEARS AGO



Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk has said that Slovenia is better off after four years of the centre-right government. »There were occasional problems [in the coalition] but we always managed to find common ground. The end result is at hand, the coalition has successfully implemented what it had promised to the public.« »Everything that we committed to has been realised to a great

extent, almost entirely, and what has not been finished yet is already under way. In this sense I believe that the work of the government, and of the coalition, has been successful.« One of the government's biggest achievements, and a landmark event for Slovenia, was the introduction of the euro in 2006. This was not the project of a single government or a single ministry, but »practically the entire period of preparation coincided with this term, which required cooperation with everyone.« »This achievement was instrumental for Slovenia, as it allowed faster economic growth and general progress. It is true that global economic growth was positive, but we still grew twice as fast as other eurozone countries.« The reason why Slovenia made such strides was »the new atmosphere in the Slovenian economy that could only have been created by clear and precise rules of the game. Slovenia adopted the rules of the eurozone.« As for other achievements, Bajuk mentioned the reduction of the tax burden on companies and cuts in public spending, which dropped from 48.1% of GDP in 2001 to about 43% of GDP at the present. »This broadens the space for the private sector, which is the true carrier of creativity and progress.« Asked whether Slovenia failed to pay enough attention to inflation considering that countries which had adopted the euro before saw prices rise, Bajuk says it is crystal clear

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by now that 80% of the difference between inflation in 2006 and 2007 is attributed to oil and food prices.

Yet Bajuk pointed to another factor that pushed up inflation in Slovenia - wholesale and retail. Whereas in the eurozone the distribution system, including retailers, absorbed nearly 18% of the producer-price increase, in Slovenia retail and wholesale did not absorb anything, instead they added 50% to the producer-price increase.

FM STRESSES ROLE OF DIPLOMACY AS FOREIGN MINISTRY ACHIEVEMENT



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel presented the achievements of the Foreign Ministry in the 2004-2008 term, emphasising the work of diplomacy as a service for Slovenian citizens abroad. According to Rupel, a great number of international events left the ministry with no time to prepare an analysis of its achievements. Rupel did not emphasise any special achievement of the term, numbering

instead a series of projects which he believes have had an impact on the fate of Slovenia as a modern country and its reputation in the international community. The minister pointed to Slovenia's EU presidency in the first half of 2008, comprising a great number of international events and achievements, which according to Rupel literally kept coming one after another.

The main question is what benefits Slovenian citizens can have from the Foreign Ministry, he said, pointing to the importance of the work of diplomacy for ordinary citizens who find themselves in trouble in foreign countries. The minister mentioned the rescuing of climber Tomaž Humar, who got stuck in his attempt to climb Mt. Nanga Parbat in the Himalayas, the release of Tomo Križnar, former special envoy to Sudan's region of Darfur, from imprisonment in Sudan and the rescuing of Slovenian climber Dejan Miškovič from the face of Mustagh Tower in northern Pakistan. Rupel also emphasised the introduction of the euro and entry to the Schengen zone. »Elimination of borders however requires knowing clearly where borders are,« said Rupel, pointing to the issue of the border with Croatia, which remained unsolved also in this term.

He reiterated that Slovenia and Croatia had good economic and human relations, while there were problems with certain »tensions and distrusts«. As the ministry's achievement, Rupel highlighted the bilateral agreement on the avoidance of border incidents signed at Brijuni in 2005, and last year's agreement from Bled, when Slovenia and Croatia decided to try and resolve their border dispute through arbitration or at an international court. On the other hand, Rupel mentioned the issue of Croatia's declaration of the ecological and fisheries zone in the Adriatic, which »surprised« the Foreign Ministry at the beginning of the EU presidency, but has been resolved successfully. Regarding the relations with Italy, Rupel believes that the countries have established a »favourable level of relations«. He emphasised the progress regarding the law on the protection of the Slovenian minority, and the creation of an inter-governmental commission of foreign, economy, transport, energy, environment and culture ministers. According to Rupel, the relations with Austria have also improved, »regardless of the issue of bilingual signs«. He added that the interest for the Slovenian minority in Austria was greater than ever, emphasising that the minority representative Rudi Vouk had good chance of being elected to the Austrian parliament.

The minister also emphasised the role of the Slovenian diplomacy in solving the issue of the status of Kosovo and in the signing of a

Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Serbia, which solidified a pro-European government in Belgrade and led to the arrest of war crimes suspect Radovan Karadzic.

LOWER NOTARY FEES A KEY ACHIEVEMENT IN 2004-2008 TERM, SAYS MINISTER ŠTURM



Justice Minister Lovro Šturm underscored the reduction of notary fees by 50% as one of the biggest achievements of his four-year term as minister, saying the people are estimated EUR 65m. The parliament passed 62 acts prepared by the Justice Ministry and as many as 97.4% of denationalisation claims have been solved, Šturm said as he enumerated the ministry's achievements. All higher courts and 30 of Slovenia's 66 courts introduced the Lukenda programme, which aims at eliminating backlogs until 2010. The efficiency of a commission for redressing of injustices and national reconciliation has also increased considerably. Between 2005 and 2008, it solved some 4,170 claims annually, while it only managed to close some 860 claims a year between 1997 and 2004.

Šturm is also proud of the amendments to the penal code which criminalised a number of activities regarding white collar crime that had previously only been viewed upon as »big disgrace«. The minister added that the implementation of the right to trial in reasonable time saved some EUR 600m.

Investment in judiciary amounted to EUR 57m over the four years, with various justice authorities getting some 45,450 square meters of new premises. Šturm also named several points in which more could have been done, including a bill on war damage compensation which had been drafted by the ministry but failed to get adopted, and the failed digitalisation of the Supreme Court's criminal records. The minister also expressed regret over continued tensions with judges, who started a work-to-rule strike over wages, bonuses and the very fact that they are a part of the public sector wage system. Šturm expressed the hope that the Constitutional Court, which is currently considering the matter at the request of the judges, will pass a »clear, definite and executable decision«.

VIZJAK: SLOVENIA MORE DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED AFTER 2004-2008 TERM



Minister Andrej Vizjak looked back at the achievements of the Economy Ministry in the 2004-2008 term, concluding that while an important step had been made towards making Slovenia's economy development-oriented, a lot of work remains to be done in terms of adapting economic policies and increasing productivity. »We are pleased with what we have achieved, but at the same time we are aware that a lot of work lies ahead. The changing situation on global markets requires a constant adaptation of economic policies,« Vizjak told the press in Ljubljana. According to him, the key goal four years ago was creating new jobs and increasing employment. In the future, the chief goal will be securing a breakthrough in the productivity of companies and thereby creating conditions for dividing up the value added fairly

between workers and development of companies. The priority tasks of the ministry in the past term included creating an environment conducive to greater competitiveness, Vizjak said, adding that funds from the state budget as well as from European structural funds were used for this purpose. According to the minister, 80% to 90% of companies have met the goals set in terms of creating new jobs and securing higher growth. The minister moreover highlighted changes in the field of company takeovers, workers' participation in profit, the reimbursements for investments into the telecommunication network, the reorganisation of the electricity market, more competition among telecommunication providers, development incentives for SMEs, and enhanced investment in tourist infrastructure.

As regards the ministry's achievements during Slovenia's EU presidency, Vizjak pointed to the adoption of legislative acts related to the free flow of goods, which form the so-called goods package, and to the agreement on the consumer credit contracts directive. Turning to the failed plan to sell state-owned telco Telekom, Vizjak said the ministry acted prudently, since the state was in no hurry to sell »such a good investment« at any price. The ministry analysed the offers on the table and decided not to pick any of them. »The worse thing would be to do otherwise and sell helter-skelter... Thus I believe that the procedure regarding the intention to sell the investment was carried out in the best possible fashion,« Vizjak added.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER SAYS STRATEGIC BASIS LAID



Slovenian agriculture has finished its integration in the EU's Common Agriculture Policy, strategic documents have been adopted and high food safety and quality standards have been implemented, Agriculture Minister Iztok Jarc said as he presented the achievements of his ministry over the past four years. Since 2004 the government has provided budget funds

to top up EU farm payments so that Slovenian farmers get as much money as their counterparts from the EU15. Overall, agriculture has had no major problems phasing EU funds, he said. The government has also adopted strategic documents such as the rural development programme 2007-2013, the national forest programme, a sea fisheries management plan and a strategic plan for fishery development. In food safety several regulations were adopted and a registry of traceability data through the entire food chain was completed. The ministry also took action in the face of extraordinary events such as bird flu, swine fever on the border with Croatia and irregularities in food production, Jarc said. Jarc acknowledged that the ministry failed with an act on the co-existence with genetically modified organisms and an act on the promotion of farm produce and food products, the former was being harmonised with the European Commission for too long and the latter failed to make it to parliament due to opposition by some farmers' organisations. The minister believes the main problem of agriculture and food industry will be adapting to the global trends. »Slovenian agriculture accounts for 2% of GDP and just under 10% of total employment, which shows that productivity is low,« he noted, adding that efforts will have to be made to adjust to global trends. Other tasks that the ministry faces in the future involve the adoption of an action plan for adjusting agriculture and forestry to climate change (a strategy has already been drafted). The ministry is already preparing tenders for the promotion of irrigation and for anti-hail nets in orchards.

CULTURE MINISTER SAYS 2004-2008 TERM SUCCESSFUL



Minister Vasko Simoniti told the press in what was a report on the ministry's achievements during the 2004-2008 term. The minister underscored numerous new cultural laws, an increased financial support for artists and a number of investments into cultural real estate, including renovations of the Sneznik castle, the Russian Chapel The Culture Ministry

has achieved everything that was set out in the coalition agreement, outgoing Culture at the Vrsic mountain pass, and the rebuilding of the WWII hospital Franja after devastating floods last autumn. Simoniti is especially proud of the public broadcaster act, which he said was similar to those in other EU countries. The law earmarked more time for Slovenian music and it exempts the poorest from paying the subscription fees, Simoniti said. The Directorate for Art set up 15 multi-media centres across the country and started to support young artists with scholarships, Simoniti said. The same body also boosted the promotion of Slovenian music and increased the funding of visual projects by 100%, said the minister. During this term, Slovenia started to promote its art abroad, but also co-financed on average 30 local projects a year. State Secretary Jelka Pirkovic, underlined the act on the Lipica stud farm, according to which the farm was divided into a public institute and a business company, while also a make-over of the the farm has also been provided for.

TRANSPORT MINISTER FOCUSED ABOVE ALL ON ROAD TRANSPORT ISSUES



Transport Minister Radovan Žerjav said that the ministry focused above all on road transport issues, making it the »ministry of roads«. »I tried changing that, deal more with the railways. Whoever will be the transport minister in the next term should not be the minister of roads, but of railways,« he said. The ministry faced a lot problems regarding expensive and flawed

motorway construction, which led to road safety risks and subsequent closures of motorway sections that caused a lot of public uproar. Žerjav is especially proud of the recent introduction of the vignette tolling system, which he said improved the traffic flow and safety and decreased pollution. The ministry is also working on satellite tolling for lorries, which is to be introduced in 2009. According to the minister, more than 81 km of motorways were opened for traffic in the last four years and another 82 km will open by the end of 2008. One of the priorities was also to improve the safety on Slovenia's streets. Žerjav said that during the first six months of 2008, the number of death casualties dropped by 33 compared to the same period last year due to the new road safety act. The minister stressed the importance of ongoing railway modernisation worth EUR 8.9bn, which is to be completed in 2023. The goal is to divert transportation traffic onto the railways. Another great achievement was the modernisation of the basic infrastructure of the Maribor airport, which cost some EUR 4.3m. Furthermore, the airport is to get an overhauled and bigger passenger terminal in an investment worth some EUR 17m.

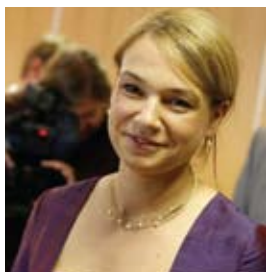
WHATMAKESTHENEWS

HEALTH MINISTER STRESSES INVESTMENT IN CLINICS AS MAIN ACHIEVEMENT



Health Minister Zofija Mazej Kukovič highlighted as the biggest achievements of her one-year term the progress made in the investment into the new Pediatric Clinic and the Neurological Clinic. She believes that the main priority for the next term should be reducing waiting lines in hospitals and clinics. According to Mazej Kukovič, another achievement is that »we managed to organise the ministry as a functioning institution which creates health care policy. The ministry was so weak that every local institute or insurance company had more influence on health care policy than the ministry itself.« Regarding investment in health, the minister said that the area was one of the toughest nuts to crack, as it required expertise in various fields. The team at the ministry has to be well organised in order to be up to the task in talks with contractors, she said. She believes that the ministry has made an important progress in public tenders. However, there is still much to be done in this area, in which more or less the same suppliers and contractors, which hold the ministry in their grip, take turns, she said. During the one-year term of the minister, who took over the ministry last September from Andrej Bručan, the parliament passed seven laws drafted by the ministry and the resolution on the national plan for health care through 2013. The minister highlighted the mental health act, which received absolute support in the parliament. She also emphasised negotiations with the trade union of doctors and dentists (FIDES) for a wage deal, and added that the ministry had issued in this term 150 licenses for specialist practitioners and 183 licenses for general practitioners. According to Mazej Kukovič, the works on the new Pediatric Clinic will be finished by 15 August, while the Neurological Clinic is expected to be moved to a new building next spring. Regarding the construction of a new emergency ward in Ljubljana, the minister said that it would be better if the project was stopped and started all over. There are many difficulties, which are a consequence of the fact that the project was planned as a greenfield investment, but in reality the ward is being build as an extension to the current building, she said. Mazej Kukovič also stressed that the ministry now published on its website data on waiting lines for individual treatments. However, regulating the issue will be an important task which should be carried out in the next term, said the minister.

HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTRY FULFILLED MOST GOALS, SAYS MINISTER



The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology has achieved most of the goals it had set for the 2004-2008 period. Investment in education and science has been increasing and better conditions for cooperation between research and business have been created, Minister Mojca Kucler Dolinar said. Presenting the achievements of her ministry over the past four years, the minister stressed that direct as well as

indirect investment in research and development had increased, including with the introduction of R&D tax breaks for companies. »The curve is rising and we are successfully following [trends],« the minister said. Ales Mihelič, the head of the ministry's Directorate for Technology, added that the statistical figures would improve as a result of the tax breaks. The fresh investment would bring Slovenia closer to the target of 3% of GDP for R&D. The ministry has also spent EUR 40m on new dormitories with 1,401 beds and it renovated dormitories with over 1,000 beds for university students. This comes on top of investment in various education infrastructure at all three Slovenian state universities - in Ljubljana, Maribor and Primorsko. Minister Kucler Dolinar also highlighted the accelerated introduction of Bologna programmes at universities. Over 350 programmes have already been accredited and preparations for the conversion have been stepped up in the natural sciences, arts, sports, social work, teacher training and health. Finally, the status of employees in higher education has improved with the reform of the wage system for the public sector. On average base wages will increase by 17% by 2010, Kucler Dolinar said.

MINISTER ŽAGAR: SLOVENIA VERY SUCCESSFUL IN DRAWING EU FUNDS



Slovenia was one of the most successful EU members as regards the phasing of EU funds, Local Government Minister Ivan Žagar told the press on 24 July. Slovenia drew some 95% of the funds available to it from the European Regional Development Fund between 2004 and 2006. According to the minister, Slovenia will get the remaining 5% by March 2010, when all procedures are concluded. Slovenia drew some 93% of the funds available for fisheries and 89% of those available for agriculture. Most funds from the Regional Development Fund were invested into business infrastructure and public services, with the value of contracts amounting to EUR 68.5m. Some EUR 44.5m was used to boost tourism, while almost EUR 44m went into innovation. The funds available from the address of the European Social Fund were more poorly utilised, their use rate only reaching 70%. However, Žagar believes that by the end of the year it will reach 95%. The poor performance here is the result of mistakes made by the previous government, according to Žagar. The biggest share of the finances from the Social Fund was used to strengthen active labour market policies and boost social integration, the minister said. Slovenia drew over 50% of the resources available from the Cohesion Fund by March 2008. Up to July, Slovenia used 48% of EU funds – 42% (EUR 122.5m) went into environmental investments, while 55% (EUR 123.1m) of these funds were invested into the transport sector. Žagar underlined that Slovenia in February signed a trust agreement with the European Commission which transfers more oversight duties onto national bodies, which is a major acknowledgement of Slovenia and its control mechanisms. Slovenia got around EUR 4.2bn for the new programming period 2007–2013, Žagar said.



Energy Key to Global Transformation, Says PM

Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša emphasised that »energy holds the key to transformation«, as he spoke of the need for the switch to a low-carbon society at the outset of one of Slovenia's biggest international forums.

»Our generation has a responsibility to launch this transformation and a chance to set its course. Some call it transition to a low-carbon society, while others talk about the third industrial revolution,« said Janša in his opening address at the third annual Bled Strategic Forum. He said that the switch was comparable in magnitude to the Industrial Revolution, including in terms of unlocking economic potential. »Each euro we invest in renewable energy technologies creates 3 to 5 times more jobs than fossil fuel generation.« Janša said that the sense of urgency to carry out this revolution was borne out of the »resources crunch« and the dangers posed by climate change to humanity. Echoing this view, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said in his address that the struggle against climate change was one of a struggle for the human kind to change its way of life. He added the forum in Bled was an opportunity to debate a course of action for the future. »It is high time for the real renaissance of environmental and energy policy. Economic, political and humanitarian pressures resulting from rising energy prices can not be ignored,« said Rupel, who urged common global action in this regard. »International collective action is crucial for an effective, efficient and equitable response to face the climate and energy challenges.« This view was echoed at a leaders' panel featuring Janša, Latvian Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek and former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel that launched debates at the forum. Janša suggested that with new technology being produced and adopted slowly, the world needs to work on making better use of existing carbon-free technologies, including

nuclear. This view was also promoted by Topolánek, who said that Europe must look to nuclear energy »simply because it has no alternative«. However, Godmanis and Schüssel showed greater reservations to nuclear energy. According to the former Austrian chancellor, whose country is one of the most staunch opponents of nuclear energy in Europe, this would require massive investment in oversight and safety. The participants also touched on the conflict in Georgia, with Topolánek saying that the recent events show that Russia will stop it at nothing to stay the main energy supplier for Europe. »For this reason it is in our best interest to find a common position on Russia,« said Topolánek. Godmanis pointed out that a common energy policy is not enough for Europe, since it also needs to build a broader partnership with its main suppliers, including Russia and the Caucasus. Schüssel said that the EU should have started a preventive diplomatic policy in the case of Georgia, since it had known for months of the provocations in the disputed provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The participants agreed that other global powers need to work with Europe and follow its lead in trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. »Europe alone cannot solve the problem of climate change regardless of what kind of goals we set ourselves,« said Janša. The Slovenian prime minister also pointed out in his address that distribution of the benefits of the environmental revolution will be a crucial measure of its success. He said that while the fossil fuel economy initially allowed Europe and North America and lately Asia to prosper, the rest of the world must now be given an opportunity to catch up. »It is our responsibility to assist them in terms of financing and transfer of technologies,« he added. This year's forum, running under the title »Energy and Climate Change: Si.nergy for the Future« has brought together around 400 participants from nearly 60 countries.



In the Museum of Contemporary History - the museum as the State Museum of Modern History of Slovenia - we collect, examine and display evidence on basic development processes in Slovenia in the 20th century and the destiny of its people under the monarchy, the kingdom and three totalitarian regimes. The last two decades of this turbulent century were marked by democratisation processes and the independence of Slovenia.

At the permanent exhibition 'Slovenes in the 20th Century', the last two sections are dedicated to democratisation and the gaining of Slovenian independence in the 1980s, and the Slovenian Independence War in June and July 1991. The intensity of democratisation processes substantially contributed to the fact that after the short war, and with little bloodshed, Slovenia became an independent country for the first time in its history. Unlike other republics of the former Yugoslavia which are struggling out of the ruins of last Balkan wars, Slovenia is at the head of post-communist countries which have started to join the EU. These intensive processes are also a challenge for the Museum. Among the priorities of our collecting policy are collections which document the defining events which we are witnessing in the 21st century due to exceptionally rapid change in Slovenia's position in the company of democratic countries - for example, collecting border-crossing signs which became historical heritage with the fall of the Schengen borders. The Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council encouraged us to create a new museum collection. The reasons for this decision are clear: Slovenia is the youngest country among the EU 27; it accepted the Presidency as one of the first countries which joined the EU in the 21st century; and it held the Presidency as the first post-communist country and the first Slavic country. And finally, Slovenia spent 62,374,158 Euros on the Presidency. The effects of these milestones and this investment deserve a permanent collection. The facts of the extent and importance of the events which took place in the first half of 2008 also require a museum exhibition on the Slovenian Presidency. The statistical data already speaks volumes about the extent: 283 events in Slovenia, 3285 events in Brussels and 4242 elsewhere in the world; 260 cultural promotional events home and abroad. At 166 official meetings of the Presidency in Slovenia, there were 27,597 delegates and 847 interpreters (they interpreted 12,800 hours and there were 21,181 pages of material translated). The events were followed by several thousand members of the press. On the Slovenian side, the Presidency involved 2720 civil servants, 133 external consultants and 245 students.

The fact that the Slovenian Presidency received 76 declarations and just as many independent statements testifies to the extent of contents of the exhibition. National and international responses are collected, and they can be summarised with the assessment that Slovenia justified the thrust of the EU and courageously carried the burdens of the Presidency. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has

already presented its work in book form, and so has Slovenian Press Agency. Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel estimates: "That was a time when Slovenia was a star: never before and never again will it be possible to attract so much attention and respect towards Slovenia...That was an extremely intense and strenuous time for me. My programmes were filled with events, I flew long distances, and I met many statesmen...That was a successful time for Slovenia: we successfully managed world problems..." The Minister's estimation belongs to the section of museum heritage which, according to European directives, is classified as intangible heritage. The curatorial department called *Moja zgodba* (My Story) in the Museum records testimonies and life stories. We hope to collect many national and international experiences of the Slovenian Presidency - from the main characters and from the thousands of organisers and other participants at the events. Let them keep their experiences in the treasury of the national memory. We believe that all these statements will confirm the view that the Presidency was a great qualitative movement for the Slovenian political and administrative elite, and that it will have an important effect on openness and self-confidence of the Slovenian society. Will agree with the flattering statement from Brian Crowley, Irish Member of the European Parliament from the Union for Europe of the Nations, made at the special session of the EU Parliament on 23rd June 2008: "This was excellent promotion for the country, where hard-working, clever young people, full of ideas represented Slovenia in the world." Will we, Slovenians, who with difficulty give credit to each other, be able to surpass provincial frames and respectfully evaluate the Slovenian Presidency? At the opening speech at the solemn opening of the European Year of the Intercultural Dialogue the President of the EU Presidency, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša stated: "Slovenia is a country - as it has been already said today - where many cultural currents historically cross. On our land, the Slavic world meets the Romanic and Germanic. Central Europe meets Western Balkans and the Mediterranean." How was this cultural 'crossing' expressed among all, the participants and bystanders who bonded during the Slovenian Presidency? The second part of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council museum collection has a classic museum display. We received elements for the spatial markings of the Slovenian Presidency image from the Government Office for European Affairs, the Operational Group for Preparation Activities and Holding the Presidency, and from the Government Communication Office (for example, part of the fittings from the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU in Brussels, from the Justus Lipsius building, from the Brdo Congress Centre: furniture, ceiling, floor and wall fittings, billboards, flags etc.), promotion and protocol gifts, information and promotion material, printed matter and printed matter for protocol, accreditation badges etc.



BEIJING GAMES: Slovenia Successful at Olympics, Slovenia 3rd in Medals per Capita Ranking

Winning five medals at the Beijing Olympics, Slovenia places third in the medals per capita ranking. One gold, two silvers and two bronzes mean that Slovenia has one medal per 401,542 inhabitants. In the overall medal count Slovenia meanwhile placed 41st among 87 countries winning medals at the Beijing Olympics.

Hammer thrower Primož Kozmus won Slovenia's first Olympic gold in track & field. Silver medals were won by swimmer Sara Isakovič in women's 200 metres freestyle, and yachtsman Vasilij Žbogar in the laser class.

Bronze medals were won by shooter Rajmond Debevec in the rifle three-position competition and judoka Lucija Polavder.

Slovenia's appearance at the Beijing Games was very good. The overall harvest of five medals and only a couple of slips make it an exceptional success for Slovenia.

Maybe there is an expected medal or two missing, for example from rowers Iztok Čop and Luka Špik, but we managed to win some medals we had not predicted, such as bronze by judoka Lucija Polavder. An important thing is that we have made an appearance with such a strong team and that we managed to make up for few mistakes. This team has the right self-esteem,« said the Olympic silver-medalist in the whitewater slalom from Atlanta Andraž Vehovar.

Vehovar was modest ahead of the Games and announced only one to two medals: »Of course I had hoped for more and this came true. This is really a great success. Maybe I appreciate this more than the public because I know how hard it is to win an Olympic medal.

He added that other athletes, those who did not win a medal, also deserved credit, pointing to the Slovenian coxless four boat, triple jumper Marija Šestak, flatwater kayaker Špela Ponomarenko and many others who showed more than expected.

Vehovar also touched on disappointments, such as Čop and Špik, and gymnast Mitja Petkovšek, as it is realistic to expect the reigning world champions to produce a medal. »And there was also whitewater kayaker Peter Kauzer, as I was almost sure that he will win a medal.«

Slovenia was represented at the Olympics with 62 athletes, but Slovenian talent this time was not represented in team sports. »I'm still sad that no team had made it to the games, but it is also important that a couple of talented individuals had gained priceless experience in Beijing.«

Vehovar also assessed the entire project as very positive. »We had made a good decision about where to make final preparations and acclimatise, as it would be very hard for young athletes to come directly to the Olympic Village. Our selection was praised both by competitors and coaches.«

DREAMS FULFILLED



PRIMOŽ KOZMUS (gold medal in hammer throw): I haven't realized all my wishes yet, nor fulfilled all my dreams

One gold, two silver and two bronze medals. This was the outcome of this year's Olympic Games for Slovenia's top athletes. Their success was greeted with a loud welcome from enthusiastic crowds. According to a survey, most Slovenians are very satisfied with the athletes' performances at Beijing Olympic Games. How could they not be - there was a lot of medals, and with a bit of luck there could have been even more. For a few days, the entire world was writing and talking about Slovenia as a country with the most medals per capita. But those who justifiably exhibited their hard-earned medals were thinking about some other things as well.

PRIMOŽ, IN BEIJING YOU ACHIEVED WHAT MEANS THE MOST IN SPORTS – AN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL. WHAT NOW?

First, I will rest for a while. Since I returned home it has been very hectic, but this time in other areas. Now I am dealing a lot with various receptions and interviews. But I have afforded my body considerable rest. In winter I will begin to prepare for the new season. After that, the world record!

THAT SOUNDS VERY MATTER-OF-FACT.

It is. The plan has already been made. Next year I want to achieve the distance of little over 84 metres, then in few years over 86.74 meters, which is the current world record. I will devote everything to that, and there is no reason why I can't succeed. But nothing comes overnight and there is a lot of hard work involved. Objectively, I am only at the beginning of the path of an elite hammer thrower - they achieve the longest distances after their thirtieth year. I haven't realized all my wishes yet, nor fulfilled all my dreams. It takes a lot of work, physically and psychologically. That shows in the competition.

Yes, this is my long-term goal by 2012. My current record is 82.30 - the world record has been 86 for twenty years. I will try to surpass it.

HOW DID YOU FEEL IN BEIJING WHEN YOU SAW THAT YOU'D WON?

Oh, you know, great. You are preparing for competitions all the time, and this was one of them. It's true that I compete with the same contestants at all competitions and that this was the most important one, but for me it was the least emotional. I am lucky that I am able to remain calm.

IN ADDITION TO SPORTS RESULTS, YOU HAVE BEEN TRYING TO ACHIEVE A BETTER EVALUATION OF TOP ATHLETES, WHICH ISN'T SURPRISING CONSIDERING YOUR GREAT REPUTATION IN SLOVENIAN SPORT, BECAUSE OF YOUR RESULTS AND BEHAVIOUR. YOU HAVE TAKEN ON THE BURDEN OF AN ATHLETE WHO PRESENTS THE PUBLIC WITH THE MOST URGENT, CONCRETE PROBLEMS OF ELITE SPORT. YOU CALL ATTENTION TO INJUSTICE AND SPEAK ABOUT UNPLEASANT TOPICS.

It's true. I am trying to achieve that athletes over 35 years of age, when they finish their careers, would receive an allowance. It is my idea, but also what many athletes want. I am convinced that this should be the state's reward for our medals.

HOW HIGH SHOULD THIS ALLOWANCE BE?

Let's say, two average gross incomes. Let me point out that I am not doing this only for myself. I am doing this for all Slovenian top athletes, for their safer future. So that they will also get paid even when they don't achieve results anymore, and live decently even when their sport career has ended. Medals are worth much more than the amount of money we get for them. They can not even be evaluated with money.

IN SPORT, OUR COUNTRY HAS SYSTEMS THAT FUNCTION ALREADY

- FOR EXAMPLE, A SYSTEM OF EXCEPTIONAL PENSIONS, SCHOLARSHIPS, EMPLOYMENTS IN STATE ADMINISTRATION, AWARDS AND VARIOUS PERFORMANCE ALLOWANCES; THEY HAVE EVEN TRIED TO ARRANGE AN ALLOWANCE SYSTEM. IS THAT NOT ENOUGH?

It's true we have all that, but I want to get an assurance for the time after finishing a career in sport, not for the period when the athlete is still active. Sport today demands the whole person. I took up studying, but didn't finish. I said to myself: I'd rather dedicate myself completely to sport. It is hard to sit on two seats and do many things at once. I think that the state should take better care of all medal winners. Former medal winners should not live in poverty. Due to strenuous training, elite athletes finish studying with great difficulty as well as take care of their social security. The Slovenian Olympic Committee and the state concluded an employment agreement already in 1996 that assures them a monthly salary. We all know the logic of sponsors; they are interested in you as long as you show results. It is almost like in the army, where there are one-year contracts, and that presents a problem. As soon as you stop or are not achieving good results anymore, the thing ends, and you are left without income. Nobody wonders what will happen to an athlete if he/she has to end his/her career because of an injury.

I'VE HEARD THAT ATHLETES ARE ENTITLED TO SOME KIND OF DISABILITY ALLOWANCE.

They are, but it is still not enough.



INTERVIEW

HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU GET FOR THE GOLD MEDAL IN BEIJING?

40,000,00 euros. The state contributed half of this (The Ministry of Education and Sport awarded the contestants 19,350,00 untaxed euros for a gold medal, 12,900,00 euros for a silver medal, and 6,450,00 euros for a bronze medal; writer's note).

HOW MUCH HARD WORK HAVE YOU INVESTED IN THE MEDAL?

I train 5 hours a day, except Sundays. I need to rest in between, but all the time I live for sport - there are no holidays. Everything is ruled by this. Of course, such a regime requires discipline, with which I don't have a problem. The key to success is a strong psyche. In moments of the highest adrenalin tension, I control my body and especially my mind. My motto is to have a positive outlook on life, which is an exceptional virtue for an elite athlete.

IT SEEMS LIKE FAME HASN'T DIVERTED YOU FROM YOUR FIRM, RATHER MODEST LIFE PATH.

I can't see why it should. I never had any problems with that. Stardom is not something I crave.

IT IS SAID THAT YOU HAVE A VERY STRONG PERSONALITY, AND THAT THERE ISN'T A THING IN THE WORLD THAT WOULD SHAKE YOU.

Probably such things exist, but I believe that everything in life happens for a reason. If I fly too high and somebody 'puts me back in my place', then so be it.

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR TRAINING PROGRAMME COST YOU ANNUALLY?

The salary for my trainer, physiotherapists and other advisors, along with other expenses, amount to over 100,000 euros annually. This year, the expenses won't be difficult to cover, because the Olympic gold medal will get me approximately as much in awards as the Olympic gold medal programme costs. Daily expenses for the whole team are around 500 euros.

HOW LONG WILL YOU STAY IN THE SADDLE?

I want to participate at two more Olympics. At the next one, I plan to achieve, as I said before, the world record.

DING TO THE NUMBER OF MEDALS WON AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES, SLOVENIANS HAVE PROVEN TO BE BETTER THAN MOST OF THE COUNTRIES WITH A SIMILAR, CENTRAL EUROPEAN SPORTING

CULTURE, WHICH ONLY SHOWS THAT SLOVENIA IS WELL PROFILED AND POSITIONED IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS.

Absolutely. Slovenian sport is almost too good for Slovenian circumstances. We are small, but we have a lot of good athletes. That is why they have to be exposed and rewarded even more.



Text: RAMÓN MIKLUS, Photo: STA

ADRIA WITH ANOTHER IMPROVEMENT IN NUMBER OF PASSENGERS



Adria Airways at the Ljubljana Jože Pučnik airport.

Slovenian flagship carrier Adria Airways carried 602,037 passengers in the first half of the year, up 26% over the same period last year, the company said in a press release on 3 May. The carrier also increased the number of flights by 17%. The number of scheduled flights increased by 16%, whereas the number of charter flights operated was up by 38%. In June, Adria's cabin occupancy rate stood at 68.29%, which is a 1% improvement over the same month last year.

FORBES: SLOVENIA 27TH BEST COUNTRY FOR BUSINESS

Slovenia is the 27th best country for business, according to the U.S. magazine Forbes, which compares 121 countries by indicators including GDP, trade balance and unemployment. The best country for business, according to Forbes, is Denmark, followed by Ireland and Finland. Slovenia comes after Taiwan and just before Italy. Climbing nine places since 2007, Slovenia came in after 12 other EU members. Forbes describes Slovenia as a model of economic success and stability for its region. Yet Forbes also writes that privatisation has lagged since 2002 and the economy has one of the highest levels of state control in the EU. Foreign direct investment lags behind the regional average and the taxes remain relatively high, while the labour market is often seen as inflexible. According to Forbes' statistics for 2007, GDP growth in Slovenia was 5.8%, while GDP stood at USD 27,300, similar to New Zealand. The trade gap was USD 1.2bn, which is as much as Vietnam's, while the 4.6% unemployment rate is the same as in the United States.

ECONOMY MINISTER SAYS EU PRESIDENCY A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak has labelled the Slovenian EU Presidency a success. The team at the Ministry of the Economy did a huge amount of work and the results are excellent, Vizjak told the press on 4 July, highlighting the accord on decoupling energy utilities as the key achievement. The deal on decoupling reached by the Slovenian Presidency involves three possible options for separating energy production from distribution: full ownership unbundling, an independent transmission operator (ITO) which is vertically linked with the parent company, and an independent system operator (ISO). Vizjak also mentioned progress made on



Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak.

the energy and climate change package, which includes binding caps on greenhouse gas emissions and shares the burden of reductions among the Member States. The headway made by the Slovenian Presidency gives the French Presidency clear guidelines for further talks, he said. Also during the Slovenian Presidency, the Member States reached accord on the goods package, a set of directives that liberalises the internal market. The goods package strengthens oversight and the safety of products, Vizjak said. Vizjak also mentioned agreement on the directive on consumer credit contracts, headway in the creation of a single European patent system, and multiple initiatives designed to promote the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

LUKA KOPER GETS 35-YEAR PORT LICENSE



Transport Minister Radovan Žerjav.

The government adopted on 10 July several regulations on the management of the port of Koper, Slovenia's sole seaport, granting port operator Luka Koper a license to manage the port for another 35 years. Transport Minister Radovan Žerjav pointed out after the session that the legal relationship between the state and Luka Koper had been in limbo since the adoption of the maritime code in 2001. The licence contract adopted today will replace a 2000 tenancy agreement which should have been terminated after the maritime code was passed. The licence contract envisages a yearly concession fee equaling at least 3.5% of revenues. According to Žerjav, this means that Luka Koper – of

which the state is the majority owner (67%) – will pay around EUR 3.5m in concession fees a year. Žerjav explained that half of the payment would go to the state and half to the Koper municipality, also a minor shareholder. Žerjav highlighted among the provisions of the agreement the fact that a larger part of responsibility for the port's management is being transferred to the state. The state is becoming the legal operator of the port. After the agreement runs out, it will become the owner of the entire infrastructure of the port. The minister also explained that the state was not thinking about withdrawing from Luka Koper and that the adoption of today's bills and agreement was not connected to negotiations on a logistics holding with German rail operator Deutsche Bahn.

NUMBER OF MOBILE PHONES RISING RAPIDLY

The number of mobile phone users in Slovenia rose by 6% in 2007 to a total of 1.98 million, now accounting for 96% of the population in Slovenia, states the national statistics office in an electronic communication development survey for 2005–2007 published on 14 July. The duration of mobile phone calls rose at 7.4% annually on average between 2005 and 2007, while that of fixed-line calls fell 6.4% annually in the same period. Most of the calls in 2007 were made from mobile phones, and only 36% were fixed-line calls, which is ten percentage points less than in 2005. Ten percent of the fixed-line calls were directed to mobile phones, while only 5% of the calls from mobile phones were made to fixed lines. According to the review, there were ten fixed-line communication providers at the end of 2007 and five mobile phone communication providers in Slovenia. Revenues in electronic communications went up 5% in 2007 and 10% in 2006. Mobile phone calls make up for 42% of the total revenues from electronic communications. The number of public switched telephone network (PSTN) and integrated services digital network (ISDN) phone lines dropped by 7%, while the number of internet protocol (IP) phone lines has increased from 45,000 to 122,000 in 2007, and now accounts for 14% of all fixed lines. IP telephony, offered by nine providers, caused the average revenues per user from fixed-line telephony to drop by EUR 22 in 2007, which is equal to the average rise of revenues per mobile phone user in 2006 and 2007. The number of narrowband Internet connections has been down by half each year since 2004. The number of private broadband Internet connections increased substantially (by ten percentage points in 2007) compared to business broadband internet connections (up five percentage points).

LJUBLJANA TO INTRODUCE WIRELESS BROADBAND NETWORK

The City of Ljubljana has launched work on a wireless broadband network which will initially cover the city centre and, by 2013, the entire municipality. The network, based on Wi-Fi technology, will provide access to the municipality's portal and limited free access to a wide range of Internet services. According to the director of the city administration, Vasja Butina, the use of up-to-date IT will be a boost to the city's economy, while also providing for the well-being of its residents. The project is being overseen by a special group, which has divided the project into three phases: providing coverage to the city centre by the end of 2009, coverage within the Ljubljana motorway ring by 2011, and coverage within the entire municipality by 2013. The

costs of the wireless network for the first phase are estimated at EUR 4.35m, said Butina, who added that it was too early to speak about the costs of the entire project.

SAVA JOINT VENTURE OPENS BIGGEST WOOD BIOMASS PLANT IN BALKANS

Panensa, a joint venture of Slovenian chemical-cum-tourism conglomerate Sava and Bosnian wood processing company Panefin, launched on 25 July a wood biomass factory in Srbac, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The biggest factory of its kind in the Balkans will serve as an energy base for Sava and other Slovenian companies. The factory's wood biomass products, such as pellets and briquettes, which are used to replace fossil fuel, will also be shipped to Western European markets. The EUR 4.5m facility, which is to employ 25 people, is only the first phase of an investment which is eventually expected to produce 60,000 tonnes of wood pellets and briquettes a year. According to Sava, the successful opening of the plant also marks the beginning of the introduction of alternative sources of energy in the Republika Srpska, the Serb entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an important step in the implementation of the long-term energy strategy of the Sava group, Sava Chairman Janez Bohorič said at the opening. Both Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik and Bohorič highlighted at the ceremony the strategic importance of the factory and pointed to the numerous business opportunities it entailed.

KRKA GROUP REPORTS 28% JUMP IN HALF-YEAR PROFIT



Krka Group chairman Jože Colarič spoke about the activities and business results of the group in the first half of 2008 at the group's press conference.

The group around pharma company Krka generated revenues to the tune of EUR 469.3m in the first half of 2008, up 20% from the same period last year. Net profit rose 28% to EUR 81.1m, the group's chairman told the press in Novo Mesto on 30 July. Jože Colarič said Krka was satisfied with the results. In the first half of the year, sales were up on all markets, with Central Europe leading the way. Sales there surged 22% to EUR 123.6m, Colarič said. In Eastern Europe, Krka registered sales of EUR 119.4m, up 17%, while in Russia, Krka's largest single market, they amounted to EUR 78.5m, a 12% increase compared to the first half of 2007. The biggest growth was meanwhile recorded in Western Europe and overseas markets, where sales surged by 46% to EUR 106.3m. In South Eastern Europe, growth was moderate at 4% to EUR 68.7m. In Slovenia, sales in the first half of the year increased after a period of stagnation, Colarič explained. Revenues increased by 2% to EUR 78.5m. In the same period, investments amounted to EUR 73.3m, and Krka registered more than 300 new products on its markets, Colarič explained. At the end of the second quarter, Krka commanded the biggest share (14.5%) of the Slovenian market, which compares to about 8% for its closest rival. Commenting on the recent flurry of takeover activities among the generics makers, Colarič said that independence ranked among Krka's key objectives for the 2008–2012 period. "There is strong interest in Krka, but there are few companies with the financial capacity to do that," Colarič said. He added that after last year's acquisition of German generics maker TAD Pharma, and the purchase of minority stakes in two Chinese pharma companies, Krka was eyeing further targets, both in Europe and elsewhere.

SURVEY: MOST SLOVENIANS LIKE "I FEEL SLOVENIA" SLOGAN



A survey showed that some 65% respondents liked Slovenia's tourist slogan "I Feel Slovenia", which was introduced last year. Those who liked the slogan believed it made Slovenia more distinctive. "It is simple, short and to the point, it shows national pride and gives the tourists the feeling of hospitality," head of the Government Communication Office Anze Logar told the press. Meanwhile, 16% of respondents did not like the slogan, mainly because it is in English, or they did not like the message or the design of the logo. Some 19% of respondents did not give a direct negative or positive evaluation. However, most of them mainly suggested smaller changes in design or language. The survey was carried out over mail. Slovenian households received a questionnaire on the slogan in the beginning of July. The office received some 12,000 replies, including about 4,700 opinions and more than 1,800 suggestions. Most of these suggestions imply that the slogan should be more widely used in tourism (33%), the economy (15%) and sports. The slogan should be more often seen on promotional gifts and souvenirs, products made in Slovenia and should be visible on jerseys of Slovenian athletes. The number of licences for the slogan increased by 71 in the last three months alone. They were mainly granted for promotional purposes at tourist, cultural and sporting events. The survey showed that the Government Communication Office did a good job with the "I Feel Slovenia" slogan. The office is currently developing four new brochures on Slovenia's history, culture, sports and cuisine.

TOURIST BOARD PLANNING TO EXPAND WEB PORTAL

The Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) presented on 20 July its latest three-year strategy for the development of its comprehensive tourist information system, announcing an expansion of the tourist Web portal. The STO expects the portal to be visited by more than 20 million people in 2010. According to the STO, the information system, available on the Web at www.slovenia.info, is already complex and provides a lot of content; it will, however, continue to be expanded and adapted. Its future development is to focus on a comprehensive integration of all providers of tourist services in Slovenia. While the portal recorded 12 million visitors in 2006, the figure is expected to rise by 2010 to more than 20 million. The number of indirect online reservations is expected to go up by 20% every year, whereas the STO also wants to increase the number of people subscribed to its tourism news to 20,000 by 2010.

WINE SECTOR REFORM BRINGS MORE FUNDS

Slovenia will receive more EU funds under the wine sector reform which entered into force on 1 August, Branko Ravnik of the Ministry of Agriculture told the press on 6 August. The reform brings new measures adapted to the situation in Slovenia, thus making the sector more competitive. The most important change of the new market regulation for wine is a different way in which EU funds may be drawn for the envisaged measures. As of 2009, funds from the EU budget will be distributed in advance among Member States in the form of "national financial envelopes". Member States will be able to use these funds for the measures they think appropriate. So far, the Slovenian wine sector has received EUR 2.7m per year, but after the reform it will receive EUR 3.5m. Funding will increase annually up until 2012, when Slovenia will be given EUR 6.1m. Funds will go for the restructuring of vineyards, promotion on third-country markets and use of concentrated grape must needed for wine enrichment. From 2010 onward, EUR 1m is intended for the preservation of vineyards on steep slopes, Ravnik said. Other available measures for market regulation will not be applied by means of funds in the "national envelope". The state will continue funding the restructuring of production capacities, while insurance premiums will be co-funded through state aid. Alongside the EU reform, the regulations include national measures which will be funded only from the Slovenian budget, such as aid for participation in fairs, education and market studies, and for providing advisory services. According to the ministry's data, there are around 17,000 hectares of vineyards in Slovenia. About 25,000 Slovenian wine-makers produce from 80 to 100 million litres of wine, depending on the harvest. Imports and exports are balanced; Slovenia imports and exports between 4 and 5 million litres per year.

INCREASING NUMBER OF DISABLED GETTING JOBS

Employment of the disabled has risen by 9% since a quota system was put into force in January 2006. Out of 170,000 disabled persons in Slovenia, 34,000 are employed, explained the head of the Directorate for the Disabled, Cveto Ursič, on 8 August. The

quota system was set up in 2006 and has been supplemented with numerous incentives for employers and the disabled, as well as a network for employment rehabilitation. All this has helped decisively in providing better employment opportunities for the disabled, Ursiç said. The disabled are also being employed by employers with fewer than 20 employees, who are not bound by the quota system. There are 110,000 employers registered in Slovenia who employ at least one disabled person. According to Ursiç, between 1,750 and 1,930 disabled have been newly employed annually since 2006, while figures stood between 800 and 1,000 annually before that. In the first half of 2008, 920 disabled persons have been newly employed, and the unemployment of the disabled is now at 10,000, Ursiç said. He also stressed that the disabled would be able to cast a secret ballot by themselves for the first time in the upcoming general election by using voting machines that would be available in all constituencies. Emergency telephone numbers are planned to be made accessible to the hearing impaired by the end of the year. He lauded the work of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs for better employment of the disabled and set it up as an example of a successful comprehensive policy adjusted by the ministry, social partners and organisations for the disabled.

SURVEYS SHOW EU PRESIDENCY BOOSTED SLOVENIA'S TOURISM

Interest in Slovenia as a tourist destination increased in the first half of the year, including due to the country's EU presidency, two online surveys commissioned by the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) revealed. The survey carried out among representatives of Slovenian tourism companies showed the highest increase in interest for natural and cultural sights (by 36%), business tourism (by 34%) and cycling (by 34%).

The markets in which interest in Slovenia has grown the most are Germany (by 33%), the UK (by 26%) and Italy (by 26%). The main reasons for the increased interest are the EU presidency (38%) and promotional activities (37%), according to the survey, which was released by the STO on 12 August. According to more than half of the interviewees, Slovenia is best known for its nature (58%), and spa and wellness centres (51%), as well as its rich culture and old city centres (40%), and food and wine (34%). The results also reveal that 52% of representatives of foreign tour operators which offer holidays in Slovenia and tourist organisations noticed a rise in interest in Slovenia.

In the first half of the year, foreign tourist organisations observed an increased interest in Slovenian towns (by 48%), natural and cultural sights (by 37%), and spa and wellness centres (by 35%). The results show that the main reasons for increased interest are promotion (29%), the fact that Slovenia is a relatively new tourist destination (23%), and the EU presidency (9%). The survey also revealed that 53% of foreign tourist organisations included in the survey are familiar with the new national slogan, "I Feel Slovenia". The two surveys, conducted in July, just after Slovenia passed the EU presidency to France, included 164 representatives of Slovenian tourist companies and 113 representatives of foreign tourist organisations, mostly from Germany, Finland and Italy.

ECONOMY MINISTER DISCUSSES BUSINESS WITH CHINESE MINISTER

Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak, who visited Beijing with a business delegation, discussed with Chinese Commerce Minister

Chen Deming the untapped potential for trade between Slovenia and China and future investment possibilities, Vizjak said on 18 August. "Last year bilateral trade increased by 40% compared to 2006, while this year it will exceed US \$1bn," Vizjak said, adding that the talks also touched on potential relations in tourism, logistics and the automobile industry. The talks included the new WHO trade agreement. According to Vizjak, Slovenia and China both support free trade and respect of intellectual property. "On the other hand, we want an agreement which does not privilege farm products, but is balanced with the non-farm portion of the accord and with service," Vizjak said. The ministers stressed that the upcoming new trade agreement between the EU and China, which is to enter the third round of talks in September, would be an important step forward. Vizjak also expressed his satisfaction that the Slovenian port of Koper and Tinajin, China's fourth biggest port, agreed today to sign a memorandum of understanding. China presented to Vizjak its energy development and reform plans, which he commended for their measures to increase energy efficiency.

The Slovenian Public Agency for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investment (JAPTI) on Friday signed a cooperation agreement with a foreign investment office in Shanghai ahead of a business conference attended by Chinese and Slovenian businessmen based in Shanghai.

PETROL REPORTS BUMPER REVENUES, PROFIT

Energy group Petrol has generated EUR 1.4bn in sales revenues in the first half of 2008, which is 51% more than in the same period last year. The group said on 27 August in a press release that its net profit in this period had risen 33% to EUR 30.8m. The supervisory board of Slovenia's biggest fuel retailer has already studied the results, assessing them as successful. The group sold 1.2 million tonnes of fuel and other crude oil products, which is 29% more than in the first six months of 2007. Sales at Petrol's shops at petrol stations generated EUR 164.3m, up 41% on the first half of 2007. The group operates a total of 415 petrol stations, including 310 in Slovenia. The rest are in the former Yugoslav republics, where Petrol has been pursuing an expansion strategy of late. Meanwhile, the fastest growing segment for the company was sales of natural gas, as growth in this area stood at nearly 200%. The company's management is expected to speak about the results to the press later today. The earnings report from Petrol came after the close of trading on the Ljubljana Stock Exchange. Petrol shares lost 0.48% to EUR 499.51 in the session.



Text ANJA LORENZETTI,
Photo: Pick Place Group archives

OUR EXCELLENCE



Pick & Place Group - The Leader in Development and Manufacture of Television Audience Measurement Equipment

The Pick & Place Group is a group of three companies Pick & Place, SMT and AGB Lab that are all specialized in the field of electronics. Their primary expertise is the development, manufacture and support of high technology telemetry equipment. The Pick & Place Group, that has the seat in the Slovene coastal touristic town of Portorož, has a very clear goal to expand the scope of their development and manufacturing services and to become a leader in the wider international electronics market.

»We are already the most important player in television audience measurement and we plan to build on that reputation. The important step in this direction is the establishment of a high volume production center in other parts of the world, starting in Asia, headed by our sister company Pick & Place Thailand«, explain in the Pick & Place Group.

In all three of their companies they build highly on the quality of their services. One of the three companies named SMT is a benchmark for the development and manufacture of electronics. It's highly trained staff and the latest SMT technologies are combined to provide complete customer solutions ranging from new development ideas to prototypes, to full production series and direct shipment to end-users. The most productive company of the three is AGB Lab. In this company there is a great understanding for today's sophisticated television environment demands that depend on precise measurement of television viewing for the television programs of all kinds. In AGB Lab they developed a range of technologically sophisticated, effective and reliable telemetry meters, known as peplemeters. These meters are the culmination of years of development and practical experience in many TV environments around the world and represent the most powerful meters available for television audience measurement (TAM) anywhere.

TELEVISION IS THE WORLD DOMINANT MEDIUM

Today in nearly every country around the world television has become the dominant medium for information, commercial

communication and entertainment. This has led to the ever-increasing desire by broadcasters, advertisers and advertising agencies, to have accurate, consistent and detailed information about TV audiences. With the billions of dollars spent annually on TV programmes and commercials, reliable TV audience information is required to evaluate and maximize the effectiveness of this investment.

Already above mentioned, television audience measurement (TAM) is the specialized branch of media research, dedicated to the quantifying (size) and the qualifying (characteristics) of this detailed TV audience information. The ratings are qualitative in nature, similar to a voting system, where the higher the number of viewers the better the programme or commercial is. These ratings, if reliable and valid, become the common currency for the market's commercial airtime. Media planners and buyers evaluate the alternative programmes offered to the best and achieve their advertising goals, while the broadcasters upon the TAM evaluate the programme or stations popularity and at the same time how much to charge advertisers for commercials during a programme and on the certain given channel.

"With over 50,000 meters in use, our equipment represents the leading source of television audience measurement in the world", are proud in AGB Lab.

In order to provide customer with valid and reliable television audience data, specialist expertise are required. The TVM5 meter is non-intrusive and easy to install (reducing installation costs) and can measure the viewing of analog or digital programs with equal accuracy and dependability. TVM5 saves the viewing data it has gathered and transmits it on a daily basis to a computer center via landline, mobile modems or network adaptor.

AGB NIELSEN MEDIA RESEARCH LAB - HISTORY OF THE JOINT VENTURE

AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab was founded in 1999 by Vladimir Polič and AGB Nielsen Media Research Media Services

OUR EXCELLENCE



S.A. of Switzerland. At the beginning of 1999, Vladimir Polič presented the very first non-intrusive meter to the global market known as TVM4 peplemeter. Later in that year, AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab, in cooperation with AGB Nielsen Media Research Media Services, won the tender for TAM measurement in Australia exactly with this peplemeter. In 2000, AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab introduced in the TVM4 the Content Tracking System (CTS) used to detect previously recorded programs (time shifted viewing-TSV) as well as used broadcaster identification as an alternative method for channel detection. With this such advanced and powerful meter, the company won the prestigious BARB tender in the United Kingdom in 2000.

On the 5th of August 2004, the AGB Group and Nielsen Media Research International announced their intention to form a joint venture that would offer television ratings under the AGB Nielsen Media Research brand name. The transaction merged all the AGB Group companies with the wholly owned TV ratings service of Nielsen Media Research, excluding the US.

In response to the challenges of rapidly changing TV technology that use different systems of broadcasting, AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab has developed a multi-engine approach to TV measurement where the combination of measurement methods compensate for the inherent weaknesses of using any one technique. This has all been brought together in the TVM5 meter. It uses its powerful range of detection tools to operate

as easily in new digital environments as it does in the classic analogue world. Today, AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab's most advanced detection solution is in the field of IPTV and is featured in the TVM5 and new TVM5 Lite meter, which is designed to be just half the size of the TVM5 meter and contains almost as many features. This development again proves that AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab is still one step ahead, drawing from its rich field experience and using the newest technologies available to develop and support the most innovative and accurate TAM meters. The TVM5 Lite meter is expected to spread rapidly to new and existing markets by the end of this year, using an updated signature matching technology and providing lower cost measurement solutions. AGB Nielsen Media Research Lab supports over 50,000 TVM series peplemeters that are being used day in and day out all over the world to completely and accurately measure television audiences.

»Today AGB Nielsen Media Research is a unique company, in that it dedicates 100% of its resources to the provision of high quality TAM services. This commitment to excellence in this niche market results in leading edge technology, superior client service and global standardisation«, believe in the company.

AGB Nielsen Media Research currently manages more TAM panel household than any other international television audience ratings provider. Both the AGB Group and Nielsen Media Research International have accumulated a wealth of experience and know how in setting up new systems and managing existing ones, and retain this know how within the unique AGB Nielsen Media Research Corporate Support Centre. In partnership they provide important viewing statistics to television stations, advertising agencies and other important players in the media market around the globe.

AGB Nielsen Media Research is currently present with an affiliated local operating company providing 'the official TAM currency' in more than 26 countries; with the Holding company, the financial headquarters of the Group, based in Milan, Italy. The structure of AGB Nielsen Media Research include a unique support company based in Switzerland, the Corporate Support Company. Its focus is on the research, production and improvement of TAM tools and services offered to operating companies to ensure that they can effectively service their market.





Boris Pahor

MINORITY WRITER BORIS PAHOR TURNS 95

One of the most important writers in the Slovenian language, Boris Pahor, turned 95 on 26 August. Pahor is acclaimed in Europe above all for his works dealing with the horrors of WWII Nazi concentration camps, whereas Slovenians as well as the Slovenian minority in Italy - to which he belongs - also know him for his socially and politically committed activities. "Nekropolis", a novel in which he remembers the internment at the Natzweiler-Struthof camp, is probably his best known work. Pahor was born to a Slovenian family in Trieste in 1913 and as a seven-year-old witnessed the fascist squads burning down the Slovenian Culture Centre in Trieste on 13 July 1920. The persecution of Slovenians in the region made him join the liberation movement during WWII, he was however arrested in 1944 and sent to the Nazi camps Dachau, Natzweiler-Struthof and Bergen-Belsen. He recovered at the French sanatorium at Villers-sur-Marne to later become a professor at the restored Slovenian school in Trieste. Editorial and political activities followed and were marked by his critical view of the dominant left-leaning currents in the Slovenian minority in Italy and the new Communist regime in Slovenia. Although left-leaning himself, he opposed Slovenian representation within Italian leftist parties, wanting an independent representation. The final break with the Slovenian authorities came in 1975, when Pahor and his fellow-writer from Trieste Alojz Rebula published a book on the Slovenian Catholic poet and thinker Edvard Kocbek. In an interview featured in the book, Kocbek spoke for the first time of the summary killings of suspected Slovenian Home Guard prisoners of war in 1945. The Yugoslav regime banned him from entering the state until 1981.

LENT FESTIVAL IN MARIBOR ATTRACTED MORE THAN 600,000 PEOPLE THIS YEAR

The most visited Slovene cultural (more than just cultural) festival called Lent, in Maribor, has surpassed all previous records. The festival long ago outgrew its local boundaries and represents a sound basis from which the European Capital of Culture 2012 will draw its strength. In the 16 days of the festival more than 400 events took place at more than 30 venues, with 4,300 performers from 34 countries, visited by more than 600,000 people. The festival opened with the 20th annual folklore festival 'Folkart',

with performances by groups from Germany, Hungary, Greece, Venezuela, Montenegro, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Slovenia, followed by a unique firework display, and continuing with music and theatre performances, as well as exhibitions and art events. The city came alive with new cultural venues, with performances for children, and jazz and new musical genres.

55 YEARS OF AVSENIK'S MUSIC, MUSICAL VISION OF THE BEAUTIES OF SLOVENIA

At the end of August, the Festival Avsenik 2008 took place in Begunje, in a large pavilion with 1200 seats, which was sold out every day. There were numerous concerts, with the best ensembles playing this music both from Slovenia and many other countries, among which we even tracked musicians from Japan. Everything was characterised by the 55th anniversary of Avsenik's music, an extraordinary phenomenon that has made Slovenia



recognised around the world. Is there anything unknown about the Avseniks? It is difficult to discover anything new; however, it is worth repeating the fact that these extraordinary Slovenian musicians have imitators all around the world. The Avsenik brothers have so far had the most successful Slovenian musical group, and won worldwide recognition. The leader of the ensemble, Slavko Avsenik, with his brother Vilko Avsenik, is the founder of popular folk music in Slovenia and of the special music group named after them. During the time ensemble was working, they sold more than 32 million records, had more than ten thousand concerts, and, jokingly, Slavko takes pride in the fact that they performed on the same day in the same city as the famous Rolling Stones, and that his band's concert was much better attended. The ensemble recorded their first single abroad in 1955 and later received many gold, diamond and even platinum albums, and numerous awards for their originality; they went professional in 1960. They created hundreds of their own compositions, notably polkas and waltzes, in which they praised the beauties of Slovenia. It is interesting that today a unique audio symbol of the Avsenik ensemble and almost the whole of Slovenia (besides the national anthem) is their composition Na Golici (known as Trompeten-Echo in German-speaking areas), which was Slavko Avsenik's idea in 1955. This tune is one of the most frequently played compositions in popular music worldwide.

TANJA RIBIČ AWARDED AT A FILM FESTIVAL

Tanja Ribič, one of the most popular Slovene theatre and movie actresses, who occasionally also participates in pop culture (a few years ago she represented Slovenia at a Eurovision song contest) has been awarded best actress of the 54th Taormina film festival in Messina, Sicily. Her roll in the movie 'Traktor, ljubezen in rokenroll' (Tractor, Love and Rock 'n' roll) by Branko Djurić, which premiered internationally at the festival, proved her ability to express irony and emotion in very diverse situations throughout the movie.

As well as the hit movie 'Petelinji zajtrk' (Rooster's Breakfast) this movie too was based on a novel by Feri Lainšček, whose texts are becoming a reliable recipe for success for Slovene filmmakers.

ŠTEFAN KARDOŠ – THIS YEAR'S KRESNIK AWARD WINNER



One of the most popular literary awards for the best novel of the year presented by Delo newspaper and named after the longest day of the year, when the award is presented, went this year to Štefan Kardoš, from the Prekmurje region. The novel of the year is his debut 'Rizling polka', a relaxingly funny novel, with an amazing touch for characterisation and relationships.

The presentation of the award is an interesting ritual in itself, which attracts public attention. It is not just a formal presentation, but a celebration of the longest day of the year, a gathering with music, recitals and conversations with the authors nominated for the award. At the beginning of the evening the jury retires to deliberate, and after two hours, when the evening is in full swing, the decision is announced. The award, 5,000 euros, is often more than the amount the author received from the publisher, and the popularity of the award, broadly reported by the media, contributes to sales of the novel.

THE ANA DESETNICA AND TRNFEST FESTIVALS IN LJUBLJANA



At the same time, two renowned and specialized cultural festivals of new scene genres took place in Ljubljana: Ana Desetnica, which presents street theatre performances - for the eleventh time this year, and who also exported some of its programme to the Lent festival in Maribor - and a bit later in the summer, Trnfest, a festival of concerts, dance and theatre performances and workshops of different kinds, which ran for 34 afternoons and evenings in July and mostly August.

Three events, part of the street theatre festival, must be mentioned. The festival opened on the last day in June, with the performance Time Out, by the Antagon theatre, in front of Cankarjev dom, with dancers on stilts, live music, video and pyrotechnics. David Dimitri performed in the mono-circus, a real circus arena, with an amazing acrobatic performance. He also performed later on one of the Ljubljana city squares. There was the world premier of the performance 'Kontejner Alhambra', by the 'Cie osmosis' group in co-production between Slovenia, Belgium and Spain, in which dancers interact with containers and fork-lifts in an interesting way.

The 17th Trnfest festival, which came alive a month later, at the end of July, will have served its visitors for 34 days this year. Concerts are mostly on Fridays and Saturdays; Sundays are reserved for theatre performances; exhibitions are opened on Tuesdays, and Thursdays are dedicated to children. Of special interest is the theatre production by the local KUD France Prešeren Trnovo club - Impro liga, Gverila theatre, Šila and Rozin theatre, which will take place over several evenings. Foreign groups also participate: KUD Idioti and Radikal Dub kolektiv from Croatia, Kultur Shock from the United States, Bruta Polka from Israel and Deti Picasso from Russia. A renowned Slovene music group, Melodrom will conclude the festival.

SEMINAR OF SLOVENE LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN LJUBLJANA

At the end of June in Ljubljana City Museum there was a ceremonial opening of the pedagogically and promotionally most esteemed seminar, the forty-fourth, of Slovene language, literature and culture. For almost half a century the festival has been attracting the most interested and enthusiastic supporters of Slovene language and culture who live or work abroad. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana attracts mostly foreigners from the field of Slavonic languages, especially Slovene, to the seminar and presents them each year with the newest research in the fields of Slovene language, literature and culture. Every year approximately 130 people attend the seminar.

Two summer schools of Slovene language have also started. The third youth school was attended by 87 students, whereas the twenty-seventh summer school was attended by 145 people from 45 countries. Both schools offer an additional programme, including numerous lectures, excursions, film nights and cultural activities.

FESTIVALS IN KLUŽE, BLEĐ AND THE IMAGO SLOVENIAE FESTIVAL

Festivals are the most noted cultural activities in the summer, so besides the Lent festival in Maribor and both festivals in Ljubljana mentioned earlier, we should not forget to mention two younger, but renowned festivals. These two in no way fall behind the city festivals, and perhaps even excel in the beauty of the natural environment where they take place. And in the same breath we should not forget to mention the travelling project of classical music performances called Imago Sloveniae, which brings old city squares and other astonishingly beautiful areas around Slovenia to life.

The international cultural festival at Kluže began in the old military fort, near the source of the Soča river, at the beginning of July, with a musical-scenic recital, 'Zlatorog'. Within a month and a half many artists from Slovenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, France and Croatia will perform. The programme is very generous and the visitors will be most pleased with the theatrical part of the festival, promising the family thriller 'Življenje v senci bananovca' (Life in the Shade of a Banana Tree) by Ivan Vidič, directed by Cezaris Graužinis; the celebrated comedy 'Moskva – Petuški' by Venedikt Jerofejev, directed by Marjan Bevk; the melodrama 'Tisti, ki jih reka spusti' (Who the River Lets Go) by David Rabet, directed by Mateja Koležnik; and the comic monologue 'CAB Ares, CAB Arei' by Žijah Sokolovič. We should also mention the musical 'Grev se Ježka' (Let's Play Hedgehog) directed by Tijana Zinajić, the Italian musical comedy 'Made in Italy', directed by Salvatore Esposito and Monica Zucon, and a cabaret 'Istrske štorijice' (Stories from Istria) by Boris Senker, directed by Robert Raponje.

Festival Bled is also growing fast – this year it offers 15 musical events with 1000 musicians. The main events of the festival are concerts by the gipsy group Langa, the pianist Amedeo Tomassi, the De Santis/De bonfils duo on viola and organ, Per Sonare on guitar and accordion, a choir from Pacific Lutheran University, an orchestra from Linz, a symphony orchestra from Baltimore, the Slovene author and singer Jani Kovačič, and the Wladigeroff brothers from Bulgaria. These are just some of the performers, and we must also mention a special concert in memory of the great composer Uroš Krek, who lived in Bled and who died last

year. Traditionally, the Bled festival attracts around 4,000 or 5,000 visitors, which considering the serious content of the festival, is a fine number. The organizers hope the festival achieves a quality that would attract visitors to Bled for the festival itself.

One of more ambitious musical projects, 'Imago Sloveniae', is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The anniversary was celebrated at the beginning of July with a special concert in front of Ljubljana Cathedral, on Pogačar Square, with performances by the choir and orchestra and soloists of the Slovene National Theatre, Opera and Ballet, Ljubljana. Two days later, a concert by the Slovene Philharmonic orchestra concluded the celebrations. More than 120 concerts are promoted as part of the Imago Sloveniae project every year, and in two decades the audience, attending more than 1000 concerts, has approached 100,000. Of special importance is that the festival brings performers of great quality to rural areas and small towns, increasing the quality of cultural programmes and attracting audiences who otherwise would never experience this kind of artistic expression.

PREMIER OF THE 'KALIGULA', DIRECTED BY TOMAŽ PANDUR, ON BRIONI ISLAND

The Ulysses international theatre, based in Zagreb, is planning two premieres this season - 'Kaligula' by Camus, directed by the famous Slovene director Tomaž Pandur, and an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' by Dušan Jovanović, directed by Lenka Udovički. The theatre opened its season with 'Balade Petrice Kerempuha' by Krleža, directed by actor-director Rade Šerbedžija; then on 18th of July, at the former elite residence of the Yugoslav leader President Tito on Brioni Island, the performance of 'Kaligula' took place. As always, the premier of the Ulysses theatre attracted numerous jet-set visitors, mainly from Croatia and Slovenia, and some from Italy.

'Kaligula' is a co-production of the Gavella Theatre of Zagreb, the Pandur Theatre and Budva City Theatre, with Ohrid Summer and Austrian Mittelfest also participating. The performance leaves a strong impression, because the Pandurian sets are magnificent, even frightening, with an eminent scene, partially submerged under water, where actors move, kill and drown as personifications of Kaligula's evil and bloodlust. The director Pandur was pleased with the performance and with the actors, who performed magnificently, and good reviews were heard from most theatre aficionados.

SLOVENE THEATRES ON SUMMER TOUR ABROAD

In the last decade, the summer habits of Slovene theatres have changed significantly. Due to the greater recognition and internationally acknowledged quality of Slovene theatres, what used to be a time of vacations and gaining strength for the new season is now a time of numerous appearances at festivals abroad.

The central Slovene theatre, Drama SNG, opened the most prestigious Macedonian festival, Ohrid Summer at the beginning of July with a performance of Moliere's 'Tartuffe', directed by Dušan Jovanović. On the 15th of July, the Slovene Youth Theatre performed 'Somrak bogov' (Twilight of the Gods), directed by Diego de Brea, at the Croatian National Theatre Split. The Ljubljana City Theatre travelled all the way to Miami, Florida, with the performance 'Carmela and Paulino', a variety show by the Spanish author Jose Sanchis Sinisterre, directed by Mare Bulc. They performed at the international theatre festival dedicated to

preservation of Spanish culture in the United States. The SNG Nova Gorica theatre also travelled abroad, to a festival in Spoleto, Italy, where they performed 'Alica', directed by Polish director Janusz Kica. The youngest Slovene theatre performers from the Teater Antona Podbevška company visited Budva to perform 'Kadmopolis', directed by Matjaž Berger.

PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTALLATION IN HELSINKI

At the most frequented spot in front of the main square of the Kamppi shopping mall in Helsinki a photographic installation 'SI-Fi Harmony & Contrast' has been installed honour of the Slovene presidency of the Council of the European Union on the 16th of June. The installation, the work of Dušan Jovanović and Ivan Matošič, is composed of 12 large colour prints on sheets of synthetic fabric measuring 3 square metres. The photo prints float in the air between white flag poles and stretch over an area of approximately 250 square metres. They are visible from a distance and attract a lot of attention.

The idea was to present the Slovene cultural heritage, natural beauty, architecture and arts and crafts, being literally a "harmony of contrasts", as the name of the project suggests.

MOVIE PREMIERE IN BOVEC: THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA



A great event was scheduled for the end of July: a Slovene and Austrian premiere of the movie spectacle 'The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian' was to be held in Bovec. The movie series The Chronicles of Narnia is produced by the Disney Company and was partly shot near Bovec. Two of the main actors visited Slovenia for the premiere, Anna Popplewell and William Moseley. Sadly, part of the event was ruined by the weather as, soon after the beginning of the projection, which was held outdoors on the airfield at Bovec, the rain mercilessly soaked the audience and the projection was cancelled.

WORLD PREMIERE OF VINKO MOEDERNDORFER'S MOVIE AT THE VENICE FESTIVAL

The Slovene director, Vinko Moedernorfer, known more for his theatre and opera direction than film direction, as well as for his extremely interesting literary work, is finishing his second

movie 'Pokrajina št. 2' (Landscape no. 2), which will premiere at the renowned Venice Film Festival in the Venice Days section. This section will present 11 movies from 11 countries. This year's theme is the individual's inner conflicts, dilemmas and fear of betrayal, and Moederndorfer's movie is about the mistakes fathers hand on to their children. "The script is based on the recognition that the unsolved past always leaves its mark and returns," said the author.

FAMOUS BAROQUE FOUNTAIN RESTORED AND ON DISPLAY IN NATIONAL GALLERY

Following almost three years of restoration, the Fountain of Three Carniolan Rivers, known locally as the Robba Fountain, will be permanently on display at the National Gallery in Ljubljana. According to Jože Dresar, the head of the National Restoration Centre restoration team, everything is set for the unveiling of one of Ljubljana's best known Baroque monuments. The fountain's characteristic obelisk, which had to be lowered to the gallery's floor through the roof, has also been put in its original position, said Dresar. The restoration of the original fountain started in August 2005. According to Dresar, the removal of the fountain was absolutely necessary because corroded metal joints severely damaged the fountain. A replica of the Robba Fountain was put in front of the Ljubljana City Hall, where the original had stood for centuries, in November 2006. Debates about the fate of the fountain and its move indoors go back to the 1970s. The copies of the statues were made in 2000, yet when the time came to replace them a self-proclaimed civil initiative for Robba's Fountain prevented the move. A special commission of art historians and restorers was appointed after that, and it decided that the fountain must be restored urgently. It was clear from the beginning that the statues of the three Carniolan rivers would be moved to the gallery. Robba's Fountain was created by the Venetian-born sculptor and architect Francesco Robba (1698-1757) between 1743 and 1751. It is modelled on the famous Roman fountains. The sculptures of the three river gods decorating it most probably represent three rivers in the then province of Carniola, namely the Sava, the Ljubljanica and the Krka.



Text: MIŠA ČERMAK, Photo: Iztok Dimc



Versatile musician Boštjan Gombač Like Puppets on a String

In his suitcase, he carries over one hundred musical instruments, which he has collected from all over the world; in his heart he carries the trumpet which, in spite of the first love, he is learning now, and in his musical soul, which he last year crowned with an Academy of Music degree, his recognisable trademark, the clarinet, is living. In his universal, not just musical, geniality, he has produced numerous pieces of performance and authorial music, original music to which he also sings in performances for children ('Gregory's Wonder Drug', 'When No One knew What to Do', 'Different', 'Attraction Polyphemus') and adults ('Patty Diphusa – Confession of a Porno Diva', 'Fužine Blues', 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' etc.), he also plays various instruments and really comes alive as an actor. Therefore, and because of the knowledge that drives him towards new explorations of himself, the world and music, he is a prodigy. And he is proud of it.

CREATIVITY IS A WAY OF LIFE, A NEED THAT YOU WANT NOT ONLY TO LIVE, BUT ALSO SHARE WITH THE PEOPLE. IS IT BECAUSE YOU WANT TO SHARE THE BEAUTY?

For me, music is one of the most abstract arts, because we cannot touch it, but at the same time it affects us the most. We feel the same when looking at a painting; however, a film is already music – the sound itself - everything that is connected to the ears and making our hair stand on end is the best critic. This has happened to me on rare occasions when looking at a painting or watching a dance performance – music affects us directly and physically. We absorb it all from the air...

WHERE DOES YOUR INSPIRATION COME FROM?

From the air. For Beethoven, it was believed that he received some kind of divine energy which could be air, people, anything. If you are involved in art that is connected to so many others, with dance, theatre,

voice etc, it's a good thing to know that it all originates from one and the same, and that a real musician is driven by it into exploration: anyone interested in his profession is driven into exploration. There are no limits - they are within us, in people. In music, one has to keep the child in oneself, have a vivid imagination, in order not to become stuck in some orchestra because of social security that is limiting. We can spend more time on work when we are free.

WERE YOU EVER AFRAID OF UNCERTAINTY, LACK OF MONEY, WORK?

No. This path of life is quite uncertain, freedom is not free, even though it may be in vain, it has to be emphasised. I almost accepted regular employment in the Slovenian Armed Forces Orchestra, but it would only lead to some kind of vegetation – as a freelancer, I can choose the people with whom I want to collaborate. And it's not about the fact that there is a conductor above me – I already did that and will again: I'm always a professional, I follow the leader, the conductor, director etc...

OF COURSE, YOU WORK A LOT WITH THE DIRECTOR IVANA DJILAS, WHO IS YOUR GIRLFRIEND. DOES THIS LEAD TO ANY DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICTS WHEN CREATIVITY AND POINTS OF VIEW INTERTWINE AND COLLIDE?

Absolutely, absolutely. It's hard to live and work together; in a way it would be easier to work with someone else. But you learn. And it requires a lot of patience and tolerance between us. Lately, I've been more and more involved with theatre, which is a new medium for me, a new space for which I have great respect. However, the truth is that actors have years of education behind them that I as an amateur do not: I mostly learn from my mistakes, which is why it is difficult to work. Even buying a new musical instrument is a great challenge, because I need a new sound in a performance: many professional musicians do not recognise us versatile musicians, because they say we do everything by halves – but that is not true. I'm a pianist and for the cabaret Patty Diphuzo playing a piano functions quite well. There is a lot of bluffing, amateurism, and banal texts in music, but not with me. I have to make a lot of music in my life before I settle: I taught three children recorder for two years, which was mentally exhausting, because I really devoted myself to every one of them...

RESPONSIBILITY AND LOVE INTERTWINE EQUALLY - ONE DOES NOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER.

Yes, that's true. Music demands a lot of hard work and the results are visible only after six months. Talent is something, but how you use it is another: during my second year at the secondary school for music I was close to dropping out and enrolling at the grammar school, because I went there with poor primary education; I was thrown into the ocean and had to learn how to swim. I don't know what could have happened – I just started playing the clarinet like Professor Igor Karlin said and worked really hard. This practice, this drill, this discipline has stayed with me for my whole life and was a good way to learn and acquire work habits and a common conscience, be part of the orchestra, the sound, and not a soloist.

BUT YOU ARE A SOLOIST – WELL, NOT WHEN YOU PLAY WITH KATALENA, TERRA F AND MANY OTHER BANDS. WHEN I HEARD AND SAW YOU PLAY, MY FIRST WORDS WERE THAT YOU WERE A GENIUS.

(Smile) These are hard words.

I MEANT IT AS A COMPLIMENT TO A BROAD, OUTSTANDING CREATIVITY.

Thank you. I know where I see myself in five, ten years, and it seems I'm on the right track. Many say that Gombač is everywhere, and I reply: Gentlemen, we all share the same space. It is important that in the music I'm interested in, everything from Indian classical music to Bach and cabaret, there are many things to try, to learn. Some people insist on playing one instrument their entire lives and master it – well, it's nice to achieve perfection, but my process is different. I'm interested in theatre music: in the play 'Patty Diphuso' we started being aware that we were not actors, but that we knew how to play music, so we decided to sing in falsetto. I can't stand actors putting on an act: you just have to get in the role and give one hundred per cent.

DOES THIS KIND OF LEAP EVER HAPPEN TO YOU?

It cannot go any other way. There were people at the fiftieth show who'd already seen it eight times, which is incredible, and one of my friends said to me she didn't feel me, that there was no soul – but she was the one who was having a really bad day; I know one needs to prepare for a concert or a show.

THE SKELETON OPERA 'ATTRACTION POLYPHEMUS', IN WHICH YOU ACT AND PLAY MUSIC, IS EXCELLENT, IS FOR CHILDREN AS WELL AS ADULTS.

The parents shouldn't see it, because it's a fairytale; it's the same as if you came to 'Confession of a Porno Diva' and expected cooking recipes to be discussed. If parents bring their children to see the skeleton opera, they have to explain to them that different traditions exist in the world, that this originates from Mexican culture, where people live with the dead and their souls, and that they have to be skeletons. And it's also an adult story, because relationships are presented, and these fine life structures, good and evil.

AND MUCH MORE!

If the performance makes you think, that's great. When it happens to me, I'm insanely happy. In this performance, all is understood in the sense of what it tries to tell us, but everyone understands it in their own way – like in the new performance at Mestno gledališče Ljubljansko entitled 'What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Love': do we talk about love, the relationship between two people, the man

and the woman; every one of us has their own story, and in every story someone will identify with it. That's how it is in the theatre or at a concert.

WHAT IS LOVE?

It can be an Indian summer, a walk - love can be anything. For me it is music and vice versa. Music is a joy, not just mere music, but also some kind of joy, love for what I do. A happy bank employee represents for me pure music and love at the same time. There are infinite types of love, as well as ways. "There's the way how you park the car with its side a bit exposed, how you arrange your hair, how you're not listening to me when I talk about your life; a way to salt the eggs, the way you are tired, how you show that you don't like my way." This is a song from the performance. Yes, everyone has their own way of seeing things, a view of the world, which is why for me everything that possesses good energy and joy towards life and work is pure music.

I think it's a shame that there are so many good musicians in the world who remain in their garages and practice, and I don't hear them, that they don't share that with me, with the world. The essence of what you do is that someone else benefits from it. This needs to be shared.

FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

Otherwise you'd explode. The so-called primitive nations are accompanied by music at all times, as well as by dancing, performances; such is their tradition. Nowadays, we have theatres and clubs – well, there are only a few where music can be played, which is too bad. Of course, I feel the need to express myself, but if I don't do that for a week or two and do some other things, which I am otherwise not able to do because of lack of time, that's fine. Acting requires much effort: actors with six ongoing performances are sure to lose their minds - either you live a completely healthy life, or you're an alcoholic, or an addict, or you go mad. Work is a valve, but too much work is not good for you and too little is even worse: the art is finding the right balance; when you have something to say, when you have certain feelings and the people believe you, just be, say. If you bluff in art, you're done. It's hard to be independent, but if you're not, it just doesn't work. It takes a lot of humour to realise everything you want.

YOU'RE NOT AN ARTIST WHO HAS TO SUFFER IN ORDER TO CREATE. YOU'RE SOMEONE WHO FOLLOWS HIMSELF, SO ACTUALLY THE PATHS OPEN TO YOU BY THEMSELVES.

I was searching for myself and it was great, because since then, I've been looking at the world, myself and everything that surrounds us in a different way. And that's just great. At a good concert or show, you get to see what people are like: when someone lies on the ground and you don't know if they are drunk or unconscious, and the people are literally walking over the bodies. We can learn a lot from this, we learn new things at every step we take. Everything has a purpose: I believe in certain coincidences, some sort of a stage, strings...

Text: ANJA LORENZETTI, Photo: Pikol archives



At the Pikol restaurant a marine orchestra plays a fish symphony

"One's attention is drawn to a wooden house, reminiscent of a log house, lying by the romantic yet mysterious pond. This house has gained a reputation as a high-quality fish restaurant ...", reads the description of the Pikol restaurant. Once the guests have discovered the excellence of this restaurant, they will keep coming back and be impressed every time by the 'works of art' of homely cuisine. "Some bet on the distinctive taste of fish, but we compose a symphony out of everything. One can play the trumpet perfectly, but the music of a whole orchestra is a completely different thing," says father Pikol, Mr Boris Gašparin, while his wife Maruška adds with a smile that ideas for new dishes, which they try themselves before serving them to their guests, are born during their walks when "you have to talk about something, just to avoid silence". The pleasant homely atmosphere is complemented with the sons, Taras and Tadej, who attend to the guests and their well-being. The Pikol restaurant has been awarded the prestigious title 'Maison de qualité', by the Order of St. Fortunat, for their excellent contribution, as a family, to the quality of life, in culinary art and positive dimensions and scope of introducing selected wines to people.

Driving from Ljubljana, only a few kilometres before Nova Gorica, you take the Vogrsko exit and turn left towards the Rožna dolina border crossing, and you will soon see the sign for the Pikol restaurant. The wooden log, situated in the exquisite natural environment, where rich people from the town used to go skating on the frozen pond, lost much of its comfort and elegance during the war. This is where young Boris liked to come, and this is where he promised to his, then girlfriend, Maruška that the land would one day be theirs. Their wish came true in 1980, when they opened a restaurant and started writing the book of Pikol's treats. The heart of the Pikol restaurant is represented by mother Maruška, who takes care of the cuisine masterpieces, father Boris, a great Slovenian sommelier and a Wine Knight of the European Order of Wine Knights, and their sons, also sommeliers, who continue the tradition of excellent wine connoisseurs. Their exquisitely selected and impressive wine list combines over 350 excellent wines from all Slovenian wine

regions and abroad, and many special selections of red and white wine that go well with fish and other flavours. At Pikol's, they prefer to find harmony with the wines from the Goriška Brda region, where the Gašparins originate from, so a special place is given to the wine producer Vuga, who, at the request of Boris, made some wines with low alcohol levels, and a new line of light, fruity and fine young wines, named Lotos Vitis Vinifera. The Pikol cellar houses local and foreign vintage wines of venerable years, which they will serve as a surprise on your wedding anniversary, at the founding of a company, or birthday celebration, and they will make sure the year of the wine is associated with your anniversary.

The Pikol's cuisine philosophy is oriented towards the preparation of dishes in the most natural way possible, based on old traditional recipes, as well as following the latest global gastronomy trends. Their culinary ideas are based on using fresh fish, seafood, vegetables and a wide range of different olive oils, produced with the cold-compress method on Vibo Valenti hill by the Russo family in Calabria, in Nova vas and in Korte of Slovenian Istria, in Gradno and Kozana of the Goriška Brda region, and on the shore of Lake Garda. The Pikol's chefs develop the exquisite taste of dishes with various herbs, condiments and salt. They specialise in seafood cuisine, preparing their dishes in a very natural style, and rumour has it that there is not a fish in the Adriatic Sea that has not yet been cooked at Pikol's – from sea urchins, moray eels, raw shrimps, to unusual shellfish and others. Traditional recipes are refined with excellent ingredients, a modern approach, and the latest global gastronomy trends, a strategy that is rewarded with private jets frequently landing at Trieste airport just because someone wants to go to the Pikol restaurant.

Among the various fish dishes, one deserves a special mention, since guests rarely leave without tasting it. To make the best sea bass carpaccio, three conditions have to be fulfilled, which is always the case at Pikol's, says Maruška. The sea bass has to be fresh from the Adriatic Sea, caught on the day it is served to guests; the right proportion of condiments to pepper; and, last,

GOODSLOVENIANINNS

Boris and Maruška Gašparin (husband and wife – owners of the restaurant)



but not least, the fish has to be professionally sliced by the hands of Tadej or Boris, both great experts in this job. Apart from this, the dish is offered its specific freshness of taste by the right olive oil and a pinch of precious Japanese Aji-Shio salt.

From the wide selection of menus on offer, I would recommend opting for one of the seafood tastings, which are exquisite delicacies for seafood lovers. I will introduce the one that is currently very popular – you will get as many as two plates for the hors d'oeuvre. The first one will be crevettes brûlées, shrimps that they will prepare on open fire in front of you, with peanut oil, sweet onions, and strawberry mousse. The second one will be gambera rosa from Sicily, with limoncello olive oil (Sancin) and black volcanic salt. The feast continues with belon belon oysters with frtalja (omelette). Next, you will get St. Jacob's scallop in a tempura of cuttlefish ink with tomato mousse, cooked with vodka, and a crust of white polenta, followed by a brochette of slightly smoked cuttlefish on baby pea mousse with dried slices of prosciutto. You will be impressed by the variety of flavours. Further on, you will be served a plate with a sachet containing a frog-fish cheek, with a side dish, all cooked in the stove and arranged on a plate in front of you. To balance the flavours, they continue with a selection of cheeses tête de moine, coated with honey; coconut air with creamy liqueur and browned coconut; and an excellent sorbet from green tea and passion fruit. However, this is still not all. Before the coffee and dessert, the Pikols will surprise you with a soufflé from dark Parisian chocolate 'Michel Clouse 75%' on sweet blood-orange juice. All the dishes will be accompanied by the wines I have already mentioned.



A frog-fish cheek in a sachet, with a side dish, cooked together in the stove.



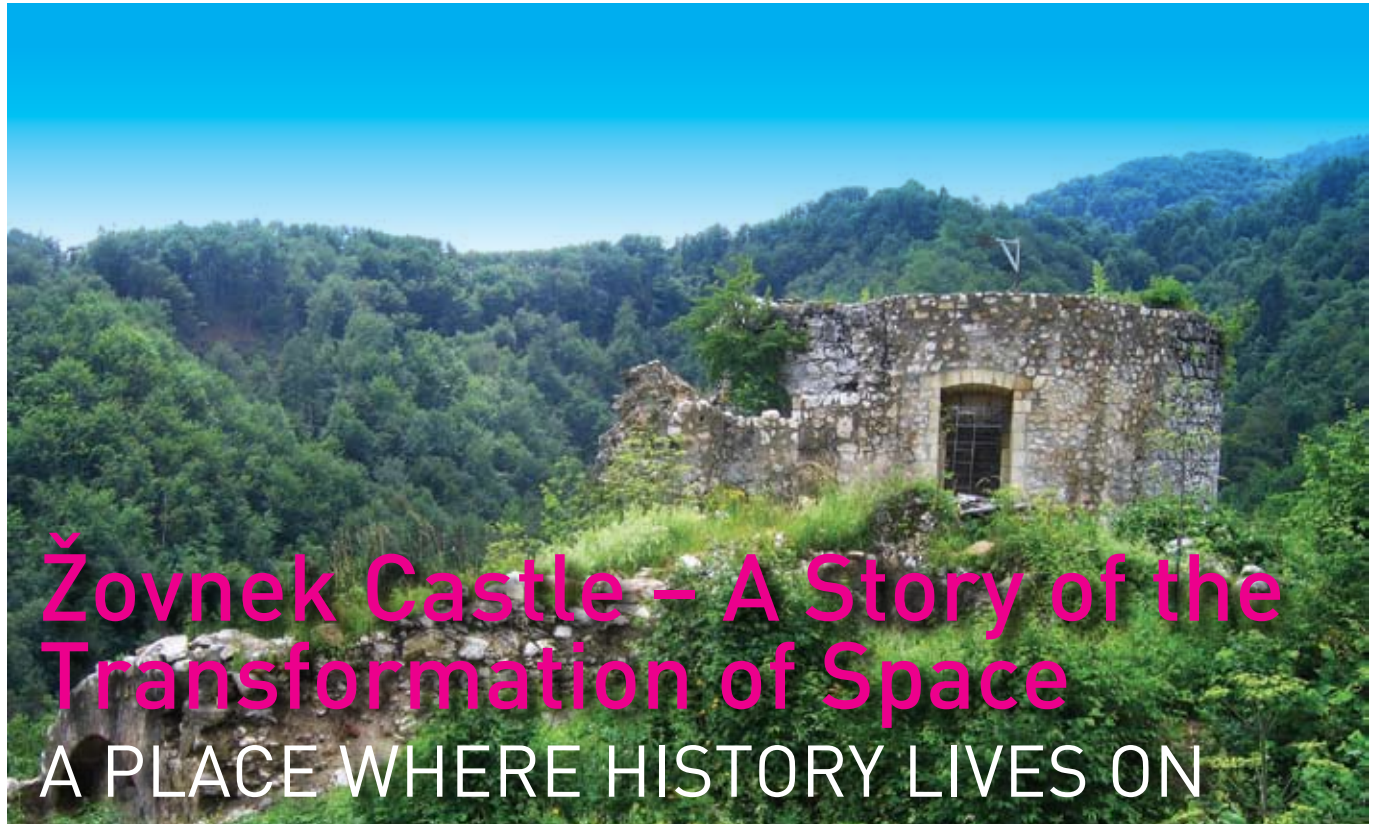
Chocolate soufflé.

The Pikol restaurant is undoubtedly an excellent choice. It is a meeting point of diplomats, managing directors, and other important guests from Slovenia and abroad. Some of them have been awarded the Pikol club card, which opens doors to the most exquisite restaurants and wine cellars in the world and enables you to make international friendships. One of the most memorable moments at the Pikol restaurant was the visit of Dr Tsukamota, a descendant of a famous samurai family and a member of the top Japanese aristocracy. A lover of our country, Mr Tsukamota and his company, all indulging in culinary and oenological treats, visited the six largest Slovenian restaurants and was extremely impressed by the magnificent art of every culinary masterpiece. However, this is another story, which you can read another time.



Muscat octopus, polenta with cedar.

Text and Photo: JOŽE PREŠEREN



In the eastern Savinja Valley near Braslovče and on rising ground in Dobrovlje, there are the ruins of the once mighty, and for Slovene history extremely important, Žovnek Castle. Its past is connected to the family of free Lords of Žovnek (Žovneški), who were considered the only aristocratic family on present-day Slovenian territory to have a permanent settlement and their own freehold family property. The origin of the family has not been fully established, but historians infer that the family has Slavic ancestors, since there are no documents stating that the family was of German origin. If the Žovneški were Germans, their descent would be cleared in detail because of the later meaning. The fact that the Lords of Žovnek were immediate ancestors of the aristocratic family known as the Counts of Celje, who were later in the 15th century a ruling house owing a huge part of the territory of modern Slovenia, is certain. This was the last great aristocratic family with roots on Slovenian territory to have an influence on European politics. The Princes of Celje are considered as the only true bearers of Slovene medieval statehood. In modern history, this is embodied only in the three stars on the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Slovenia, although some historians have striven to give greater symbolic value to the coat-of-arms of the Counts of Celje in independent Slovenia. But this is not important for our article: today we will go to the ruins of ancient Žovnek Castle, which are entrusted to the Žovnek Cultural and Historical Association in Braslovče led by historian Franc Kralj.

Centuries of Ascent and Decline

The emergence of the Žovnek family is connected with the emergence of Braslovče, today one of the most beautiful towns in Slovenia and one of hop centres of the Savinja Valley. The town was a missionary centre as early as the year 1000, and later on it was a seat of an ancient parish. Co-founders of this ancient parish were the Žovneški or their ancestors. A few years ago, when the church in Braslovče was subject to research, pre-Romanic window openings were discovered. They indicate that

the church could be over 1000 years old. The town of Braslovče was named after Braslav of Pannonia, who was a leader and had his last seat in Blatograd near Lake Balaton (Hungary). In the documents known so far, the Žovneški were mentioned as late as 1120, when they were still called the Savinjski (of Savinjsko). They changed their family name to Žovneški in 1341, and later on to Celjski (of Celje) when they were promoted to counts. They kept this family name until 1456, when the male line died out. The women's side still survives.

Žovnek Castle is among the oldest and most important castles in Slovenia, since it was a family castle owned by a distinguished home aristocratic family, and the administrative centre of a vast property for more than 200 years. The property of the Žovnek family was freehold land (allodium), which according to medieval law meant that the land was bought, or it came into their possession in a way other than based on the enfeoffment system. Their property encompassed a great part of the Savinja Valley, through which the Romans had also built a road. The road enabled migration of different nations, but pillaging raids often took place along it as well. When the situation calmed down, important trade routes connecting present-day Italy, Pannonia and Central and South Europe ran through the property of the Žovnek family. Different tolls and other dues brought in a lot of income, and so they became one of the richest Central European aristocratic families. They constantly increased their property through acquisitions and at the same time they established family ties with important aristocratic families through marriages, which increased their reputation in the high society of that time. In addition to the central Žovnek Castle, they also possessed Liebenstein Castle, Ojstrica Castle, and Šenek Castle in Polzela, which served mainly as military fortresses for road control. Today, all the castles are in ruins and in some cases, the remains are barely recognizable.

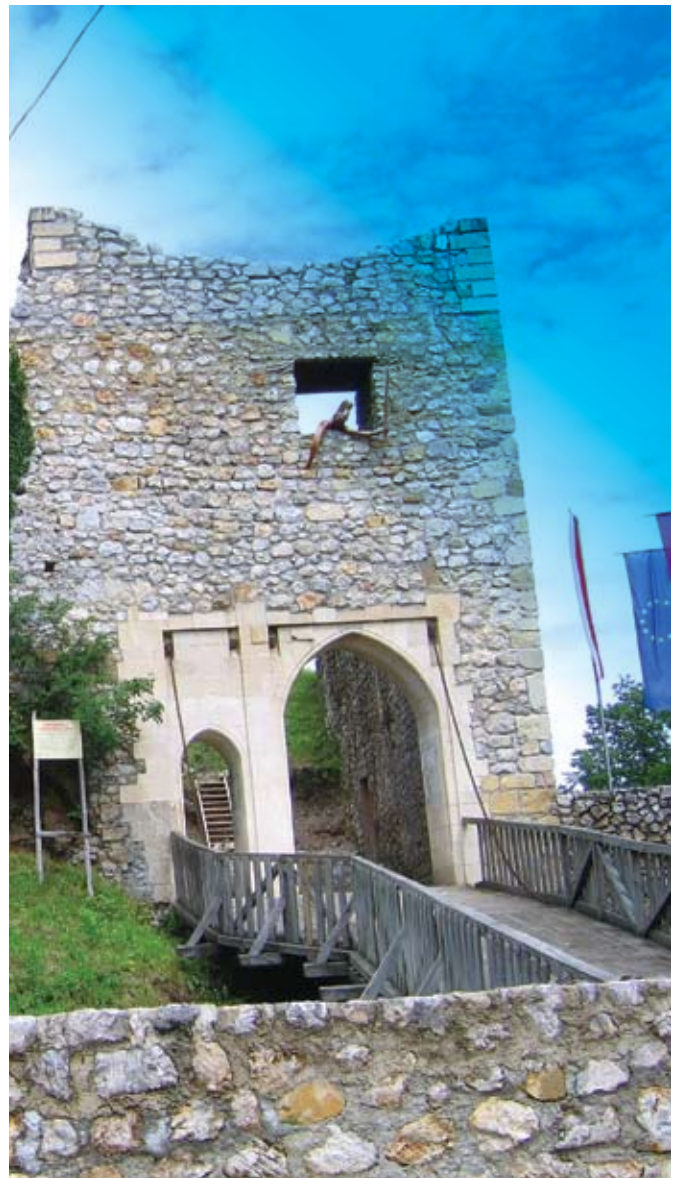
CULTURAL TRAILS

Some milestones

- Between the years 1123 and 1130, Gebhard I, at that time still of Savinja, was first mentioned in documents.
- From the year 1173, Gebhard II and his descendants bear the name of Žovnek.
- Around 1200, the Žovneški acquired a large property around Lemberg near Poljčane as a feudal estate. The property was owned by the diocese of Krka in the Koroška region. The diocese was established by St. Emma (Hema) of Krka, born in Pilštajn in Kozjansko. Her descendants were related to the Žovnek family.
- Konrad of Žovnek (mentioned between the years 1220 and 1241) was a medieval lyrical poet. Three of his poems have been preserved.
- In 1331, the Žovnek family inherited from the Counts of Vovbre/Heunburg half of Celje, in addition to other properties.
- In 1333, the Žovneški bought the other half of Celje, so they owned it entirely. Then they moved to Celje, but they were still called Žovneški.
- Around 1335, Frederick I of Žovnek became governor-general of Carniola. After him, this position was also taken up by his descendants, and they kept it for almost a century.
- On 16 April 1342, Frederick I of Žovnek was promoted to Count of Celje. From that year on, the family used the name Celjski. They lived in Celje most of the time and only occasionally at Žovnek.
- The Žovnek-Celje family was the most powerful in the time of Herman II of Celje. They strongly increased their property and also assumed roles as bans of Croatia. Herman's daughter Barbara was an empress and was considered one of the most educated rulers, since she spoke several foreign languages.
- The Žovneškis won under the name Celjski the title of local rulers and bearers of Slovene medieval statehood. The Principality of Celje comprised parts of the Koroška region, most of present-day Croatia and northwest Bosnia. This statehood is embodied in three gold stars on the coat-of-arms of the Republic of Slovenia.
- In 1454, Prince Frederick II of Celje, who was married to the unfortunate Veronika of Desence, died in Žovnek. After his death, the treasury was transferred from Žovnek to Celje.
- In 1456, Ulrik II, the last Prince of Celje, was assassinated and with him the men of the Žovnek-Celje family died out. Žovnek Castle and its pertaining property came into the possession of the Habsburg dynasty.
- Around 1600, Žovnek Castle and the castle property were bought by Adam Schrott. After him, and until the end of the Second World War, the castle and property passed through a series of owners and were then nationalized.
- After the year 1816, when a new Žovnek Castle had been built in the valley, the old Žovnek Castle began dilapidating. The tax legislation of that time caused the worst damage, since a tax was imposed on buildings with roofs. In order to avoid taxation, the castle facilities were unroofed and construction material for the new castle was obtained by pulling down the old castle.
- Around 1910, Edmund Cnobloch, the owner at that time, took care of the cleaning of the ruins, made some benches, roofed the defence tower, and erected a crucifix under the roof.
- In 1993, cleaning and renovation works started at Žovnek Castle. Their aim was a renewed roof on the castle tower, where a museum is supposed to be set up.
- In 2000, electricity was installed at the Castle, which made construction work much easier and also enabled the organization of events.

The maintenance work plan prepared by the Žovnek Cultural and Historical Association in Braslovče envisages the preservation of the castle as an arranged ruin. From the facilities, only the castle tower would be arranged – three metre thick walls need renovation – with an appropriate raising, roofing and setting up of a smaller museum offering historical material concerning the Castle and the Žovnek family. The arranged castle ruins will be an interesting sight for students and tourists, and there would also be appropriate premises for cultural events.

In 2007, the Cultural and Historical Association organised an exhibition called Žovnek – a Story of the Transformation of Space, presenting rich illustrative material on the Castle's architecture. This year, an extended exhibition mainly of material about the Castle was included in events during the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union. The Association supplemented this year's exhibition mostly with material about the architecture of Castle since, despite 200 years of dilapidation, many preserved architecture elements of the central castle facility have been discovered and they have to be maintained in the form of illustrative material. There are many old prints presenting the castle, and old ground plans, old photos and a model of the castle. This year, a catalogue about Žovnek Castle containing more than 70 prints, old postcards and photos was compiled.



Text: JOŽE PREŠEREN, Photo: Darinka Mladenovič



Šmarna gora – Ljubljana's point of pilgrimage or tourist point

You often meet people in Ljubljana who pride themselves that there is no day they would not walk up Šmarna gora, in any weather, in rain and sun, and when the paths are frozen or snowy. Of course, there are more who do it once a week, on free Saturdays or Sundays, and there are also people who go only once per year. But there is hardly anyone in Ljubljana and its outskirts who would say they have never been on top of Šmarna gora - over the year, around 100,000 people go up there. Well, that is a lot more compared to those who climb the incomparably higher and more famous Triglav, the highest Slovenian mountain and a national symbol. Šmarna gora is, on the contrary, only a symbol of Ljubljana and its wider surroundings. It is a steep inselberg with two summits - beside Šmarna gora, at 571 metres, there is the four metres higher Grmada.

Especially young people climb this hill only for recreation, meaning that they hurry off to the top as fast as they can, where they maybe drink water or have tea, and return after a few minutes via the same or another path. Sportsmen organise hill running or even mountain bike races to the top. There was a record holder who arrived at the top in twelve minutes, and younger people who are used to walking arrive in half an hour, while the usual hikers, the older ones as well, need a whole hour of moderate walking.

And what awaits us at the top? First, we should mention the wonderful view in all directions, towards Ljubljana, to the Sava River, the mountains in the north and west. Of course, there is also a respectable church worth seeing, on which we will say a few words, and the famous Ledinek Tavern, where there is always refreshment available - if nothing else, at least a tasty home-made tea. There are no lodgings in this tavern; however, they

are more renowned for their stews and, among other things, for the annual organisation of a New Year's Eve party, for which one must book a few months in advance due to its popularity.

On top of Šmarna gora, the famous pilgrim's church of St Mary reigns. On the summit itself, traces of prehistoric settlement have been found, and the Romans had a fort here, due to the strategic position. Notes from the 13th century mention a castle, and a hundred years later a chapel was mentioned in writings. Because more and more pilgrims came, in 1432 a bigger gothic church was constructed here, which was bounded by strong walls and towers in the time of Turkish invasions. Later, when the Turkish danger was over, they decided to build a new church following the plan of the most famous Slovenian builder of that time, Gregor Maček. The baroque church was constructed and furnished between 1711 and 1729, when it was finally consecrated.

The church is richly decorated with frescoes by the Slovenian painter Matevž Langus, who also painted the main altar, and there is a sculpture in the niche dressed in baroque manner. Painting in 1842, 1846 and 1847, Langus took particular care with the central cupola, specifically consecrated to all pilgrims and people who helped in building the church, which also carries an inscription in the Slovenian language.

It is also worth mentioning that the most famous Slovenian poet, France Prešeren, used to walk up Šmarna gora, and that in the village of Zavrh under Šmarna gora, the Slovenian priest, composer and mountaineer Jakob Aljaž was born; he made history by buying the summit of Mt Triglav, which thus remained Slovenian, and constructed the famous Aljaž Tower there.



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