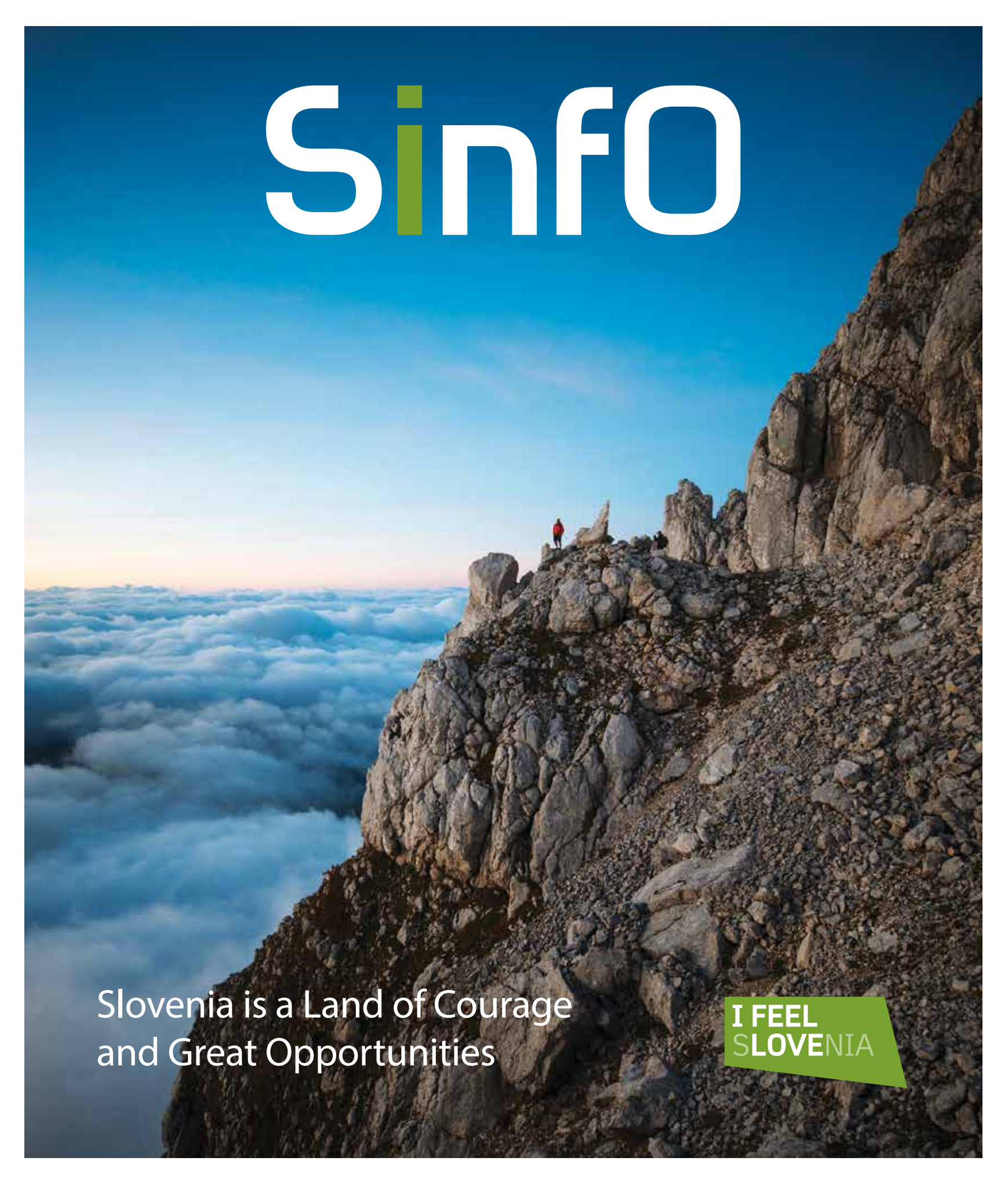




Sinfo

Slovenia is a Land of Courage
and Great Opportunities

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



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EDITORIAL



Foto: Bruno Toič

SLOVENIA IS A LAND OF COURAGE AND GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

Thirty-five years ago, we established our own state. The decision to establish an independent Slovenia was one of the most important decisions in our history - a decision to shape our own future. It was driven by courage, perseverance and the belief that we could succeed.

Over the past thirty-five years, Slovenia has become a modern, open and confident European country. Small in size, but great in its diversity, knowledge and people. From the Alps to the Adriatic, different landscapes, cultures and traditions come together within a relatively small area.

Perhaps those who see Slovenia from the outside see it particularly clearly, as do those who are only just beginning their journey through life. That is why the words of foreign diplomats, Slovenians living abroad and young people are so valuable.

But Slovenia is not just a beautiful country. It is also a country that we continue to build every day. Through knowledge, the economy, science, diplomacy, responsible spatial planning and the work of public institutions, we are creating the conditions for future generations to live and thrive.

This issue of Sinfo therefore offers a look at Slovenian past, present and future. Above all, it is an invitation not only to get to know Slovenia, but also to appreciate it.

Independence cannot be taken for granted. It is a value that unites people, regardless of their differences. And perhaps this is the greatest challenge of all: to appreciate the country that has been built and, through its work, knowledge and values, make it even better, more open and more recognisable around the world.

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Editor-in-Chief



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Photo: Primož Predalič

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IN FOCUS

Photo: Personal archive

ADDRESS

The Birth of a New Success Story

Every nation's history holds a handful of tectonic turning points. Ours came thirty-five years ago, when a centuries-old dream of the Slovenian people finally came true. The seeds of statehood planted and nurtured by generations before us within a succession of larger political unions at last ripened into the full independence of the Republic of Slovenia.

This issue is dedicated to that historic moment, one defined by two decisive breaks. First, we broke with communism and chose the path of the developed West. Second, we broke with the Yugoslav idea and, as a fully sovereign nation, joined the process of European integration. Even then, the world was already watching us as a success story in the making.

History, of course, does not end with any single moment; it flows and turns continuously through time. And today, Slovenia stands once again at a turning point. Under the mandate begun a few months ago by the new centre-right government, we will complete both of those earlier breaks by finishing the reforms that will clear away the last remnants of the past. After a brief period of drift, Slovenia is back on the right course. The course of social and economic development now being charted across Central Europe, a region fast becoming the true engine of the European Union. Slovenia is open for business once again.

In the years ahead, the pace of our community's development will accelerate. A new generation chose this new parliamentary majority, and it is to that generation that the policies of the coming years will be devoted. It is for them that we are shaping a country where lower taxes will reward knowledge and hard work. A country whose reforms will give fresh momentum to biotechnology, space technology and cutting-edge artificial intelligence.

These are the fields in which Slovenia already competes at the world's highest level. We are not a country built for mass production; we are a country built for world-class achievement. This issue offers a first glimpse of that future and there is more to come in the issues ahead.

Slovenia has come of age: a country that has grown into a mature partner within Western integration, and a community being built by a new generation hungry for progress and merit. It is to these aspirations that the new government will tailor its reforms across every field.

So where do you fit into this picture? Come. Invest in Slovenia. Visit Slovenia. Follow Slovenia's progress. This historic turning point is giving birth to a new star of Europe, a country of world-class achievement in the key industries of tomorrow's economy. Join us, and become part of this success story too.

Dr Sebastjan Jeretič
Acting Director of Government Communication Office



IN FOCUS

Photo: KPV archive

ADDRESS

Sovereignty is not Won for all Time; Every Generation must Know how to Defend it, Safeguard it and Stand Up for it

On 25 October 1991, I flew over Pivka by helicopter, watching the last convoy of the Yugoslav People's Army vehicles leaving Slovenia. With the departure of the last soldier of the aggressor, the last visible trace of foreign military rule also disappeared from Slovenia. For the first time in a long while, Slovenia could truly breathe freely.

At that time, I spoke words that were true then, are true today, and will remain true tomorrow: *"There is no force that could take even a single kilometre of territory from Slovenia."*

Thirty-five years later, it all seems self-evident, but it was not always so. Just five months before these events, a war was raging in Slovenia – a kind of war we had previously known only from television, watching bloody battles from faraway lands. Tanks were rolling along Slovenian roads, sirens were wailing, and fighter jets and helicopters were roaring through the air. Everything seemed to indicate that what happened later in Bosnia, and what is happening today in Ukraine, would happen to us. But it didn't. We owe that to the courage of the Slovenian people, the Slovenian Territorial Defence and the Slovenian police. Just a few months later, we were free people.

We celebrate Sovereignty Day as a national holiday in memory of these very events, which were crucial to Slovenia's path to independence. When the last Yugoslav People's Army soldier left, we Slovenians finally fulfilled a dream granted to only a handful of nations that have shaped human history. We became the architects of our own destiny, in our own land.

We therefore have our own country today, but it was not simply handed to us. We fought for it ourselves – with determination, courage, our own hands, rifles and tanks, and, sadly, with blood. And that is precisely why we sometimes forget all too easily just how hard we had to fight for the freedom we enjoy today.

For that reason, we must never take our sovereignty for granted. Today, the world is changing rapidly. It is becoming more dangerous and more unpredictable. As John F.W. Rogers, chairman of the board of the Atlantic Council, recently said: *"What we are experiencing today is not simply another period of geopolitical turbulence. The deeper change is that the international system that has shaped much of our lives has been transformed. Because when an old system is weakening and a new one is emerging, leadership is not simply about defending what has existed. It is about deciding what is worth carrying forward and what must change. There is a reason for confidence, however, because our alliances have not disappeared. They have adapted. Across the Atlantic, nations are investing more seriously in their common defence. The recognition that security is not something that can simply be outsourced, that peace requires strength, preparedness, and burden sharing is becoming even more concrete."*

It is therefore particularly worrying that, in our country today, those for whom Slovenian independence was never a great ambition are once again becoming increasingly vocal. They are the ones calling for Slovenia to leave NATO, an alliance of free nations which, together with our allies, provides us with a defensive shield against threats and against the hegemonic ambitions of the world's despots. That is precisely why Slovenian Sovereignty Day also serves as a warning: we must not forget how hard we fought and at what cost, to secure our own country. Sovereignty is not won for all time; every generation must know how to defend it, safeguard it and stand up for it.

"Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men have died to win them." Franklin D. Roosevelt once said.

Thirty-five years ago, we Slovenians proved to the world that we are willing to sacrifice everything for our homeland. Our task today is to ensure that one day we pass on to our children a Slovenia like the one we have today. Free, sovereign and ours.

Janez Janša
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

KEY MILESTONES

From Drawing its Own Borders to Securing an Enduring Presence in the Global Mosaic



GRAPHICS BY IRENA KOGOJ



IN FOCUS

16th Government of the Republic of Slovenia led by Prime Minister Janez Janša. Photo: Luka Štefulj/Ukom

SLOVENIA THROUGH THE LENS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Achievements that have Shaped the Country. Goals that Guide it.

TEXT BY MONIKA JERIČ

PHOTO BY NEBOJŠA TEJIĆ/STA

Over 35 years of independence, Slovenia has made significant progress in numerous areas, to which previous governments have contributed. Below, we present some of the key achievements and development goals highlighted by the ministries of the current, 16th Government of the Republic of Slovenia, headed by Prime Minister Janez Janša.



Minister responsible: Mateja Ribič

DEMOGRAPHY, FAMILY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Slovenia has built a strong family policy. It provides parents with extensive rights following the birth and during the upbringing of children, as well as opportunities to better balance work and life.

In response to the challenges of an ageing society, the ministry intends to upgrade family policy into a comprehensive demographic policy. This will be based on supporting families and young people in employment, addressing housing needs and starting a family, promoting active and healthy ageing, and regulating legal migration.



Minister responsible: Andrej Šircelj

FINANCE

Slovenia adopted the euro in 2007, which contributed to economic growth. Three years later, it further strengthened its integration with the world's most developed countries by joining the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Ensuring stable, sustainable and predictable public finances will remain crucial in the future as well. The ministry plans to establish a National Demographic Fund, which is expected to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the pension system. Its plans also include free basic banking services for income recipients and maintaining the option to choose between cash and electronic payments.



Minister responsible: Anže Logar

ECONOMY, LABOUR AND SPORT

Slovenia has made progress in creating products and services with higher added value, supported by digitalisation, automation and robotisation.

Key priorities include encouraging investment in advanced technologies, developing our own products and brands, strengthening innovation, and further improving the business environment, including by reducing the tax burden on labour and increasing employees' net incomes.

During its years of independence, Slovenia has developed an autonomous labour regulation system comparable to those elsewhere in Europe. Thanks in part to its active employment policy, Slovenia ranks among EU countries with higher employment rates and lower unemployment.

Over recent decades, the country has developed a comprehensive sports system, ranging from sport for children and young people, recreation and grassroots sport to high-quality and elite sport. The state will continue to promote greater physical activity among the population and the development of modern sports infrastructure.



Minister responsible: Jernej Vrtovec

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY

The ministry considers ensuring energy security and transitioning to clean energy sources among the country's greatest achievements. Slovenia has also developed transport infrastructure by road, rail and sea. In recent years, it has improved conditions for public transport, walking and cycling, while significantly reducing the number of road fatalities.

In the coming years, Slovenia will focus on reliable, low-carbon energy supply, modern sustainable mobility and major infrastructure investments. Key projects include the development of renewable energy sources, further development of nuclear energy, modernisation of public transport, transport electrification and completion of the second railway track.



Minister responsible: Borut Rončević

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND YOUTH

Over 35 years of independence, Slovenia has built a high-quality, widely accessible and internationally comparable education and science system.

Key priorities include strengthening cooperation between science, higher education institutions and the economy, developing the skills of the future, particularly in digital technologies and artificial intelligence, enhancing the reputation of the teaching profession, and creating conditions for attracting talent.



Minister responsible: Janez Cigler Kralj

AGRICULTURE

At EU level, Slovenia has protected 31 agricultural products and foodstuffs. A decade ago, it established the national Selected Quality – Slovenia scheme, which strengthens the visibility and recognition of local food. It has supported technological and generational renewal in agriculture, sustainable forest management and the strengthening of local food supply chains.

The ministry responsible for agriculture will focus on food security, increasing resilience to climate and market challenges, reducing administrative burdens on farmers, and protecting animals and the environment.



Minister responsible: Ignacija Fridl Jarc

CULTURE

Slovenia is home to cultural heritage of global significance, as confirmed by nine entries on UNESCO's cultural heritage lists. It has also presented its creativity to the world, among other things as the Guest of Honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2023 and the Bologna Children's Book Fair in 2024. The title of European Capital of Culture has been awarded to two cities, Maribor (in 2012) and Nova Gorica (in 2025).

Under its new leadership, the ministry identifies reducing bureaucratic barriers and strengthening creativity and access to culture among its key priorities. Particular attention will be paid to young people, including through the introduction of a cultural voucher worth up to EUR 200 for 18-year-olds. Other priorities include establishing the Museum of Slovenian Independence and continuing the renovation of cultural infrastructure.



Minister responsible: Valentin Hajdinjak

DEFENCE

Upon gaining independence, Slovenia established the Slovenian Armed Forces to protect its sovereignty, and since 2004 the country has also been a member of NATO. Slovenia stands out for its effective civil protection and disaster relief system, whose quality has been demonstrated repeatedly in response to natural disasters. As Minister of Defence Valentin Hajdinjak emphasises: "Our greatest achievements are not weapons or equipment. They are people."

Slovenia aims to improve working and living conditions for its servicewomen and servicemen and to build a modern, well-equipped and highly trained armed forces. It will invest in unmanned systems, cyber defence, artificial intelligence, modern communications and infrastructure, while continuing to strengthen the civil protection and disaster relief system.



Minister responsible: Monika Kirbiš Rojs

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, COHESION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Slovenia has established a modern system of local self-government and regional development, while EU cohesion funds have helped finance numerous development projects. Slovenia also actively participates in shaping cross-border European solutions through the Interreg programme.

Among the ministry's key development goals are the establishment of regions and reducing development disparities between different parts of the country. Investment will continue in transport infrastructure, climate change adaptation, energy efficiency, research, development and digitalisation.



Minister responsible: Mihael Zupančič

JUSTICE

Over recent decades, Slovenia has made significant progress in the efficiency and accessibility of judicial protection, the digitalisation of proceedings, alternative dispute resolution, and the development of a justice system that is more child-friendly and responsive to the needs of other vulnerable groups.

The ministry's key focus is ensuring a high-quality and independent judiciary that decides on people's rights and obligations in a timely and fair manner. Strengthening public trust in judicial institutions and more effectively combating corruption, organised crime and economic crime also remain important goals.



Minister responsible: Franci Matoz

INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

A major milestone was Slovenia's accession to the Schengen Area in 2007. To provide public services and safeguard the public interest, the country has developed a high-quality public sector and established key digital infrastructure and e-services.

It has established a high level of security, which the ministry will strive to maintain in the future as well. Key priorities include establishing a motorway police force, implementing the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum, and further digitalisation of public services. More effective functioning and decentralisation of public administration also remain important goals.



Minister responsible: Tadej Ostrc

HEALTH

The key strength of Slovenia's healthcare system is its highly trained, dedicated and professional healthcare workforce. Slovenia takes pride in its outstanding medical expertise and specialists who achieve excellent results in numerous areas of healthcare.

In the coming years, the ministry will focus on more efficient organisation of the healthcare system and ensuring timely, high-quality healthcare for all residents.



Minister responsible: Polona Rifelj

ENVIRONMENT AND SPATIAL PLANNING

Slovenia has established a modern system for environmental and spatial management while successfully preserving one of its greatest assets: its exceptional natural wealth.

The ministry will strive to maintain high environmental standards and strengthen the country's resilience to climate change. At the same time, the state will build its green transition on balancing environmental objectives, economic competitiveness and social justice. Other goals include faster spatial planning and greater access to housing.



Minister responsible: Tone Kajzer

FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Over 35 years, Slovenia has travelled an extraordinary path, from international recognition and the establishment of its own diplomatic network to membership in key international organisations.

The ministry emphasises that Slovenia must remain a reliable and active partner in the international community while firmly representing its national interests. In the coming years, it intends to pursue a proactive, pragmatic and results-oriented foreign policy.



LINDEN TREE

For centuries, the linden tree has been regarded as a symbol of Slovenian identity. Under its canopy, village communities once gathered to make decisions and strengthen bonds between people. This is why the linden tree continues to represent a place of dialogue, connection and national identity. During the period of national awakening, it became one of the key symbols of the Slovenian national identity, while the linden leaf also featured prominently in the famous “Slovenia, My Country” campaign.

High above Črna na Koroškem, the Najevnik Linden Tree (*Najevska lipa*) has been growing for almost 800 years; it is the tree with the thickest trunk in Slovenia and one of the most powerful symbols of Slovenian unity, perseverance and community. In August 1991, it also became a symbol of Slovenian statehood when the first gathering of Slovenian leaders in independent Slovenia took place beneath its canopy. This tradition continues today with regular annual gatherings.

Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik/www.slovenia.info



IN FOCUS

Photo: Luka Štefulj/Ukom

LOJZE PETERLE, SLOVENIA'S FIRST PRIME MINISTER

There is no Strong Slovenia Without the Values of Independence

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

Slovenia's independence was not a process taken for granted, but a combination of political decisions, preparations, diplomatic efforts and a favourable international environment. How did the key days in the country's creation unfold, who played an important role in its international recognition, and what are the most important values for the survival of a nation? An interview with Slovenia's first Prime Minister, Lojze Peterle, provides a behind-the-scenes look at these watershed events and reflects on the challenges Slovenia faces today.

In the second half of the 20th century, Europe and the world as a whole were shaken by a number of political, social and economic changes. After the death of Josip Broz Tito, these changes also affected Yugoslavia. How did you experience those changes?

It was already during Tito's time that I felt that Yugoslavia's common foundations were crumbling. Its common spirit was gone. Some say that Yugoslavia had effectively ceased to function even before Tito's death. It is interesting that the delegation of Slovenian communists left the communist party congress in Belgrade (the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia held in Belgrade in January 1990) after realising that the situation was beyond repair.

Yugoslavia was a political formation held together by dictatorship and little else.

In January 1991, Slovenia and Croatia proposed a transformation of Yugoslavia into a 'soft confederation'; however, a confederation can only consist of independent states. A cavalcade of presidents travelling from one capital to another was unable to find a common denominator between them.

Belgrade was not willing to respect the Yugoslav Constitution that gave every entity the

right to self-determination and secession.

In Belgrade, I argued in favour of a peaceful dissolution, but those in power refused to accept it.

When did you reach the decision to find a different way out?

The awakening of the Slovenian national and political consciousness began in the 1970s. We were not the originators of the idea of Slovenian statehood, but we understood that the opportunity had presented itself to finally establish a state of our own. I am glad and proud that we succeeded.

The team at the helm of the Slovenian Spring that assumed the principal responsibility of achieving Slovenia's independence was determined to go all the way.

On 28 April 1991, six leaders of the Demos coalition parties gathered at Brdo pri Kranju. Each had to express their willingness to go all the way. All six of us unanimously decided to do so. I often emphasise that, for the first time in history, Slovenians had the opportunity to freely and democratically decide whether they wanted a state of their own or not. Demos won the first democratic elections. The coalition's programme called for a democratic and independent Slovenia. Despite their experiences in Belgrade, the old political parties proposed remaining part of Yugoslavia.

If Demos had not won, there would have been no plebiscite on independence.

On the day the government I led was elected, the Belgrade authorities disarmed the Territorial Defence by orders signed by two of our generals. As Prime Minister, I had no information about what was going on.

On the day the government I led was elected, the arms held by the Territorial Defence were seized.

There was some resistance, but most of the arms were seized. This was understood as a clear threat from Belgrade, some even took it as a threat of war. We thus embarked on the path to independence empty-handed. But fortunately we understood what this move by Belgrade meant. On the following day, 17 December, we started building the Slovenian armed forces.

Did the war in Slovenia really last only ten days?

For me, it lasted more than a year. As I have already mentioned, seizing the arms from the Territorial Defence meant that Belgrade acted against our will to gain independence.

The aggression of the Yugoslav Army indeed lasted ten days, but we were ready. This was the secret of our success.

Some called it a miracle, others called it grace, still others believed that it was a mission impossible. Distinguished foreign visitors, ambassadors, advisers and ministers all told us: "Abandon your dreams. Be realistic. You will not succeed." But we were ready for the conflict and we surprised the entire world, including the realists who believed that we would not be able to hold our own.

You probably enjoyed strong support from abroad, from Slovenians living abroad.

We enjoyed extraordinary support. That was the time of the Slovenian Congress, which did a great deal to mobilise the Slovenian people.

Slovenians staged protests in various countries.

People demanded recognition and help. It was something that still warms my heart today when I remember people's enthusiasm for an independent Slovenia.

What major power was instrumental in securing Slovenia's international recognition?

I am grateful for this question, as you will probably hear different interpretations. As President of the Christian Democratic Party, I was fortunate that ours was the first party in Slovenia to join an international political association.

As Prime Minister of an unrecognised country I could not go on regular diplomatic visits to Bonn, Paris or any other city, but I could join the discussions of prime ministers from these political circles at the same table.

In Budapest, I attended the congress of the Christian Democratic International together with Helmut Kohl, who asked me for a private meeting. I still remember his words: "I understand your political goals. As Germany exercised its right to self-determination and reunited, we cannot deny you the same right. But, how can we prevent the Balkans from exploding?"

I replied: "Our desire for freedom and democracy poses no threat to anyone. It is not us who are the problem in Yugoslavia. We only want to enjoy the same freedoms as other free nations of Europe."

Kohl was a man with a broad knowledge of history. He also had understanding of small countries. He was a man with broad horizons and a European vision. I am glad to have been able to engage with people like him at that time. He was Europe's leading statesman at the time. You asked me about international recognition. We worked hard at every level: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenians abroad and other ministers who wrote to their counterparts. Letters were also written by Archbishop Alojzij Šuštar. There was a massive campaign to secure international recognition, while the main responsibility rested with the Slovenian government. I was fortunate to keep in contact with prime ministers of various countries.

When we were attacked from the air, I wrote to prime ministers across Europe.

Helmut Kohl responded approximately one month after the signing of the Brioni Agreement, which imposed a moratorium on our further moves towards independence. He invited me to his summer residence at St Gilgen near Salzburg in Austria. Our conversation lasted almost three hours. He told us immediately: "Don't be impatient. Your recognition is no longer in question.



Photo: Luka Štefulj/Ukom

You have met all the criteria." The first country to recognise us was Ukraine, which recognised us in December, ahead of Germany, the European Economic Community and the Vatican. I would like to add that, as far as I am concerned, Kohl was the driving force behind the efforts to convince the world, particularly the United States of America, that Yugoslavia could not be preserved. I consider Kohl the architect of Slovenia's international recognition.

Slovenia also received strong support from Pope John Paul II. He was well aware of what was going on.

He had survived Nazism and communism. He understood us and supported us. I consider him someone who made a major contribution to Slovenia's international recognition. He was also the first Pope to greet the Slovenian people in their own language in Rome.

How was your government?

My government, with 27 members, was a parliament in miniature. We still operated in accordance with the old legislation. Eight of my ministers were not members of Demos. Eight of them were former communists.

I selected people based on their commitment to our goals, regardless of their family history or party membership.

I did not impose my views on them, as I prefer trust to constraint. I also prefer humour to the knife, and so on. In short, that government, which was so diverse, more diverse than any government before or since, simply carried out what was at the top of our common agenda.

I maintain that the entire government had to work to ensure we were prepared.

Of course, it was crucial that we won the war and presented the world with a fait accompli.

After gaining international recognition, Slovenia joined the European Community, NATO and other international organisations. Do you think that Slovenia's decisions to do so were correct?

At that time, thank God, there was a shared desire for a united Slovenia. We achieved independence for everyone.

Look, we achieved independence through a plebiscite. It was by plebiscite that we joined the European Union and NATO.

If I look back a bit and talk about the difference between what happened at Čebine (the Communist Party of Slovenia was founded there in April 1937) and at Poljče (on 9 November 1990, a key confidential consultation of the Demos parliamentary group took place there, resulting in a groundbreaking decision to hold a plebiscite). The event at Čebine brought us a revolution, not a plebiscite. There was no plebiscite on joining Yugoslavia or to adopt communism. This is a profound asymmetry, but young people don't learn about it in school. They actually don't know why we wanted to be independent. You were asking about these decisions. Were they positive? I was involved in all these matters. I once suggested that the leaders of parliamentary parties first discuss the open issues on the path to the European Union, and that worked well. There have never been any serious disagreements about joining the EU.



Photo: Luka Štefulj/Ukom

When we established ourselves on the global political map with international recognition, we gained entry to the United Nations, the European Union, the OECD, and so forth.

Suddenly we appeared on the world stage with our rights, votes, and visions. All this could be called a success story.

How could this unity be restored?

My answer is very simple. Slovenia must come first. I maintain that my government put Slovenia in the first place. The parliament followed suit.

What about the concept of reconciliation?

If I mention this to someone when asked how things are here in Slovenia now, people do not understand that, 80 years on, we still have not been able to bury the unfortunate victims of post-war killings.

I emphasise 'post-war' as the war was already over.

But the revolution was in full swing.

In other words, if we wish to preserve our country, we must once again embrace the values of independence.

Very well said. I would say the same. But look, this embracing of those values did not apply to everyone in Slovenia. For me, the crucial question is to what extent we have internalised the values of independence, given that young people are not taught the essence of Slovenian independence at school. Without this, there can be no real awareness of what happened, what went wrong, or why independence came about. I hope that this will soon change.

I would also like to say that independence was a project and achievement of the Slovenian Spring. There is a clear contrast between the values of revolution and the values of independence.

This is our reality. We have experienced a strong resurgence of the concept of the enemy, which is characterised by a class-based attitude towards different parts of our population, as well as by renewed culture wars. There were many things that did not strengthen our mutual bonds, but I hope that this period is now behind us.



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

I strongly welcomed the initiative of our current Prime Minister, Janez Janša, to build a partnership with other political parties.

I hope that this will really come true.

And what is your message to conclude this interview?

The holidays commemorating Slovenia's path to independence, which we fought for 35 years ago, must be holidays shared by all Slovenians.

There were holidays in the past that divided us. But these are holidays of all of us.

Above all, I would like to see a greater joy for life, because without Slovenians, there will not be much of Slovenia left.



IN FOCUS

The exhibition United in Victory at Ljubljana Castle to commemorate Statehood Day, 2007. Photo: Jože Dežman

MUSEUM OF SLOVENIAN INDEPENDENCE

Between Historical Memory and Responsibility towards Future Generations

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

The establishment of an independent Slovenia marked the foundation of today's Republic of Slovenia and represents the greatest historical achievement of the Slovenian nation. It is therefore important that Slovenia has an institution dedicated to systematically preserving and presenting this period through museum exhibitions. On 23 June this year, the Government established two independent museums: the Museum of Slovenian Independence and the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia.

Until now, the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia has specifically been responsible for documenting and presenting this period through its collections and exhibitions, carrying out important work as a national museum institution. However, its spatial limitations restrict its ability to provide a comprehensive presentation of democratisation and independence.

The Museum of Slovenian Independence holds great importance

Slovenian independence embodies more than just a theme of contemporary history. The process that led to it involved democratisation, political pluralism, a plebiscite, independence, international recognition, and defending the new state.

The museum will therefore portray this comprehensive process by incorporating the roles of political and civil society actors, as well as culture, the media, the economy, the Territorial Defence, the police, the Yugoslav People's Army and diplomacy.

The museum's task is to present this period, and to collect and preserve as many resources as possible, including documents, artefacts, photographs, films, personal archives and oral testimonies.

Time is of the essence. Thirty-five years have passed since independence.

Witnesses to these events are growing older, and personal archives remain scattered. If these materials are not collected now, part of this heritage will inevitably be lost.

Other countries have similar museums, too

The Museum of the Risorgimento (dedicated to the unification of Italy) is located in the most prestigious area of the Eternal City. It is housed in the renowned Vittoriano building, which stands symbolically above the ancient Roman Imperial Fora and Piazza Venezia.

Italians refer to it as the Altar of the Fatherland because it symbolises Italian identity and pride.

The building also contains the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from the Isonzo Front. This magnificent building hosts an exhibition on the creation of modern Italy.

In Europe, Portugal is a particularly noteworthy example. The National Museum of Resistance and Freedom showcases the resistance to dictatorship and the subsequent transition to democracy following the revolution of 25 April 1974.



Opening of the exhibition. Photo: Jože Dežman

In Poland, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk documents the Solidarity movement and the democratic changes that played a significant role in the collapse of communism in Europe.

Similar museums can also be found in Lithuania, Latvia and elsewhere.

In the United States, the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia is an independent institution dedicated to the American Revolution, the War of Independence and the establishment of the American republic.

Its permanent exhibition guides visitors through the history of the resistance movement and the formation of the new state.

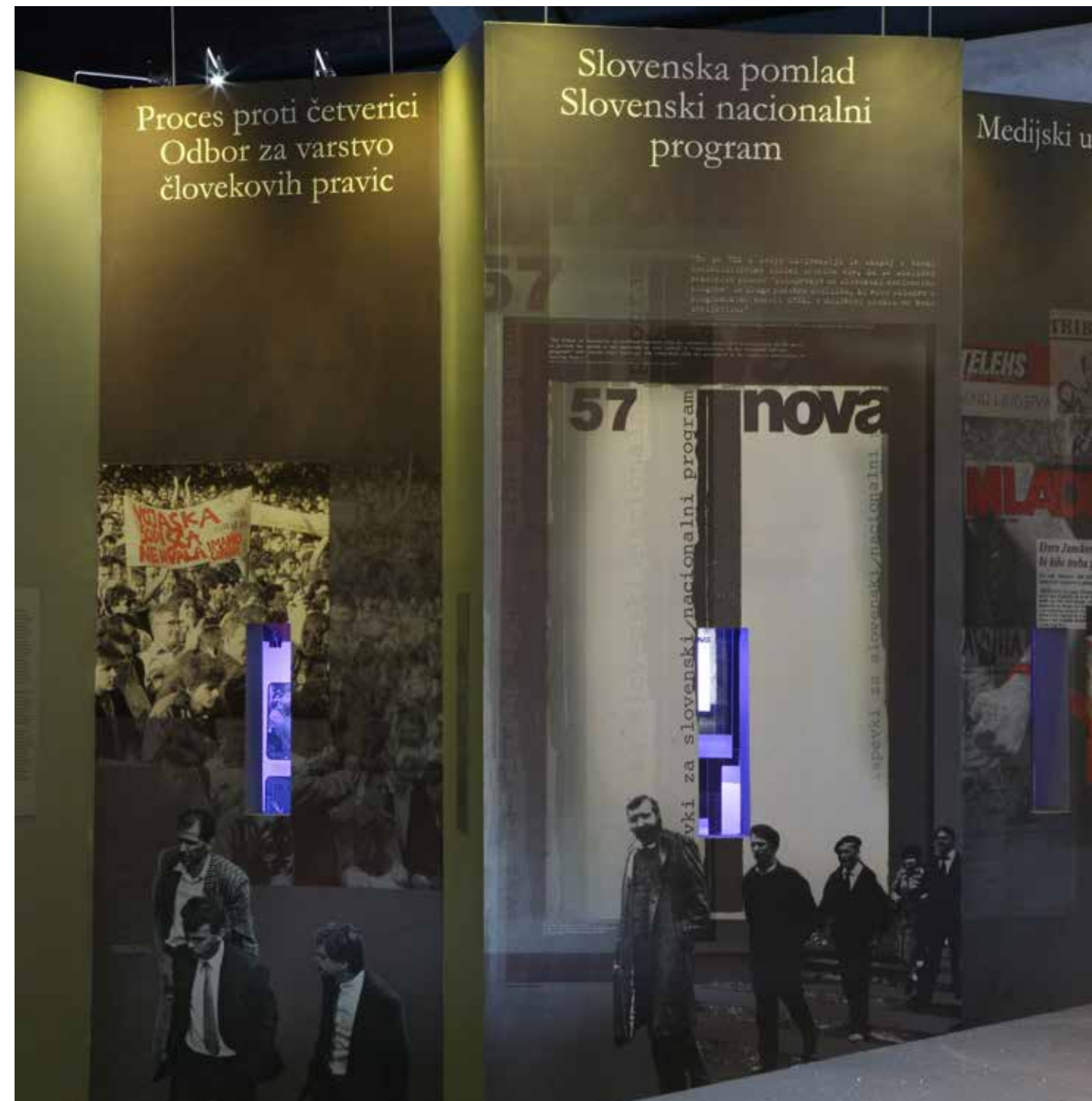
Now it's about Slovenia

When Slovenia gained independence, it assumed full responsibility for its own future for the first time in modern history.

Jože Pučnik encapsulated this historic turning point with the words: "Yugoslavia is gone, now it's about Slovenia."

The Museum of Slovenian Independence, established by the current Government, will ensure that this significant moment in history is not merely remembered, but also understood by future generations as the foundation of Slovenian statehood.

The Museum of Slovenian Independence was for the first time established as an independent institution by the Government led by Prime Minister Janez Janša in 2022. However, in 2023, the Government led by Prime Minister Robert Golob decided to abolish it as an independent institution and merge it with the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia.



In the photograph: In 1988, when the journalists Janez Janša, David Tasič and Franci Zavrl, along with the military officer Ivan Borštner, were accused of disclosing military secrets and tried in a foreign language before a military court in Ljubljana, Slovenia woke up. Mass rallies took place in Ljubljana and elsewhere, with people demonstrating outside the military court where the trial was being held.

In the photograph: Civil society was gaining strength in Slovenia, and new social movements were emerging. In 1987, issue 57 of Nova revija featured articles by a number of Slovenian intellectuals, including Dr Jože Pučnik, Ivo Urbančič, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, France Bučar, Tine Hribar and others, which contributed to the Slovenian national programme. In these articles, they called for an independent state and the abolition of the one-party dictatorship. Photo: Jože Dežman



The Yugoslav People's Army launched its aggression against Slovenia, with units totalling 22,000 men. In response, the civilian population set up barricades of buses, lorries, cars and other obstacles in front of the tanks. The people of Slovenia united in the fight for their country. Photo: Jože Dežman



Despite their lack of weapons and technical equipment, the morale of the members of the Slovenian armed forces remained high, and all civil defence sub-systems were involved in the defence effort, providing logistical support to the Slovenian armed forces. Photo: Jože Dežman

Other countries: Italy and USA



The National Museum of Italian Risorgimento in Roma (Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento Italiano) is the oldest, largest and most significant of the 23 Italian museums dedicated to the Italian national revival and the unification of Italy. It is also the only museum that can officially be designated "national", pursuant to a 1901 law, thanks to its rich and valuable collections. Photo: Wikipedia



The Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia recounts the history of the American Revolution and the establishment of the United States of America. This modern museum guides visitors through the key events, figures, and ideas that shaped the struggle for independence. Through its rich collection of artefacts, documents and interactive exhibits, the museum vividly brings the revolutionary era and its lasting impact on American society to life. Photo: Wikipedia



SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE

Slovenian is the official language of the Republic of Slovenia and has played an important role in shaping Slovenian national consciousness and preserving national identity through the centuries.

It was the Slovenian language that united the Slovenian cultural space and preserved its unique cultural identity. Today, Slovenian is spoken as a mother tongue by approximately 2.4 million people worldwide. Among its distinctive features, the dual number stands out – a rare grammatical form used when referring to two persons or objects. Despite its relatively small linguistic area, Slovenian is an exceptionally rich language. It belongs to the South Slavic language group, but also shows influences from Western Slavic, Romance, Germanic and Finno-Ugric languages. Linguists have identified around 50 dialects.

Photo: Daniel Novaković/STA



IN FOCUS

On 12 June 1991, a mountain rescue unit, supported by the Police Air Unit, ceremonially raised the Slovenian national flag, still bearing no coat of arms, to the summit of Triglav for the first time; this event was captured on film by Slovenian national broadcaster Radiotelevizija Slovenija. Photo: Joco Žnidaršič, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF SLOVENIA

A New State on the World Stage

TEXT BY POLONA PREŠEREN

When Slovenia declared its independence in June 1991, it embarked on the path towards international recognition. Given the circumstances at the time, recognition was far from guaranteed and represented one of the most demanding and significant challenges facing the young state. Slovenia had to demonstrate political wisdom and diplomatic skill, while convincing the world that it was ready to take its place among sovereign states.

The declaration of independence and sovereignty was followed by a war, during which Slovenia secured control over its territory. However, this did not yet amount to international recognition of its statehood. An important milestone on this path was the Brioni Declaration of July 1991, the first international document to acknowledge Slovenia's international legal personality while also providing a peaceful way out of the armed conflict.

The process of gaining independence reached its symbolic conclusion on 25 October 1991, when the last soldier of the Yugoslav People's Army left Slovenian territory. Today, this date is marked as Sovereignty Day.

Throughout the entire process of gaining independence, Slovenian diplomacy focused all its efforts on securing the support of key countries. Slovenian representatives established contacts in European capitals and other important centres of decision-making, building a network of relationships that helped open the doors of the international community for the young state. Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenia's first Minister of Foreign Affairs, later emphasised the need to reorganise the Foreign Ministry and establish an effective diplomatic network within a very short period of time. "All of us who were involved in the process of independence, as well as the citizens who supported us, were driven by a high degree of self-confidence and a shared determination to seize this historic opportunity and establish our own state," Rupel later said.

Another important factor in Slovenia's success was the support and engagement of Slovenians living abroad.

During the crucial months of the independence process, Slovenian communities beyond Slovenia's borders and around the world became grassroots ambassadors of the new state. Through their reputation, personal contacts and public engagement, Slovenians around the world helped open many doors and made a significant contribution to a broader understanding of Slovenia's efforts to achieve independence. International recognition was thus not only the result of the work of state institutions but also of the collective efforts of Slovenians at home and abroad.

First recognitions

A turning point came on 19 December 1991, when Germany, Sweden and Iceland became the first Western European countries to announce their recognition of Slovenia. For the young state, this was a clear sign that attitudes in Europe were changing. Germany played a particularly important role in this process, as it was the most determined advocate among European countries for the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. Germany, Austria and the Holy See were among those that showed particular sympathy towards Slovenia, as they were well acquainted with the situation in the country.

A rapid succession of new recognitions followed. The Holy See and San Marino recog-



Withdrawal of the Yugoslav People's Army from Koper, October 1991. Photo: Aleš Černivec, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia



The former Austrian and German foreign ministers, Alois Mock and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, were awarded the Republic of Slovenia's highest state decoration — the Gold Order of Freedom. The decorations were conferred on them by former Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel. Both men are recognised as pivotal figures in European diplomacy, having provided crucial support for Slovenia's independence and international recognition in 1991–1992. Photo: Nace Bizilj, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia

nised Slovenia on 13 January 1992, followed two days later by the European Community, the forerunner of today's European Union. Soon thereafter, Slovenia was recognised by many other countries, including Canada, Australia, Russia, the United States and China.

Recognition by countries with a decisive role in international relations carried particular weight. These included the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom. Their support was not only a matter of political recognition, but was also crucial to Slovenia's successful admission to the United Nations, where the permanent members of the Security Council have a special responsibility and the right of veto in decisions on the membership of new states.

Membership of international organisations

Slovenia reached the culmination of its international recognition process in the spring of 1992. It first became a member of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in

Europe (now the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), and on 22 May 1992, it became the 176th member of the United Nations. In doing so, it finally took its place among the world's sovereign states and acquired all the rights and responsibilities that came from this status.

Today, 35 years later, international recognition may often seem like a given. But in 1991, it was anything but. This success was the result of a combination of courageous political decisions, effective diplomacy, the efforts of Slovenians living beyond Slovenia's borders and around the world and international circumstances.

Today, Slovenia is an active member of the European Union, the United Nations, NATO and many other international organisations. Yet, the path to this status began in those very months when Slovenia still had to prove to the world that an independent and sovereign Slovenia was not merely a political aspiration, but a reality – and that it was ready to take its place in the international community.



The first government led by Lojze Peterle, officially the 1st Government of Slovenia, was in office from May 16, 1990, to May 14, 1992. Photo: Joco Žnidaršič, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia



The largest event, with the highest attendance, after Slovenia's independence was the first visit of Pope John Paul II, between 17 and 19 May 1996. Kissing the soil was like kissing a mother's hands, like kissing the earthly mother of the homeland and showing respect for her people. The photograph presented here was taken on May 17, 1996. Photo: Nace Bizilj, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia



Members of the Slovenian Government and the European Commission gather for a group photograph at the inaugural meeting marking the beginning of Slovenia's second Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Brdo pri Kranju, 1 July 2021. Photo: UKOM archive



Prime Minister Janez Janša participated in the NATO Summit held in Ankara, Türkiye, on 7 and 8 July 2026. Photo: KPV archive



Ambassador Asel K. Roberts hosted a celebration to honor 250 years of American Freedom, joined by the guest of honor, Prime Minister Janez Janša. In the photo: Prime Minister Janez Janša with his wife Urška Bačovnik Janša and ambassador Asel K. Roberts. Photo: KPV archive



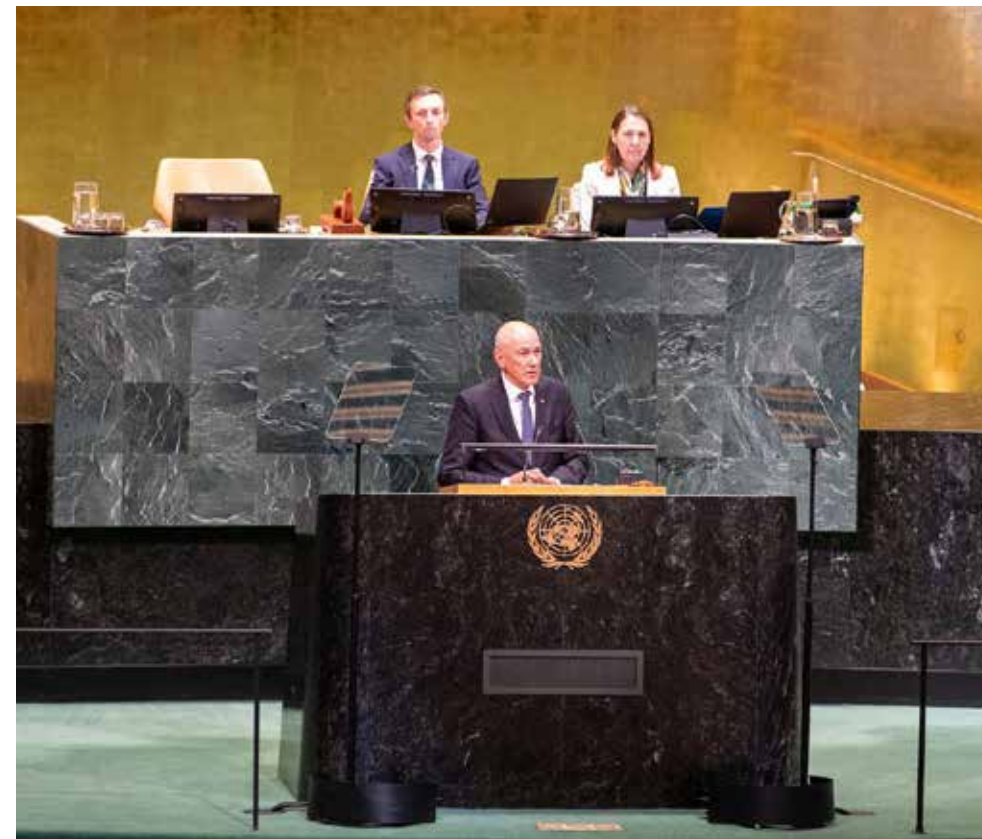
Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala were the first world leaders to visit Ukraine after the start of the war in 2022, where they met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Photo: KPV archive



The President of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic, Giorgia Meloni, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, decided at their recent meeting in Rome to elevate cooperation between the two countries to a strategic level. The ensuing plan will focus on defence, energy, connectivity, research, innovation and culture. The two countries will also coordinate their efforts to protect the external borders and return migrants. Photo: KPV archive



Prime Minister Janez Janša, accompanied by his wife Urška Bačovnik Janša and the Slovenian delegation, met with His Holiness Pope Leo XIV in the Vatican. They discussed bilateral relations between Slovenia and the Holy See, Ukraine, the Middle East, the Western Balkans, peace and artificial intelligence. He presented the Pope with copies of the poem Zdravljica in Slovenian and English – part of the poem forms Slovenia's national anthem – and a tennis racket signed by Slovenian best tennis player Žiga Šeško. His personal gifts to the Pope included a cross and his two books. He also invited the Pope to visit Slovenia. Photo: KPV archive



Prime Minister Janez Janša addressed the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. In his speech, he called on the international community to turn words into action, eliminate double standards in responding to global crises and strengthen the UN's credibility through consistent respect for universal principles. Photo: KPV archive

IMPRESSIONS OF SLOVENIA

Slovenia in Their Hearts

TEXT BY ANA ZARABEC

What does Slovenia look like through the eyes of a diplomat discovering it for the first time? What does someone who once said goodbye to Slovenia, but still carries it in their memories, recognise in it? And what does it mean to a generation of young people born after independence, for whom an independent Slovenia is the only homeland they have ever known? Their stories are different, but they have something special in common: Slovenia has left its mark on them and found a lasting place in their hearts.



Photo: Personal archive

His Excellency Jiří Kuděla, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the Republic of Slovenia

I admire Slovenia for its natural diversity, beautiful sights and the way its people care for the environment. Czechs and Slovenians are very close and share similar values; all the Czech Republic lacks is the sea. Living in Slovenia has taught me to value my free time and work-life balance more.



Photo: Personal archive

His Excellency Giuseppe Cavagna, Ambassador of the Italian Republic to the Republic of Slovenia

My wife and I have felt warmly welcomed in Slovenia since the start of my mandate, and that first impression has been reinforced with each passing day. Kind people, excellent facilities and beautiful nature make Slovenia a truly welcoming place.

What is different about Slovenia? To begin with, the pace of life. In Slovenia it is much gentler compared to most other parts of Europe. The overall quality of life is also pretty high, helped by an excellent work-life balance. And yes, coffee-drinking rituals are different: there is no espresso at the counter here...

I learned about the importance of minorities – Italians in Primorska, Slovenians in Friuli Venezia Giulia – in building bridges across borders, the power of friendship and cooperation among neighbours and the philosophy beyond the dual.



Photo: Željko Stevanič/IFP

Her Excellency Sylvia Groneick, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Slovenia

I admire Slovenia's stunning cultural diversity and vibrant cultural life, be it in form of its excellent museums, even in small towns, its wide variety of festivals – from the Ljubljana Festival and Festival Lent in Maribor to Punk Rock Holiday in Tolmin – and its hundreds of music schools and public libraries throughout the country. It is no wonder that Slovenia has one of the highest numbers of writers and poets per capita in Europe. For Slovenians, culture is not just a hobby – it provides social cohesion, values and identity.

What really stands out is that even small communities boast impressive local infrastructure – especially when it comes to sports facilities. Go to Horjul, and you'll find a modern basketball court where young people play at 9pm in the evening; go to Velenje beach for a bit of windsurfing; or go to Kočevje for a state-of-the-art climbing hall. Many Slovenians love living outside the big cities – not just because Slovenia's natural environment is beautiful, but because the local infrastructure is so well developed. Something that Germany can really learn from Slovenia!

I am still in the process of learning the beautiful Slovenian language – and, in doing so, discovering the role that language plays in the country. Slovenians care deeply about their language because they know that without the Slovenian language, there would have been no Slovenian independence, no Slovenian statehood. So, my three favourite words in Slovenian? *Dober tek, kolesarska pot, dežela.*



Photo: Embassy of the French Republic in Slovenia archive

Her Excellency Fabienne Runyo, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Republic of Slovenia

For more than a year now, I've been discovering Slovenia's rich history, particularly its connections with France: from the legacy left by Napoleon during the Illyrian Provinces, to the history of Tržič and Sainte-Marie-aux-mines or to the mining tradition that united the people and industries of our two countries, as evidenced today by the links between Trbovlje and Sallaumines, or between Velenje and Vienna.

Slovenia's geographical location is unique, and the great diversity of ecosystems within its compact territory is a major asset. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, between the Germanic, Balkan and Mediterranean worlds, it only takes a little over an hour to travel from the Alps to the Adriatic coast. What is also unique in Slovenia is the vivacity of its regions and the commitment towards industry, innovation and economic development also outside of Ljubljana.

I particularly appreciate this great diversity and these influences: the lakes and mountains, of course, but also the typically Venetian architecture in Piran and Koper. Above all, however, I am amazed by the beauty of the landscapes. Each valley offers new perspectives and surprises, each more beautiful than the last. I never get tired of it.



Photo: Personal archive

Her Excellency Asel K. Roberts, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Slovenia

These first months have been a privilege. From Bled to Koper, what stays with me is Slovenia itself: the warmth of its people, the beauty of its landscapes, and its deeply rooted culture. I have learned that to truly know Slovenia, you must experience it. I am only just beginning, so I will keep traveling, keep listening, and keep working on my slovenščina. *Hvala za vso gostoljubnost, Slovenija!*



Photo: Personal archive

His Excellency Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Republic of Slovenia

The snow-capped mountains, the emerald green rivers, the glittering lakes and the lush forests that make Slovenia an enchanted land of unspoiled nature are only complemented by its hospitable and gracious people and the depth and richness of its language and culture. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to help strengthen the friendship between India and Slovenia and to craft a partnership for the common prosperity of our peoples. As we prepare to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the establishment of India-Slovenia diplomatic ties in 2027, our relationship is destined to reach greater heights and new milestones.

Ana Boltežar, Argentina

This was my first time in Slovenia. When I arrived, I was filled with joy and pride: after so much planning and so many rehearsals, I could hardly believe that I was finally here. I returned home with so many wonderful memories. It was particularly important to me to visit the place where my grandparents had lived, as well as the places we had talked about during our Slovenian language course.



Young Slovenians from Argentina at the peak of Triglav. Photo: RAST LV

Slovenia is a wonderful country with beautiful landscapes. Back home, we say that Slovenia is our second home, and that is exactly how we felt during our visit.

If I had to name the place that impressed me most, I would choose Triglav without hesitation. We spent unforgettable days there, talked a great deal and walked through magnificent landscapes. At times, I found it difficult because I suffer from vertigo and was often afraid. But our guides and group leaders were always there to help and encourage us.

Reaching the summit was the best feeling of all. Not only because I had initially doubted that I would make it, but also because it was only when I stood there that I truly realised how far we had come and how much ground we had covered. There were difficult moments, of course, but it was an exceptionally beautiful experience.

When we returned home on 30 August, I was very sad that the journey was over. It left us with so many memories. Most importantly, we all enjoyed ourselves and had fun together. Our group leaders accompanied us throughout, helping us and teaching us important lessons that will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

I hope that I will return to Slovenia one day, relive all the wonderful moments from this visit and create new memories.

Young Slovenians

I was not yet born when Slovenia gained independence, but I clearly remember the stories my grandfather used to tell me whenever I visited him. As a child, I never really listened to them; today, however, I understand what an enormous step independence was for Slovenia. *(Miha, 26)*

We often talked at home about how important Slovenia's gaining independence was. Those stories have given me a deep respect for the people who believed in Slovenia at the time and did something for their country. Freedom, responsibility and a sense of community are also important values for our generation. *(Kaja, 24)*

I always used to say that Slovenia was a small country. Now I think that is precisely its greatest advantage. Everything is close by. In a single day, you can be in the mountains, by the sea, in a city or surrounded by nature. You know all your neighbours and everyone in your local community. Brilliant! *(Laura, 25)*

When I hear the Slovenian national anthem at a major competition, I am filled with a special sense of pride. It always gives me goosebumps. At that moment, you realise that you are part of something greater. I would like to hold on to that feeling beyond the sporting arena as well. *(Mitja, 22)*

What matters most to me is being able to fulfil my potential here at home, close to my family and friends. That is why I am not worried about the future: Slovenia offers more opportunities than you might think, provided you are willing to seize them. *(Lina, 23)*

It is only when you move abroad for an extended period that you begin to appreciate the things you once took for granted. Today, I admire Slovenia's natural beauty, tranquillity and quality of life more than ever. That is why I am always happy to return home, where a bowl of homemade beef soup is waiting for me. I have never found anything quite like it anywhere else. *(David, 27)*



Photo: Depositphotos



IN FOCUS

The national flag of Slovenia features three equal horizontal bands of white, blue, and red, with the coat of arms of Slovenia located in the upper hoist side of the flag centred in the white and blue bands. The coat of arms is a shield with the image of Mount Triglav in white against a blue background at the centre; beneath it are two wavy blue lines representing the Adriatic Sea and local rivers, and above it are three six-pointed golden stars arranged in an inverted triangle which are taken from the coat of arms of the Counts of Celje. Photo: Ukrom archive

THE STORY OF THE SLOVENIAN FLAG

From Wolkova Street to the Summit of Triglav

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

On Wolkova Street in the heart of Ljubljana, passers-by hurry about their daily business, yet few know that it was here that one of the most important symbols of the Slovenian nation was born. From that historic moment, the Slovenian flag has made a long journey – from a symbol of national awakening to the emblem of an independent state.

A commemorative plaque on the façade of the building at 8 Wolkova Street marks an event that took place on 7 April 1848. On that day, the Slovenian patriot and student Lovro Toman, together with a group of like-minded companions, first hoisted the white-blue-red tricolour on Slovenian soil. It was a courageous act and a clear response to the flying of the German flag on the Ljubljana Castle tower.

In memory of this historic event, 7 April is today observed as Slovenian Flag Day – a celebration of a symbol that has expressed the identity of the Slovenian nation for almost two centuries.

The story of the Slovenian tricolour, however, did not begin in Ljubljana. It was first designed by Slovenian students in Vienna in March 1848, during the Springtime of Nations, when peoples across Europe demanded greater national rights and political recognition. Soon afterwards, the flag arrived in Ljubljana, where it became a symbol of the Slovenian national awakening. Its white, blue and red colours were not chosen by chance – they reflected the historic colours and coat of arms of the province of Carniola, colours that Slovenians came to recognise as their own.

Over the course of history, the Slovenian flag acquired ever greater significance. In the nineteenth century, it represented Slovenian cultural and national identity, while during the struggle for independence it became a

symbol of the nation's aspiration for statehood.

As Slovenia moved towards independence, the tricolour took on an even deeper significance – it became a symbol of the anticipation of a defining moment in the nation's history.



Lovro Toman (1827-1870). Photo: Wikipedia

When the Colours Became a Homeland

One of the most memorable moments in the history of the Slovenian flag took place on 12 June 1991, when the Slovenian tricolour was flown for the first time on the summit of Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain. It was raised by members of the mountain rescue service, led by Janez Brojan, the long-serving head of the Mojstrana Mountain Rescue Service.

At that time, the flag did not yet bear the national coat of arms, but it carried an exceptionally powerful message: Slovenia stood on the threshold of independence.

The idea for this symbolic ascent was no coincidence. In the days leading up to the independence celebration, there was a desire to create an image that would express the bond between the Slovenian nation and its highest peak, while clearly heralding the birth of a new state. The mountain rescuers were the natural choice for such a mission – people who had long embodied courage, solidarity and a deep connection with the mountains. They transported the flag to the summit with the assistance of the Air Support Unit, while the event was documented by photographer Joco Žnidaršič. The photographs taken on

the summit of Triglav soon became some of the most iconic images of Slovenia's path to independence.

A few days later, on 26 June 1991, during the ceremony proclaiming Slovenia's independence in Trg Republike square in Ljubljana, the national flag of the Republic of Slovenia bearing the new coat of arms was officially raised for the first time.

The coat of arms features the silhouette of Triglav, two wavy blue lines symbolising Slovenia's sea and rivers and the three golden stars the Counts of Celje.

A Promise of the Future

The Slovenian flag is therefore much more than a national symbol. Its colours tell stories of the courage of the students on Wolf Street, of generations who preserved Slovenian identity, and of the moment when the flag fluttered atop Triglav as a promise of the future. Perhaps this is its greatest strength: it connects the past with the present and reminds us that great chapters of history often begin with small acts – with a single flag, a single idea and people who believe they can reach the summit.



The official flag of the Republic of Slovenia (with the added coat of arms) was publicly raised for the first time on June 26, 1991, at Republic Square in Ljubljana upon the proclamation of Slovenian independence. Photo: Joco Žnidaršič, held by the Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia



Slovenian Flag Day commemorates 7 April 1848, when Lovro Toman, a patriotic Slovenian student, and his like-minded colleagues first hoisted the Slovenian tricolour at Wolfova ulica 8 in Ljubljana. Photo: Heraldica Slovenica archive

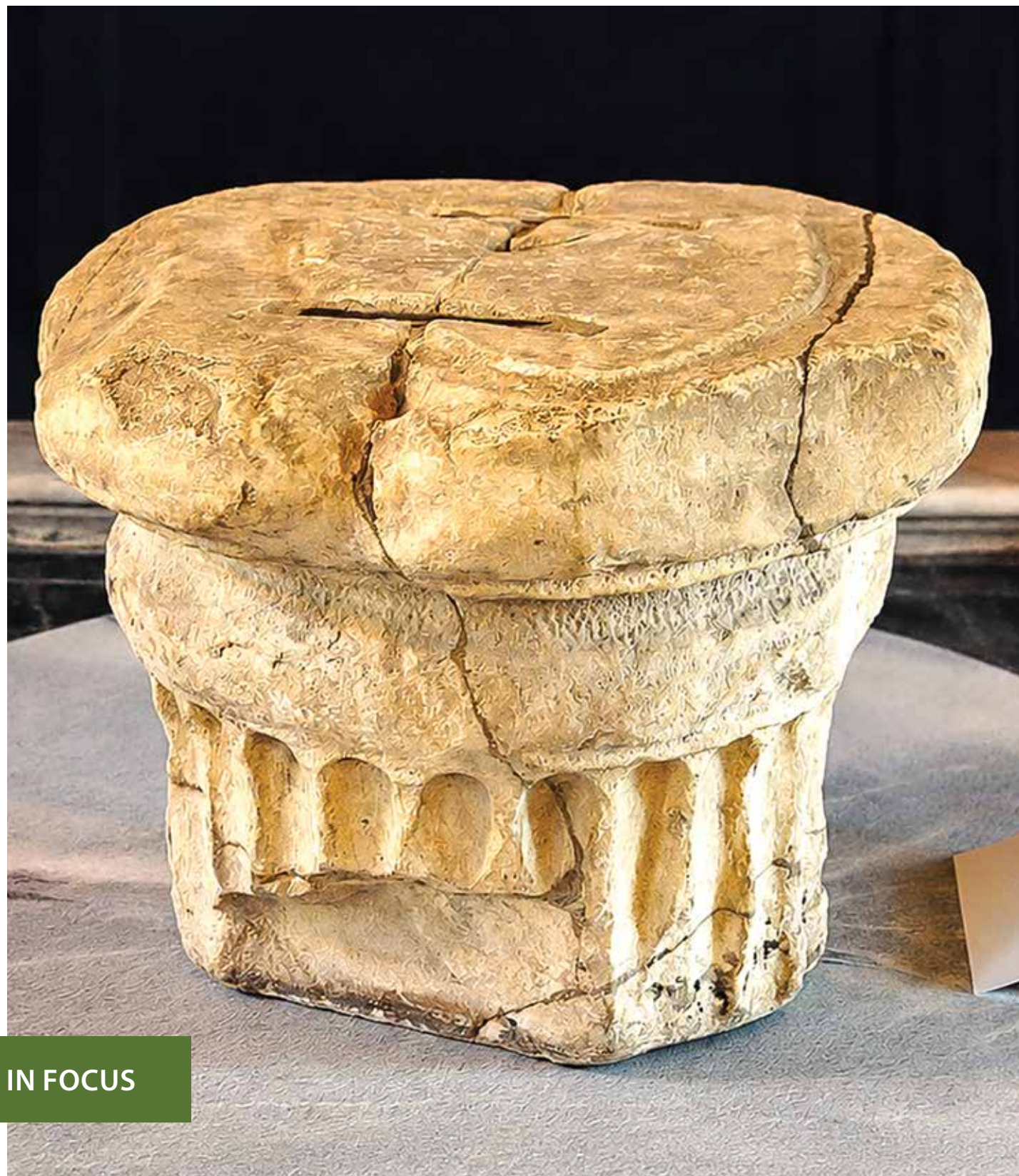


PRINCE'S STONE

The Prince's Stone is one of the most recognisable symbols of Carantania, an early medieval Slavic principality that united a large part of the Alpine and Pannonian Slavic world between the 7th and 11th centuries. On Gosposvetsko Polje (Zollfeld) in present-day Austrian Carinthia, Carantanian dukes were installed in a unique ceremony conducted in the Slavic language.

The stone, which originates from the Roman column in the ancient town of Virunum, is now kept in Klagenfurt. Its symbolic value remains an important part of the historical heritage of Slovenia and the wider Alpine region. The Prince's Stone is regarded as one of the key symbols of Carantania, as well as of Slovenian history and statehood.

Photo: Wikipedia



IN FOCUS

Prince's Stone. Photo: Wikipedia

FROM THE PRINCE’S STONE TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The Carinthian Enthronement Ceremony,
Jean Bodin and Thomas Jefferson

TEXT BY PROF. DR BOŠTJAN MARKO TURK

The enthronement of the Dukes of Carinthia, which evolved from the earlier enthronement of the Carantanian princes, represents one of the most fascinating political rituals in European history.

The ceremony, which survived until 1414, when it was performed for the last time at the enthronement of Duke Ernest the Iron, was not merely a solemn ceremony, but a deeply symbolic act of the transfer of power.

The Carinthian enthronement ceremony and the contractual nature of political authority

The ceremony consisted of three main parts, the most important of which took place at the Prince's Stone at Karnburg (Slovenian: Krnski grad). The new duke arrived dressed as a peasant, leading a bull and a mare, while an hereditary free peasant, or kosez, was already seated on the stone.

Speaking in Slovenian, he asked the duke whether he would be an upright judge, whether he would protect the land, widows and orphans, and whether he was of the Christian faith and freeborn.

Only after the questions had been answered affirmatively was the seat “purchased” for the duke with 60 denarii, a bull, a mare, and a promise to exempt the peasant’s house from tribute.

The peasant then lightly struck the duke on the cheek as a reminder of the duty of justice and yielded the stone to him. The duke sat upon it, pointed his sword towards all four directions, and drank water from the peasant’s hat. Through these acts, he symbolically affirmed his commitment to justice, humility and service to the land. This was followed by a Mass at Maria Saal and a ceremony at the Duke’s Chair on the Zollfeld, where the duke received homage and granted fiefs.

What made the ceremony distinctive was its pronounced contractual character. Political authority was presented not merely as a matter of divine grace or hereditary right, but as a relationship between the ruler and the community.

The people, symbolically represented by the free peasant or kosez, required the duke to act in a certain manner: to rule justly, protect the land and the vulnerable, and respect the community. The political contract between the ruler and the people was thus not merely an abstract idea, but was publicly enacted and ritually affirmed.

It was precisely this feature that later attracted the attention of European political thinkers. The Carinthian ceremony represented a rare historical example of a system in which authority was not merely the ruler’s privilege, but a relationship based on consent and mutual obligations between the ruler and the people.

Jean Bodin, Jefferson and the European tradition of popular sovereignty

The French legal theorist and philosopher Jean Bodin (1530–1596) described the Carinthian enthronement ceremony in detail in his seminal work *Les six livres de la République* (*The Six Books of the Republic, or The Six Books of the Commonwealth, 1576*). His account was based on earlier sources, including an account by Pope Pius II (Enea Silvio Piccolomini). Bodin did not present the ceremony merely as a historical curiosity, but incorporated it into a broader discussion of the origins and nature of sovereignty.

Bodin referred to the Carinthian ceremony in the famous phrase: “un rite qui n’a point son pareil dans tout le monde” – “a rite that has no equal anywhere in the world”.

This statement is significant because it shows that Bodin recognised something politically exceptional in the Carinthian example. Although he himself advocated permanent, indivisible and strong sovereign authority, he saw in the Carinthian ceremony a concrete example of a relationship between the ruler and the community in which authority was linked to certain conditions and obligations.

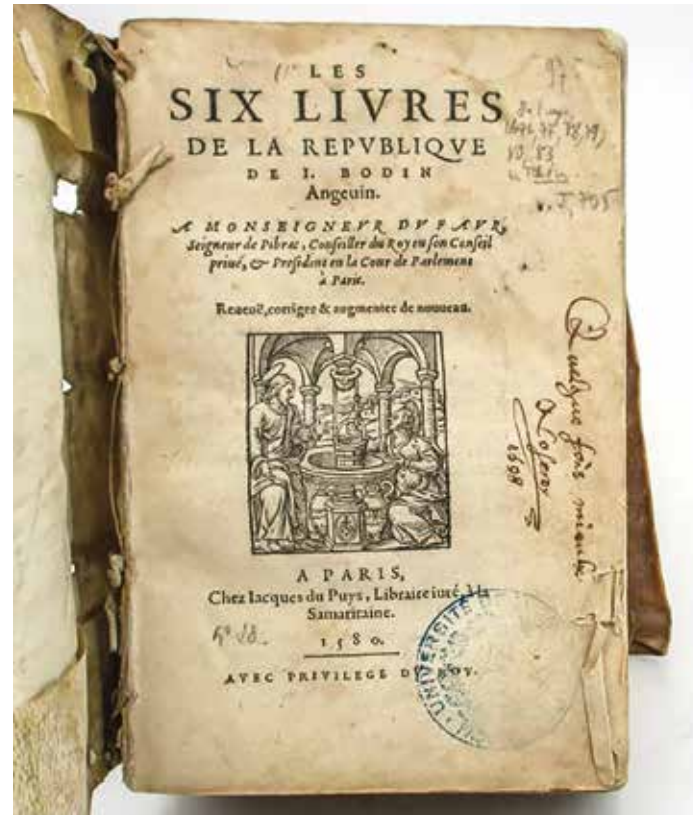
Bodin’s account thus placed a local medieval custom within a broader European political context. The Carinthian enthronement ceremony evolved from a historical practice into an example that could be invoked in discussions of the relationship between the ruler and the people, the origins of legitimate authority, and the nature of sovereignty.

Particularly interesting is the fact that Bodin’s work later came into the possession of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson had a 1580 edition of Bodin’s *The Six Books of the Republic* in his personal library. On the page where Bodin describes the Carinthian enthronement ceremony, he marked the passage: before the printed signature I, he wrote the letter T. This was one of only two such markings in the entire book. The marking itself, of course, does not prove that Jefferson derived his political theory from this passage, but it is significant as evidence that he owned the book and marked precisely the passage in which Bodin discussed the Carinthian ceremony.

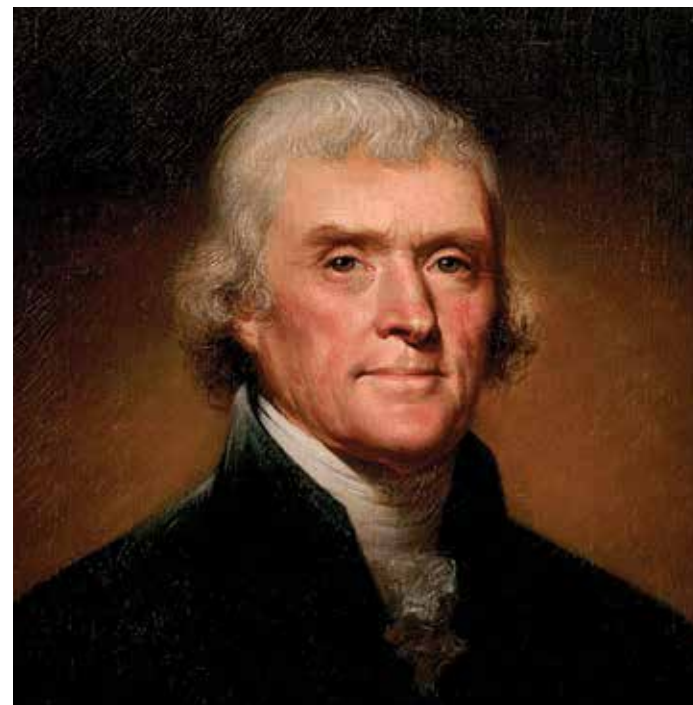
Jefferson was also one of the most prominent Francophiles among the American Founding Fathers.

He had a high level of proficiency in French, and read French authors in the original; moreover, during his residence in Paris from 1785 to 1789, he became directly immersed in the intellectual world of the French Enlightenment. He therefore read Bodin’s account within the broader context of the French legal and political tradition.

However, the Carinthian ceremony should not be regarded as a direct source of Jefferson’s political thought. His understanding of natural rights, popular sovereignty and limited government developed within a broader European intellectual environment in which John Locke, Algernon Sidney and other political philosophers played an important role. The significance of Bodin’s account lies elsewhere: it offered Jefferson a concrete



Bodin’s The Six Books of the Republic. Photo: Wikipedia



Official Presidential portrait of Thomas Jefferson (by Rembrandt Peale, 1800). Photo: Wikipedia

European historical example in which the relationship between authority and the community was visible.

This was particularly important during the American dispute with the British Crown.

Criticism of the authority of George III did not have to be justified solely by new Enlightenment principles or by a revolutionary break with the past.

It could also be linked to an older European political tradition that recognised examples in which the legitimacy of authority derived not merely from birth, hereditary right or force, but from the relationship with the community and the fulfilment of certain duties.

From the Carinthian ceremony to the Declaration of Independence

It is precisely here that we find an important parallel with the 1776 Declaration of Independence, whose principal author was Jefferson. Its fundamental principle is that governments are established to secure the rights of the people and that they derive their just powers from the “consent of the governed”. When a government becomes unacceptable, the people have the right to alter or abolish it.

There is an important structural parallel between the Carinthian enthronement ceremony and this principle. In both cases, political authority is not presented as the ruler’s private property, but rather as a relationship between the ruler and the community. Before assuming power, the Carinthian duke must accept the terms of his rule; in the Declaration, the legitimacy of the government is tied to the consent of those over whom it governs. In both cases, political authority is linked to responsibility towards the community.

This connection was explored in particular by the Slovenian-American historian Joseph Felician in his work *The Genesis of the Contractual Theory and the Installation of the Dukes of Carinthia* (1967).

Felician interpreted the Carinthian enthronement ceremony as an important historical example of a contractual conception of authority and drew attention to the significance of Jefferson’s marking in Bodin’s book. In his view, Bodin’s account enabled the Carinthian ceremony to enter European political theory as a concrete example of a contractual relationship between the people and the ruler.

Felician’s thesis is important, but it must be approached with caution. The Carinthian ceremony cannot be presented as the sole or direct source of Jefferson’s political thought.

It is more accurate to speak of a historical precedent which, through Bodin’s work, became part of the European intellectual world from which Jefferson also drew.

The particular significance of the Carinthian example lay in the fact that it was not an abstract theory: the contractual relationship between the community and the ruler was embodied in the ceremony itself.

The Carinthian enthronement ceremony may therefore be understood as one of the early European embodiments of the principle that political authority is not the private property of the ruler, but a public relationship between those who govern and the community. Bodin gave this medieval ceremony a place within the European theory of sovereignty, while Jefferson lived at a time when similar ideas were being reformulated in the modern language of natural rights, the consent of the governed, and popular sovereignty.

The historical thread thus connects the Prince’s Stone, Bodin’s French political theory, and Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.

It does not prove the direct transmission of a single idea from Carantania to America, but it does point to something broader and historically more significant: political ideas travel across centuries, are transformed in different cultural settings, and acquire new meanings. The Carinthian ceremony may therefore be understood as one of the European historical precedents for the idea that the legitimacy of political authority entails the consent of the community, the accountability of the ruler, and the right of the people to exercise political judgement.

This historical connection later also became part of Slovenian-American cultural memory.

Its symbolic significance was highlighted by Bill Clinton, the first US president to visit Slovenia, in 1999.

In this way, the centuries-long historical connection, from the Carantanian tradition and the Carinthian enthronement ceremony, through Bodin’s French political thought, to the American conception of popular sovereignty, was also incorporated into contemporary historical memory.



HAYRACK

The hayrack is considered a unique architectural gem of Slovenian vernacular heritage, with around 80% of all the world's hayracks found in Slovenia. Originally, their primary purpose was to dry hay, grain and maize. The first written descriptions of hayracks date back more than 300 years. One of their most remarkable features is their exceptional wooden construction. Master craftsmen often built hayracks without using a single metal nail, joining the wooden elements with wooden pegs and meticulously crafted carpentry joints. To ensure the harvest dried as effectively as possible, hayracks were erected in sunny, well-ventilated spots where the wind could do the rest.

Their recognisability extends far beyond Slovenia's borders. Even King Charles III owns a traditional Slovenian hayrack, which he received as a gift during his visit to Slovenia and now stands on one of his estates in the United Kingdom.

There are many different types of hayrack in Slovenia, including single, extended single, parallel single, low, extended and double hayracks. They are also known by various regional names, such as *kozolec*, *jezer* and *topljar*. Every hayrack is unique – its shape, size and decorative details reflect the surrounding landscape, local building traditions and the craftsmanship passed down through generations of master carpenters. Hayracks can also be admired at the open-air museum Land of Hayracks (Dežela kozolcev), home to 19 carefully preserved hayracks. Among them stands the Simončič Toplar, the largest hayrack in Slovenia. Built in 1936, it has been designated a cultural monument of national importance.

Photo: Matej Leskovšek



ECONOMY

Krka primarily manufactures generic medicines for domestic and international markets. Photo: Krka, d. d., Novo mesto archive

THE SLOVENIAN ECONOMY: 35 YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION

How Slovenia has Developed into one of Europe's Most Open and Innovative Economies

TEXT BY PETRA PREŠEREN GOLOB

When Slovenia gained independence in 1991, it began transforming its socialist economic system into a modern market economy. Two key milestones on its path were accession to the European Union in 2004 and joining the Schengen Area in 2007, both of which strengthened the country's integration into the European economic area.

Thirty-five years later, Slovenia has one of Europe's most export-oriented economies, and its competitive edge is built on knowledge, innovation and high added value. Exports of goods and services account for around 80 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, while Slovenian companies successfully operate in more than 170 markets worldwide.

From manufacturing to knowledge and innovation

At the beginning of the 1990s, Slovenia's economy was dominated by traditional industrial activities. Today, manufacturing remains a key pillar of the Slovenian economy, accounting for around one fifth of economic output and placing the country among Europe's strongest industrial economies.

At the same time, the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, the electrical industry, the automotive industry, information and communication technologies, and business services are playing an increasingly important role.

An important part of Slovenia's automotive tradition is the Revoz factory in Novo mesto, where Renault vehicles have been produced for more than five decades. Revoz, which is now focusing on the production of electric vehicles, has become one of the Renault Group's key manufacturing sites in Europe. Other successful Slovenian companies include Krka, one of

Europe's leading generic pharmaceutical companies, operating in more than 70 markets worldwide; Kolektor, a global provider of high-tech solutions for the automotive industry, the energy sector and smart infrastructure; and Adria Mobil, one of Europe's leading manufacturers of motorhomes and caravans.

Another globally recognised high-tech company is Dewesoft, which has been working with NASA for more than two decades.

Its measurement systems were also used in the Artemis II mission, which carried a crew towards the Moon for the first time since 1972.

Increasingly attractive to international investors

The development of Slovenia's economy has also attracted numerous international investors. Foreign direct investment amounted to approximately EUR 24 billion in 2025.

Increasingly, these investments are being directed towards research and development centres, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced manufacturing and green technologies.

The Japanese company Yaskawa, one of the world's leading manufacturers of industrial robots, has established its main

European manufacturing and logistics facility in Kočevje. The new distribution centre and production complex further strengthen Slovenia's position in the field of advanced robotics.

Among the largest investors are also the pharmaceutical companies Sandoz and Novartis, which are expanding their development and production capacities for biological medicines in Slovenia.

Slovenia is the largest producer of medicines in Central and Eastern Europe, and its pharmaceutical industry is among the strongest in the European Union.

Slovenia's attractiveness as an investment destination is underpinned by its strategic location, membership of the European Union, the euro area and the Schengen Area, a highly skilled workforce and a high-quality research environment. This is also demonstrated by the fact that numerous international companies are not only expanding their manufacturing operations in Slovenia but are also establishing research and development activities and integrating Slovenian companies into their global supply chains.



Novartis. Photo: Jure Makovec/STA

Looking to the future

Thirty-five years after gaining independence, Slovenia continues to demonstrate that economic success is not determined by a country's size. It aims to build its future on high value-added activities while creating a predictable, stable and competitive business environment.

The future growth of the Slovenian economy will therefore be driven by artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, smart manufacturing, advanced materials, industrial digitalisation, the circular economy and green energy technologies.

Slovenia's goal is not merely to attract investment, but to foster an environment where new ideas emerge, innovative solutions are developed and high-quality jobs are created. It is therefore increasingly positioning itself as a partner in developing the technologies of the future.



Revoz in Novo mesto has been an important part of the European automotive industry for over five decades and is the only car factory in Slovenia. Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA



Dewesoft is building the City of Acrobats in Trbovlje, a 40,000 square metre technology complex dedicated to research, development, production and support for start-ups. Photo: Boštjan Podlogar/STA



Yaskawa develops and manufactures industrial robots and advanced automation solutions in Slovenia to be used in manufacturing worldwide. Photo: Jakob Pintar/STA

ECONOMY



Sustainable development is not just a goal, but a solid foundation for the future. The green transition requires harmony between technology, the economy, people, and nature. Every building block counts. Photo: ChatGPT

SLOVENIAN SOVEREIGN HOLDING

Assets Linking the Country's Economy and Resilience

TEXT BY SLOVENIAN SOVEREIGN HOLDING

Slovenia has entrusted the management of its corporate holdings to Slovenian Sovereign Holding (SSH), an overarching professional asset manager. Prudent, responsible and long-term management of state assets is of fundamental importance to the economy and to all citizens.

SSH manages state holdings in 81 companies spanning various sectors, such as transport, energy, tourism, banking, insurance, pharmaceuticals, forestry, food production and telecommunications. The portfolio includes some of Slovenia's largest companies. At the end of 2025, the total book value of the state-owned holdings was EUR 14 billion.

These companies employ around 81,000 people, accounting for approximately one in every twelve employed persons in the country.

In 2026, SSH's portfolio companies are expected to invest EUR 2.5 billion. These funds are directed towards renewable energy sources, the electricity grid, railways, and the digitalisation of business operations — namely, infrastructure that will be in use for decades to come, and which will build the state's resilience.

Historically, the management of the state's corporate holdings was the responsibility of individual ministries, but today it is consolidated in a single institution under a model that separates the State's role as an owner of equity holdings from its other functions. The National Assembly adopts the strategy for managing state's holdings, which serves as a basis for an annual management plan prepared by the SSH and approved by the Government. SSH reports annually to the National Assembly on the results achieved.

Management performance and return for the owner

Management performance is measured by the rate of return on the portfolio. In 2025, the net return on equity (ROE) of the companies managed by SSH was 8.9%, compared to the projected 7.1% in the annual management plan. This is one of the strongest results of the past decade, following returns falling below 3% in 2022 due to the energy crisis. The companies in the portfolio generate a total net annual revenue of around EUR 23 billion, with an average value added per employee of EUR 90,000.

Between 2022 and 2025, the State received approximately EUR 1.4 billion in dividends, the majority of which flowed directly into the state budget.

Since SSH's establishment in 2014, over EUR 3 billion has been returned to the state budget and other state owners.

Contribution to post-flood reconstruction in 2023

In August 2023, Slovenia suffered the worst natural disaster in the history of our independent state. Floods and landslides damaged bridges, roads, and residential and commercial buildings, affecting a third of the country's municipalities.

According to the law, SSH's profits were allocated to the Fund for the Reconstruction of Slovenia after the floods.

In 2025, SSH generated a net profit of EUR 85.7 million — the highest in its history. Between 2024 and 2026, SSH contributed almost EUR 250 million to the reconstruction fund. SSH’s strong business performance thus directly supported the country’s reconstruction efforts.

Resilience as a prerequisite for the stable functioning of the State

Resilience is a cornerstone of Slovenia’s financial stability, systemic reliability, and national security. It is also an integral part of responsible and long-term-oriented corporate governance.

State-owned enterprises manage a significant proportion of the country’s critical infrastructure. They provide energy, transport, telecommunications and financial services, without which public services and the defence system would be unable to function.



The Styrian Motorway, Vransko–Blagovica section. DARS is the largest state-owned company in the SSH portfolio, accounting for around a quarter of its value. It manages the motorway network carrying the majority of the country’s freight and passenger traffic, as well as connections with neighbouring markets. Photo: DARS archive

This is true in normal circumstances, but even more so during periods of heightened readiness and in emergency security situations.

Companies with state ownership shares therefore bear a particular responsibility for ensuring a stable supply and uninterrupted operations. In recent years, SSH has placed greater emphasis on resilience.

A pillar of economic and social stability

Well-managed state assets generate returns that are channelled back into the state budget, making a significant contribution to the citizens’ welfare. The management of the state’s corporate holdings is evaluated based not only on performance in a given financial year, but also on the preservation or increase of asset value over the coming decades, while ensuring the continued provision of essential daily services.



A new passenger train operated by the Slovenske železnice (Slovenian Railways). Slovenske železnice is a state-owned company that operates railway infrastructure forming part of the Republic of Slovenia’s critical infrastructure. In 2025, it carried 20.9 million passengers — a quarter more than the previous year — while also serving as a key freight transport provider between the Port of Koper and Central European markets. Photo: Slovenian Sovereign Holding archive



The Centre for Cyber Security and Resilience of Telekom Slovenije. Telekom Slovenije is a majority state-owned company and the operator of critical telecommunications infrastructure. It’s Cyber Security Centre, one of the most advanced in the region, continuously monitors and counteracts cyber threats to the networks on which public services, businesses and everyday communications depend. Photo: Telekom Slovenije archive



SOČA

The emerald-green River Soča rises in the heart of the Julian Alps beneath Mount Jalovec, where it emerges spectacularly from the karst underground in the mystical valley of Zadnja Trenta. Its otherworldly turquoise colour has inspired artists for centuries; the finest literary tribute to it was paid by the poet Simon Gregorčič whose famous lines “*You are splendid, limpid daughter of the heights*” celebrate its beauty. This emerald beauty with its untamed torrential character carves out deep gorges and creates a paradise for water sports. During the First World War, the surrounding area was also the scene of some of the fiercest fighting on the Isonzo Front.

As the river leaves the mountain gorges and flows towards the Goriška Plain, it is crossed by the Solkan Bridge. This engineering masterpiece boasts the world’s largest stone arch of any railway bridge and was built from 4,533 cut stone blocks. The river’s natural splendour has even captivated Hollywood, with scenes from *The Chronicles of Narnia* filmed along its banks. The Soča remains a timeless symbol, uniting unspoilt mountain wilderness, a rich cultural heritage and outstanding human ingenuity in a single flow.

Photo: Depositphotos.com

Today, Slovenia is a Part of Major Research Networks

TEXT BY PETRA PREŠEREN GOLOB

Upon gaining independence, Slovenia lost a significant part of the research infrastructure previously shared with other republics of the former Yugoslavia. In 35 years, it has built a modern research system, integrated into international research networks.

Slovenian researchers collaborate in finding answers to the biggest questions of our time, from space exploration and artificial intelligence to new ways of treating diseases and sustainable solutions.

Slovenian satellites and space exploration

All of the above is corroborated by Slovenia's full membership of CERN (the European Organisation for Nuclear Research) and the European Space Agency, which opens up opportunities for cooperation, business and education.

But Slovenia's presence in space reaches even further: in 2020, the first Slovenian satellites, the NEMO-HD and Trisat, were launched into space.

Trisat is the first satellite that has been fully designed, manufactured and assembled in Slovenia, developed jointly by the University of Maribor and the Slovenian company Skylabs. In 2022, the two satellites were joined by a third one, Trisat-R.

Space exploration also continues on the ground. At the Planica Nordic Centre, researchers from the Jožef Stefan Institute and the European Space Agency study how extreme conditions, such as weightlessness, affect the human body.

The Jožef Stefan Institute is also Slovenia's leading research institution in the fields of natural sciences, engineering and life sciences.

Among other things, their researchers participated in confirming the existence of the Higgs boson, and together with researchers from the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of the University of Ljubljana, they were the first in the world to use liquid crystals in microscopically small circuits that operate exclusively on light. Recently, they succeeded in 3D-printing microscopic structures directly inside living human cells, opening up new possibilities for research into intracellular processes.

From new treatments to solving environmental challenges

In the period since Slovenia gained independence, the National Institute of Chemistry and the National Institute of Biology have also evolved into internationally renowned research centres.

The National Institute of Chemistry achieves cutting-edge results in the fields of synthetic biology, gene and cell therapies, artificial proteins and batteries.

One of its most notable discoveries in medicine is a new approach to treating cancer with immunotherapy, which consists of boosting the immune system by introducing specific proteins and inducing cell death in cancer cells. As a result of its sustainability efforts, the Institute has developed efficient organic cathode materials for use in batteries, enabling the production of safer batteries with lower content of lithium and other metals.

With Trisat, Slovenian scientists and engineers have demonstrated that even an extremely small satellite, weighing barely four kilograms, can incorporate an exceptionally wide range of functions. Photo: Skylabs archive



The human centrifuge at the Planica Nordic Centre is an advanced research facility for studying the effects of artificial gravity and simulated space conditions on the human body. Photo: Marjan Verč

The National Institute of Biology generates cutting-edge knowledge in the fields of biotechnology and systems biology, genetic toxicology and cancer biology, ecology and evolutionary biology, as well as marine and coastal ecosystem research, and applies this knowledge to address environmental, health, food-related, and societal challenges.

As part of an international research team, its researchers discovered a previously unknown ecosystem beneath deep-sea hydrothermal vents at the East Pacific Rise.

Together with researchers from the University of Ljubljana, they developed a sustainable biotechnological method of protecting potatoes from the Colorado potato beetle. Their work clearly demonstrates how cutting-edge basic science translates into everyday solutions.

Slovenia has been co-developing artificial intelligence for decades

Research in the field of artificial intelligence is no less ambitious, and Slovenia boasts a tradition spanning more than half a century.

This year, the Slovenian Artificial Intelligence Factory project was initiated, one of 19 such factories being created in the EU.

Positioned at the heart of this factory will be a supercomputer that will provide computing capacity for businesses, researchers and other public institutions. While the first Slovenian national supercomputer, Vega, launched Slovenia into the European high-performance computing network in 2021, this year's acquisition, the Frida supercomputer, specialises in calculations that are key to artificial intelligence and, among other things, the further development of the GaMS open-source large generative language model for Slovenian, developed by experts from the Centre for Language Resources and Technologies of the University of Ljubljana.

Science as the foundation of social development

In the multitude of global tools, a language model for a language spoken by only two million people may appear insignificant.

But just as the language has long been associated with the idea of Slovenian sovereignty, today the country is building technological sovereignty by developing its own technologies and investing in science.

It is far from a given that a language with so few speakers should have its own large language model, let alone that it should have been developed by Slovenian researchers themselves. And therein perhaps lies the greatest symbolism: Slovenian researchers do not rely on the solutions of others, but help shape the future.



Tissue culture growth chambers at the National Institute of Biology. Photo: Miran Kambič



An isothermal titration calorimeter enables researchers at the National Institute of Chemistry to study the interactions between proteins, nucleic acids and other biomolecules. Photo: Archive of the National Institute of Chemistry



SCIENCE

Photo: Slovenija Biotech Hills archive

SLOVENIA IS EMERGING AS A KEY PLAYER IN BIOTECHNOLOGY

Pharmaceutical Excellence is Paving the Way for a New Phase of Development

TEXT BY ANUŠA GAŠI

How a country of two million people has become one of Europe's pharmaceutical success stories – and why it now aims to build on this tradition to become one of the leading biotechnology hubs in Europe and globally.

Any discussion of the future of the European economy inevitably turns to biotechnology. This field will see the development of new generations of medicines, advanced therapies, biomanufacturing processes, sustainable food production solutions and technologies that will shape the quality of life of future generations. The race for a leading position is already in full swing. Countries are competing for researchers, development centres, talent and high-tech investment. Slovenia is entering this race – not as a newcomer, but as a country with an exceptional track record and clear ambitions for future development.

Slovenian expertise on the global map

Slovenia's success in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology is no coincidence. It is the result of more than seven decades of continuous development. While many countries developed their pharmaceutical industry primarily as a manufacturing activity, Slovenia pursued a different model. It systematically invested in science education, chemistry, pharmacy, biochemistry and engineering. Research institutes developed alongside universities, with corporate development departments and spin-off companies emerging around them, while a culture of collaboration and trust took shape among all stakeholders.

This interconnectedness, Slovenia's small size and the close proximity of all stakeholders are among the Slovenian ecosystem's greatest competitive advantages today.

The results are impressive. Pharmaceutical products are among Slovenia's most important exports, with the country ranking among the leading European exporters of pharmaceuticals and among the top exporters in Central Europe. The pharmaceutical industry accounts for more than six per cent of Slovenia's gross domestic product and is one of the country's most development-intensive economic sectors. It directly and indirectly employs more than 50,000 people, while average value added per employee is approximately twice the average for the Slovenian economy. For a country of just over two million people, this is an achievement that demonstrates how cutting-edge expertise, long-term investment and international openness can create a globally competitive environment.

Within a relatively small geographical area, leading international pharmaceutical companies such as Novartis, Sandoz Lek and Krka operate alongside a number of fast-growing biotechnology companies with a global presence.

These include Labena, Acies Bio, Jafra, Metronik, Niba Labs, Medis, Lotrič Metrology, Brinox, Cleangrad, Iskra PIO. While their technologies, innovative solutions, research and products are developed in Slovenia, they are used by companies, research centres and healthcare systems around the world.

Today, Slovenia is no longer merely a manufacturing location.



Novartis has officially opened a new aseptic manufacturing facility in Ljubljana. The site, dedicated to filling biological and RNA-based medicines, will create over 300 jobs and further cements Slovenia's status as a critical hub within the Swiss pharmaceutical giant's global network. Photo: Jure Makovec/ STA

It is increasingly becoming a development hub for Europe's pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. This shift is also evident in the investments being made by some of the world's largest companies. In recent years, Novartis and Sandoz have significantly expanded their research, development and manufacturing capacities in Slovenia and are currently undertaking one of the largest industrial investment cycles in the country's history. Such investments are not merely financial. They reflect a high level of confidence among foreign investors in Slovenia's expertise, research excellence, highly skilled workforce and stable business environment.

"Our greatest competitive advantage lies not only in our world-class companies and research institutions, or in the proximity and interconnectedness of all stakeholders within the ecosystem. It lies in our ability to bring together knowledge, business and public institutions in pursuit of a shared vision for development. This enables innovations to move more quickly from the laboratory into industry and onto the market."

The European Union has identified biotechnology as one of the key areas for its future competitiveness and technological sovereignty. Slovenia intends to play an active part in this development.

Not as an observer, but as an active contributor to European solutions, with a clearly defined role in the development of biotechnology in Europe.

This is why, for the first time this year, businesses, research organisations, universities and other partners have come together to prepare the Strategic Framework for the Development of Biotechnology and Pharmaceuticals in Slovenia 2026–2035. The document sets out Slovenia's first unified development vision for the life sciences. Its objective is clear: to position Slovenia among Europe's most prominent biotechnology research, development and manufacturing hubs, while creating the conditions for faster translation of

knowledge into innovation, new companies with access to global markets, and high-value-added jobs.

The strategy is based on concrete measures: developing world-class research infrastructure, attracting and retaining talent, strengthening clinical research, supporting start-ups, accelerating technology transfer, and creating a supportive environment for domestic and foreign investment. Slovenia's relatively small size is a key advantage, enabling faster decision-making, more efficient partnership-building and the faster translation of research achievements into practice.

Slovenija Biotech Hills

The Slovenija Biotech Hills initiative plays an important role in achieving these goals by bringing together companies, research organisations, universities, healthcare institutions and the government. Its purpose is to build partnerships, connect Slovenian expertise with international best practices, and strengthen Slovenia's profile as a trusted European partner in the life sciences. Slovenia is not building its biotechnology ecosystem from scratch – it already has one in place.

It has a world-class pharmaceutical industry, internationally recognised research institutions, successful biotechnology companies, highly skilled professionals and a clear vision for future development.

It now aims to bring these strengths together into a unified ecosystem, open to international partnerships, research collaboration and new investment.

From knowledge to breakthroughs

Slovenia offers expertise, partnerships and an ecosystem ready to help shape the next generation of European biotechnology breakthroughs – strengthening global competitiveness and enhancing the resilience and technological sovereignty of both Slovenia and Europe. This is an opportunity for researchers, companies, investors and institutions that believe the future is shaped when scientific excellence is matched by an ambitious vision and a strong culture of collaboration.



Sandoz, the global leader in affordable medicines, in June 2026 announced plans to build a new biosimilar drug substance facility in Ljubljana. The investment of around USD 300 million in disposable fed-batch (DFB) technology will expand in-house manufacturing capacity and further strengthen the Company's Europe-based end-to-end biosimilar development, manufacturing and supply network. It represents a key element of the Bio100 goal to capture a significant share of the long-term biosimilar opportunity. Photo: Sandoz archive



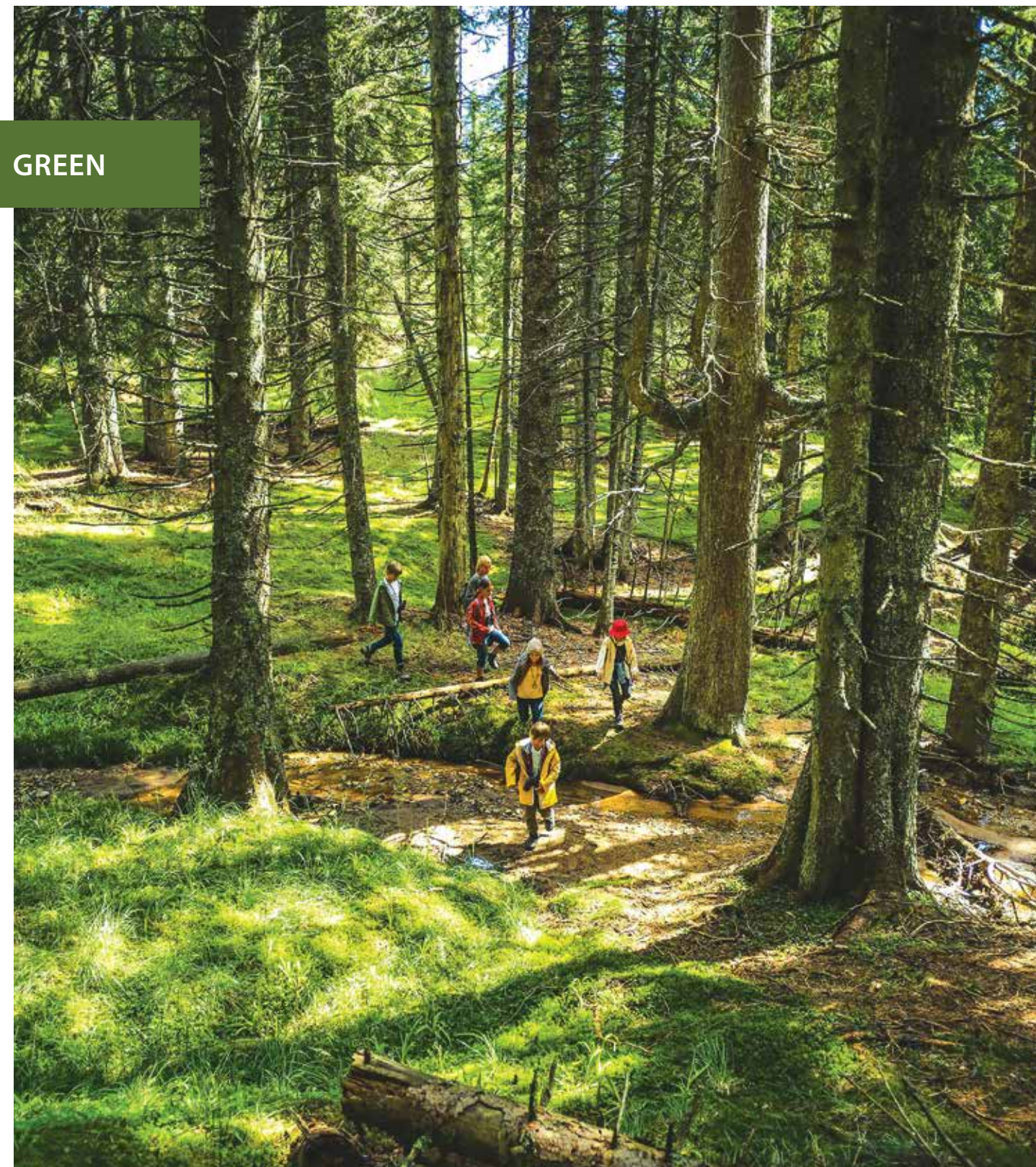
VELIKA PLANINA

At the end of spring, the sound of cowbells rings out across Velika Planina, announcing the arrival of the herdsmen. The fairy-tale plateau with one of the largest preserved herdsmen's settlements in Europe invites visitors to discover authentic alpine pastoral life, ancient customs and the beauty of unspoilt nature. The settlement comprises around 140 huts, instantly recognisable by their distinctive architecture. Their roofs are covered with spruce shingles that extend almost to the ground, protecting the huts from harsh mountain weather.

From June, when the herdsmen arrive with their livestock, until September, the sound of cowbells echoes across the plateau, allowing visitors to experience the rhythm of traditional alpine pastoral life. The herdsmen are happy to invite visitors to taste homemade dairy products, such as sour milk, cheese, curd cheese and a traditional herdsman's meal – buckwheat mush (žganci) served with sour milk. Another hallmark of Velika Planina is *trnič*, a traditional pear-shaped cheese that herdsmen once made as a symbol of love and presented to their sweethearts.

With its unique character, Velika Planina has also gained recognition abroad. In 2025, the British newspaper *The Guardian* listed it among Europe's recommended destinations for a spring break, highlighting its flowering meadows, breathtaking Alpine views and the authentic pastoral heritage. In the spring, the plateau is carpeted with violet spring crocuses, giving Velika Planina an especially magical appearance.

Photo: Ana Pogačar/www.slovenia.info



Natura 2000 sites cover almost 38% of Slovenia's territory. Photo: Ciril Jazbec/www.slovenia.info

THE GREEN HEART OF EUROPE

From Nature Conservation to a Sustainable Slovenia

TEXT BY POLONA PREŠEREN

Slovenia is one of the most forested and biodiverse countries in Europe. Forests cover almost 60 per cent of its territory, and over a third of the country is included in the European Natura 2000 network. Natural heritage is therefore one of the cornerstones of Slovenian identity and quality of life, as well as an increasingly important source of development opportunities.

In Slovenia, we often say that green is not merely a colour. 'Slovenian green', which speaks of the country's extensive forest cover, is also a way of life.

It represents a way of thinking about space, development and the future, as well as a unique relationship with nature cherished by Slovenians.

However, this relationship has changed profoundly over the past 35 years. Environmental protection is no longer solely the remit of nature conservation; it has become an integral part of broader development policies — spanning energy, transport, tourism, agriculture, the economy and spatial planning.

Natural heritage

Slovenia is committed to integrating its natural and cultural heritage into global efforts to protect and conserve it. Its sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List include the Škocjan Caves, the mercury heritage of Idrija, the Prehistoric Pile Dwellings around the Alps, the works of Jože Plečnik in Ljubljana, and the Krokar and Snežnik-Ždrecle primeval beech forests.

Slovenia participates in the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme and is part of the Global Geoparks Network.

Intangible cultural heritage is particularly important, as it links the natural environment, tradition, knowledge and way of life.

All of this attests to the value of Slovenia's landscape, and brings with it a responsibility to preserve it for future generations.

The right to water enshrined in the Constitution

In 2016, Slovenia took one of the most symbolic steps towards a more responsible approach to natural resources by enshrining the right to drinking water in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia.



In Slovenia, the right to drinking water is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Turizem Bled archive

Article 70a stipulates that everyone has the right to drinking water, that water resources are a public good managed by the State and that these sources serve the supply of the population on a priority and sustainable basis.

The provision of drinking water to the population is also defined as a public and non-profit service. By doing so, Slovenia has ensured that water is protected at the highest legal level. Water is thus not only a natural resource, but also a public good and a foundation of quality of life.

From waste separation to a circular economy

Slovenia's green transition can also be seen in its waste management practices. Over the past few decades, Slovenia has developed a robust system of separate waste collection, recycling and waste processing, with civil society movements playing a pivotal role in shifting public attitudes towards waste.

The nationwide *Let's Clean Up Slovenia* campaigns of 2010, 2012 and 2018 brought together hundreds of thousands of people.



Triglav National Park is Slovenia's only national park and one of Europe's oldest protected areas. Photo: Aleš Zdešar/www.slovenia.info

These campaigns demonstrated that environmental protection is an area in which individuals and communities can directly drive change. Today, Slovenia ranks among the European countries with the highest proportion of separately collected municipal waste. In 2023, around 78 per cent of municipal waste was collected separately.

Natura 2000

Slovenia has also broadened its nature protection system over recent decades. The Natura 2000 network currently comprises 355 sites, covering roughly 37 per cent of Slovenia's territory across 204 of its 212 municipalities. Around 128,000 residents, accounting for around 6 per cent of the Slovenian population, live within Natura 2000 sites.

Nature conservation is therefore not confined to a few large parks, but it has become an integral part of spatial management throughout the country.

Triglav National Park, regional and landscape parks, nature reserves, and other protected areas all help to safeguard the habitats of numerous species.



Bike-sharing network makes sustainable urban travel easy and accessible. Photo: Turizem Bled archive

Green mobility and energy

Slovenia's commitment to going green is becoming increasingly evident in the way people travel and how energy is produced. The country is investing in railway infrastructure, public passenger transport, cycling networks, and infrastructure for alternative fuels. The overarching goal is to reduce dependence on private cars, lower emissions, and improve the quality of the living environment.

The energy sector is playing a key role in this transition.

Slovenia is increasing its use of renewable energy sources (RES) while investing in energy efficiency and new generation capacities. According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, the share of renewable energy accounted for 25 per cent of gross final energy consumption in 2024, while renewables accounted for over 43 per cent of electricity generation.

Sustainable tourism

Slovenia has also incorporated sustainability into its tourism development strategy.

In 2015, it launched the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, a system designed to guide destinations and tourism providers towards more sustainable business practices.

This means that sustainable tourism is evolving into a way of managing destinations, encompassing mobility, resource management, the preservation of local identity, and the engagement of local communities.

Agriculture

Slovenia's green story continues in its rural areas, with agriculture and food production. Protecting traditional and local products helps to preserve knowledge and production



Local products help safeguard cultural heritage, preserve traditional knowledge and create value in rural areas. Photo: Ukom archive

methods, as well as cultural heritage. It also enables local economies to create added value.

Organic farming, short supply chains, local produce and responsible land management combine nature conservation with rural development.

This approach also creates opportunities for new jobs, innovation and enhanced competitiveness.

Slovenia's green transformation

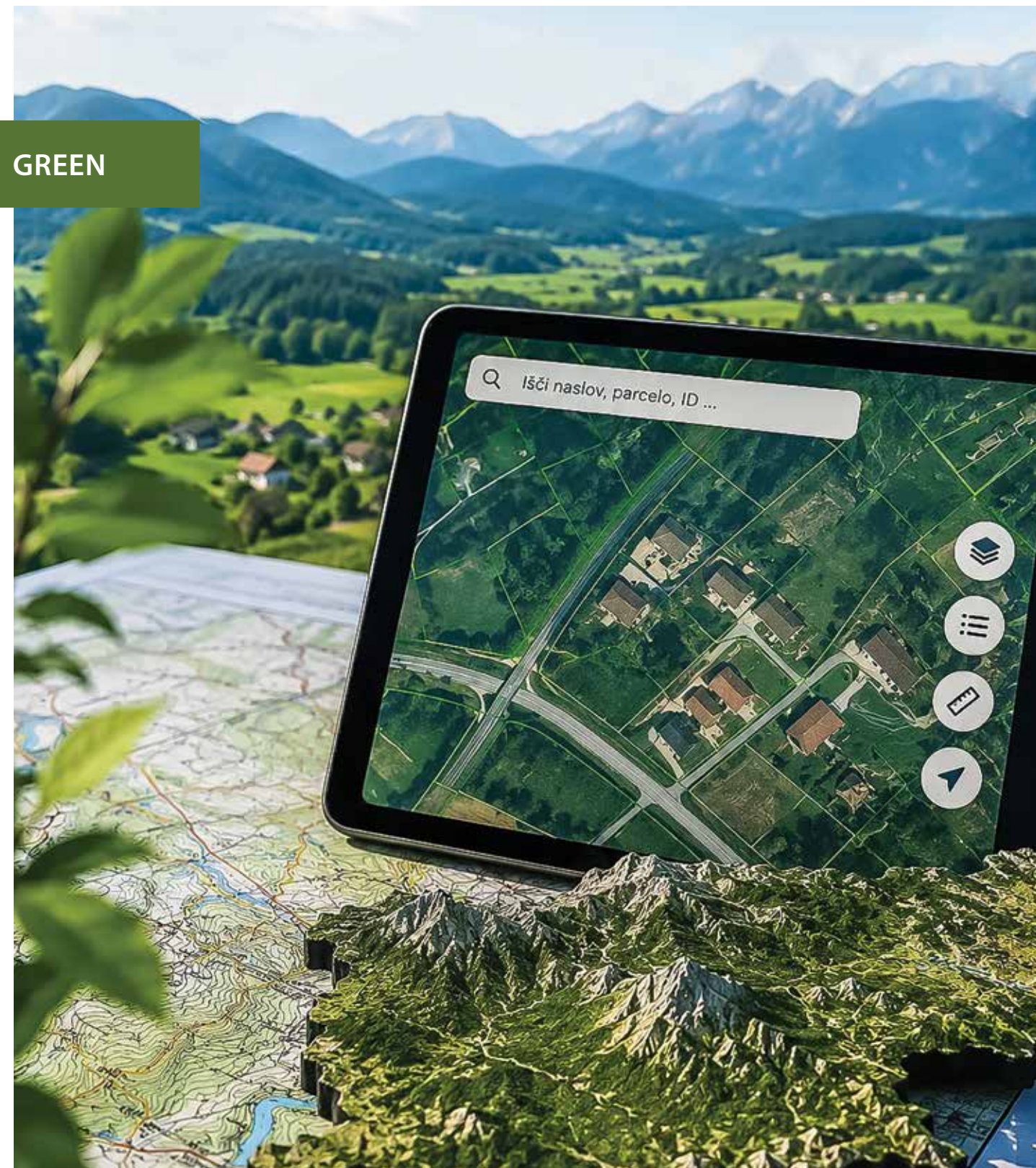
Over the past 35 years, Slovenia has made significant progress from protecting individual natural areas to developing a broader understanding of sustainable development.

Today, nature is recognised as a guarantor of quality of life and an important asset for development.

The green trajectory has become embedded in many aspects of everyday life, from enshrining the right to drinking water in the Constitution and inscribing Slovenian natural and cultural treasures on UNESCO lists, to waste separation, expanding protected areas, promoting sustainable tourism, green mobility and renewable energy sources.



Savica Waterfall is part of Triglav National Park. Photo: Michael Matti/www.slovenia.info



GREEN

From the first dot on the screen to the view of the beautiful mountains: every plot of land has its own story and its own potential. Photo: ChatGPT

GEO SLOVENIJA

A Digital Reflection of the Space We Share

TEXT BY KSENIJA MIHAJLOVIČ, MATJAŽ GRILC AND SUZANA JURIČ

Slovenia is a small country. It takes only a few hours to drive from the coast to the foot of Triglav, the country's highest mountain peak. The Alps, the Karst, the Pannonian Plain and the Mediterranean all converge here, spanning just over twenty thousand square kilometres. This diversity is precisely what makes our space one of our greatest assets. For this reason, we must understand it better than ever before.

Thirty-five years ago, we established our own state. Since then, thanks to our extensive knowledge and dedication, we have created comprehensive records of space, land, buildings, roads, waters, forests and much more. Today, Slovenia has a well-developed system of spatial records and a strong foundation of authoritative spatial data. However, we are entering a new stage of development. While we used to focus on collecting data, we now need to link it together to create a comprehensive whole. This is the essence of Geo Slovenija.

Geo Slovenija is the national spatial information infrastructure. It does not replace authoritative records; it connects them and enables their joint use.

It brings together data from state authorities, municipalities, public services, research institutions, and economic organisations, enabling these different systems to exchange, combine and use data more effectively.

But why is this important? Because space is shared by everyone. Whether a municipality is planning a new residential area, the state is building transport infrastructure, a farmer is working the land or a company is planning a new investment, they are all using the same space. The quality of these decisions therefore depends on the quality and connectivity of the information on which they are based.

This is precisely what Geo Slovenija enables. It links data on real estate, spatial planning documents, water, nature, transport, utility infrastructure, agricultural land and many other areas, all in one place. This provides a comprehensive picture of

space, enabling faster, higher-quality and, above all, more coordinated decision-making.

Geo Slovenija brings benefits for all

State authorities and municipalities can plan development more effectively, businesses can obtain information for their investments more quickly, and residents can gain easier access to public services. Data duplication is reduced, administrative burdens are lightened and collaboration between institutions is strengthened.

Geo Slovenija is also an important building block in creating a green Slovenia. Climate change, floods, landslides, droughts and the increasingly rapid spatial transformations require us to make responsible decisions.

To preserve our quality of life and natural assets, we need to understand the concept of space in its entirety.

Integrated spatial data enables us to monitor these shifts, plan development more effectively, and protect nature and natural resources more efficiently.

Artificial intelligence represents a dedicated chapter in this transformation. While we often discuss what it will make possible, we rarely consider what it needs to function. The true value of AI lies not in algorithms, but in high-quality data. Geo Slovenija helps build this data foundation by connecting authoritative data sources, improving their interoperability and usability, and supporting their semantic description.

Looking ahead, AI could help identify spatial changes, detect discrepancies across records and monitor the consequences of natural disasters.

Such applications should rely on high-quality, well-described data and remain subject to expert review and validation. AI can support expert decision-making, while responsibility for interpreting results and making decisions remains with people.

A new era of understanding space

Geo Slovenija is therefore much more than just a technological project. Rather, it is Slovenia's shared development platform which, under the leadership of the Surveying and Mapping

Authority of the Republic of Slovenia, brings together numerous partners from the state administration, local communities, science, and the business sector. Its greatest value does not lie in new information systems, but in enabling different datasets to speak the same language.

Thirty-five years ago, we laid the foundations for a modern state. Today, we are creating its digital reflection.

Not to create yet another database, but to ensure that we can develop Slovenia's space thoughtfully, understand it better and preserve it as one of our greatest national assets for future generations.

Geo Slovenija is the national spatial data infrastructure that:

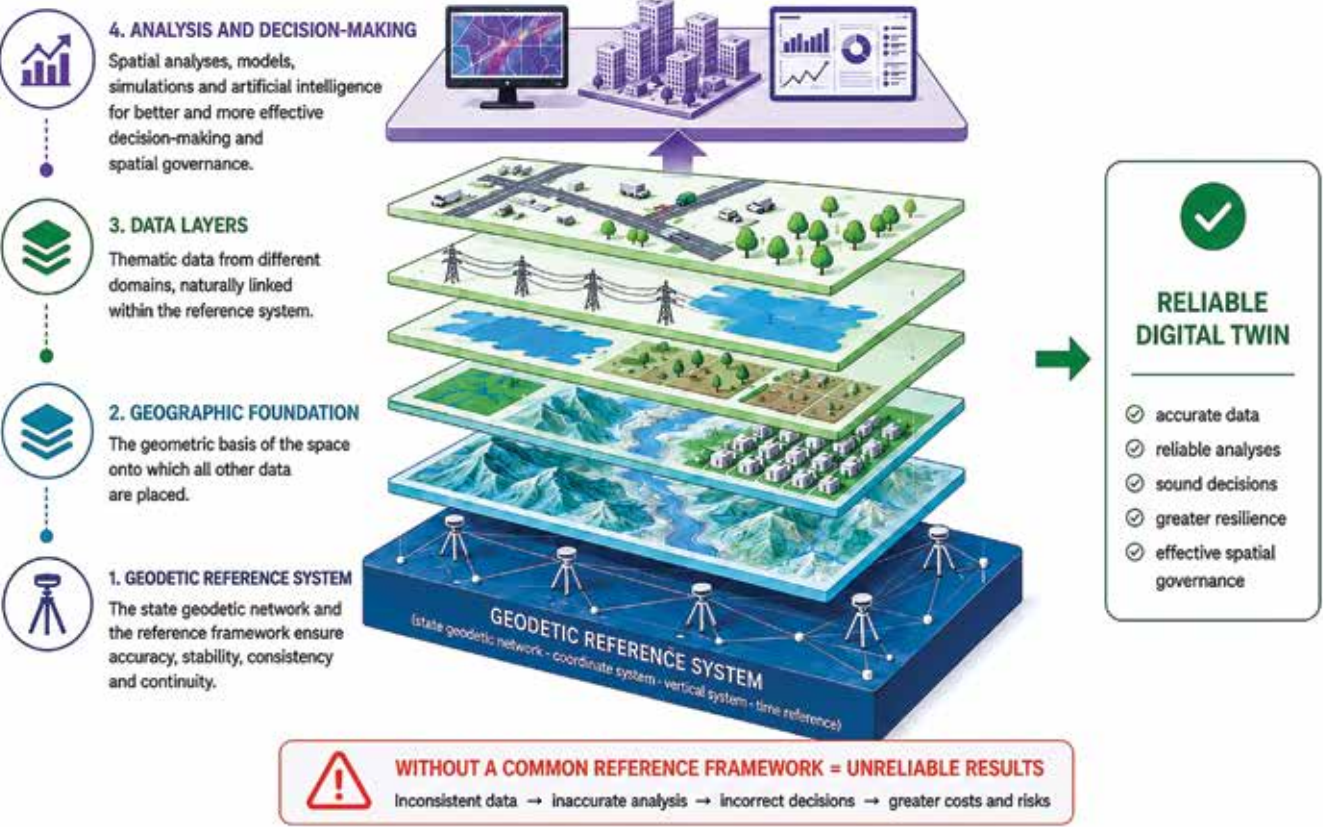
- is developing a shared digital environment for connecting and jointly using spatial data from various state authorities and other data controllers,
- enables faster, higher-quality and more coordinated spatial decision-making;
- provides the data foundation for the development of artificial intelligence and Slovenia's digital twin;
- supports sustainable development, more efficient public services and greater national competitiveness.

Slovenia in numbers

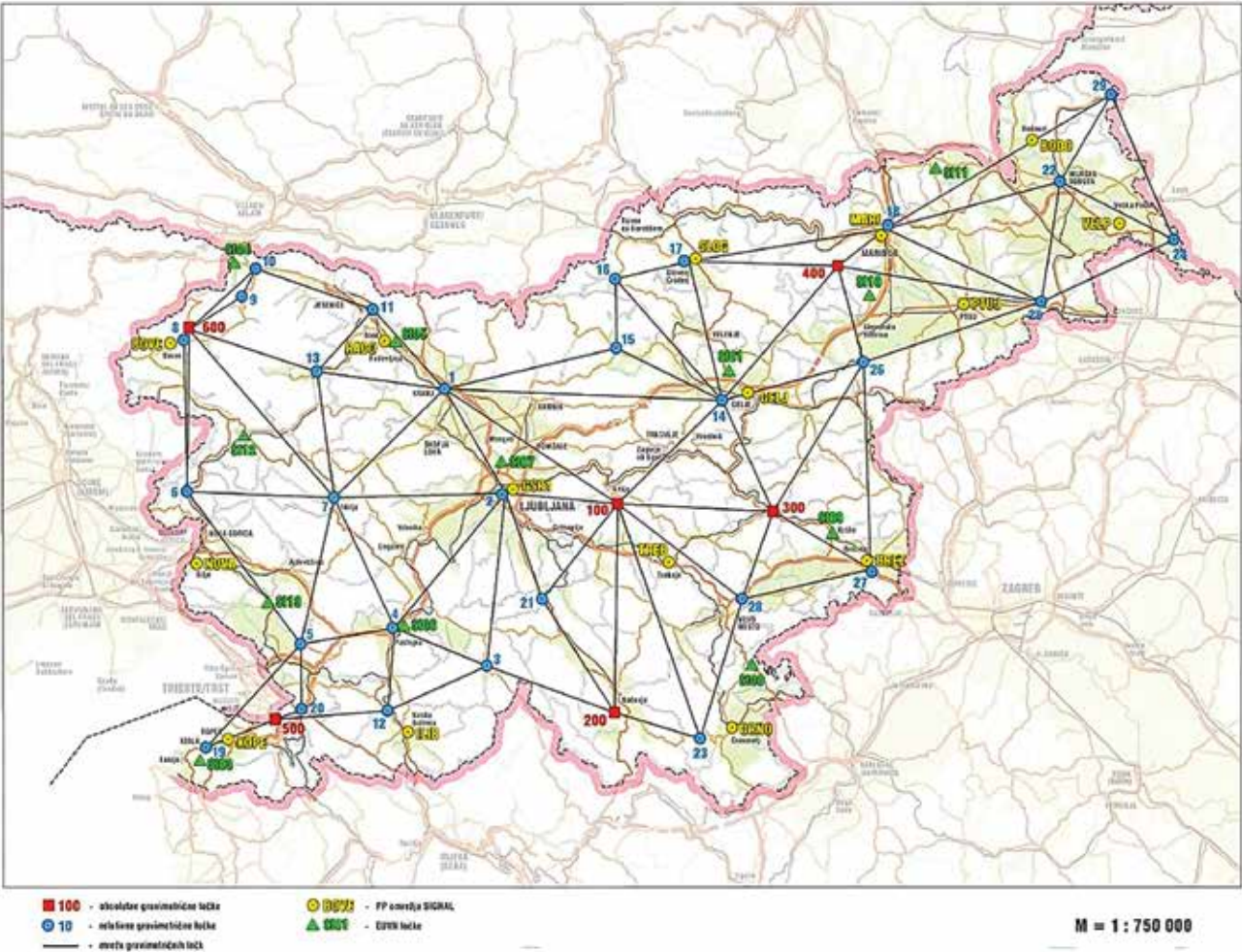
- As of June 2026, more than 1.2 million buildings and 1.9 million building parts are recorded in the Slovenian real estate cadastre.
- Every day, the data services of various spatial data controllers process more than 5 million queries, searches and service calls, the majority of which are generated automatically by digital systems and services.

The Geospatial Infrastructure Foundation – the Basis of a Reliable Digital Twin

A unified and coherent reference system enables integration, analysis and informed decision-making.



Reference spatial data as the foundation for a digital twin. The infographic illustrates how high-quality spatial data are created using a common geodetic reference system. This foundation enables the integration of geodetic, geographic and other thematic data layers, which together support reliable analyses, informed decision-making and the development of a digital twin. Photo: Geo Slovenija archive



Geodetic reference system of Slovenia
The map of Slovenia shows a network of gravimetric points, SIGNAL network stations, EUVN points and the connections between them. The map highlights the distribution of geodetic points throughout Slovenia. EUVN points are part of the European Vertical Reference Network. They enable Slovenia's height data to be compared with those of other European countries. This is important for reliable spatial data, cross-border projects and high-quality spatial analyses. SIGNAL network stations are permanent satellite-based measurement stations enabling accurate positioning in Slovenia. They are part of the geospatial infrastructure foundation underpinning reliable spatial data, geodetic measurements and numerous digital services. Photo: Geo Slovenija archive



BLED

Bled is considered one of Slovenia's most beautiful destinations. Its charm lies in Lake Bled with its picturesque island, the majestic mountains, forests and rich cultural heritage that attract visitors from around the world.

Lake Bled was formed in a tectonic depression, later shaped by the Bohinj Glacier. Today, it measures 2.12 km in length, up to 1.3 km in width and reaches a depth of 30.6 m. In the middle of it lies Slovenia's only natural island, home to the Church of the Assumption of Mary.

Overlooking the lake is Bled Castle, first mentioned in 1011. With more than a thousand years of history, it is regarded as the oldest castle in Slovenia and offers one of the most breathtaking views of Bled and the Julian Alps.

In the 19th century, the Swiss natural healer Arnold Rikli left a lasting mark on Bled. His philosophy of healthy living in harmony with nature transformed the town into a famous health resort. His principles – exercise, fresh air, sunshine and water – continue to inspire visitors to this day.

Bled is also a place of numerous legends. The island is linked to tales of the lake's origin, the wishing bell and the mysterious sunken bell. Traditional pletnas – handcrafted wooden boats – glide across the lake, whilst visitors are also drawn by the famous Bled cream cake (*kremšnita*).

The view of Mount Triglav, the tranquil lake surface, swans and the morning mist create a scene that many describe as straight out of a fairy tale.

Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



DIPLOMACY

At the prime ministers’ panel, the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, and the Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Magyar, presented their visions for the future of the region. This clearly demonstrates that Slovenia has become a significant hub where the paths of the most influential leaders cross.

SLOVENIA AND THE POWER TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

Strategic Choices in a Changing World

TEXT BY SIMONA LESKOVAR, AMBASSADOR AND BSF PROGRAMME DIRECTOR
PHOTO: MARKO ARANDJELOVIĆ

The world is changing, and not necessarily in the way we would wish. Power is shifting, long-standing certainties are eroding, and the rules that have shaped international relations for decades are being challenged. Europe is still coming to terms with this new reality. There is a war on its doorstep, while security, energy, technology, supply chains, food security and economic competitiveness have all become matters of strategic importance. At the same time, states are increasingly building partnerships based on interests and circumstances rather than fixed blocs.

For Slovenia, this is not a reason to retreat into the role of a small country observing events from the periphery. Rather, it makes it imperative that we assess where we stand and what we can contribute to shaping the future. Slovenia’s size limits its ability to shape events through power alone. Yet influence also derives from geography, relationships, ideas, credibility and the ability to bring people together.

Slovenia is a Central European country with a distinct Adriatic dimension, and Central Europe is rapidly assuming greater importance for Europe’s future, economically, strategically and in terms of values.

There is no strong EU without a strong Central Europe; indeed, the European project remains incomplete without the countries in this part of the continent.

Slovenia’s location connects Central Europe with the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans, while the Port of Koper and the transport corridors traversing our territory serve as critical arteries connecting wider European markets. Our region sits at the intersection of some of Europe’s most vital trade, transport and energy routes. In an era increasingly defined by resilience and the need to reduce strategic dependencies, this geography is not merely an economic endowment; it is a strategic asset of the first order.

Connectivity, therefore, is far more than infrastructure.

It encompasses resilience, economic development, energy security, civil and military mobility, and the ability to withstand disruption.

For Central Europe, enhancing connectivity translates directly into greater strategic leverage. It also unlocks new opportunities for trade, investment, economic diplomacy and practical support for Ukraine. Slovenia has a direct and enduring interest in ensuring that these connections function effectively, as our own security and prosperity depend on an open, interconnected and resilient Central Europe.

Europe must strengthen its capacity

This was also reflected in Prime Minister Janša’s message at the 2026 Bled Strategic Forum: Europe must strengthen its capacity to act, defend its interests and its way of life, and take greater responsibility for its own security in a more contested international environment. That means enhancing Europe’s resilience, reducing strategic dependencies, including critical economic dependencies, reinforcing demographic resilience and ensuring that its geopolitical commitments are matched by credible action, particularly when it comes to EU enlargement to include the Western Balkans. For Slovenia, these broader European imperatives also point to areas where it can cultivate future competitive advantages.

Biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, as high-value sectors at the nexus of innovation and technological sovereignty, could represent one such avenue.

At the same time, Europe should not turn away from its North American partners. Whatever transatlantic frictions may arise, our shared security interests, deeply integrated economies, and enduring cooperation in technology, research and innovation constitute a solid foundation for partnership. European strategic autonomy should not be misconstrued as a departure from the transatlantic relationship. Rather, it should be understood as the pursuit of a stronger, more capable Europe that is also a more credible partner.

The future is shaped by choices

For 21 years, the Bled Strategic Forum has embodied this philosophy, providing a platform through which Slovenia has sought to connect people, ideas and interests in times of profound change. Its purpose is not simply to debate a changing world, but to create a space where decision-makers, leaders and practitioners can meet, challenge assumptions, exchange views and forge relationships that endure beyond the Forum itself. In bringing together voices that might not otherwise come together, the BSF has also sought to build connections across regions, institutions and perspectives. For a small country, this convening power is itself a form of influence.

The future is not something that simply happens to us. It is shaped by choices, capabilities and the audacity to act.

As the Prime Minister Janez Janša observed at Bled, defining moments may arise suddenly, but the capacity to meet them is built long before they arrive.

For Slovenia, the question is not whether a small country can shape the future alone, but whether, together with partners, we have the power to shape the conditions that will ensure that our shared future remains in our hands.



The Slovenian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Tone Kajzer, the Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša.



Conversation with The Honorable Allison Hooker, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, US Department of State, United States.



Oleksandra Matviichuk is a Ukrainian human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 as head of the Center for Civil Liberties. At the Bled Strategic Forum, she received an award for her work in human rights.



About the current situation at the Middle East: Ebtesam Al Ketbi, President and Founder, Emirates Policy Center, United Arab Emirates; Baroness Ashton of Upholland, Member of the House of Lords, United Kingdom; Former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, European Commission; Danny Citrinowicz, Senior Researcher, Iran and the Shi'ite Axis Program, The Institute for National Security Studies, Israel; Mojmir Mrak, Professor, School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; Trita Parsi, Co-founder and Executive Vice President, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, United States.



DIPLOMACY

The Young Bled Strategic Forum is an international gathering of young political leaders, aged 18 to 35, that takes place every year on the sidelines of the main BSF.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

A Generation Ready to Lead

TEXT BY JELKA KLEMENC AND BARBARA MALI, CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE
 PHOTO BY CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE (CEP)

Against the backdrop of the Julian Alps, Slovenia once again welcomed a new generation of global changemakers to the Young Bled Strategic Forum, held from 28 to 30 August 2026. Every year, participants from all around the world are selected for their demonstrated leadership potential and their capacity to become future decision-makers.

Since its launch in 2011, Young BSF has grown into one of Slovenia's flagship public diplomacy initiatives. More than an annual gathering, it has built a global network of young leaders who go on to shape public policy, diplomacy, business and civil society in their own countries, taking their Slovenian experience with them.

Leading Through Uncertainty

At a moment of profound geopolitical change, institutions struggle to keep pace, and the rules that have shaped the international order are increasingly contested.

This year's forum challenged participants to look beyond uncertainty and ask how they could help shape what comes next.

Under the theme *After the Rupture: Agency and Resilience in a Fragmented World*, discussions explored geopolitical fragmentation, democratic resilience, use of critical raw materials, the future of the Euro-Atlantic order, Europe's role in a changing world and the ways young public officials can translate ideas into meaningful policy.

Not merely youth perspective

Young BSF will continue to evolve as a participant-driven platform where young people are recognised not merely as representatives of a "youth perspective", but as diplomats, civil servants, entrepreneurs, researchers, peacebuilders and community leaders who not only endure the disruption, but *can* and *will* respond to it with responsibility and purpose.

Equally important, it will continue to provide them with a direct voice at the annual Bled Strategic Forum, where they help shape the conversation.

Young BSF will continue to foster cooperation across borders and generations, to recognise young leaders as partners in addressing global challenges and shaping international affairs as well as boosting Slovenia's role in it. If this year's forum asked what comes after the rupture, the answer may already be emerging: *a generation that is ready not only to inherit the future, but to help build it.*



This gathering has become a unique meeting place for a diverse range of young political leaders, business people, influencers, philosophers, and social activists, providing them with a platform to share their visions, exchange ideas and network.



GASTRONOMY

Potica and Carniolan sausage were always indispensable at events hosted by the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Washington, D.C. Photo: Dr Božo Cerar, personal archive

POTICA, CARNIOLAN SAUSAGE AND SLOVENIAN DIPLOMACY

How They Helped Slovenia Find Its Place in the International Community

TEXT BY DR BOŽO CERAR, AMBASSADOR EMERITUS

Today, when Slovenia is mentioned around the world, many people think of Lake Bled, Luka Dončić, Ana Roš or even potica cake. Thirty-five years ago, however, things were very different. Back then, we first had to explain to the world that Slovenia even existed.

I experienced this firsthand in 1992, when I left to open the Slovenian Embassy in London. While driving on London's M25 motorway, a car with British licence plates began signalling for me to pull over. My first thought was that something must be wrong with my old Volkswagen Golf. But when we both stopped, a woman stepped out of the other car and excitedly asked, "Are you really from Slovenia? Is that really a Slovenian licence plate?" She was a Slovenian from Lesce who had married an Englishman. Today this may sound almost unbelievable, but at the time even a Slovenian licence plate was a rarity – and tangible proof that a new country had appeared on the map.

It soon became clear to us in London that it was not enough that only diplomats and a few thousand Slovenians living abroad knew about Slovenia. The wider public often confused us with Slovakia or Slavonia.

So we set ourselves a simple goal – to put Slovenia on the map. Literally.

At the famous Liberty department store in London, we organised a major presentation entitled *Putting Slovenia on the Map*. Among the Slovenian exhibits, a traditional wooden hayrack (kozolec) had a place of honour, while visitors also had the opportunity to discover Slovenian cuisine. Posters featuring a map of Slovenia were displayed throughout the London Underground, and the Slovenian flag flew above the department store. At the time, we truly felt that we were writing history together.

Gradually, however, I came to realise that people often discover a country through its cuisine before they learn anything else about it.

That is why I insisted on serving Carniolan sausage, potica and Slovenian wine at almost every reception. Some thought that an accordion, traditional folk costumes and traditional food seemed a little too simple for modern diplomacy. I saw it differently.

Why not to be proud?

If Italians are proud of pizza, the French of their cheeses and baguettes, and Austrians of the Wiener Schnitzel, why shouldn't Slovenians be proud of potica and Carniolan sausage? I once made exactly this point to a group of Slovenians living in Pueblo, Colorado. After my lecture, a lady asked whether it was true that potica was not really Slovenian. I returned to the microphone and replied, "The Italians have pizza. We have potica and we're not about to let anyone take it away from us." The audience responded with enthusiastic applause.

Years later, it turned out that potica had also won over the highest circles. Pope Francis asked Melania Trump whether she ever served potica to the President of the United States Donald Trump at home.

Shortly afterwards, Slovenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended that all Slovenian diplomatic missions actively promote potica as one of the country's signature national dishes. I smiled. Years earlier, I had received more than a few sceptical looks for expressing exactly the same view.

Perhaps the greatest confirmation came during the annual Open House Day at the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Washington, D.C. Every year, around four thousand visitors came through our door on that day. They toured exhibitions, listened to Slovenian music, including the accordion, admired Slovenian products, but the longest queues invariably formed around the potica, Carniolan sausage and Slovenian wines. By the end of the day, we had almost always run out of food. That was when I finally realised that people first taste a country and only then do they truly begin to discover it.

Today, culinary diplomacy is widely recognised as an important instrument of public diplomacy. Thirty-five years ago, however, Slovenia was only beginning to explore its potential.

Looking back, I am grateful to have been among those who believed that even a slice of potica or a piece of Carniolan sausage could help open the doors of the international community to a newly independent country. Sometimes, the road to the world really does begin at the dining table.



Buffet reception at the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Washington, D.C., during the promotion of Slovenia as a tourist destination in 2016. Photo: Dr Božo Cerar, personal archive



Carniolan sausage is one of the best-known symbols of Slovenian cuisine and is protected by the EU geographical indication. It is traditionally served with mustard, freshly grated horseradish, a bread roll, and sauerkraut or pickled turnips. Photo: Depositphotos



Diplomacy is often enriched by the flavours of the country it represents. Among them, potica – the traditional festive nut roll – holds a special place. Photo: Depositphotos



TURJAK CASTLE

Few Slovenian castles are steeped in as many stories as Turjak Castle, which has defied the passage of time and the storms of history for more than 800 years. Following the earthquake of 1511, it acquired its imposing Renaissance appearance with its distinctive bastion, which remains one of its most notable features to this day. The castle was severely damaged during the Second World War, and for decades afterwards it was sadly more a symbol of untapped potential than of the splendour it had once represented.

That is precisely why the decision to undertake its comprehensive renovation was so important. After years of efforts to preserve it, Turjak Castle finally underwent the largest renovation in its modern history.

The renovation encompassed the palace, the bastion, the inner castle courtyard, the former hunting lodge, the ruins of the stables, and the parkland surrounding the castle. The works were carried out with the utmost respect for the historical heritage, which is why the renovated spaces now retain the authentic character of the various periods that shaped the castle's historical development.

Today, Turjak Castle is alive once again. Its premises now house exhibitions, cultural and event spaces, a café, a wine cellar and accommodation facilities. A special place is occupied by the new permanent exhibition, which takes visitors through important chapters of Slovenian history by narrating the story of the Auersperg family. The castle is thus no longer merely a monument to the past, but a place for encounters, exploration and new experiences..

Photo: Ministry of Culture archive



Luka Dončić, NBA superstar and global basketball icon. Photo: Jure Makovec/STA

BORN FOR SPORTING GREATNESS

From the World's Highest Peaks to the Greatest Sporting Arenas

TEXT BY POLONA PREŠEREN

When the Slovenian national anthem, *Zdravljica*, rings out at sporting events, we are filled with pride and respect. Slovenia is a country with just over two million inhabitants, yet in recent decades it has become one of the most recognisable sporting nations. Slovenian athletes win Olympic medals, world and European titles, triumph at the biggest competitions and compete in the world's most prestigious leagues. However, Slovenian sport is not just a story of medals; it is also a story of character.

We Slovenians are resilient, persistent and ambitious. We set ourselves goals that sometimes seem impossible, and in doing so push the boundaries. This was evident long before independence.

In the first half of the 20th century, gymnast **Leon Štukelj** was one of the greatest Olympians of his time; he remains an enduring legend. In 1979, **Andrej Štremfelj** and **Nejc Zaplotnik** became the first Slovenians to reach the summit of Mount Everest. On an expedition considered one of the most demanding ascents of the world's highest mountain, they reached the summit via the challenging West Ridge.

Pushing the boundaries

The exploits of Slovenian mountaineers did not end there. In 2000, **Davo Karničar** became the first person to complete a non-stop ski descent from the summit of Mount Everest to Base Camp, skiing from an altitude of 8,848 metres down to 5,350 metres without taking off his skis.

Slovenians have also pushed the boundaries on the water. **Martin Strel** made a name for himself with his endurance swimming feats on some of the world's greatest rivers, including the Danube, the Mississippi, the Yangtze and the Amazon. His achievements demanded a combination of physical endurance, mental fortitude and almost unbelievable perseverance.



Leon Štukelj, Olympic champion and gymnastics legend. Photo: UKOM archive



Luka Špik and Iztok Čop, Olympic and world rowing champions. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA



Tina Maze, Slovenia's most successful alpine skier. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

Elite sport has become one of the most recognisable success stories of independent Slovenia. On 23 September 2000, at the Olympic Games in Sydney, **Iztok Čop**, **Luka Špik** and **Rajmond Debevec** won Slovenia's first two gold medals as an independent country. Since then, the list of sporting heroes has grown steadily, and 23 September has become Day of Slovenian Sport, a national holiday which is not, however, a work-free day.

Tina Maze won four Olympic medals and, in 2013, set a record for the most points scored in a single Alpine Skiing World Cup season, with 2,414 points. Primož Roglič went from being a ski jumper to becoming an Olympic champion in cycling and one of the most successful cyclists of his generation. **Tadej Pogačar** is among the biggest names in world cycling and, in 2026, secured his fifth Tour de France victory, thereby equalling the record for the number of overall victories. **Janja Garnbret** is the first Olympic champion in sport climbing and one of the most successful sport climbers of all time. The Los Angeles Kings are set to retire ice hockey player **Anže Kopitar**'s jersey, and a statue of him will also be erected outside Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.

Slovenia's sporting story is also being written by the **Prevc** family of ski jumpers – **Peter**, **Domen** and **Nika** – as well as by motocross rider **Tim Gajser**, **Jan Oblak**, one of the world's best football goalkeepers of his generation, and numerous basketball players. **Luka Dončić** stands out among them today, while before him **Goran Dragić**, **Rašo Nesterović** and **Saša Vujačić** also left their mark on Slovenian basketball at the highest level. To date, Slovenian Olympians have won 83 medals, 59 of them as representatives of independent Slovenia.

Success across a wide range of sports

Another distinctive feature of Slovenian sport is its diversity. Slovenians achieve outstanding results in ski jumping, Alpine skiing, cycling, sport climbing, judo, kayaking and canoeing, rowing, athletics, motocross, snowboarding, basketball, ice hockey, football and other sports.

For a country of our size, the extent of our success is exceptional.

We excel in individual sports, whilst also achieving considerable success in numerous team sports. We are also one of the most successful countries in the world in terms of the number of Olympic medals per capita. of the world's highest mountain, they reached the summit via the challenging West Ridge.

Sporting success isn't always on the pitch

In 2026, Slovenia witnessed another historic moment: Slavko Vinčič became the first Slovenian referee to take charge of a FIFA World Cup final.

Such achievements also demonstrate that Slovenia sends not only athletes to the world's biggest sporting stages, but also coaches, referees, experts and other sports professionals.

At the same time, Slovenia is also an accomplished organiser and host of major sporting competitions, ranging from world and European championships to major international sporting events.

Sporting success is no coincidence

These success stories are no coincidence. Sport in Slovenia is underpinned by a strong culture of physical activity, club sport, the work of coaches, volunteering, sports federations and our natural surroundings, which make it possible to stay active all year round.



Tadej Pogačar, the world's No. 1 cyclist. Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

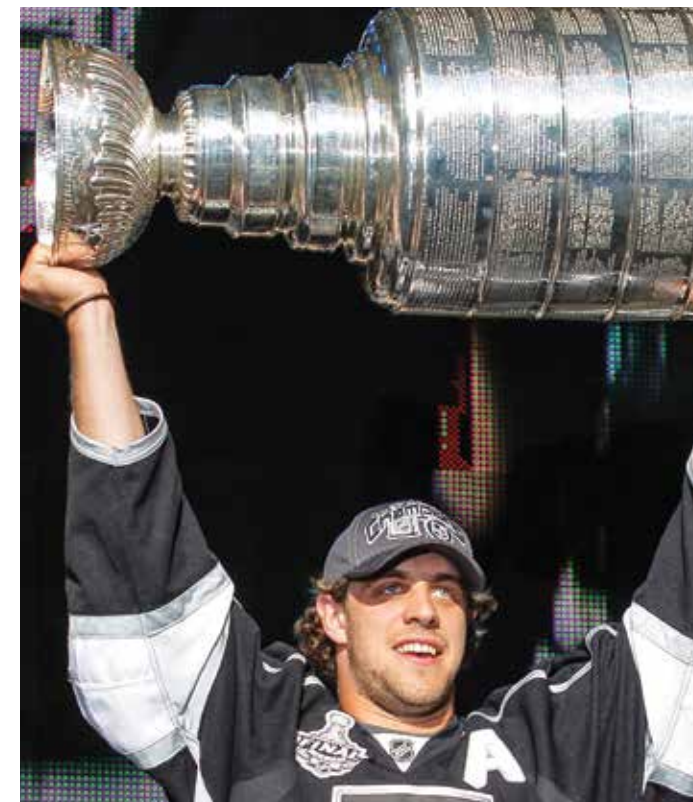
We like to say that physical activity is in our DNA. More than 60 per cent of Slovenia's population engage in sport or physical activity at least once a week.

We enjoy spending our free time in the great outdoors, playing sport and making use of the many sports facilities across the country. That active lifestyle begins early, in kindergarten and primary school, where physical education is part of the curriculum. Sport is simply part of our everyday lives, from school playgrounds and local clubs to major international competitions.

And what is the common thread running through all these sporting stories?

It is the decision to give it a go. To set yourself a goal that goes beyond what is expected.

To persevere when the going gets tough. And to refuse to believe that the size of a country determines the size of your dreams. Time and again, we Slovenians prove that with perseverance, ambition and courage, we can achieve even what initially seemed impossible.



Anže Kopitar is widely regarded as Slovenia's greatest ice hockey player. Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

FACTS



SLOVENIA IN NUMBERS

A Story About People and Progress

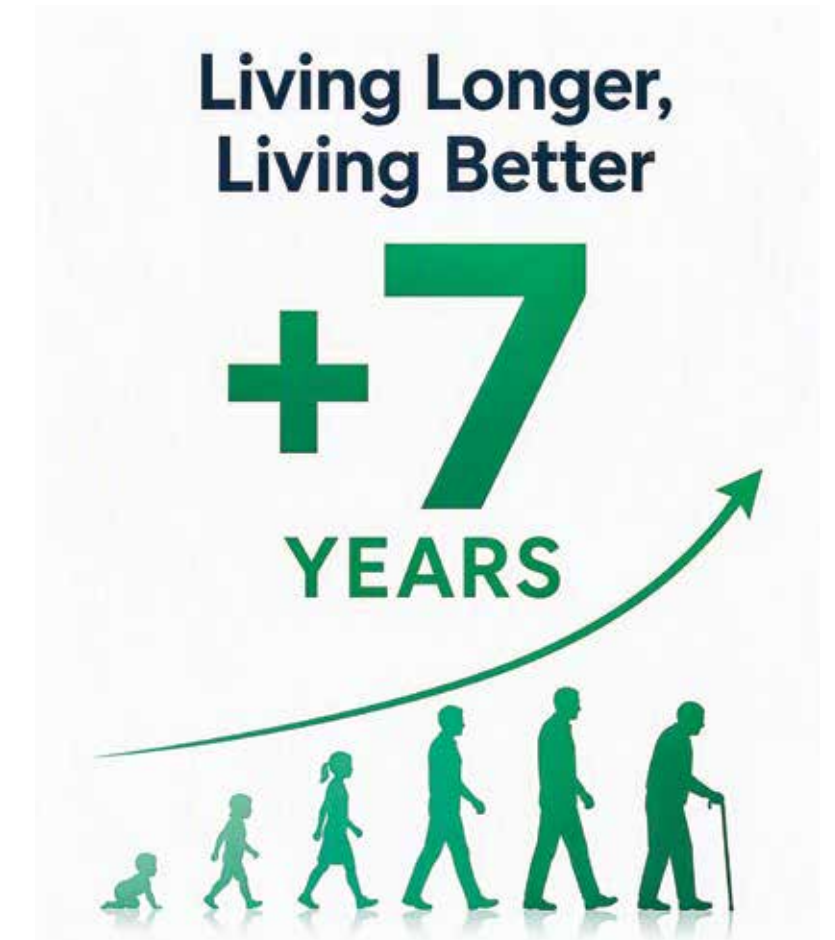
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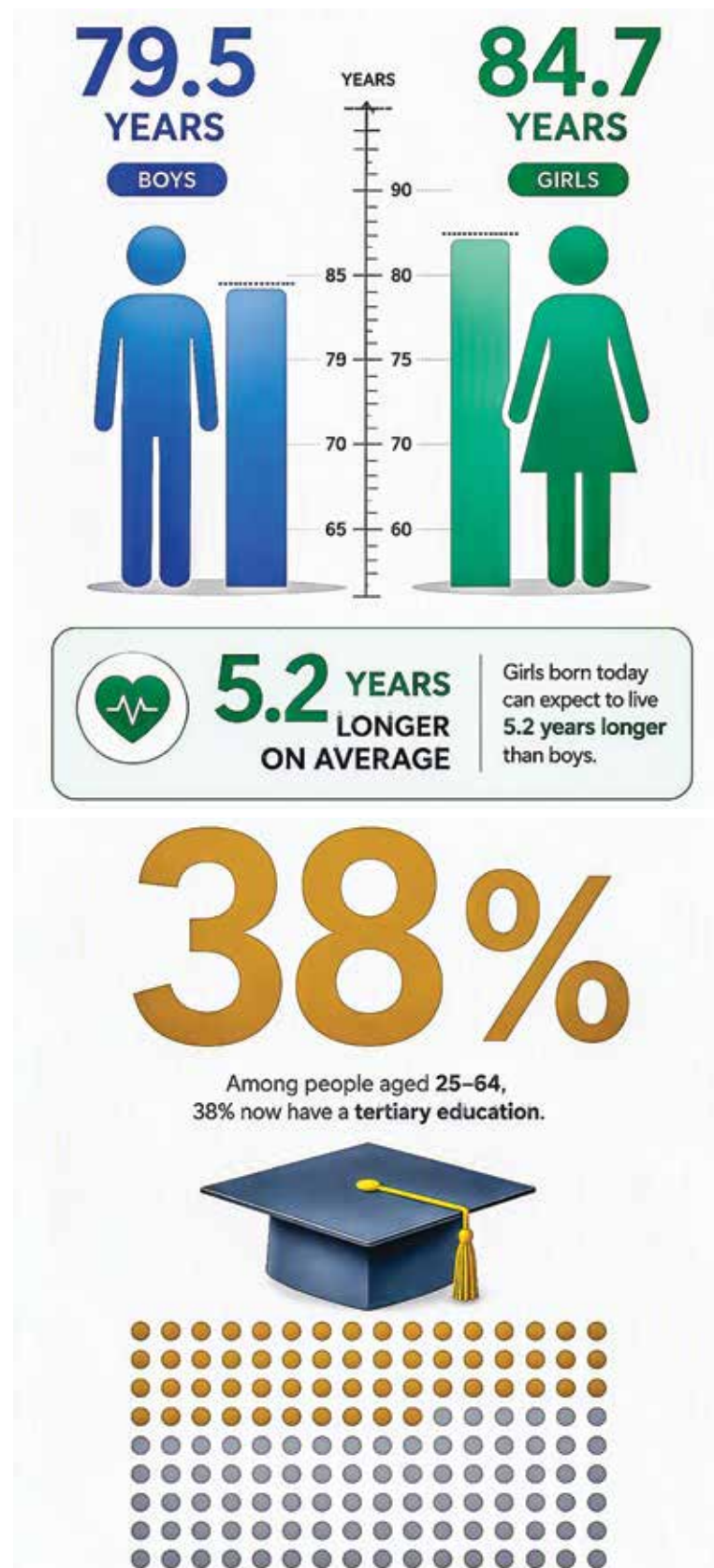
Thirty-five years after gaining independence, Slovenia is no longer a young state seeking its place in the world. Today, Slovenia is a recognised member of the European Union, the euro area, the United Nations and many other international organisations. Over the past three and a half decades, it has built modern institutions, developed an open economy and became a country that actively contributes to addressing common European and global challenges.

The greatest story of Slovenia's development is that of its people. At the end of 1991, Slovenia had a population of just under two million. Today that number exceeds 2.13 million – an increase of approximately 7%. Society has changed over the past decades: people live longer, are better educated and more connected to the world.

Since independence, Slovenia's demographic picture has changed: the population has increased by more than 130,000, while it has also aged considerably. The average age of the population has risen by more than seven years, and since 2003, there have been more people aged 65 and over than children under the age of 15. At the same time, people live longer, are better educated and are increasingly connected to the international community. Demographic changes thus reflect both the success of development and one of the key challenges of the future: adapting society to an ageing population.

Since independence, the average age of Slovenia's population has increased by more than seven years, while people live longer and enjoy a better quality of life.





Boys born today have a life expectancy of 79.5 years, compared with 84.7 years for girls.

Over this period, Slovenia has also become a strongly knowledge-based society.

Among the population aged between 25 and 64, 38% of people now have a tertiary education.

In the early 1990s this share amounted to only a few percent. The state lays the foundations for the future from early childhood, with 86% of children aged between one and five participating in pre-school education programmes. Almost 196,000 pupils attend 820 primary schools, and Slovenia allocates 5.2% of its gross domestic product to formal education.

An important part of Slovenia's success story is the economy.

Gross domestic product has almost doubled in real terms since independence, while GDP per capita was around four times higher in 2021, the 30th anniversary of independence, than in 1991, and today it stands at approximately six times its 1991 level.

Slovenia has evolved from a transition economy into a competitive, export-oriented country, closely linked to European and global markets.

This progress is also evident in everyday life. If we compare the purchasing power of the average salary today with that at the time of independence, it is clear that people can afford significantly more basic necessities. On the 30th anniversary of independence, statistics showed that the average salary could buy almost three times as much bread, more than three times as much coffee and significantly larger quantities of other goods than in 1991.

Quality of life

Slovenia has also strengthened its position in the fields of culture, creativity and sport. Every year, it hosts more than 25,000 cultural events, while its creators contribute to fields such as science, design, architecture and innovation. The country enjoys particular international recognition through its athletes, who, despite Slovenia's small size, have been winning Olympic medals, world championship titles, and victories at some of the world's most prestigious sporting competitions for decades.

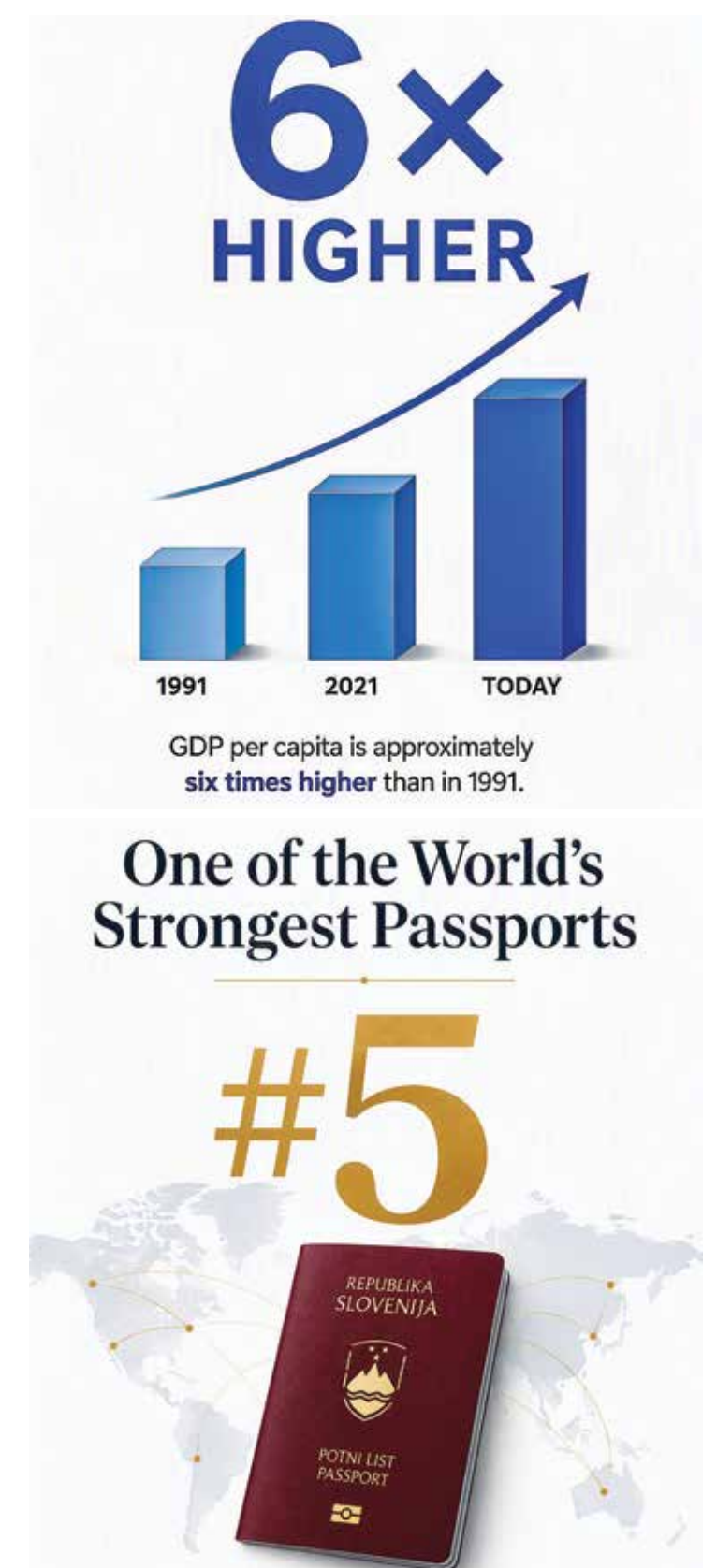
Slovenia has also become increasingly well-known around the world. It has developed from a relatively little known European destination into one of Europe's leading examples of sustainable tourism. Today, it attracts nearly seven million visitors annually, who account for more than 17 million overnight stays. Visitors are drawn by its diverse landscapes, ranging from the Alps and the Pannonian Plain to wine-growing hills and the Adriatic Sea, as well as by its high quality of life and commitment to a green future.

The Slovenian passport also reflects the country's development.

According to the Henley Passport Index, it ranks fifth among the world's most powerful passports, providing visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 184 destinations worldwide, and symbolising Slovenia's openness, trust and international reputation.

Thirty-five years after independence, Slovenia remains committed to the values on which it has built its path: knowledge, cooperation, creativity and respect. It is these values that remain the strongest foundation for the future.

Source of statistical data: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS)



Quick facts



Capital city: Ljubljana

Other major towns and cities: Maribor, Celje, Kranj, Velenje, Koper, Novo mesto, Ptuj, Nova Gorica, Murska Sobota, Jesenice, Trbovlje

Language: Slovenian; in nationally mixed areas, Italian and Hungarian as well

Surface area: 20,271 km²

Location: central European country

Population: 2,136,385 (2026)

Currency: euro

Country calling code: +386

Time zone: GMT/UTC +1

Length of the land border: 1,322 km: 318 km with Austria, 232 km with Italy, 100 km with Hungary and 672 km with Croatia

Length of the coast: 47 km

Highest peak: Triglav (2,864 m)

The largest lake: Cerknica lake (26 km²)

The longest river: The River Sava (221 km)

The longest subterranean cave: Postojna Cave (19.5 km)

Largest protected area of nature: Triglav National Park (83,982 ha)

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