

Sinfo

MARCH 2010

BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

Petra Majdič

“MORAL OLYMPIC CHAMPION”

Maze's Silvers Slovenia's
Best Results Ever

33 SPORTS

PETRA MAJDIČ

Moral Olympic champion



MONTHLY REPORT 04
New Environment Minister

IN FOCUS 06
The Slovenians and their cultural holiday, Exit Strategy

INTERVIEW 14
Dr Zdenka Čebašek - Travnik

BUSINESS 18
No lack of ideas for achieving faster and stronger development

LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR 20
Dr Erwin Kubesch, Austrian Ambassador, Aleksander Geržina, Slovenian Ambassador

ART & CULTURE 22
Ljubljana's year of the book

OUR EXCELLENCE 29
Green tourism, an opportunity for a green country, Seaway goes green at sea

SPORTS 33
"Petra Majdič - moral Olympic champion", Tina Maze - Double Silver

SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS 37
Slovenian Cuisine in Milan

PEOPLE 39
Anže Kopitar - The boy from the sandbox, a sportsman for all times

CULTURAL TRAILS 42
Slovenian Dialects

CULTURAL TRAILS 44
Carnival celebrations - valuable cultural heritage





Veronika Stabej
Director

PRIZES, AWARDS AND HARD WORK

PERMIT ME TO CONTINUE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE introduction to the last issue of Sinfo, which set out some thoughts on the winning philosophy.

In Slovenia most of us are still affected by the three medals at the Olympic Games in Vancouver, Petra Majdič's bronze and Tina Maze's silver.

For all of us, Petra's medal is at least gold, since there are very few people who would actually start a competition after a fall and injury like that, let alone do battle with the best cross-country skiers in the world and go on to win a medal. That medal was not just laboured for in terms of superhuman effort, it also serves as proof of what the human spirit can do to achieve a goal. And that is literally infectious. Immediately after winning her own medal, skier Tina Maze said that she had been given a special boost by Petra. And what an achievement! But Tina didn't stop at one, she went on to win a second Olympic silver medal, making her Slovenia's first female double Olympic medallist.

The joy at the medals, the goodwill and happy atmosphere were also reflected in the Slovenia House at Whistler, which our office has helped to organise and operate. We can take credit, along with the competitors and other guests of the House, for ensuring in the spirit of our slogan I Feel Slovenia, that we are being increasingly "felt".

A great deal of will, dedication and resilience must also be shown by those who are active in the arts. They do not expect major prizes for their efforts, yet they are still delighted by recognition of their work. So this issue has allocated a special section for two of this year's Prešeren Prize winners, the dancer Mateja Rebolj and illustrator Kostja Gatnik.

A great deal could also be said about hard work by this issue's interviewee, the Human Rights Ombudsman Dr Zdenka Čebašek-Travnik, whose main attention in the future will be focused on ensuring that the economic crisis does not lead to mass breaches of socio-economic rights.

P.S.: As you have probably noticed, this Sinfo is a little less shiny than the previous issue, but of course this will in no way affect the content, it will simply help preserve our environment. Starting with this issue, Sinfo is printed on "green" paper.

“
THE JOY AT THE MEDALS, THE GOODWILL AND HAPPY ATMOSPHERE WERE ALSO REFLECTED IN THE SLOVENIA HOUSE AT WHISTLER, WHICH OUR OFFICE HAS HELPED TO ORGANISE AND OPERATE.
”



Cover photo Stanko Gruden / STA

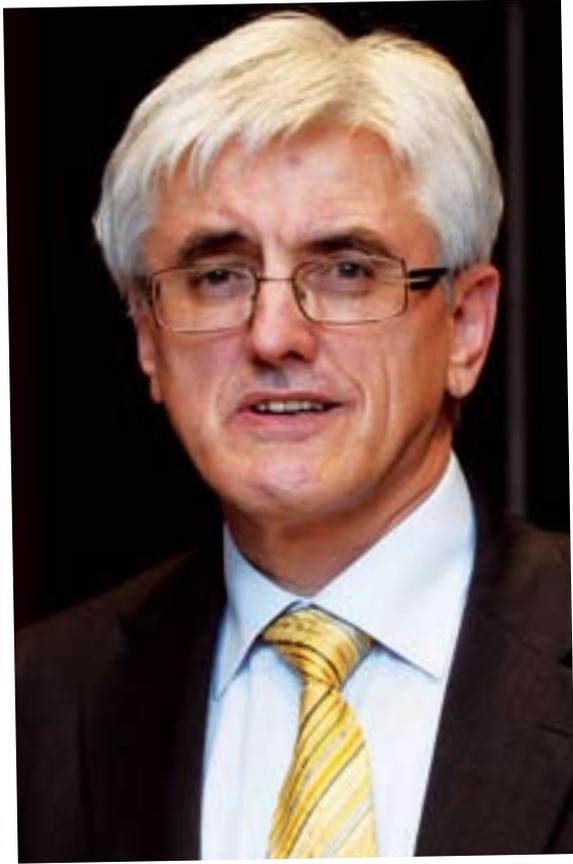
Sinfo - Slovenian information

Editorial Government Communication Office
Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386 1 478 2630, Fax +386 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Director Veronika Stabej
Editor-in-Chief Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si
Editorial Board Albert Kos, Mateja Malnar Štembal, Valerija Mencej, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Andreja Šonc Simčič, Andrej Savelli, Branko Vidrih
Photo Editor Veronica Ditrih
Production Videotop Color Media d.o.o.
Graphic design Boštjan Krajnc **Printed by** Mobinet

Gateway to information on Slovenia www.slovenia.si
Government Communication Office www.ukom.gov.si
Government of the Republic of Slovenia www.vlada.si
Slovenian Tourist Board www.slovenia.info
Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry www.gzs.si
Slovenian Chamber of Craft www.ozs.si
Public Agency of the RS of Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments www.japti.si
Ljubljana Stock Exchange www.ljse.si
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia www.stat.si
State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia e-uprava.gov.si

SINFO is printed on the eco-friendly FSC label paper. The FSC label provides assurance, that paper originates from responsible forest management according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.

NEW ENVIRONMENT MINISTER



Mateja Malnar
Štembal
Photo STA,
Tamino Petelinšek,
Matej Leskovšek

IN THE MIDDLE OF FEBRUARY, WITH 48 VOTES IN favour and two against, deputies confirmed the appointment of Roko Žarnić, professor at the Ljubljana Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geodesy, as the new environment minister.

Žarnić was taking up the ministerial position vacated by Karl Erjavec, who resigned from the post in the January parliamentary session before deputies had decided on his dismissal. This was prompted by Prime Minister Borut Pahor, after the minister was called to resign by the Court of Auditors owing to the unsatisfactory measures of the ministry in managing the separate collection of urban waste.

The new environment minister indicated that he would first deal with raising the efficiency and level of organisation at the ministry. He highlighted the challenge of managing urban and non-urban waste, rehabilitating the quality of outside air, drawing up water management plans and a programme of building public water infrastructure up to 2020, and intensive implementation of cohesion projects in the area of the environment alongside proactive cooperation with local communities. He also highlighted anti-flood measures and the Natura 2000 area.

The new minister also places great importance on the issue of sustainable tourism, which he believes has great potential in Slovenia.

‘The new environment minister indicated that he would first deal with raising the efficiency and level of organisation at the ministry.’

EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton visits Slovenia

PRIOR TO SCHEDULED MEETINGS in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, and EU Vice President, made a short visit to Slovenia for the purpose of being more closely familiarised with conditions and experiences in the region.

She and Prime Minister Borut Pahor held talks that focused largely on the international conference on the Western Balkans. The Slovenian Prime Minister expressed the conviction that this meeting would “in many respects be ground-breaking”, while Baroness Ashton stated that Mr. Pahor had her full support for the conference. The international conference, an initiative



launched by the Slovenian Prime Minister and his Croatian counterpart Jadranka Kosor, and which is scheduled for the second half of March in Brdo pri Kranju, has been jointly organised by Slovenia, Croatia, the European Council and the European Commission. It will mark the first meeting in 18 years of all the regional leaders and Albania, while a representative of Kosovo will

also attend.

Pahor also indicated that together with Ms. Kosor, with President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and the current EU President, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, he will strive for the meeting to adopt a Ljubljana Declaration, in which they would express support for the inclusion of the Western Balkans in

European integrations.

Upon Baroness Ashton's visit, the Slovenian Foreign Minister Samuel Žbogar expressed his pleasure that the High Representative had responded to the invitation, and also offered the view that she would know how to make use of Slovenia's familiarity with the region.

President Türk discusses bilateral relations and the environment in India



AT THE BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY, Slovenian President Dr Danilo Türk made a working visit to India, where he met with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and addressed participants at the opening of the 10th sustainable development summit.

His discussions with Indian Prime Minister Singh focused on environmental issues and activities following the December climate summit in Copenhagen. The two emphasised the need to continue talks that might lead to a legally binding and balanced

agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, at the latest by the climate summit in Mexico City. They also talked about the cooperation of the two countries under the aegis of the United Nations. In his speech to the sustainable development summit in New Delhi, the Slovenian President stressed that major challenges await the international community this year, and these must be tackled without delay, with a legally binding agreement in the fight against climate change an essential objective in this.

As President Türk underlined, the Copenhagen conference did not meet the high expectations, but while its results were modest, it was nevertheless realistic and positive, so the disappointment should not run too deep.

The President devoted special attention to the urgent need to include new interested parties in the international climate negotiations, and called for a restructuring of the negotiating process and the inclusion of other players, especially the commercial sector.



Prešeren's monument in the square named after him.

THE SLOVENIANS AND THEIR CULTURAL DAY

Jože Osterman Photo STA

OVER A DECADE AGO, WHEN I MENTIONED IN PASSING AT A SESSION of the Council of Europe's Culture Committee in Strasbourg that we Slovenians have officially been celebrating our own cultural holiday for more than half a century and, what is more, that public opinion surveys rate it among our most popular holidays, I was rewarded by a certain amount of friendly interest but also the rather arrogant comment of a German colleague (who happened to be a dear friend) that I was perhaps exaggerating a little in singing the praises of a country that was then quite fresh for Europe and correspondingly little known. It was only later that it occurred to me what the man probably meant: the level of cultivation of a human community does not depend on a holiday, but on other matters. And yet, whatever may justifiably be said about our general level of culture (reading books, going to theatres and exhibitions and, last but not least, general knowledge and civilisation), this does not change the fact that although a cultural holiday may be a slightly unusual matter, it is one that among the Slovenians actually functions extremely well.



Miklavž Komelj



Barbara Cerar



Aldo Kumar



Maja Delak



Peter Musevski



Andrej Rozman Roza

A Slovenian wreath your poet has entwined...

INCREDIBLE THOUGH IT MAY SEEM, PEOPLE IN THE NORTH-WEST OF Slovenia, where the tall chimneys of the Jesenice ironworks once rose to the sky, dominating the grey and dirty industrial centre that grew up around it, the largely rural population of the nearby plain around Bled, which gently rises towards Lake Bohinj and the Julian Alps, and the citizens of the nearby administrative centre of Radovljica, all breathe the same air on the Day of Culture. Columns of hikers, consisting of people of every type – old people and children, bright pupils and students, housewives from villages, farmers and their wives, worn-out workers of riper years – wind their way from these places to Vrba, the birthplace of Slovenia's greatest poet, France Prešeren. On Slovenia's Day of Culture, this little village becomes the capital of Slovenia, in which nostalgic memory of the poet combines with modern pride at being an independent country, possessing one of Europe's official languages and Slovenian culture, which was one of the fundamental impulses behind the germination of the Slovenian nation. On Slovenia's cultural holiday, past centuries symbolically meet in the present in Vrba, and with them everything that has survived in the nation's collective memory as one of the elements that make Slovenia a nation.

Each year this atmosphere produces new ideas on how to pay reverence to the poet's spirit and, in this way, to Slovenia. Everyone wants to pay the best possible homage to the history and to the poet that have given him his spiritual life. This year the players of the Slovenian ice hockey champions Jesenice came up with an interesting activity. These lads from a sport which is famous for its toughness, not to say roughness, showed a completely different side in front of several thousand spectators when they read – with great sensibility – Prešeren's love lyrics and dreamy ballads, and the meditative sonnets in which Prešeren hopes for better times.

But Vrba – the undisputed capital of the country on the day of the cultural holiday – is far from being an isolated case in the broad, proud circle of human association whose basis is culture. Twenty kilometres closer to Ljubljana, Kranj, which calls itself Prešeren's town because the poet spent a large part of his life there, wakes up to the holiday with a cultural fair the equal of which would be hard to find anywhere else where a famous artist's name is celebrated. Stalls crammed with books and other items for the most part connected with culture, actors dressed in the costumes of the 19th century, for the most part members of the town's numerous cultural societies, along with a few professional actors, who convert the legends about Prešeren into a living event which is followed by thousands of visitors. All this is undoubtedly a surprising contrast to the town's other face, where the mayor laments the abandonment of the town centre because people are increasingly drawn to the new entertainment centres attached to out-of-town hypermarkets. Evidently the cultural holiday attracts a completely different kind of person to Prešeren's town and perhaps there is a lesson to be learned here.

Ljubljana, of course, could not be allowed to lag behind in this swirl of events. Slovenia's capital usually prepares itself for the cultural holiday some days in advance, and on February evenings the city's squares and streets resound with the voices of Ljubljana's choirs, singing Prešeren's poems in locations connected with the poet. One particularly well-known location is the church in Tmovo, where the poet met his muse, a rich city girl called Julija Primic, who occupied in his poems a place similar to that of Petrarch's Laura, in other words the image of unrequited yearning and love, which gave birth to the most profound poems of pain and hope. In Prešeren Square, a crowd of people gather below the poet's statue on the festive day to hear Slovenia's most famous actresses and actors recite Prešeren's poems. This event has already gained the status of an event that every Slovenian has to see at least once. >>>

On Slovenia's cultural holiday, museums and galleries also throw their doors wide open – some of them free of charge, while others offer big discounts, and the result of this is that in some institutions this day accounts for between 5% and 10% of the total number of visitors for the whole year. It is probably not worth asking ourselves whether so many visitors are chiefly attracted by the fact that admission is free, or at least very cheap, since experience tells us very clearly that a person who is not interested in culture would not go to a museum or a cultural institution even if admission were always free. It would be closer to the truth to say that the cultural holiday awakes in most people a sense of belonging, which drives them, on this day at least, to do something cultural. Not even the media can resist the general popular feeling that culture is, after all, something important and worthy of consideration. Despite their dwindling involvement in cultural matters, there is no doubt that many of them purchase an indulgence for their otherwise somewhat negligent attitude towards this aspect of life. But the desire to contribute something themselves to the valuable cultural enthusiasm, which Slovenians only show on this scale once a year, is also evident in the media, since it gives them legitimacy and reinforces the impression that they are standing in the middle of the 'arena of life'.

A record of my pain and of your praise ...

THE PHENOMENON OF THE CULTURAL HOLIDAY DESCRIBED ABOVE SOAL has other dimensions which may not be apparent to the less attentive observer, but which perhaps represent the most important 'purifying' role of culture even today. Ever since we began celebrating the festival, art and culture, which in Slovenian history have indisputably occupied the position of creator and defender of fundamental national and human values, and thus of social ethics and principles, have been given the opportunity, on this day, to hold a mirror to all other spheres and pronounce critical words about them. Politics is understandably the sphere to which artists have always devoted most criticism, often in very cutting words. So it has been since the beginning, even in the harsh years of the former socialist regime, and so it remains today.

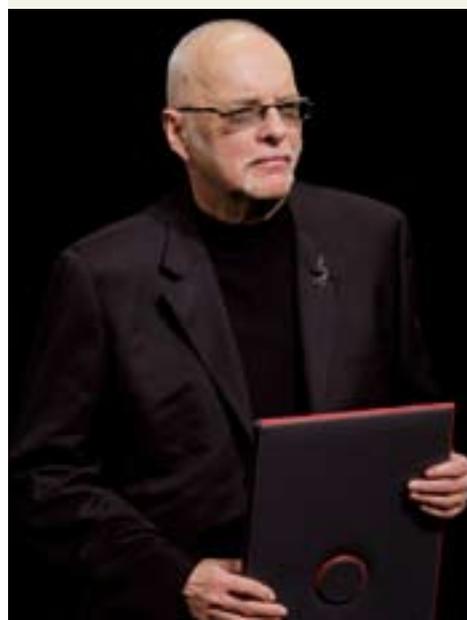
The main event on the eve of the holiday is the presentation of the Prešeren Awards – the country's highest prizes for artistic endeavour, which undoubtedly represent, through their long tradition, the most recognisable manifestation within the context of the celebration. It would perhaps be interesting to monitor the tone and emphasis of the keynote speeches at the Prešeren Awards ceremonies, since it would be possible to develop from them quite a clear picture of the state and development of Slovenian society, to discern its glittering moments and crises, since in the majority of the speeches there has been relatively little exaggeration and hypocrisy. Since almost the very beginning of this hallowed national ritual, art and culture have won themselves an interesting concession: the right to keynote speeches on cultural holidays has usually gone to the artists themselves, for which reason the speeches have increasingly frequently deviated significantly from the usual political speeches that people are used to from other celebratory gatherings. Even towards the end of the former Yugoslavia, some speeches caused discomfort and tension between the political authorities and artists. A walkout from the ceremony by one prime minister in the early 1980s was one event that agitated the public at the time, and one of the heralds of the political changes that happened a decade later. In this dialogue with everyone else, culture has always tranquilly assumed the a priori right to criticise others, while not necessarily attempting to clean its own doorstep, and in doing so has pointed out the badly regulated conditions in its sphere, the firmness of its principles and the fact that there is little money in this field, which undoubtedly gave it the necessary legitimacy. On the other hand, it must be admitted that politics has learned much from this dialogue,

Prešeren Awards 2009

This year Prešeren Awards were won by the painter Kostja Gatnik and the dancer Mateja Rebolj. In their own way, the awards are somewhat surprising. Gatnik is not a painter in the usual sense of the word, since his work takes in all forms of visual communication and appears in places where one would almost not expect it. Rebolj, on the other hand, is the first person from the dance field to win this highest award. The award citations summed up some of the characteristics of their work:

Kostja Gatnik

“ His oeuvre is characterised by an opening up of the concept of the visual and visual communications of the last quarter of the 20th century. Gatnik burst dazzlingly onto the art scene through Pop Art and Hyperrealism. In the late 1980s he surprised critics with his very personal, confessional and reflective poetics. His art editorship of *Tribuna* represented a springboard into the complexity of pop culture. Among the artists of his generation, he deserves particular credit for the fact that discourses about privileged artistic media became irrelevant in the last quarter of the 20th century. He has constantly been present with caricatures, comic strips, posters, album covers, book illustrations and illustration par excellence. He has shown his paintings very rarely. He charms, teaches, enlightens everyone, be it with drawings or painted images. His photographs reveal the sensitivity of the painter's eye, even in this genre. Some decades ago, Gatnik began to change conceptions of artistry, creativity, fine art and the sphere of visual communications. ”





Mateja Rebolj

“ There is not a dancer in Slovenia able to incorporate into his or her work, with the same degree of artistic excellence, such a broad spectrum of different dance/movement and contemporary theatrical aesthetics as Rebolj. As a ballet soloist of the SNG Opera and Ballet Ljubljana, she has danced a series of roles from the classical ballet repertoire such as Giselle and Odette from Swan Lake ... But her artistic creation truly found a home in 1985 when the 'retro-garde' Sisters of Scipio Nasica Theatre (with Baptism under Triglav) and a production of the Ljubljana Dance Theatre entered her life ... Since the mid-1980s she has inscribed her creativity into the contemporary choreographies of Ksenija Hribar, Matjaž Farič, Sinja Ožbolt, Mateja Bučar, Mare Mlačnik and Magdalena Reiter. A central place is occupied by her fundamental encounter with the 'retro-garde' and 'cosmo-kinetic' art of Dragan Živadinov. In Farewell Ritual at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Centre in Russia, she floated for 20 seconds in an anti-gravitational field, and in this way realised the ultimate utopia of dance history: the dancing body conquers the force of gravity and touches its light infinity.”

‘A political class that has listened to and endured critical words has passed an important test of its own tolerance and democracy.’

and has subsequently not dared to deprive culture of its right to say what it wants on the cultural holiday, even though it has often had to grit its teeth and accept criticism.

This year, once again, politics was spared nothing. The economic crisis which in the past year has begun seriously to restrict creative possibilities

in all artistic spheres, and the increasing tendency from a few years ago to try and control the cultural sphere and the media, received quite a sharp response, particularly in the speech of the president of the National Council for Culture, and the demand that open questions be resolved more quickly in a more principled and fair manner, so as to re-establish normal conditions for successful creative work, which needs freedom and autonomy. This does not only apply to culture but to all areas of life where a new momentum needs to be found. This criticism did not actually contain much that was new, but it was expressed in a direct and clear manner, which – given the conciliatory responses from political circles – could contribute to resolving certain problems that despite the current crisis are capable of being resolved more quickly.

There is actually much that is good in this constantly self-renewing function of social criticism that we Slovenians have granted to culture. Although it still contains many elements from the days when, owing to the absence of a state and its institutions, the Slovenian nation was compelled to formulate its political programmes through culture, even today the language of culture is sufficiently comprehensible, well-argued and genuine to be able to make a significant contribution to the creation of the energy that Slovenians will need to address today's problems. A political class that has listened to and endured critical words has passed an important test of its own tolerance and democracy.

*Since from my heart's deep roots
have sprung these lays...*

IT IS PERHAPS NOT SUPERFLUOUS TO MENTION THAT GREAT ATTENTION IS paid to culture, at least at the declarative level, and that it is facing important tasks in the coming years. We need only mention this year, which in April will see Ljubljana become the World Book Capital, while in two years' time, Maribor will be the European Capital of Culture. All of this shows how urgent it is that this sphere should develop more quickly and, above all, more efficiently, although it must be admitted that such a plan is also evident from the government strategy presented to the Slovenian public some days ago.

This interesting and very important backdrop to what is a unique Slovenian cultural holiday, is without a doubt a good environment for the presenting of awards to artists who, either in the past two years, for which the awards of the Prešeren Fund are granted, or over the course of their artistic career, have created works that count among the finest in the Slovenian cultural arena. The pleasant and sincere social and media attention which surrounds the award winners is further proof of the high esteem in which Slovenia's cultural holiday is held by the public.

The winners of the Prešeren Fund awards are the poet Miklavž Komelj, the actor Peter Musevski, the composer Aldo Kumar, the actress Barbara Cerar, the writer Andrej Rozman Roza and the dancer Maja Delak.





CAREFULLY CONSIDERED MEASURES ESSENTIAL FOR CRISIS EXIT

Alenka Čebular Photo STA

IN SLOVENIA, LIKE IN OTHER COUNTRIES IN EUROPE, the economic and financial crisis appears to be easing, and some economies are already showing the first signs of recovery. Yet cases such as Greece remind us that the real work is just beginning, and that successful exit from the crisis requires the necessity of the economy adjustment to the times that are coming. The latest crisis has exposed numerous weak points in existing systems, so the recovery will require radical

structural changes. This has also been the case of Slovenia, where the economic crisis has placed a mirror in front of us and (among other things) has made confront with all the urgently needed reforms which we could not carry out as a society in the previous years.

For this reason the Slovenian Exit Strategy 2010-2013, which the Government adopted at the beginning of February, is a very important starting point for the further development of this



‘The key objective of the Slovenian Government while it was adopting individual packages of anti-crisis measures, was that these measures – despite their short-term orientation – must link development and restructuring of companies, while at the same time caring for employees, their education and training, as well as taking care of the unemployed and their prospects for the earliest possible return to active work.’

country. This document was created gradually, over numerous discussions while short term anti-crisis measures were being adopted, during the drafting of the programming budget 2010 - 2011 and parallel to the formulation of key development priorities. In this process it became very clear which are the most necessary structural adjustments, if Slovenia wishes to maintain an internationally competitive economy and the status of a social state.

Anti-crisis measures mainly of a short-term nature

With the outbreak of the crisis in 2009 the Slovenian Government adopted several packages of short term anti-crisis measures to cushion the shock experienced by the economy. The majority of the measures were aimed at stabilising the financial system and ensuring bank liquidity. Thus, through the implementation of guarantee schemes we indirectly ensured funds for companies to operate normally. The measures adopted to improve the securing of cohesion policy funds have already yielded results: since owing to the improvement of conditions in this area in 2009, Slovenia generated a surplus in relation to the EU budget.

In addition to liquidity problems, companies faced (in certain sectors, such as construction, it is still the case) a major drop in orders. The adopted measures were therefore oriented also towards preserving jobs, both through subsidies for shorter working hours, and through incentives for investment in development that should create new jobs with higher added value.

The key objective of the Slovenian Government while it was adopting individual packages of anti-crisis measures, was that these measures – despite their short-term orientation – must link development and restructuring of companies, while at the same time caring for employees, their education and training, as well as taking care of the unemployed and their prospects for the earliest possible return to active work.

Exit from the crisis only through structural measures

The adopted anti-crisis measures enabled the preservation of numerous jobs and prevented the growth of poverty, but in the long term neither the economy nor the country can survive in this way. The consideration of when to leave off anti-crisis measures and what to replace them with is part of the exit strategy, which in the narrower sense means precisely this: planning the speed and sequence of withdrawing measures that have helped the economy weather the crisis in the short term. In the broader sense the exit strategy and structural measures determine the orientation and objectives for the period after the crisis. The harmonisation of short-term anti-crisis measures with the objectives of long-term structural changes is therefore a key task for the aforementioned document.

The exit strategy has been mapped out as a combination of economic policy measures, structural changes and institutional adjustments, which while ensuring fiscal sustainability, will >>>

‘The Government has identified three basic developmental priorities for the period 2010-2013: entrepreneurship and skills for development, secure flexibility and social cohesion and developmental, transport and energy infrastructure for an effective and stable environmental balance. In order to achieve these objectives, Slovenia needs accessible and effective sources of finance, as well as an adjustment of cohesion policy.’

ease the social position of the weakest and strengthen the competitiveness of the economy and the creation of jobs. The long-term and primary objective of course is sustainable economic growth.



The Concept of the Exit Strategy

Economic policy measures: balancing public finances and strengthening secure flexibility elements

After its exit from the crisis, the Government is seeking to re-establish balanced public finances in Slovenia. This will be achieved through spending cuts and not by increasing the tax burden. The condition for this is determining the scope of public spending through the fiscal rule and the structure of public spending based on national development priorities. The Government has identified three basic developmental priorities for the period 2010-2013: entrepreneurship and skills for development, secure flexibility and social cohesion and developmental, transport and energy infrastructure for an effective and stable environmental balance. In order to achieve these objectives, Slovenia needs accessible and effective sources of finance, as well as an adjustment of cohesion policy.



Minister of Development and European Affairs Mitja Gaspari.

The measures that will afford companies more transparent access to development funds include for instance the restructuring of institutions that dispose of these funds, as well as the adjustment of guarantee schemes and other forms of state aid. Upon the expiry of the anti-crisis measure of subsidising those waiting for work, the spotlight will focus on active employment policy measures, social programmes and lifelong learning policies in relation to structural changes.

Greater social cohesion should be achieved through greater efficiency in the system of social security and rights relating to public funds. Contributing to this will be the introduction of single entry points for all social transfers.

In order to achieve the concept of secure flexibility, changes have been drawn up in the regulation of what is called casual work and employment, with the aim of affording employers more flexible employment, while employees will nevertheless maintain their social security.

All the priority programmes, together with very extensive social programmes, will represent around 45 percent of all national budget spending. “These are clearly determined priorities, limited by the appropriate finances relative to GDP and the national budget,” said the Minister for Development and European Affairs, Mitja Gaspari. In order for these priority programmes to be as successful as possible, the Government will start to steer financing from the European cohesion and structural funds primarily into these programmes. (Source: STA)



‘All the priority programmes, together with very extensive social programmes, will represent around 45 percent of all national budget spending.’

Structural changes: social security for all generations

Given the demographic indicators, which suggest that Slovenia, like the majority of developed countries, will experience longer life expectancy coupled with a low birth rate, meaning an ageing of the population, reform of the pension and healthcare systems have for some time been subjects of debate. The economic and financial crisis has merely intensified these debates, and especially the urgent need for changes to actually be implemented.

The key objective of **comprehensive reform of the pension system**, which is already being prepared, is the long-term financial viability of the system and appropriateness of pensions: **secure old age for all generations**. The proposed reform is divided into two parts, these being modernisation of the system in effect (which enters into force on 1 January 2011) and establishing a new system with entry into force on 1 January 2015.

There are primarily two objectives of healthcare reform: first, public and non-profit healthcare geared towards satisfying the needs of the population and not towards generating profits and second according to the solidarity principle, preserving universal

access to necessary and professionally justifiable healthcare services and rights stemming from health insurance. At the same time, legislation is being drafted that will for the first time comprehensively regulate the system of long-term care for all those who for various reasons cannot care for themselves and need the help of others.

Prime Minister Pahor: “We have to succeed!”

Although in drawing up the document ‘Slovenian Exit Strategy 2010-2013’ the Government has tried to achieve the greatest possible consensus both among the social partners and in the general public, opinions of course remain divided. Yet if we wish to maintain the success story that we have built over the past twenty years, we must as a society achieve consensus on certain key priorities. Or as Prime Minister Borut Pahor stated in parliament as the Government’s exit strategy was presented: “Slovenia is too small and too open economy to have any other choice than to be competitive, adaptable and the best, so we have to succeed in carrying out the exit strategy!” Implementing the exit strategy is an absolute priority for the country this year and probably also in the coming years. ●

The whole document is available at:

http://www.vlada.si/fileadmin/dokumenti/si/projekti/Protikrizni_ukrepi/izhod_iz_krize/SI_exit_strategy.pdf

The economic crisis cannot be an excuse for reducing human rights

Dr ZDENKA ČEBAŠEK - TRAVNIK

Human Rights Ombudsman

Slovenia belongs among those countries that for the most part guarantee basic citizenship rights, but in the future more widespread violations of socioeconomic rights will occur, says the ombudsman. Economic crisis should not be an excuse for reducing human rights in any area.

We need to devote more attention to ways of resolving disputes and disagreements, not only in the courts, where we have a new normative regulation governing this area, but in all other procedures too, believes Dr Čebašek-Travnik. In her opinion many problems could be resolved more effectively, more rapidly and more cheaply – and above all in a more agreeable manner for all involved – through mediation, settlement, or simply through tolerant discussion.

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Maja Slavec

What issues are you currently dealing with?

At present the office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia (the ombudsman's office for short) is working on ways to motivate the competent ministries to get things moving in the field of children's rights, where what we are missing above all is the possibility of secure hospital treatment for mentally disturbed children, and specialists to treat them. This is an issue that affects both Slovenian children and foreign children who are victims of human trafficking or who are members of families that have fled their own countries. In terms of legislation, our main focus is the Family Code, for the adoption of which we are pushing hard. I have in mind here above all the formal recognition and regulation of the figure of children's advocate – a children's advocacy project has been ongoing at the ombudsman's office for two years now. The Family Code is extremely important, not least because it will introduce a ban on corporal punishment of children and equalise the rights of children from same-sex partnerships. These are children who are themselves unable to obtain

legal recognition of their rights and whose social (non-biological) parents are unable, for example, to exercise the right to maternity or sick leave, which for the present can only be claimed by a biological parent. The Code covers a large number of apparently small issues which, however, have a significant impact on

“ THE NUMBER OF APPEALS CLEARLY REFLECTS A LACK OF TRUST IN THE COURTS, LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE LENGTH OF PROCEDURES OR BECAUSE INDIVIDUALS BELIEVE THAT THE FACTS OF THEIR CASE HAVE NOT BEEN PROPERLY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS. ”

quality of life. I do not understand those who oppose the adoption of this Code, because by introducing legal regulation of this kind we are not taking anything away from anyone. I do not see how the rights of those children who live in a traditional family would be limited if a child who lives in a same-sex family is granted the right to have both parents with him when he is ill.

The relationship between politics and the work of the ombudsman can be a tricky one. How do you see the attitude of politicians towards you?

The reason I obtained the necessary majority in the National Assembly is probably because up to that point I had never expressed my political views in public. In my work I often have to adopt positions that are politically coloured (or are understood as such), and on this basis politicians, and other people, jump to conclusions about my political orientation and describe my actions in those terms. And, of course, it can also happen that they attempt to discredit my actions. The Family Code, for example, is one of those topics that is closer to the Left in terms of content, while on the other hand there are matters where I am seen as being too right-wing, or people ask me why I do not respond to a particular question. A reliable indication of the fact that I am politically unaligned comes when a declaration or position of mine is attacked by both the Left and the Right. Then I know that my decision was apolitical.

What sort of issues do citizens most often turn to you with?





We are currently preparing the annual report for 2009, from which it is clearly evident that the largest number of complaints are from the fields of justice, police matters and restrictions of personal liberty. It is also evident that poverty is reflected through numerous areas that are not directly related to social issues. It is apparent from housing problems, judicial and tax enforcement procedures, healthcare issues and issues relating to disability. There are, unfortunately, an increasing number of complaints connected with poverty.

Can you really help with these problems?

People expect a lot from us. Even the name 'Human Rights Ombudsman' can cause people to get their hopes up too much. [The Slovenian term for ombudsman, *varuh* or *varuhinja* translates literally as 'guardian' or even, in its feminine form, 'nurse' (or 'babysitter').] I should perhaps say that we are not entirely happy with the current title of the institution. What we actually do in our work is identify possible violations of human rights in the relationship between the individual and the State. For example, we verify whether social services centres are assessing benefits correctly, or whether an eviction has been carried out according to the proper procedure, or the reasons why procedures before various State or judicial bodies take so long, and so on. Over a quarter of the complaints we receive are deemed to be justified. In these cases the complaints cover violations of the rights of individuals. This is quite a high percentage. With ombudsmen in other countries the figure is between 20% and 22%. Of course, this figure is not an indication of how the State respects (or violates) human rights, but of the fact that people have quite a good awareness of the types of cases in which the ombudsman can help them.

Even so, Slovenia is one of the countries with the highest number of appeals before the European Court of Human Rights in proportion to its population.

We are in second place. The European Court has opened its doors so wide that

people have taken it as a normal part of the appeals procedure. The number of appeals clearly reflects a lack of trust in the courts, largely because of the length of procedures or because individuals believe that the facts of their case have not been properly taken into account in judicial proceedings. The ombudsman cannot express an opinion



“ THE PROBLEM IS THAT TODAY NO ONE IS PREPARED TO RECOGNISE THE AUTHORITY OF ANYONE. ”

on the content of judicial proceedings, but she can examine the reasons for their excessive duration.

In an ageing society you are dealing increasingly with the rights of the elderly. How?

The powerlessness of a specific individual or group is something to which I, as ombudsman, have to pay particular attention. Children and the elderly are connected by the fact that both groups have less social power, where children do not even have the legal foundations for representation, and the elderly are too little considered by society. We believe that we must help both groups make their voices heard. We are working towards the establishment of the institution of advocacy which, along the lines of the children's advocate, would also enable advocacy for the elderly and for the adult disabled.

You also draw attention to the reduced

authority of State institutions.

The problem is that today no one is prepared to recognise the authority of anyone. But without this, people also lose faith in the idea that someone will take responsibility for a decision. A void leaves room for many manipulations, which only confuses people more. If the authorities were once the school, the court and parents, today we are seeing that we no longer have these vitally necessary foundations. They will need to be reinforced and built up again. It appears that the media are aware of this too. They are increasingly feeling the need for clear borders to be established with regard to public reporting. We are also often witness to incorrect behaviour on the part of various State institutions. If they have made mistakes, the right thing for them to do is to explain them by providing unambiguous and rapid answers. In this way they would conserve their authority and the public trust, although unfortunately this is something we rarely experience. Obfuscation and buck-passing, however, destroy their reputation and authority.

An economic crisis should not be allowed to be an opportunity to reduce human rights. Can you confirm this?

If we look at fundamental human rights, they are affected by this economic crisis in a more indirect manner. Individuals campaigning for specific rights are placed in a worse starting position by the crisis, which functions as a kind of self-censorship. Social rights are undoubtedly reduced. Nothing is declared openly, but the actual level that we have already achieved will reduce. The State is striving to alleviate social hardship as much as possible. To accuse the State of not looking after the poorest members of society would not be correct. Whether or not it will actually manage to maintain the current level of the social state is something we don't know, just as we don't know for how much longer the economic crisis will continue to worsen.

Is it still possible to talk about Slovenia as social state?

I asked myself this question in the

rhetorical sense over a year ago when I was writing the annual report for 2008. The differences that have become our everyday reality are simply too great for us to still be able to talk about a just social state. We can no longer claim that we all have equal access to education, culture and healthcare, and if this does not stop, Slovenia will no longer be able to claim that it is a social state. We cannot expect an improvement in this sense from economic measures, at least not in a time of crisis. I see more opportunities elsewhere, in education and in adapting to the changed conditions. This is something that needs to be learnt, and it is here that I see one of the ways to return to a social state.



There are also many violations in the field of public sector employment.

What is your involvement in this?

Violations involving employment relationships have occurred before, in the public sector too. It may be that there have been more of them recently. Why this is happening more now is difficult to say. There is, however, a new understanding of mobbing, in other words harassment in the workplace, bullying and abuse. We at the ombudsman's office have begun dealing more closely with this problem because we have established that no effective legal remedies are available to victims of harassment. Thus, for example, I see from the material for the session of the Commission for Petitions, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities at the National Assembly that, with more than a year having passed since the entry into force of the new Penal Code, which also defines harassment as a criminal offence, we still do not have a single conviction. Of the 77 cases reported, only two have come to court, and even here the judgements are still not final. Legal inefficiency concerns me greatly, because rapid action is very important for the victims in employment-related cases, either in the sense of stopping the harassment or finding another solution to the victim. Legislation does not allow us to do this, while from the employer what it mainly asks for is documentation of measures that are supposed to prevent harassment. We know that this isn't enough. We

“ THE DIFFERENCES THAT HAVE BECOME OUR EVERYDAY REALITY ARE SIMPLY TOO GREAT FOR US TO STILL BE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT A JUST SOCIAL STATE. ”

have joined forces with the National Labour Inspectorate and together we are preparing a project designed to help public sector employees.

Some people complain that your work is not sufficiently effective.

Statements like this clearly indicate that such critics do not know my work. When we invite them to explain their criticisms, there simply aren't any. Let's not forget that the ombudsman has no executive powers, and therefore the effectiveness of our work cannot be shown by the number of measures implemented, but by the number of irregularities detected. We are also one of the few State institutions to hold meetings with NGOs every month.

You have recently been honoured by the French president Nicolas Sarkozy.

The official reason is that the French government wanted to thank me for my contribution in shaping the excellent mutual relations that exist between Slovenia and France, and for improving the reciprocal knowledge of the institutions of the two countries. I work both with the French ombudsman and with the other Mediterranean ombudsmen, and my efforts are also appreciated in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

The ombudsman is an important function in most European countries, even in those countries that do not have a written constitution. Each country has its own specific system. Here in Slovenia the election of the ombudsman requires a two-thirds majority of all the members of the National Assembly. No other function requires such a high consensus. The ombudsman is elected for a six-year term of office. Some ombudsmen in other countries have permanent mandates and various powers. In Slovenia we have the Human Rights Ombudsman Act which gives the ombudsman powers regarding access to information. There is no State institution that can close its doors to the ombudsman. The Act is a good one. It has lasted 15 years already and we're proud of it. We don't want it to change. In Slovenia the ombudsman is charged by law to exercise the functions of a national preventive mechanism under the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. With our model of incorporating NGOs, we serve as an example in this field to many other countries. They invite us to come and give talks to them and they come to us to learn – so you see, we do have things that Europe can learn from us. ●

NO LACK OF IDEAS FOR ACHIEVING FASTER AND STRONGER DEVELOPMENT

Vesna Bertoneelj Popit, Delo Photo Shutterstock

THE ASSESSMENT FROM THE OFFICE FOR MACROECONOMIC Analysis and Development (OMAD) is that Slovenian exports are gradually strengthening, and the situation in the processing sector is also improving, while retail is stagnating, the position of the construction sector is deteriorating from month to month and earnings are also dwindling in the catering sector, since increasings of people no longer have money to spend on its services. With the raising of the minimum wage, OMAD believes that increasings of people will receive this higher minimum wage. In OMAD's assessment, owing to deteriorating conditions in the labour market, the of unemployed, which was approaching 100,000 at the end of January, could rise to 120,000 this year.

Yet the more it seems that the economic crisis in Slovenia has thus bottomed out, and that growth should slowly start to crawl up again, the more proposals and ideas there are about what should be done to make the recovery more solid and faster and thereby for Slovenia to emerge from the crisis truly stronger and more competitive.

As the lawyer and journalist Dr Matjaž Nahtigal writes, for example, Slovenia can only achieve a comprehensive developmental breakthrough by means of its own savings. Here he cites as examples the Asian tigers, where during the periods of biggest growth, the levels of public and private savings

'The number of patent applications in Slovenia increased last year by 22 percent, while it stagnated in the majority of countries owing to the crisis. The Slovenian intellectual property office believes that the increased number of patent applications has been spurred chiefly by the financial and other government measures to stimulate innovation, and by the patent office, which the intellectual property office helped establish at the University of Ljubljana.'

amounted to 35 percent or even higher. In his opinion, you cannot rely excessively on foreign capital in the very first developmental phase, since that will come when the development cycle is already under way. Nahtigal also points out that tax reform should provide incentives for the population and government to save. It is equally important, he says, to establish financial brokerage institutions, which will have the know-how to direct increased savings into long-term developmental investments.

Dušan Semolič, President of the Federation of Free Unions of Slovenia, says that the urgently needed increase in competitiveness in the Slovenian economy should not be an end in itself, nor should it be simply about greater profits, but about greater prosperity for people. If this is not the case, says Semolič, we will follow the same path that led us into the crisis. The Federation of Free Unions is convinced that the most important factor is human capital, in which more needs to be invested. Slovenia's success story to date has been based on a higher labour intensity, which is not the right path for long-term competitiveness, since it has led to an inappropriate composition of the commercial sector and to a small proportion of high-tech exports, stressed Semolič.

The independent strategic adviser Boštjan Ložar says, meanwhile, that the strategy is good only if it is also successfully carried out, no matter whether you call it a developmental, anti-crisis or exit strategy. In this Ložar believes that the action designed to achieve the objective needs to be split into two parts, i.e. into clear measures and strategic decisions. The clear measures should include a radical reduction in public spending and thereby a reduction in the tax burden on labour, raising the retirement age to 65 years, a more flexible labour market, professionalization of company management and so forth. Ložar includes among strategic decisions the decision about which areas will see the economy most easily making the developmental breakthrough, and this cannot be achieved without a critical mass of concentrated know-how. At the same time Ložar concludes that Slovenia lacks sufficient courage to determine priority areas. For this reason all Slovenian governments have avoided this to date.

The Economic Institute at Ljubljana's Law Faculty has drawn attention to the sizeable gross foreign debt, which now stands at more than EUR 40 billion, with net debt at EUR 10 billion. Net debt is approaching one third of Slovenian GDP and 40 percent of the revenue in the balance of payments, and this year Slovenia will supposedly spend approximately 3 percent of GDP on servicing





its debt. While the major portion of gross debt involves borrowing by companies and individuals, recently, or rather during the terms of the previous and current governments, there has also been an increase in foreign borrowing by central government. In the crisis conditions, this has been spurred by budget problems, and also by the fact that in the conditions of an extremely strong market, the previous government created no reserves for hard times, which in some other countries has possibly eased the functioning of the government in crisis conditions.

Among the sectors experiencing the greatest commercial difficulty during the current crisis is Slovenia's construction industry, which two years ago was still one of the fastest growing construction sectors in the European Union. The high level of debt and problems selling apartments have contributed to the deteriorating liquidity position. This sector, which previously and in strong market times was already a poor payer of subcontractors, should this year according to Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry forecasts face a roughly 15 percent reduction in commercial activity, which may well place construction companies, which are heavily indebted, in an even more difficult position. Having been heavily involved in previous years in the construction and repair of motorways and major structures, the construction sector will now supposedly keep itself afloat through economically efficient renovation projects.

The Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also awarded prizes for commercial and entrepreneurial achievements. Existing award winners, who 291 people over 42 years, were joined this year by Tomaž Žepič of LPKF Laser & Elektronika, Bogdan Oblak of Commerce, Tone Stanovnik of Špica International, Sonja Rajh of the company Farmtech, Peter Žigante of Savaprojekt, Mojca Kert Kos of Petrol Energetika and Zorko A. Cerkenik of the company Istrabenz Plini.



Dušan Semolič, President of the Federation of Free Unions of Slovenia.

Each year the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry presents awards to managers who have been heading their companies successfully for a number of years. The criteria applied in this include internationalisation of the company, rapid and effective expansion, a clear vision and long-term strategy and equally importantly, the company's own development and innovation.

Several Slovenian companies are opting to outsource their production to other countries with lower labour costs. Although companies are pointing out that raising the minimum wage to approximately the level of the poverty threshold is causing major problems for them, and for this reason the unemployment rate will rise, and although there was a clearly expressed opinion from the government about manufacturing operations that were not capable of paying their workers at least enough to live on, companies are making their own decisions. In the past few days the Gorenje Company of Velenje announced that it would be moving part of its production to Serbia, and in Velenje they would retain just the production of more demanding products. At the same time Gorenje made the assurance that the number of employees in Velenje would not be cut, something that is hard to believe.

The Gorenje move can on the one hand be understood as a measure for the smoother operation of the company during the economic crisis, and on the other hand it could be a decision to retain at home operations for which workers can be better paid.

This is not the only such example. The Maribor Foundry started outsourcing less demanding production to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar moves are being pursued by several other companies. And however much it seems that these decisions are cost-based, on the other hand they are perhaps forgetting that by outsourcing its manufacturing, the West helped China to develop into what is now such a big competitor that the West itself does not know where it can sell its products now.

It is encouraging that the number of patent applications in Slovenia increased last year by 22 percent, while it stagnated in the majority of countries owing to the crisis. The Slovenian intellectual property office believes that the increased number of patent applications has been spurred chiefly by the financial and other government measures to stimulate innovation, and by the patent office, which the intellectual property office helped establish at the University of Ljubljana.

Since the Slovenian communications market is in effect saturated, providers including Telekom Slovenije have been focusing on Balkan markets. In addition to Macedonia and Kosovo, Telekom Slovenije has also penetrated Albania. In 2010 it should be consolidating ownership in these markets, and while no new investments are planned, there are plans for investments in markets where communications are not yet saturated to be returned in three to five years.

Slovenia's negotiations with the OECD are in their concluding phase, and the latest assessments are that Slovenia should be joining the OECD in May.



Dr ERWIN KUBESCH

Slovenia and Austria – exemplary good neighbours and trusting partners

IF WE WISH TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CURRENT relations between Slovenia and Austria, we must take into account the many years of common history and the fruitful co-operation of the past centuries.

Vienna was the first place where talented students from Carniola attended university and thousands of them graduated from the “Alma Mater Rudolphina”, which was founded in 1365. Amongst the graduates of the University of Vienna, 40 rectors and deans, as well as a large number of distinguished professors, were of Slovenian origin.

Many Slovenians fought valiantly for Austria and a great number of Slovenian intellectuals, artists and architects enriched Vienna with their knowledge and talents.

One of the most notable personalities was the first official bishop of Vienna (from 1513 onwards), Jurij Slatkonja (Georg von Slatkonja) from Ljubljana. The Georg Slatkonja composers’ prize, named after him, is still awarded by the Archdiocese of Vienna every three years.

A further link between Ljubljana and Vienna is the world-renowned composer Gustav Mahler, who began his career as opera conductor in Ljubljana for the 1881 to 82 season.

The 20th century with its bloody conflicts had far-reaching consequences for both Slovenia and Austria – especially the Second World War and the tragic events that ensued.

This period in our history has been replaced by sincere endeavours on both sides to achieve a trusting dialogue between good neighbours. Austria and Slovenia are not only geographically, geopolitically and historically tied, but as one author once put it so aptly, fatefully “interlaced”.

Austria’s helping hand in Slovenia’s struggle for independence is not forgotten and remains inseparably connected with the name of our former Foreign Minister, Alois Mock. Austria also actively supported Slovenia in its efforts to become an EU Member State in 2004.

Nowadays, our deep and rewarding co-operation applies to many different fields and can be regarded in many respects as exemplary good.

We support each other mutually in international organisations, for example in the case of Slovenia’s current candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (2011/2012). Within the EU context, our positions are harmonised on an ongoing basis – and differences in opinion occur very rarely. Important topics for the future, such as protecting the climate, developing secure energy resources and a European perspective for the Western Balkans are common concerns for us.

As regards the economy, Slovenia is Austria’s twelfth largest export market – we export as much to Slovenia as we do to China and India put together. Slovenians are the most important buyers of Austrian products worldwide, spending €1,300 per capita. At the same time within the EU, most Slovenian products are imported by the Slovenians. And Austria is

also the most important investor in Slovenia.

For Austria, Koper is the second most important port in the world (after Rotterdam). Over 2,000 trains annually run to Linz alone.

Each year, around 40,000 Austrians travel to Maribor to enjoy an opera or ballet. Many Austrian cultural enthusiasts are already looking forward to what Maribor will offer in 2012 as Europe’s capital of culture.

Significant bilateral topics also include Krško nuclear power station, the denationalisation process and bilingual place-name signs in Carinthia.

Austria’s proximity means that it will pay great attention to decisions on the further development of Krško. There is no doubt that Slovenia will respect the bilateral nuclear information agreement and will, as agreed, bear in mind the concerns and any possible consequences for its neighbour.

The denationalisation process has hitherto found a positive solution for 87.5% of Austrian applications. The treatment of the still unresolved cases, amounting to almost €100 million, currently seems to be proceeding a little more slowly.

With regard to additional bilingual place-name signs in Carinthia, I would like to mention the appeal by our Foreign Minister, Dr Michael Spindelegger. Not long ago he said that, “at the occasion of the 2010 National Day, the 55th anniversary of the signing of the Austrian State Treaty, it would be appropriate for Austria to announce to the world and to its European neighbours that this homework has been completed.”

Finally, I would like to mention some more human aspects: Slovenians and Austrians like and understand each other, and I do not mean just purely through communication, which takes place mostly in English. According to an opinion poll, Austria is Slovenia’s favourite neighbouring country. Austrian students feel very much at home in Ljubljana – and I believe that the same is also the case for Slovenian students in Vienna. Personally, I am extremely happy and grateful to be able to work as Austrian ambassador here in Slovenia in a mission that is challenging and fulfilling in many respects.

If I may add a personal wish, it is that in the foreseeable future significant progress will be made to clear up the matter of place-name signs in Carinthia – and that the question of the status of the small German-speaking community in Slovenia is also resolved.

I remain optimistic that the few questions that remain open within the context of the otherwise excellent bilateral relations can be satisfactorily resolved through patient dialogue with a sense of proportion and tact.

Slovenia and Austria as exemplary good neighbours and reliable partners will continue to promote security, stability and prosperity in Europe. ●

Dr Erwin Kubesch Ambassador of Austria to Slovenia



ALEKSANDER GERŽINA

Austria is one of Slovenia's most important trading partners

SLOVENIA AND AUSTRIA ARE NEIGHBOURS AND FRIENDS WITH well-developed bilateral relations in every sphere. The fact that both countries are members of the EU has raised bilateral cooperation to a higher level and improved its quality. Their close partnership and alliance are reflected in practically all areas of cooperation. In the EU they share many similar views on European policies. Cooperation is particularly close in the Western Balkans, where we are connected by common interests and efforts towards the protection of security and stability. Slovenia has supported the Austrian initiative for the development of a Danube Basin and Black Sea strategy, since these are two regions that offer numerous opportunities, particularly for the business enterprise sectors of the two countries. Slovenia is ready to cooperate actively with Austria on the realisation of this project. The two countries have already been working together for several years within the framework of the Regional Partnership, where the two countries participate in a range of very specific projects. Slovenia's chairmanship of the Regional Partnership ended last year. Slovenia supported Austria's bid for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, which body Austria successfully chaired last November. Cooperation between the two countries was particularly good during Slovenia's EU Presidency in the first half of 2008. Further proof of the excellent bilateral relations is the frequency of high-level visits. The presidents of the two countries have established a friendly and open relationship. This year we are also expecting a visit by the Slovenian foreign minister to Vienna.

When talking about relations between the two countries, we must not forget the Slovenian minority in Carinthia and Styria. Together with Austria, we are endeavouring to make the life of the minority as comfortable as possible. We expect Austria, for its part, to do everything in its power to protect the minority in accordance with its obligations under international and domestic law.

The economy occupies a special place in bilateral relations. The economies of the two countries are so interwoven that their respective governments actually no longer have a clear view of all aspects of their interconnection. This is a good and encouraging sign. It indicates that we know each other as few nations in Europe know each other, and that we trust each other. It is also proof that business and economic operations are taking place in a context of healthy economic cooperation. Allow me to mention a few general indicators. Austria is one of Slovenia's most important trading partners. In 2008 it was Slovenia's fourth most important export partner and third most important import partner. Trade between the two countries exceeded 4 billion euros in 2008. Austria is also the most important foreign investor in Slovenia, with foreign direct investment in Slovenia totalling 5,123,3 million euros or 46.6% of all foreign investment in the Slovenian economy (Bank of Slovenia figures). It is true

that there are difficulties from time to time, deriving above all from Austrian restrictions – particularly as regards the opening of the Austrian labour market, which will not take place until the spring of 2011. By working together, however, we manage to resolve problems as and when they appear, such as for example this summer in relation to the joint repairs to the Gornja Radgona–Bad Radkersburg bridge.

Despite the already well-established close economic partnership, I still see many opportunities for deeper cooperation, particularly in tourism. It would also make sense to strengthen and promote economic cooperation in border regions and less developed regions. To this end we have revived the Contact Committee with Carinthia, and we also intend to propose and encourage regular cross-border consultation and cooperation between the mayors of border municipalities. This is a field in which it is more important than ever to draw jointly on funds from EU programmes.

Close relations between the two countries also exist in the cultural and scientific spheres. It is worth mentioning that Austria has further decentralised in recent years and founded, alongside the existing university centres of Vienna, Graz and Salzburg, new ones in Bregenz, Linz and Innsbruck. Decentralisation offers many new opportunities in the sphere of science and technology, which among other things represents a foundation for further successful economic performance. It would not be out of place to mention at this point the connection between Slovenian and Austrian artists throughout history, a connection that has continued and grown in strength right up to the present day. I am thinking of names such as Carlos Kleiber, Bernarda Fink, Uroš Lajovic, and many others. It is particularly encouraging to note that more and more Austrian citizens are taking up Slovenian studies at Austrian universities, and that interest in learning the Slovenian language is growing.

Slovenia and Austria have existed in this geographical part of Europe for centuries. The interdependence and interconnectedness of the two nations are profound. Relations have not always been simple and easy, and as neighbouring countries there will always be specific issues to face, some positive and others more difficult. And yet, precisely because of these experiences, we have learned over the centuries to live alongside one another, to respect each other and to work together. Coexistence has thus grown into true partnership in practically every sphere.

The year 2012 will also mark an important turning point in relations between Slovenia and Austria, as we celebrate two decades of established diplomatic relations. On this occasion we shall seek answers to the questions of where we are and where we wish our common path to take us in the Europe of the 21st century. Until then we can also work together to remove the few obstacles to cooperation that still remain. Best wishes, ●

Aleksander Geržina Slovenian Ambassador to Austria



ZORAN MUŠIČ IN VENICE

Last year, which was marked by the 100th anniversary celebrations of the birth of Zoran Mušič, the most internationally recognised Slovenian artist of the second half of the 20th century, concluded with the opening of the Mušič exhibition *Estreme Figure*, staged by his life partner Ida Cadorin in Venice.

Jože Osterman Photo Andrej Kriz

LAST YEAR, WHICH WAS MARKED BY the 100th anniversary celebrations of the birth of Zoran Mušič, the most internationally recognised Slovenian artist of the second half of the 20th century, concluded with the opening of the Mušič exhibition *Estreme Figure*, staged by his life partner Ida Cadorin in Venice. The exhibition, in a city where the painter (alongside Paris) spent the greater part of his creative life, features around 90 works, primarily paintings and sketches, with an emphasis on portraits painted after 1975. The majority of the works were presented to the public for the first time.

Respects were paid symbolically to Mušič at the Venice exhibition by

Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and Minister for Culture Majda Širca, who were on a visit at the beginning of February that took in the premises of the Istituto Veneto di Scienze in Venice, venue of the exhibition, as well as a visit to Ms Cadorin.

The exhibition represents a logical conclusion to important developments in which over the past four years Slovenia has conducted a range of research and presentations on the painter Mušič, with input coming from abroad, too. In 2009 alone, on the centenary of his birth, Slovenia hosted 12 independent exhibitions, and in the rest of Europe there were eight exhibitions in five

different countries. Slovenia issued memorial coins, a special postage stamp and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts hosted a two-day expert seminar. The biggest event was undoubtedly the retrospective of the painter at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, with 170 paintings and drawings, making it the biggest exhibition of Mušič's paintings to date this century. It is also worth noting that the manor of Dobrovo in Brda houses the only permanent exhibition of Mušič's works in the world. Meanwhile his paintings are sought after by all the great museums and collectors, and the best overview of his creativity is provided by the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art. ●

LJUBLJANA'S YEAR OF THE BOOK

Ljubljana is the tenth city to receive UNESCO's Title - World Book Capital. Its 'mandate' will last from April 2010 to April 2011. This represents a very important opportunity – particularly if Ljubljana plays its role successfully – to promote both the city and the country as a whole, since Ljubljana has long proclaimed itself a city of culture and civilisation. We discussed the project with Dr Uroš Grilc, the director of the City of Ljubljana's culture department.

Jože Osterman Photo Barbara Jakše

Why the city and not the country?

When he took up his current position just over two years ago, Dr Grilc viewed the difference between city and state policy as regards supporting the book sector as a major challenge. It does not make sense for the city to repeat nationwide forms of support for the publishing industry by subsidising publications, purchasing books for libraries and providing other support for publishers and librarians. What it can do is look for alternative projects through which it can make an important contribution to the promotion of reading. The result is an increased level of culture in the city, with greater awareness among its citizens, and greater cohesion. Even before that, Dr Grilc was troubled by the fact that, except in the library field, local communities in Slovenia have almost no adequately defined cultural policy for the book sector.

The Capital project, however, has since the very beginning been able to count on the participation of the Ministry of Culture and the Slovenian Book Agency, not to mention all the relevant publishing companies, library associations and writers – in other words the whole chain from author to publishing company to book distribution that leads to the act of reading, which in the end is the key object of this project. When presenting its candidacy, Ljubljana paid particular attention to the inclusion in the project of the broadest possible circle of interested parties. This approach probably gave it a decisive advantage in the competition with cities of the calibre of Vienna, Lisbon, Riga, St Petersburg, Wellington and Guadalajara. The organisers also invited all foreign embassies based in Ljubljana

and their cultural institutes to take part in the project. To date they have received replies from the embassies of Brazil, the Netherlands, Austria and Germany with the Goethe Institute, France with the Institute Charles Nodier, Denmark and Finland.

Even the name of the Capital project indicates its planetary dimension, but particularly in Europe, because of its latent Eurocentrism, the dimensions of this project are often identified with the borders of the European Union or, at the most, the borders of Europe. The Capital project challenges this self-regarding attitude in a number of ways. The other fairly widespread stereotypical assumption is that the book is above all a literary (i.e. artistic) medium, which is a mistake. The project is based on the principle that the book is a universal, global, information medium that the human being constantly and necessarily encounters throughout his or her entire life: in education, in every form of professional training, in everyday information, in entertainment - in short, at every step.

Events

Two events are planned even before the official handover of the title. On 7 April, a new fortnightly cultural periodical called *Pogledi* ('Views') comes out for the first time. This is one of the key foundations of the entire programme and will fill a gap that has long existed in the media landscape as regards the quality cultural press. On 19 April they will formally take on the title of World Book Capital and present the project to the world public at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, in the presence of UNESCO's highest representatives and

the diplomatic corps. Never before has Slovenia been at the helm of a project of such weight within this context.

On 23 April 2010, Ljubljana will begin its 'year of the book' in spectacular fashion, starting with the ceremonial raising of the flag outside the Town Hall and continuing at Križanke. Conceived as a harmonious meeting of science, art and philosophy – all through the prism of the book. The strengthening of media support for the book in general is one of the main objectives of the project. The agreements on media sponsorship between the City of Ljubljana and the national broadcaster RTV Slovenia, and also the *Dnevnik* newspaper, are of exceptional strategic importance, since it is often difficult for books to find their way into the daily press or onto television.

A total of over 300 events will take place as part of the Capital programme. The biggest event in the project will without a doubt be the literary festival taking place in May 2010 under the banner 'Literatures of the World: Fabula Festival', an event organised by the Študentska Založba academic press. The adjudication criteria required the inclusion of the literatures of every continent, and thus the festival will reveal quite a number of literary expressions and aesthetics that are less well known in our environment. At the end of the project, in 2011, the Chamber of Publishing, Bookselling, the Graphic Industry and Radio and Television Media, a branch association of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, will hold a conference in Ljubljana entitled World Book Summit 2011. Topics will include the challenges brought to the book publishing sphere by digitalisation, translation from small language groups into global languages, and pan-European >>>

bestsellers. The conference is expected to end with the adoption of the Ljubljana Resolution on the Book. In this way, we shall offer UNESCO some guidelines with which to orient its own activities in the book sector.

The programme section entitled The Book and the City will include 28 projects that will serve as an important complement to existing literary events that already take place in Ljubljana, such as the Slovenian Book Days and Vilenica. Some projects will emphasise the importance of reading by means of interventions in public areas (buses, trains, cafes, public spaces in the city). Ljubljana will gain several reading corners in public spaces, readings will take place in hospitals, the asylum centre and old people's homes, and there will be several projects designed for children. The organisers have also given our support to the socially responsible aspect of bringing books closer to vulnerable groups and, in conjunction with Študentska Založba, the National Association for the Blind and Partially Sighted and Ljubljana's museums and galleries, they will be carrying out a project involving adaptation of the exhibition spaces and exhibits of the permanent collection of the City Museum for the needs of the blind and partially sighted.

Two projects, 'I Grow with a Book' and 'Ljubljana Reads' will continue and be expanded: three-year-olds will love *A Polka-Dot Pot* by Anja Štefan by Jelka Reichman, while first-year pupils are sure to enjoy the book of Slovenian fairy tales (and one German fairy tale) in comic strip form by Matjaž Schmidt. The Capital project will also devote special attention to three of Slovenia's best-known writers: Boris Pahor, Svetlana Makarovič and Slavoj Žižek. We all know that they are the best, but how well do Slovenians really know their works?

The section entitled The Book and Creativity in Fields of Culture will include 35 projects that aim to draw attention to the inherent role of the book within individual fields of art. There will also be theatre, dance and music performances and special exhibitions, all on the theme of the book and reading. One of the major theatre festivals will have the book as its theme, while landscape architects will be able to express themselves in the creation

of a new reading park in Ljubljana. In this way, we give the project breadth and address different audiences, while at the same time we emphasise how central the book is to every creative process. The responses of public city institutions to the invitation to take part in designing the programme indicate that we can expect a whole range of extremely interesting events: an exhibition of miniature books, an exhibition of book design, an exhibition of illustrations, a renovated cinema bookshop, and themed evenings on books and films, books and the theatre, books and music.

'Breakthroughs' and permanent elements that will remain in the city

The project will address an old problem that we have been aware of for a long time, says Dr Grilc. The difference between the 25 million books lent by general libraries, which places the Slovenian book market at the very top of European statistics, and the mere two to three books sold per inhabitant, where we are at the bottom of the European publishing pile, is simply too great to permit the more sustainable development of the Slovenian book. If we do not address this problem, we will have done nothing significant for the development of the book. Our reply to this is the 'Books for Everyone' project, which is coordinated by the Ljubljana City Library. Around 20 titles from different genres will be published in impressions of at least 8,000 copies, while the retail price of a copy will be no more than three euros. The print run is large by today's standards, and the price is very accessible. But the problem is points of sale. There are too few bookshops in Slovenia. There are huge areas where there are simply no bookshops. If we take as a criterion the fact that most of the participants in the project will be bookshops offering at least 1,000 titles and the output of at least 20 publishing houses, then we can only count around 50 such bookshops. This is alarming. Fortunately, the library network is significantly better distributed and includes over 270 lending libraries. For this reason, the plan is to extend points of



Uroš Grilc

sale to Slovenia's general libraries, and to promote the published titles extensively in the media. The project is based on the fact that publishers, bookshops and libraries do not see each other as competitors here, and that within the framework of this

'national campaign', each category brings its own specificity and its own interests. All the participants have understandable reservations about the project from the point of view of their own interests, but all agree that it is worth persevering in the direction of increasing the accessibility of books and changing attitudes towards buying books. Book-buying is not, in fact, an inevitable part of reading culture. This is something of which the Finns are very well aware, and for several years they have been far ahead of everybody else in terms of the literacy rate.

A permanent acquisition in terms of cultural infrastructure in spring 2010 will be the Trubar House of Literature in Ribji Trg. Many European cities have a space like this, but Ljubljana has not had one until now. At the same time we will breathe life into Ljubljana's Trubar heritage by combining the approaches of a library and a museum. The House of Literature is a special public space devoted to literature and the book in general, which will contribute, through an ongoing programme of events, to the lively cultural and urban pulse of the city. The Trubar House of Literature will combine several functions: it will be a cultural and intellectual centre, a book club, the headquarters of a new web portal on literature and books, a gallery space and an information centre.

Within the context of the Capital event, the City of Ljubljana will also carry out a serious historical reflection. It will erect a monument to the Slovenian Reformation, open a new library in Zadvor and refurbish the library in Moste. The first specialist children's bookshop is due to open in the spring. In September, Ljubljana will get a new comic shop and, in this way, attempt to stimulate this genre, somewhat overlooked in Slovenia, since progressive publishing houses are exploiting comics as an important tool in the development of reading culture. ●

KNOWLEDGE ONLINE AT VIDEOLECTURES.NET

Videolectures.net is a project being carried out at the Jožef Stefan Institute within the Centre for the Transfer of IT Knowledge and in cooperation with the Technology Section at the Jožef Stefan Institute.

Andrej Savelli

THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT is to ensure free and open access to high-quality video lectures given by acclaimed teachers and scientists at major events such as conferences, summer schools, workshops and other promotional events. The portal is aimed at promoting science, exchanging ideas and fostering knowledge-sharing by providing high-quality didactic content that is also appropriate for a general audience. All the lectures, accompanying documents, information and links are systematically selected and classified.

The project was hatched in 2002, when the then portal manager used a home video camera to record local lectures, while today in academic circles the portal is regarded as a kind of “scientific Youtube”. Recently the portal has been enjoying the cooperation of the distinguished Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which has for almost a decade now been offering free access to videos of lectures by its professors, and it has now been followed by numerous other eminent universities, including Cambridge, Oxford and Berkeley. To date the portal has published more than 9200 videos from 7449 lectures and talks given by 5858 speakers at conferences and scientific symposiums, and the number is growing every day. And the most important thing is – access to all the content is unlimited and free of charge.

The portal links together eminent knowledge-disseminating centres that are otherwise intended for a select section of society, in order to facilitate access to such content by those for whom education is harder to access (including primarily students from developing countries). It is now already the biggest such portal in the world and the only one of its kind in Europe. Its aim is to become an official world



distributor of academic content. The portal is gaining validity every day, with professors and lecturers also taking it increasingly seriously, since they recognise that the portal is also a useful teaching aid and a substitute for lectures. The portal offers tools allowing each person to formulate the learning plan that suits them. They can formulate the structure of the course and lectures, and flesh out this structure with videos, text, links and so forth.

All of this earned the portal in June 2009 a prestigious world prize, the World Summit Award, in the category of e-knowledge

and technology, as what is currently the biggest web portal with video-educational content in the world. WSA is a non-profit initiative of the global forum for the information society, which functions under the aegis of the United Nations with the aim of reducing the digital gap between UN member states. In this way the creators of the Videolectures.net portal gained confirmation for their work, and the prize will also bring global recognition as well as the interest of new cooperation partners. Slovenia may thus become one of the centres of global e-education. ●

MAJA ALIČ WINS EMZIN'S 2010 PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

Andrej Savelli Photo Maja Alič, Jaka Babnik, Manja Zore

THE FIRST PRIZE IN THE EMZIN'S 2010 Photo of the Year competition for artistic photography was awarded to Maja Alič for her "Obrazi samopodobe" (Faces of Self Image) cycle, which convinced the international jury with a very personal and at the same time conceptual approach that offers many possibilities of further development. Recognising people through the eye of the lens, functioning here as the viewpoint of another, in whose eyes we never recognise ourselves, since seeking the truth that a photograph should portray is continually moving, resulting in an inability to identify or seek oneself, which the photographer illustratively indicates via the cycle of eight, large-format self-portraits of various shots of face and gestures, photographed in

different places and different emotional states of herself, never disclosed in full.

Second prize went to Jaka Babnik for his We are Dogs! cycle, and third prize to Branko Blaž Lesjak for his Around Midnight cycle.

An award for journalistic photography was also given, in addition to prizes for artistic photography, which is conferred by the Delo newspaper and publishing company. This prize was won by Manja Zore for the photographic cycle entitled Revma (Rheumatism). Zore's modern approach to creating

reality from an everyday theme – disease – expands the boundaries of journalistic photography. Through intimate, but realistic shots, we face the consequences of disease, which can affect anyone.

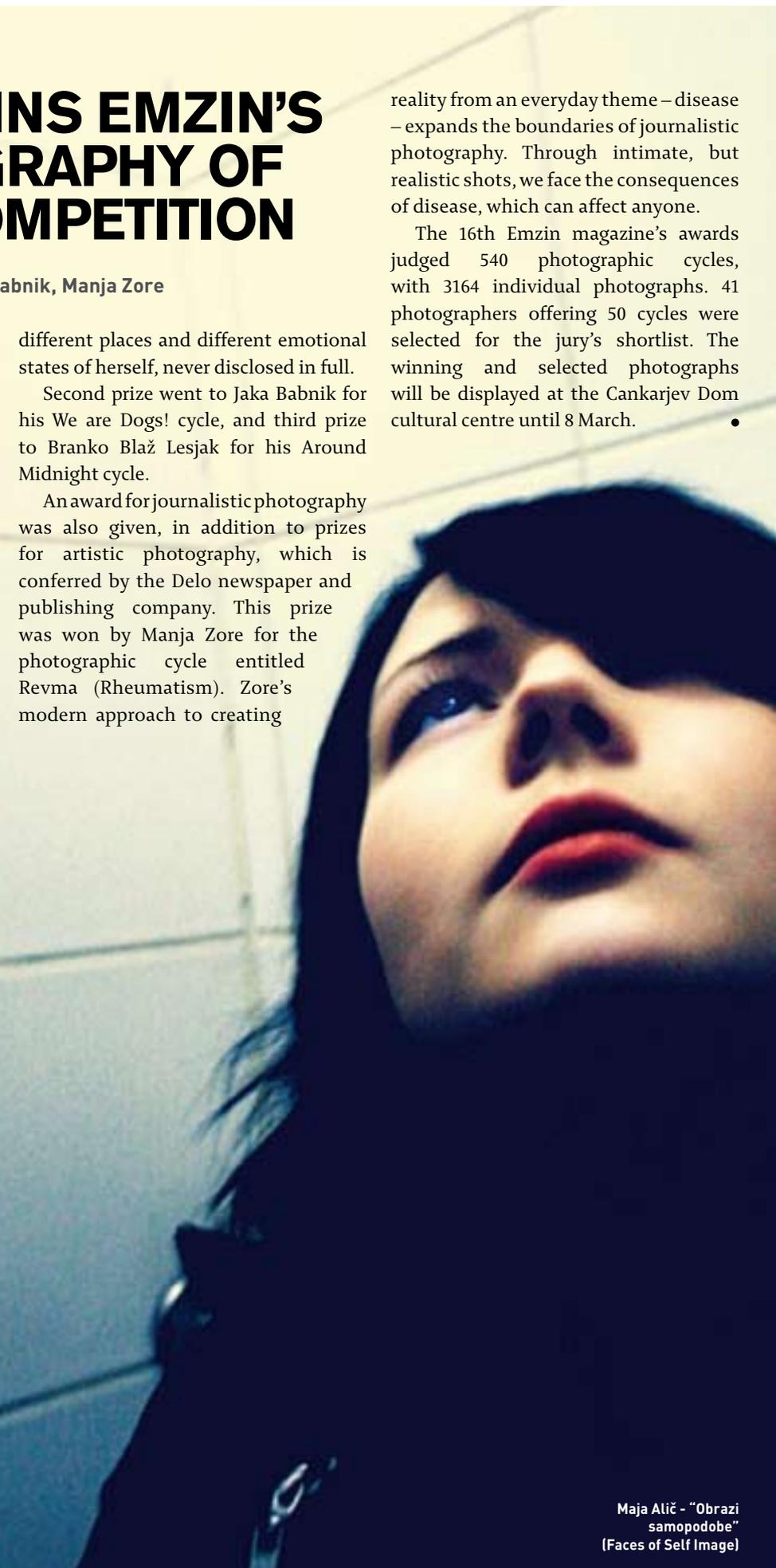
The 16th Emzin magazine's awards judged 540 photographic cycles, with 3164 individual photographs. 41 photographers offering 50 cycles were selected for the jury's shortlist. The winning and selected photographs will be displayed at the Cankarjev Dom cultural centre until 8 March. ●



Jaka Babnik -
We are dogs!



Manja Zore - "Revma"
(Rheumatism)



Maja Alič - "Obrazi
samopodobe"
(Faces of Self Image)

EXHIBITION AT THE KRESIJA GALLERY AND ENOOKI (ONE-EYED) AUCTION

On 4 February, Enooki, the Photo-Journalist Association of Slovenia opened its well-established exhibition with 96 photographs going under the hammer

Andrej Savelli Photo Jane Štravs, Stane Jeršič

THE PHOTOGRAPHS WERE exhibited until 16 February at the fourth annual auction, with Enooki donating the proceeds to blind and partially sighted children. The exhibition was part of this year's Enooki campaign, entitled "How well can you see?" The point was to ask people "can you see that there's no photography in the newspaper,

can you see that photography really adds something to newspaper articles, can you see how the partially-sighted see, and can you even see that the blind and partially sighted are among us?"

On 10 February a panel discussion was organised at the gallery on the subject: The Value of Photography in Print Media. One common finding was that Slovenian

photo-journalists faced similar problems in the media crisis to their writing colleagues, as at present no one knows the future shape and fate of the media.

The highest price in the auction was obtained by the photograph Obvestilo redarstva [Enforcement Notice] by Jane Štravs, which was purchased for 1,000 euros by Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Jankovič. The auction was also attended by Prime Minister Borut Pahor, who made the winning bid for the photograph Eclipse v očeh opazovalca [Eclipse in the eyes of the beholder], the work of Bojan Velikonja, who is president of the Enooki society. The total takings of the auction, which amounted to 8,560 euros, were boosted by the sale of the photograph Otroci iz Gaze [Children of Gaza], by Tomaž Skale, to Slovenian President Danilo Türk. The journalist Jaka Tomc proved his mettle as the outstanding bidder, contributing 1,740 euros for charitable purposes through purchase of various photographs. •



Most expensive picture sold (EUR 1,000)

Buyer: Zoran Jankovič, **Artist:** Jane Štravs
Title: Traffic Warden's Ticket

Second most expensive picture sold (EUR 400)

Artist: Stane Jeršič





36 ICE SWIMMING IN BLEED

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Shutterstock



Finnish Ambassador to Slovenia Laura Kakko and the Mayor of Bled, Janez Fajfar

MOST PEOPLE WOULD PROBABLY agree that ice swimming, or swimming in ice cold water in the winter, is an extreme pursuit few are capable of attempting. And those few gathered between 22 and 24 January for the world ice swimming championship in Bled. Around 700 hardcore types from more than 20 countries, with a third coming from Finland, followed by representatives of the other Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom and Russia, boldly splashed into the icy lake. The swimmers, aged between 18 and 70 years, were not greatly concerned about the low water temperature. At the Castle bathing centre at Bled, they competed over 25 and 50 metres, with the boldest, a full 60 of them, tackling a 400-metre swim in water measuring 4 degrees Celsius. Those less experienced simply got into the water and took part in a discipline called 'penguins'. And the group swimming was quite fascinating, with swimmers going through a proper choreographed performance with music and costumes.

As the 17-year-old Finn Sakari Yrjo-Koskinen recounted, he first swam in ice water when he was ten, and in the air (-4

degrees Celsius) he was not cold, since he was warmed by the great atmosphere. As part of the opening ceremony, alongside the Finnish Ambassador to Slovenia, Laura Kakko, the Mayor of Bled, Janez Fajfar, had a splash around in the water. He said that he had already had a dunking or two in ice water and that he had accepted the challenge to swim in his home town with the other participants.

Winter swimming is very popular in Finland, said Laura Kakko, adding that this is a sport aimed more at having fun, while it was also beneficial for the body and spirit. The great popularity of the sport in Finland was clear from the large Finnish contingent, which numbered a full 389 swimmers. Swimmers also came to Bled in large numbers from Russia (91 swimmers), 62 came from the United Kingdom, and alongside the participants from other countries there were 30 Slovenians.

"It was fantastic. I needed a lot of persuasion and courage, but clearly it's all in the mind, and I recommend winter swimming for all," said Janez Fajfar enthusiastically, concluding that now Bled would have a 12-month swimming season. "In winter Bled cannot compete

with the well-developed ski centres such as Kranjska Gora. But we can offer swimming in the lake! The participants of the world championship are wonderful guests and promoters of Bled, so we will be organising winter swimming meetings every year," promised the Mayor of Bled.

The swimmers also included 53-year-old Reiner Johnson: "We've got marvellous weather, much warmer than my home, and the Bled backdrop is really fantastic, not to mention how well-arranged and clean it is," praised the Finnish swimmer, who has been pursuing this activity for ten years, plunging into icy water two to three times a week. "It's an extremely healthy activity; since I've been swimming in ice water, I haven't yet been ill," said Reiner Johnson, and the great majority of winter swimming enthusiasts agree with him. Winter swimming is conducted under the aegis of the International Winter Swimming Association (IWSA) and the organisation Suomen Latu, which is one of the biggest sports organisations in Finland, with more than 60,000 members. ●

Blue river creek in Slovenian Alps near town Tolmin.

GREEN TOURISM, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A GREEN COUNTRY

As much as 4 to 10 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions are created by world tourism, and for the most part these emissions involve air transport.

Ana Mrzlikar Photo Shutterstock

TOURISM ON THE ONE HAND IS THEREBY CAUSING climate change, while on the other hand it will feel the consequences. For this reason advanced tourism services are acquiring increasingly recognisable forms of sustainable tourism, the kind based on the commercial success of tourism >>



“GIVEN ITS NATURAL FEATURES, SLOVENIA HAS GREAT SCOPE FOR INCREASING ITS VOLUME OF GREEN TOURISM. WITH AROUND 60% OF ITS SURFACE COVERED IN FOREST, SLOVENIA IS THE SECOND MOST FORESTED COUNTRY IN EUROPE.”

Picturesque
Soča River.

operations which at the same time are kind and constructive to the natural, cultural and social environment. Like all developed countries, Slovenia is pursuing this trend, too.

In Slovenia we have a long tradition of safeguarding protected areas such as Triglav National Park, while the concept of green tourism has in practice only started to become established recently. In protected areas, only sustainable tourism can be developed; in the more strictly protected parts, only the friendliest form, ecotourism, is permitted.

Given its natural features, Slovenia has great scope for increasing its volume of green tourism. With around 60% of its surface covered in forest, Slovenia is the second most forested country in Europe. In quantity of river water per inhabitant, Slovenia is the richest of the European countries, and while a full fifth of our coastline is protected area, Slovenian drinking water ranks among the cleanest in Europe and even in the world. As much as 36% of Slovenia's surface area is included in the Natura 2000 network, while the rich flora and fauna – there are more than 22,000 animal and plant species living here – rank Slovenia among the naturally wealthiest countries of Europe. All this means that Slovenia is a country with wonderfully unspoilt nature valued by its inhabitants and tourists alike. It is these natural features that represent the precondition for developing green, responsible tourism. Responsible tourism respects the natural and cultural environment and in a responsible way contributes to the development of the local economy. At the same time it promotes an awareness among tourists of their environmental impact.

Green tourism is therefore tourism that takes account of environmental, economic and social sustainability, and adapts to climate change and mitigates its impact. “Green tourism is not just a phrase in Slovenia,” says Dimitrij Piciga, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board. “Green tourism is the market advantage and opportunity that Slovenia holds over numerous

other destinations. Meanwhile the Slovenian Tourist Board is aware of the great responsibility entrusted to those who are shaping the development of Slovenian tourism. For this reason we are now committed to ensuring that what is green, ecological and sustainable permeates every activity of ours in the future. We have indeed committed ourselves to preserving the forests, water, sea and other natural wealth to the greatest possible extent, so we can preserve the trump card of our tourist attractions for the generations that come after us. Even now, with the intention of raising awareness about the importance of mitigating the environmental impact of tourism and with the aim of adapting tourist services in a sustainable way, we have mapped out the direction of development for Slovenian tourism. We are formulating measures and strategies for green tourism in Slovenia, we are researching and analysing, we are familiarising Slovenia's tourism providers with the sustainable development of our tourism at every single step, we are directing our market communications on this topic to target audiences, we are including sustainable tourism development in our partnerships, we are offering public incentives for implementing green tourism, a “green” study tour has been set up for journalists and so on”, adds Mr. Piciga.

First EU Eco-daisy for Terme Snovik

Since 2003 the EU Eco-daisy has been the recognition and official emblem of the European Union for environment-friendly tourist accommodation facilities. The companies that have acquired the emblem are striving for lower air pollution, more sparing use of energy and other natural resources, they do not use pesticides, fertilisers and other synthetic materials in order to reduce the pollution of their local environment, and they offer organically produced food.

The first prestigious Eco-daisy in Slovenia was received by

Terme Snovik. The highest-lying spa in Slovenia, located in the valley of Tuhinjska dolina, very close to Kamnik, earned the emblem through its high-quality, its environmental success and its ecological efficiency. Their concern for the social and natural environment is not just declarative, but a part of their identity. They confirm their ecological orientation through numerous achievements in the environmental field; alongside their ECO LABEL daisy – the European recognition for environment-friendly tourist accommodation, they have also received a CIPRA award from the International Committee for the Protection of the Alps for their environment-friendly and energy-efficient spa, and an ISO 14001 quality system certificate, which is a guarantee that in its work the spa uses processes, working methods, materials, products and energy that prevent pollution, and they are constantly improving their attitude to the environment. In practice this means that they have a water-water heat pump installed and vacuum pipe collectors, and the entire apartment village is heated by wood biomass. Moreover they also received a prize for the most energy-efficient company of 2008 in Slovenia.

The Soča Valley and Solčavsko - Slovenian EDEN destinations

In line with the orientations of European tourism policy, the European Commission has come up with the project European Destinations of Excellence – EDEN. The aim of the project is to direct attention to the value, diversity and common characteristics of European tourist destinations and to promote destinations where the objective of economic growth has been set in such a way as to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability. A key feature of the chosen destinations, which are located in 27 Member States and candidate countries, is their commitment to social, cultural and environmental sustainability. In 2008, out of three finalists for the Slovenian Destination of Excellence – Kranj, Idrija and the Soča Valley – the Soča Valley was selected.

The Soča Valley is distinguished by the exquisite Soča River, mighty waterfalls, fairy-tale pools, hidden ravines and mysterious springs. The history of the Soča Valley – here we have in mind the battles on Soča or Isonzo Front fought in this area during the First World War – wrote the region into world history, and its heritage will help tourists recognise and understand the history of this area and its people. If you visit the Soča Valley, you can be sure of unforgettable experiences in nature, a clean environment and tranquillity.

In 2009 out of the three finalists for the Slovenian Destination of Excellence, the winner was the region of Solčavsko, with Tolmin-Kobarid and Kozje runners up. Solčavsko, a broad region of three valleys – Logarska dolina, Matkov kot and Robanov kot – and of the Podolševa and Solčava rivers, is completely surrounded by mountains. It lies on the uppermost reaches of the Savinja



Canyon of Soča river also known as "emerald river".

River and ranks as one of the enchantingly beautiful landscape features of the Alps. Bounding Solčavsko on the northern side is the Karavanke range (Mt. Olševa), while in the east, south and west the valleys are surrounded by the 2000 m and higher peaks of the Savinjske Alps, including Raduha, Ojstrica, Planjava, Brana, Rinka, Skuta and Mrzla gora.

This year, 2010, Slovenia is participating in the EDEN project for the third time. The theme of this year's selection is Aquatic Tourism.

Green tourism at the Korita Eco Camp

Alongside the winning and final destinations of the EDEN selections in

Slovenia, alongside the holder of the EU Eco-daisy emblem, Terme Snovik, we can also count among the models of green tourism the first environmental campsite, Eko Kamp Korita, and the Bohinj Park Ecohotel.

Eko Kamp Korita is undoubtedly one of the most original campsites in Slovenia, and probably in the entire Alps. It lies in the heart of Triglav National Park at the village of Soča (Trenta), right by the small channels of the Soča River. The first ecological camp in Slovenia is built entirely of natural materials, with all energy coming from the sun, and water serving as the refrigerator. If you visit the eco camp, suof sticks, natural garbage bins, a "living house", wooden sculptures and more. The campsite has separate refuse collection and uses biodegradable cleaning agents. They buy food from neighbouring farms and in this way they stimulate the local economy. One of their aims is to raise awareness in people about the importance of preserving the environment.

So what will the future hold for the development of green tourism? "The advantage is certainly held by those destinations that will see the opportunity of tourism in the light of developing sustainable tourism. Here it is important for all the key stakeholders at the destination to agree with the concept of sustainable development, and for them to formulate appropriate developmental and marketing plans and activities that they will also implement. Certainly in view of all the "green" facts, Slovenia has excellent scope for developing and marketing green or sustainable tourism development in the future," enthuses Piciga. "At the 12th Slovenian Tourism Forum in Radenci, where the central theme was sustainable development in Slovenia, we were shown the results of the survey Foreign guests on Slovenia and climate change. The results show that foreign guests in Slovenia appreciate the relaxing, unspoilt, green and tranquil environment, which offers them activities in nature. The conclusions of the survey show that "green" is a recognised and desirable element of tourist facilities offered by the destination, and that this is probably one of the key elements that differentiate Slovenia from other destinations, and something recognised by guests." ●



SEAWAY GOES GREEN AT SEA

Concern for the environment is becoming increasingly important in the boating world.

Valerija Mencej Photo www.greenlinehybrid.com Gallery

THIS HAS BEEN SHOWN IN THE TITLE EUROPEAN YACHT of the Year, won by the Greenline 33 Hybrid, a boat of Slovenian design and manufacture. Owing to its innovative design, at the biggest world nautical exhibition at Düsseldorf in Germany on 23 January this year it won what is termed the nautical Oscar, the European Yacht of the Year prize. At Düsseldorf, another Slovenian vessel, the sailing yacht Seascope 18, from the company Issa, also won a prize.

Greenline 33 Hybrid is the new Slovenian brand from the company Seaway, which had already surprised European nautical circles in the exhibitions of last autumn, through its exceptional environmental friendliness, its efficient energy use, comfort and unusually accessible price. In less than half a year, this boat has won several design and environmental awards, as well as the title of Yacht of the Year.

The global crisis has been very evident in the nautical industry, with world production in the past two years dropping by a full half in this sector. Seaway has responded to the crisis with an innovative product that is friendly to the environment and its surroundings. With the Greenline 33 Hybrid they sought to significantly lower the costs of operation, while at the same time radically reducing carbon emissions

at sea. This 10-metre vessel uses hybrid propulsion (diesel and electric motor) and has a photovoltaic roof. With its absence of exhaust gases, noise and waves, this boat represents an enjoyment, both for the owner and for prospective neighbours in the marina or at moorings.

The heart of the Greenline 33 is an entirely new form of hull, called Superdisplacement™, which contributes to lower fuel consumption. The electric drive of the boat creates no noise or fumes, and at the same time generates a negligible stern wave. Full batteries, not taking into account the additional energy gained from the solar roof, will propel the boat up to 20 nautical miles, which is ample for short day cruises. The solar roof ensures that the batteries are

fully charged, and provides additional energy for sailing under electric power. Sailing at low speeds (e.g. 4 Nautical Miles), the quantity of solar energy gained and quantity of energy used are equal, meaning that such sailing presents no burden on the environment. Nevertheless the boat also comes with a 400-litre diesel engine, although for the most part during the summer cruising season one single tank of fuel will suffice.

The Greenline 33 uses two times less fuel per nautical mile than comparable displacement hulls and four times less than semi-displacement or twin-engine planing boats. During the season the boat will use the same amount of fossil fuel as a yacht of similar size, and up to ten times less fuel than a twin-engine planing boat of comparable size. The reduced fuel consumption can also of course be observed proportionately in the costs.

This boat, which is already in series production, is breaking the ice in the area of environmentally friendly products. It is no surprise that this product has been designed and developed by the Slovenian company Seaway. Seaway is the biggest world developmental nautical company, formed out of the design studio J&J Design, founded in 1983 by the brothers Jernej and

Japec Jakopin. Since then their plans and tools have given rise to around 250 projects, through which in 28 countries and 60 boat yards around 60,000 vessels have been built. Their boats have won more than 30 national and European titles of Yacht or Motor Boat of the Year. The yachts designed and developed at J&J Design and Seaway hold the biggest market share in the world. The Greenline 33 Hybrid is following the same path, and with more than 90 orders it has already become the most sought-after motor boat in the world. This hybrid boat of course shows that there is no lack of knowledge in Slovenia for developing products for the new age. ●

Japec Jakopin

“ The present moment demands that we think about our values. We need to move from what is established to something new, based on responsibility to society, the environment and culture. Our vision of new values in the nautical world is an affordable price, feeling good and concern for the environment. Greenline is designed with this in mind, and we are delighted by the positive response. ”

**Queen of Slovenian hearts:
We got them all!
Unbelievable, it really is!**



PETRA MAJDIČ WINS THE BRONZE AFTER A DRAMATIC SERIES OF EVENTS

The ninth Slovenian medal at the Winter Olympic Games

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Stanko Gruden / STA

IMMENSE DESIRE, WILLPOWER AND ENDURANCE CARRIED Petra Majdič to her bronze medal, the first for Slovenia at the 21st Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver. The greatest Slovenian cross-country skier of all time experienced the most difficult moments of her sporting career in the Olympic Park in Whistler, but she persevered to the end. During a pre-qualifying warm-up she slid off the icy track at the most dangerous bend into a three-metre-deep gully, crashing heavily against the rocks. After a medical check-up found no broken bones, she set off again for the starting line on her own responsibility. In severe pain she battled her way through to the final.

Results of later tests showed that she had fractured four ribs

and, at the same time, that one of the fractured ribs had pierced her lung membrane and that air was escaping from the lungs into the chest cavity. Majdič was then taken by helicopter to hospital in Vancouver.

The ninth Slovenian medal at a Winter Olympic Games (the first was won by Alpine skier Jure Franko at the 1984 Games in Sarajevo) is proof of the fighting spirit of a woman who is currently probably Slovenia's best athlete. If anyone wondered at Majdič's statement that,

“ NEVER GIVE UP. MIRACLES CAN HAPPEN. IF I CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU! ”

for her, this bronze medal was like a gold medal with little diamonds in it, the doctors finally confirmed the truth of this, and the superhuman effort with which the skier from Brinje near Ljubljana had fought her way to the medal. >>>

Prime Minister Borut Pahor congratulates Olympic winner Petra Majdič on her bronze medal:

“Slovenia has a heroine who has shown, in sport, what a winning mentality means. Everyone who has ever taken part in sport understands her situation. Excellent fitness is not enough, because in the end it is character that counts. She has proved that it is possible to win even when you are on your knees. You do not give up, you pick yourself up, and you go on. She is a great inspiration to me, she can be a great inspiration to all of us, because she shows us that it is possible to overcome obstacles and achieve success.”

President Danilo Türk bestowed the Golden Order for Services on cross-country skier Petra Majdič for her exceptional performance at the Vancouver Winter Olympics.

“Petra Majdič displayed heroics and a courageous fight on her way to a big achievement at the Olympics. She demonstrated the unstoppable competitive spirit and perseverance needed ... to accomplish what she has accomplished,” said President Türk.

‘Anyone who has ever fractured a single rib knows how much this hurts. I broke four of them. During the race it was really bad. I was in such pain that not even painkillers helped. A few times I wanted to give up, but when you know what you’re fighting for, you keep going. At the finish I was more exhausted than I have ever been before. To put up with such pain for three hours, and to ski at the same time, is something incredible. In the circumstances I didn’t expect the medal, but I really wanted it. I think that in normal circumstances I would have won. Even my fellow-competitors have told me that I deserved to win,’ said Majdič after the medals ceremony, adding: ‘I wouldn’t have been able to stand it if had finished fourth. But fortunately I got a medal. It still hasn’t really sunk in, but there will be time for that.’

It seemed very unlikely that she would be able to take part in the race, but: ‘That same moment, another part of me was saying that I couldn’t give up and I began to shout: “I want to go to the start! I want to go to the start!” I knew that these Olympic Games were my last opportunity. When they wanted to take me to the emergency department, I just kept shouting that I wanted to go to the start, because I didn’t want to hear that the Games were over for me.’

In the final, the most successful Slovenian cross-country skier of all time showed the world what it means to have an iron will, and wrote a success story that embodies the Olympic spirit. Petra Majdič has won the prestigious Terry Fox Award for the courage she showed when she finished third in the Olympic women’s sprint with five broken ribs. Fox founded a foundation which gives out award every year in Canada to the most courageous, unselfish and committed athlete who embodies the virtues of Terry Fox.

FROM THE ABYSS TO THE WINNERS’ PODIUM

Andrej Stare, RTV Slovenia commentator

The images of the terrible accident of the Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili, which ended so tragically, left all of us who follow world sport praying that nothing similar would happen again. Olympic Vancouver was in shock and the opening of the Games was dedicated to the memory of the 21-year-old athlete from Georgia.

Unfortunately another accident, though one with a much happier ending, did take place on the cross-country course, where the protagonist was Slovenian champion Petra Majdič. As team officials helped her out of her wheelchair and onto the winners’ podium to receive her bronze medal, she did not hide the pain that had thrust her into this position in the most glorious moment of her career. Her fall during the warm-up on the most dangerous section of the sprint course, where athletes reach speeds of up to 50 kilometres an hour, raised numerous questions. Petra Majdič is considered the fittest athlete in world cross-country skiing. She is a strong and combative sportswoman with enormous determination and energy. Her terrifying fall into a three-metre-deep gully transformed the race of her life – “her” race – into a sports thriller. People are still asking how, with four fractured ribs and a pneumothorax, she managed to get through the qualifying rounds, win her quarter-final, get through the semis, and take the bronze medal in the final.

At the finish she lay on the ground curled up in agony and had to be helped from the snow stadium by medical staff. This was a feat unparalleled in the history of modern sport. To win a medal when so badly injured is something that pushes the limits of human endurance. Petra Majdič once again proved what a great athlete she is. The 2009 Slovenian Sportswoman of the Year and 2008 Slovenian Woman of the Year showed everyone who has ever suffered an injury in sport because of inadequate fitness and preparation just what can be achieved if you truly want something.

Norwegian TV commentator Arne Scheie: “Alongside the victory of our own Marit Bjørgen, we should award another gold medal to Petra Majdič. Her achievement cannot be compared to any other result at these Olympic Games.”

World sport has seen another, darker side at the Vancouver Olympics. The death of an athlete, several serious injuries, and a lack of preparedness for unforeseen complications in the speed skating and biathlon events demonstrate how difficult it is to organise an Olympic Games. In sports where the organiser lacks experience and tradition, knowledge and knowledge alone must decide. And there is no shortage of knowledge in world sport management.

Petra Majdič returned to Slovenia after several days of treatment in Vancouver. Her bronze medal is on its way to becoming a symbol of sport and the athlete’s tenacity, desire for success and strength. Petra is the undisputed heroine of the 21st Winter Olympic Games, and her feat will continue to inspire awe in many generations to come.

Petra Majdič’s return from the abyss to the winners’ podium is a journey hitherto described only in literature, in Dante’s Divine Comedy.



"I AM EXTREMELY HAPPY WITH THE TWO MEDALS. LOOKING BACK, I COULD HAVE DONE MORE IN THE SUPER COMBINED COMPETITION...BUT IN THE GIANT SLALOM I DID ALL I COULD ... IN WAS ALREADY TIRED BEFORE THE SLALOM, WE HAD BAD LUCK WITH THE WEATHER, BUT IN GENERAL I AM HAPPY,"

SHE COMMENTED ON HER 9TH PLACE IN SLALOM AND 5TH IN SUPER COMBINED.

TINA MAZE - SLOVENIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL WINTER OLYMPIAN DOUBLE SILVER

Tina Maze, the 26-year-old skier from Črna na Koroškem, has hit top form at the Winter Olympic Games.

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Stanko Gruden / STA

FOLLOWING HER SUCCESS IN THE SUPER GIANT Slalom, she came second in the Giant Slalom competition to win her second silver medal. With this medal, she said after the competition, she has fulfilled her childhood dream and her life's ambition. This is the third Slovenian medal at these Olympic Games, the fiftieth Slovenian Olympic medal and the eleventh Slovenian medal at the Winter Olympics. Tina Maze is also the first Slovenian athlete to win two individual medals at the Winter Olympics, topping the achievement of ski jumper Matjaž Debelak, who took one individual medal and one team medal at the 1988

Winter Olympics in Calgary. With her two Olympic medals, Tina Maze has written one of the most exciting chapters of Slovenia's Olympic story.

'Wow! I feel fantastic! This is an enormous success for me and for Slovenia,' said the skier. 'Before I left for Vancouver I said to myself that I was going to go for two medals and I'm thrilled to have got them. Now I can go back home with my childhood dream and life's ambition fulfilled. When I got to the Games I knew I was in good shape but I never expected to win two medals, because I have never managed to ski well at big competitions.'

VISITORS FLOCK TO THE OLYMPIC SLOVENIA HOUSE

Highly favourable response to the I feel Slovenia slogan

Polona Prešeren Photo Aleš Fevžer, Stanko Gruden/STA



DURING THE WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES IN CANADA, the Slovenia House in the centre of Whistler Village has been very popular. It is quite clear that the decision to set up the House for this Olympic Games has been the right decision. The great location of the House, its pleasant atmosphere and the treasures it contains are all reasons why House guests have enjoyed being in it and have been happy to return. It started with the opening of the House, which was attended by a bunch of guests from the Olympic Committees of other countries, representatives of Slovenian and foreign media, the Whistler community, Slovenian expatriates and other friends and supporters of Slovenia. Slovenia House was a joint project of the Olympic Committee of Slovenia, the Slovenian Government Communication Office, the Slovenian Embassy in Ottawa and the Slovenian Tourist Board.

The House has also been visited several times by the Olympic Games ambassador and member of the Canadian Senate Nancy Green Raine, and the Canadian Minister for Sport, Gary Lunn, who wished our sports team all the best: "You Slovenians are good at the winter events, and I am sure that before the games are over, we will all stand proudly together in the awards arena and hear the Slovenian national anthem."

Gary Lunn, who met Slovenia's Minister for Education and Sports, Igor Lukšič, over a working breakfast at Slovenia House, was thrilled with the slogan I feel Slovenia, and he even wanted one of the T shirts worn by staff at Slovenia House. He said enthusiastically that the presentation of Slovenia was one of the most attractive and original.

Every afternoon at five o'clock the House offered a happy hour, intended for tasting Slovenian wine and food and for thematic presentations of Slovenia. Slovenia House was also visited by numerous representatives of other Olympic committees, including more than 10 presidents, by Canadian business people, the mayor of Whistler Mountain, acclaimed sports legends – Vegard Ulvang, Bente Skari and others – representatives of foreign media houses including the Associated Press, Reuters

and Vancouver Sun, and visitors from all over the world.

Slovenia's profile at the Vancouver Olympics was further enhanced by the official clothes for the Slovenian Olympic delegation, crafted by Mura and Toper. The jacket was a special hit, and is regarded as one of the most original garments of the games. Hand in hand with the slogan I feel Slovenia, the clothes earned very positive responses.

I feel Slovenia in Canada

Slovenia House was furnished in the spirit of the emblem I feel Slovenia. The idea was that anyone who came to the games in Vancouver, and especially to Whistler, should feel Slovenia.

The responses of visitors to the slogan I feel Slovenia have been exceptionally positive, and of course this has contributed to us becoming increasingly recognisable in Canada. "How imaginative, great marketing, I like it," were just some of the responses we got from visitors or random passers-by at the Olympic venues and streets of Whistler and Vancouver.

And Slovenia House was not the only place where you could encounter the emblem I feel Slovenia at the Olympic Games. Our fans carried the slogan to the competition venues with placards saying I feel Slovenia and Slovenia supporters' caps. Banners reading I feel Slovenia also adorned the apartments of our Olympic competitors in the Olympic villages of Vancouver and Whistler.

In fact our banners were among the most recognisable at the competition venues and thus far at the two medal ceremonies. And other competition visitors who wanted to support Slovenia and Slovenian competitors, came to Slovenia House for placards to support our team.

The national emblem in fact could not be better suited to the positive message of the Olympic Games. I feel Slovenia is a positive signal that speaks of how the Slovenians are a sporting nation. All those who talked to us are inspired by the fact that as much as some 40 percent of the population of Slovenia is involved in sports, and that we are right up on top of the world in terms of number of medals per inhabitant. ●

Presentation of the Slovenian cuisine and wine-making at the centre of the Milan event.



SLOVENIAN CUISINE IN MILAN

Outstanding Slovenian performance at the Identita' Golose congress of original cuisine

Vesna Žarkovič Photo archives Zemono Manor

EXPLORING THE LUXURY OF WHAT is simple, supreme and light, the best ingredients, great knowledge and dedication, one's own style, abundant imagination, innovation and wit – a top chef needs all these things to get invited to prepare dishes on a selected theme in front of several hundred colleagues.

Four years ago Tomaž Kavčič of the family-run restaurant Pri Lojzetu at Zemono Manor was invited to Milan, Italy to participate in the Identita' Golose congress of original cuisine. He enchanted and inspired his audience, which comprised chefs and journalists.

He prepared sea bass poached with a strip of salt from the Sečovlje salt pans, in this way using a revived ancient salt-maker's method for preparing food to deliver a little lecture, to those assembled, about simplicity and imagination. In front of a packed congress hall he was brilliant with his presentation of a wood fire, a simple and effective way of minimally cooking a good piece of meat, for which you need two planks of beech wood from the forest of Trnovski gozd, some dry oak leaves, olive oil in which hazelnuts and walnuts have been marinated and a pinch of salt bloom from the Piran salt pans.

Simplicity itself. Yet this was not all; Kavčič's charming philosophy of cuisine had a decisive influence on the Italians inviting Slovenia as this year's special guest to the 6th international congress. His performance was full of superlatives, and his confident delivery was more than successful in placing the power and innovation of Slovenian cuisine and wine-making at the centre of the Milan event, while a further dimension was provided in the welcome address by the Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor, who stopped in at the congress after talks with the Mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti, >>>

The Slovenian presentation was in a style with sufficient tradition and innovation.





In front of a packed congress hall Tomaž Kavčič was brilliant with his presentation of a wood fire.

and the president of the regional government of Lombardy, Roberto Formigoni. The Prime Minister addressed his speech, with its emphasis on modern tourist services and natural beauty, to the numerous Italian journalists – there were more than 250 of them, alongside 400 participants.

Kavčič commented on the successful Slovenian appearance by saying that the invitation to the prestige congress signified a major and important confirmation of something we already know: Slovenian food establishments have gained what they earned and what they have been working for. This was followed by a string of praise. He was delighted most of all by the praise from the founder of the congress, Paolo Marchi, to the effect that the Slovenian presentation was the most outstanding one of the past four years in which the meeting had been held. Undoubtedly he was the biggest Slovenian star in Milan.

The meeting of cookery wizards and all manner of gastronomic adventures in Milan is the brainchild of journalist Paolo Marchi, who invited participants to consider what satisfies us most today – what is it that is really worth something on the table. In his opinion this is: vegetables



‘Slovenian food establishments have gained what they earned and what they have been working for.’

with soul, bread that is good three days after baking, good meat, superb olive oil, pasta you can truly enjoy without sauce, since what counts is its flavour.

The Milan congress is set out as a professional and learning event. It attracts top chefs to exchange experiences and visions in breaking culinary boundaries. There has been a marked shift away from trends following a changing of aggregate states, since the key emphasis is on superlative ingredients and their

natural flavours with imaginative interpretation. The Slovenian presentation was in a style with sufficient tradition and innovation. In the gastronomic superpower of Italy, interest in local cuisine extends in a big way to Slovenia. Interest among Italian tourists in this is growing, with 4% more tourists coming to Slovenia from that market last year, despite the crisis, meaning that Italian guests account for around a million overnights a year in Slovenia. Gastronomy plays an important part in this, and without it, the Italians are just not interested.

Slovenian producers of food items and wines put together a joint presentation on 20 square metres of exhibition space, and participants included the Piran salt pans, Fonda fish farm, Kocbek oils, the company Mlinotest Živilska industrija of Ajdovščina, Kmetija Matic 1825 with its natural and organically produced fruit juices, the company Barone and the winegrowers Aleš Kristančič, Marjan Simčič, Vinska Klet Goriška brda and Danilo Steyer. For all three days, visitors to the Slovenian stand could try typical Slovenian products, with tasty snacks provided by different Slovenian master chefs. ●



ANŽE KOPITAR

The boy from the sandbox, a sportsman for all times

Andrej Stare Photo: STA, Videotop archive / Personal archive

IT WAS NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO, in Červar on the Croatian coast, that I met my long-time acquaintance Matjaž Kopitar, an ice hockey player in the national team. He was holding the hand of his little son, who was playing in a sandbox, making cakes with his shovel. He uttered a few words, and was smiling and animated. Friendliness and contentment shone from his eyes. Today that little boy from the sandbox is one of the best Slovenian sportsmen, star of the NHL hockey league Anže Kopitar.

The years have passed, with father Matjaž concluding his international career in 1994, after becoming the best shooter on the Slovenian team at the world championship in Ljubljana.

Matjaž played in a total of 84 matches for the national team, appearing in five world championships. In 2002, playing for Maribor against Kranjska Gora in a national championship game was Matjaž Kopitar (then 36 years old), while the well-built ace playing in the number 11 shirt for Kranjska Gora was the 15-year-old Anže Kopitar, Matjaž's son, the little boy from the sandbox. The game ended as a 6-6 draw. One of the Maribor goals was scored by Matjaž Kopitar, while two were scored for Kranjska Gora by Anže Kopitar. This unique meeting has taken on symbolic significance today, when Anže Kopitar is the big star of the famous NHL team the Los Angeles Kings and one of the best hockey players in the world.

Meteoric career

His career has enjoyed a meteoric rise, and at the age of 22 Anže has gained previously unimagined popularity.

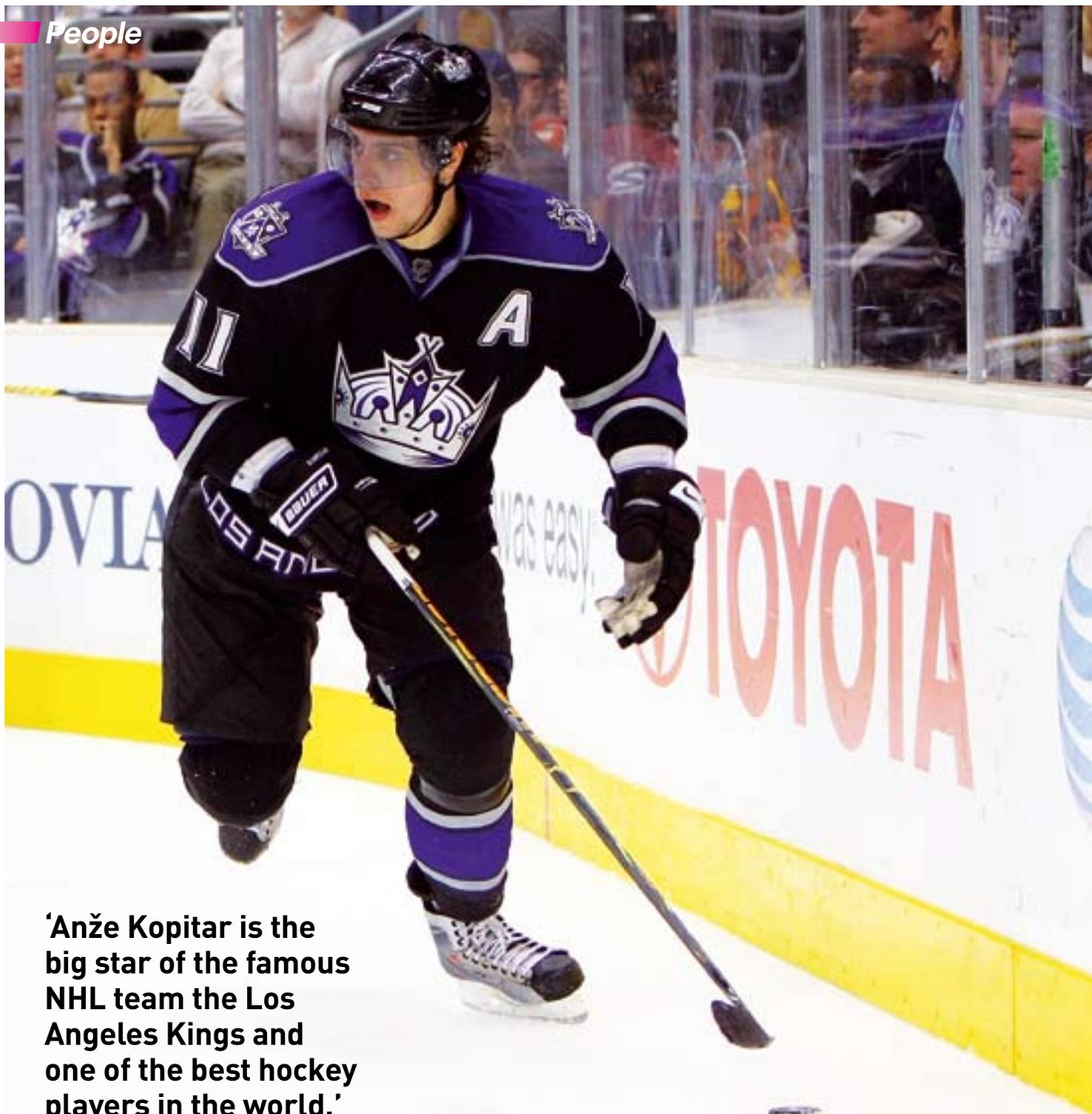
In North America ice hockey is a number one sport, and today Anže is one of the main stars of world hockey and one of the most popular players for the dreamland city of film, Los Angeles.

Before he got to Los Angeles, the young Anže had to go through the filter of selection, for even with his exceptional talents he had to prove his quality from day to day. After Kranjska Gora, the trail led him to the Swedish city of Sodertalje, where he learned many of the secrets of playing ice hockey. Although it was a tough climb up, scouts from the most prominent clubs in the NHL noticed him and through their agents they placed him in the NHL draft. Each year around 300 young men from all over the world find themselves in this "draft", and the best teams in the NHL vie to get these players in their centre. The rule of the draft is that the team with the lowest ranking in the previous season gets the chance to buy the best player in the draft. Anže was placed 11th in the draft. He anticipated an offer from the New York Islanders or Columbus. So he was totally surprised when a representative of Los Angeles stepped up to the microphone and said: "In the first round the Los Angeles Kings have selected number 11 – Anže Kopitar". A dream he dared not even think about had become reality. The eternal city of Los Angeles became his new home. The Los Angeles Kings is a famous team, and after an extraordinary career, the best hockey player of all time, Wayne Gretzky, played for them.

Many moments of his otherwise brief hockey career are now unforgettable, and his outstanding games have placed him at the very top of the ladder of most popular sports people. Through his appearance, his attitude to his team-mates, fans, opponents and referees, Anže has shown that he is not just an exceptional hockey player but also an exceptional person. This virtue has made him a star, yet he remains modest.

Kopitar – biggest promoter of Slovenian sport in the USA

The homeland of ice hockey, Canada, has >>>



‘Anže Kopitar is the big star of the famous NHL team the Los Angeles Kings and one of the best hockey players in the world.’

just six clubs in the NHL, while for the most part Canadians play in the non-Canadian teams. Just how popular Kopitar is could be observed in practice at every step of the 2008 world championship in Canada. Kopitar is the biggest promoter of Slovenia and Slovenian sport in North America. Although some Slovenian basketball players have claimed the NBA title (Nesterovič, Udrih, Vujačić), no Slovenian sportsman can compare to Anže.

At the store selling fan club accessories in Los Angeles, if you want to buy kit with the number 11 shirt – Anže Kopitar’s kit – you have to wait several weeks. Pretty much every Kings fan wants the number 11 shirt, since Anže is an idol for both, young and old, the idol of all the Kings, of all Los Angeles.

The Staples Center arena in Los Angeles is one of the biggest in the USA. It hosts the Los Angeles Kings ice hockey

players and also the best basketball team in the world, the Los Angeles Lakers. Each club has its star, idol and driving force. These are the great Kobe Bryant and Anže Kopitar. The Staples Center last hosted the NHL final, the battle for the Stanley Cup, in 1993, when the Montreal Canadiens fought it out with the Los Angeles Kings. At that time the Kings featured the best hockey player in history, Wayne Gretzky, and alongside him there were brilliant

performances by the Finn Jarri Kurri, by Luc Robitaille, Tony Granato, Rob Blake and others. But the day went to the Canadians with a final score of 4-1, and the Cup went to Montreal. Now will history repeat itself and the Staples Center soon host this prestigious encounter again? Will Anže Kopitar and his team-mates have better luck than the legendary Wayne Gretzky? All the indications are that the Kings should soon rise to the top of the NHL and thereby of world ice hockey.

One of the biggest events at the Staples Center was the celebration of Wayne Gretzky's 1,000th goal in 1992. Before the match the lights in the arena went down, then spotlights picked out the legendary Kings captain and on the other side a completely white Rolls Royce, which the Los Angeles Kings had presented to their great hero. That kind of show was only possible in the biggest movie city in the world, Los Angeles.

The 47.6 million dollar man

Given the exceptional nature of the central position where Anže Kopitar plays, his rapidly acquired fame is truly amazing. American hockey and sports fans generally do not distinguish players by where they come from; they just recognise good and bad, sports gentlemen and those who do not deserve that title. With his attitude to his team-mates, coaches and spectators, Anže Kopitar has become an icon of the club, which signed a 47.6 million dollar contract with him, spanning seven years, following his introductory three seasons. This is one of the biggest sums paid to date for an ice hockey player in the NHL. In his very second season in the NHL, Kopitar played in the prestigious 56th All Star Game at the Phillips Arena in Atlanta, where the best of the best hockey players in the world are invited to play. A few days ago he scored his hundredth goal in the NHL, and he made it clear that his statistics will be among the best.

Anže Kopitar's family, his father, mother and younger brother Gašper (himself a very promising hockey player) have moved to California, where each in their own way helps Anže play and train. It is this family help that Anže mentions in numerous interviews, stressing that



‘At the store selling fan club accessories in Los Angeles, if you want to buy kit with the number 11 shirt – Anže Kopitar’s kit – you have to wait several weeks.’

his family in fact takes the greatest credit for his meteoric rise. The high moral and human qualities in Anže stem from his upbringing in the family circle, at school and in sports clubs, and outstanding work in planning a top professional career, has turned out to be the right and only path to hockey stardom.

Slovenian ice hockey fans want to see Anže again in the Slovenian national kit, when the national side competes in the six-nation tournament at the end of April in Ljubljana (Croatia, Poland, Great Britain,

South Korea, Hungary and Slovenia) to determine who gets back into international ice hockey's top flight. But if the Kings play in the final for the Stanley Cup, sadly Anže will not be in the Slovenian team. If at all possible, Anže will as always be delighted to join the national team in the number 11 shirt. To date Anže has taken part in four world championships (2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008). And his last appearance in Canada was something special. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Slovenian side enjoyed a huge fan base precisely because of Kopitar, whom the Canadians hold in great esteem. The pool of Slovenian ice hockey players is one of the smallest in the world, with a total of just 1,200 Slovenians playing this dynamic sport at eight covered and two open-air rinks. By comparison, in Canada competitive hockey is played by more than 500,000 players in 2,451 arenas and 11,000 open-air rinks. For this very reason, Kopitar's unimagined success is all the more amazing. ●

SLOVENIAN DIALECTS

Slovenian is the official language in the Republic of Slovenia and an official language of the European Union.

Albert Kos

IT IS ONE OF THE LESSER SPOKEN European languages with around two million speakers, and also one of the lesser spoken in Slavic language family, alongside languages such as Macedonian and Upper and Lower Serbian. Most Slovenian speakers live in Slovenia, but the Slovenian-speaking areas extend across the state boundaries into the border-lying areas of the neighbouring countries of Austria, Hungary and Italy, where, however, the Slovenian-populated territory has significantly reduced over the past two centuries, and the number of people using Slovenian as a mother tongue in everyday life and at least partially in public life has significantly declined. Slovenian has also spread around the world, as large numbers of Slovenian emigrants during different periods, have moved, not only around western Europe but also to north and south America and Australia.

Dialectal variety of Slovenian

One special feature of Slovenian, which is one of the most archaic Slavic languages with many linguistic peculiarities to this day, is its considerable dialectal variety, and indeed it has more dialects than any other Slavic languages. In the relatively small area of Slovenia and the surrounding border areas – totalling just 24 000 square kilometres - there are 26 dialects and 12 sub-dialects with distinctive features, which together form 7 dialect groups. This dialectal diversity over a relatively small area and the relatively small number of Slovenian speakers makes Slovenian unique among Slavic languages. The reasons for the diversity are primarily geographical and historical, including the administrative and political division of the Slovenian nation across different states, historic provinces and

ecclesiastical units. Slovenian-inhabited territory features numerous mountains and hills that act as major geographical dividers, and in the past made it difficult or even prevented cohesive development between people across the broader space, a fact that was only heightened by administrative and political demarcation, from former ecclesiastical and provincial divisions to current state borders.

Dialects and the development of the Slovenian literary language

Given this dispersion of Slovenians, who only gained an awareness of their shared linguistic roots and developed a national consciousness at a relatively late point, the development of standard literary language and hence spoken language was extremely important. This can be traced back to the mid-sixteenth century, when a number of Protestant writers – with Primož Trubar to the fore – founded the Slovenian literary language based on central Slovenian dialects; this central focus meant that Slovenians from the periphery did not immediately accept the standard language as their own. The process of shaping the Slovenian literary language therefore lasted for a considerable time, with the development of Slovenian news and journal writing and literature incorporating many elements from other dialectal areas, which enriched its expressive function and comprehensibility. The Slovenian language and geographic space its speakers populated were therefore a cornerstone of the United Slovenia (*Zedinjena Slovenija*) political programme in the mid-nineteenth century, which was promoted in various forms until the end of the twentieth century.

Alongside the standard Slovenian literary language which gradually

gained recognition for use in education, administration and public life in general, the individual dialects have largely continued their existence until the present day, and still function as markers of the regional origin and identity of their speakers. This diversity still has strong roots in more rural areas, but has in recent decades been subject to urbanisation, which is observed primarily in larger towns and their surroundings, where inhabitants have formed new sub-dialects, often under the influence of large numbers of immigrant groups from other parts of the former Yugoslavia. However, these are normal processes of mixing and melding of various language influences that have been present throughout history and are typical of all living languages. One specific feature along those lines, is the area around Kočevje, a town some 50 km south of Ljubljana, where a number of mixed sub-dialects, predominate that cannot be assigned to any of the dialect groups, which is due to demographic changes after the second world war, during which the area was abandoned by a dense population of ethnic Germans (the Gotschee Germans). People from various parts of Slovenia moved there subsequently to fill the unpopulated area. Finally, the influence of neighbouring languages is seen in all outlying dialects to varying degrees: Italian and Friulian to the west, German to the north, and particularly Croatian and Serbian in some parts of the Slovenian-Croatian border, as well as Hungarian, to a lesser extent, in the north-east of Slovenia.

Development of Slovenian dialectology

The development of Slavic linguistics led to the archaic features and elements of the Slovenian dialects being subject

to intense research as early as the nineteenth century. Initially foreign linguists dominated such work, which was primarily aimed at using Slovenian dialects as the key to the reconstruction of the former common Old Slavic language. Although some dialectal features had already been recorded by individual Slovenian researchers, the real start came with the Russian linguist Izmail Ivanovich Sreznevsky (1812-1880) and his successor Baudouin de Courtenay (1845-1929). Both paid close attention during their field visits to Slovenia to western Slovenian dialects, particularly Resian (*rezijansko*), which is the most distant and most isolated of any Slovenian dialect and therefore retained numerous specific linguistic features that elsewhere disappeared as the language developed. Their findings formed the basis for academic scientific dialectology, which was further developed during the twentieth century by numerous Slovenian linguists, with particular mention to be made of the professors Anton Ramovš, Tine Logar and Jakob Rigler. Foreign experts continued to make major contributions meanwhile.

Dialects outside Slovenia's borders

The Resian dialect is worthy of a little more attention. It is now only spoken by around 2,000 people in the mountainous valley of Resia (Rezija) in the western Julian Alps in Italy, who have geographically and historically been almost completely separated from their Slovenian-speaking neighbours, in Slovenia as well as the other Slovenian speakers in Italy. This community, with around a dozen villages and settlements, has preserved its special dialect until today, and actually does not see itself as part of the Slovenian language community, is naturally exposed to strong influence from the Friulian, and in modern times, the Italian language, since the bottom of the valley opens towards the Romance language world. Over the years many inhabitants have emigrated from the valley for economic reasons, but have retained their dialect

in daily use, and even developed Resian dialect literature.

Some other Slovenian dialects in areas outside the borders of today's Slovenian state are even more threatened than Resian, particularly in areas where in the past – and today – there were no Slovenian schools, Slovenian was only preserved in family tradition and church services, and has long been kept out of public life. In Italy this applies particularly to the Torre (*tersko*) dialect of Slovenian inhabitants in the mountain parts of Venetian Slovenia (Beneška Slovenija), and in Austria to the Gail (*ziljsko*) dialect spoken from the lower course of the Gail river west of Villach. But the numbers of speakers of many of the other Slovenian dialects outside the borders of the Republic of Slovenia are declining due to assimilation processes, and unavoidable demographic trends in economically undeveloped lands and they are threatened with extinction. This is particularly notable among the Slovenian dialects of Venetian Slovenia, which was handed to Italy after a plebiscite of 1866, separating its inhabitants from other Slovenians. This same happened to the Carinthian (*koroško*) dialect in Austria, particularly north of the Drava river, and the sub-dialect of the small community of Rába Slovenians in Hungary (settled along the Rába river), who in contrast to the Slovenians in the Prekmurje region, were not included in the new Yugoslav

'In the relatively small area of Slovenia and the surrounding border areas – totalling just 24 000 square kilometres - there are 26 dialects and 12 sub-dialects with distinctive features, which together form 7 dialect groups'

kingdom in 1918, and remained in Hungary throughout. Since, in some areas literary Slovenian is strange and difficult to understand for many speakers of Slovenian dialects, two local weekly reviews appear in the two most distant peripheries of the Slovenian language space, publishing some articles in dialect: Venetian Slovenia has the *Novi Matajur* weekly, published in Cividale del Friuli, while the Rába Slovenians have the *Porabje* weekly, published in Szentgotthárd.

Complementariness of dialects with literary language

The dialect system in the Republic of Slovenia, the home state of Slovenians, remains largely unchanged, since anyone born outside the capital is born into their own dialect area, where they make themselves understood in their own environment, and share with other local inhabitants on a daily basis and pass it on to the next generations, even if the dominance of the literary language in public life is gradually moving dialects closer to each other, making distinctions between them less clear. Most Slovenians are skilled in both the literary language, which they study at school and constantly come into contact with via radio and television, and their dialect, which they use for everyday communication on the local level. Schools, in contrast to previous practice, are giving increasing respect to dialects, and recognising their role in the language of education, where previously they were strictly forbidden. The use of dialects in film and theatre is no longer unusual, either as a manner of expression that stresses local authenticity, or as an indicator of specific dramatic and film roles, often to comic effect. However, attitudes to dialects in public life are increasingly opening up, as awareness increases that dialects – as emphasised by the leading Slovenian dialectology expert of the present day, Prof Dr Vera Smole – are of value and part of the cultural heritage that should be protected and preserved, since dialects expand and enrich an individual's communication skills and understanding. ●



CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS

Valuable cultural heritage

Laufarija in the Cerkljansko region

Jože Prešeren Photo Darinka Mladenovič

THE SLOVENIAN NAME FOR THE merry events that take place at Carnival time is *pustovanje* or, when the event is locally coloured, *kurentovanje* or *laufarija*, *škoromatija*, *šelmarija* and so on. Or sometimes we simply use the international name – *karneval*. As is fitting, almost every town and village of any size has its own Carnival. And of course, Carnival is an established and popular holiday occasion, full of merriment and mischief, although many people take it very seriously. It is difficult to establish exactly when people began dressing up in costumes at this time of year, as winter comes to an end, but there is no doubt that the custom dates back to the pre-Christian era, when people celebrated the reawakening of nature as the winter drew to a close.

“Masquerading is perhaps one of the oldest characteristics of the human being, since even in prehistoric times people would use masks to try and obtain food: a

mask made it easier for them to get closer to animals,” suggests the well-known Slovenian ethnologist Dr Janez Bogataj. “Over the course of history, dressing up in a costume has represented the human desire to enter a different self.” Dr Bogataj explains that today’s Carnival celebrations are a surviving remnant of historical memory of a time in which people still believed in supernatural forces that were supposed to help drive away the winter. On the other hand, modern carnivals, which are mainly held in towns, allow the inhabitants at least once a year to be critical of the authorities and, in their own way, expose the wrongs in society.

Quite a number of Carnival events in Slovenia today have their roots deep in history. The largest event of this kind is, without a doubt, the *korantija* or *kurentovanje* in Ptuj and the surrounding area, which every year draws 10,000 visitors to the streets of Ptuj, not to mention

hundreds of participants from all over the country and even from abroad. This really is a truly international Carnival.

Another extraordinarily picturesque event is the *laufarija* in Cerklno and the surrounding region, known as Cerkljansko. We are going to devote a little more attention to this event today, and for good reason.

Owing to its representativeness and originality, Samo Bevk MP has suggested in Slovenia’s National Assembly that the Republic of Slovenia should propose these two Carnival traditions – *kurentovanje* and *laufarija* – to UNESCO for placing on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This list, which covers oral traditions and expressions, including language, as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage, rituals, festive events and so on, as yet contains no elements from Slovenia. Be that as it may, at present the list contains around 90 masterpieces from 70 countries, 21 of them in Europe. Let us



The *laufarji* were revived some years after the Second World War thanks to the efforts of a local man called Peter Brelih, who actually lived in Ljubljana. He began to encourage his close kinsmen to preserve the old customs, and above all the *laufarija*, which he was convinced was something unique not only in Slovenia, but in Europe. He was helped in the revival of the old customs by the ethnologist Dr Niko Kuret, and also by some of the older inhabitants. They even borrowed the original masks from the ethnographic museum. Soon after that, they made new masks modelled on the old ones. With one exception, all the masks are made of wood, and for this reason they require the skilled hands of a carver.

And thus in 1956, after some years of preparations, fourteen *laufarji* appeared on the streets of Cerklje, each of them with its own name in the local dialect: The Old Man and the Old Woman, two Thread Men, the Evil One, the Ivy Man, the Bark Man, the Baker, the Fleece Man, the Scabby Man, the Sackcloth Man, the Lady and Gentleman and of course Pust, the central figure of the *laufarija*. In the years that followed they were joined by a further eleven figures: The Drunk Man and the Drunk Woman, the Pine Man, the Basket Man, the Spiteful Man, the Feather Man, the Straw Man, the Wild Man, Daisy, another Thread Man and finally the Innkeeper.

Careful preparations

The start of the *laufarija*, which reaches its peak at Carnival, is on the first Sunday of the New Year, when the first *laufar* appears on the streets after the second Mass in Cerklje. The following Sunday there are two of them, and then more >>>

hope that these two events from Slovenia will make it onto the list!

The *Laufarija* in Cerklje

Cerklje is a small urban centre close to the better-known Idrija (once mainly known for its centuries-old mercury mine, currently being closed down). Cerklje is the centre of the Cerkljansko region, through which an important trade route has run since prehistoric times from the Soča Valley towards the valley of Poljanska Dolina. Before the Second World War, Cerklje was a local administrative centre. After the war, it gained an electrical appliances factory and a timber industry, while crafts, particularly lacemaking, were also developed. Thus Cerklje is known on the one hand for its industry, and on the other for old customs, the best known of which is the *laufarija*.

Today nobody knows any longer when the *laufarji* first appeared in Cerklje,

although in all probability the custom derives from pagan ceremonies. All that is known is that the *laufarija* did take place in 1914, after which everything went quiet for several decades. That was the year that the First World War broke out, sending most of the young men from their homes, and thus there was no one left to look after the preparation and running of the event. After the First World War, Cerklje passed under Italian occupation and in this period there was no real will to revive the old custom, which had already practically sunk into oblivion. It also appears that the Fascist authorities banned the organising of such events.

‘The *laufarija* was something unique not only in Slovenia, but in Europe.’



on each Sunday after that. And thus something mysterious happens each week in the run-up to Carnival Sunday, when the group is complete – 25 *laufarji*. The preparations need to begin early, because there is plenty of work to do: the young men must gather ivy, moss and pine branches, sew costumes and compile the list of charges. Where does the name *laufar* (plural: *laufarji*) come from? The name derives from the German word *laufer*, meaning ‘runner’, since one of the figures is constantly running around frightening children. Such German-tinged expressions derive from the days of the Austrian Empire and were once considered ‘popular’ language in Slovenia.

Everything happens in the pre-Carnival

‘The name *laufar* derives from the German word *laufer*, meaning ‘runner’.

and Carnival period, on the streets of Cerkno and the surrounding villages. In this preliminary period, the *laufarji* also perform the function of wassailers and set off to visit farms in the surrounding area. They used to say that they were collecting thread to sew their costumes, but today they are happier with home-made sausages, brandy and other good things. To a generous householder they wish a good harvest, health in the home and, above all, ‘that the turnip will be fatter’.

The main idea of the *laufarija* is that Pust needs to be brought before the judge. He is accused of everything – Pust is to blame for a harsh winter, the bad weather, for a poor harvest and everything bad that has happened in the past year. His costume is made from fresh moss, and therefore must be made new every year. It weighs at least 60 to 80 kilograms, and therefore the lad who appears in this role must be sturdy and strong. The only member of the group who speaks is the Old Man, who is dressed in the traditional peasant costume of the area; he is the head of the *laufar* family. Next to him walks the Old Woman, a crooked old crone who drives away the winter with a birch broom.

On Carnival Sunday, the ‘imperial and royal court’ tries Pust in Cerkno’s



main square for all his sins, tomfoolery and nonsense. The list of charges, which is known as the *kalamon*, is read in the local dialect and, particularly for the local inhabitants, is the main topic of conversation, since the contents of the list of charges are still relevant today. On the morning of Shrove Tuesday, the *laufarji* dig up the *bot* (a woodman's mallet, a kind of wooden hammer) that they buried the previous year, while in the afternoon they all set off again in procession to the main square, where the 'imperial-royal' judge reads the list of charges again and adds any sins committed in the last two days. When the jury finds Pust guilty, the judge sentences him to the harshest penalty: 'death by mallet'. The execution of Pust

is carried out by the Old Man, who strikes Pust on the head with the mallet. After the execution, Pust is taken to a local inn, where he lies on a bier until midnight, the official end of the Carnival period in the Cerklno area. The programme of the *laufarija* does not include an Ash Wednesday funeral.

Who are the members of the *laufarija* family?

As we have already said, the *laufarija* family numbers 25 members. Each *laufar* wears a mask called a *larfa* which, together with the costume, represents a figure symbolising specific human faults or weaknesses, a specific social class or a local character. All the masks except one are carved from linden wood, and the costumes are made especially for them. For three of the figures – Pust, the Pine Man and the Ivy Man – the costumes are newly made each year from fresh plants.

One of the most frightening figures is the Thread Man, who has big eyes and crooked teeth. He gets his name from the threads left over from the linen-weaving process, from which his costume is made. There are three of these figures in procession, running about, frightening children and other spectators, and looking after Pust.

The Ivy Man and Daisy represent the spring. Her costume is sprinkled with daisies, while his is made from between 8,000 and 10,000 ivy leaves. The Fleece Man is a shepherd from the area around Cerklno. He is dressed in a sheepskin coat and carries a basket on his back. The Scabby Man represents the plagues of illness. His face is 'adorned' by rashes, scabs and a runny nose that he wipes with his hand. The Sackcloth Man is dressed in sackcloth. The Spiteful Man leans on a stick, which he also uses to drive away the children, and plays the hurdy-gurdy. The Drunk Man and the Drunk Woman (who is armed with a rolling pin) are always quarrelling. The Feather Man is plastered in chicken feathers and represents the village idiot. The Straw Man has a costume made from the straw that was once used to thatch the roofs of houses. The well-dressed Lady and Gentleman walk restrainedly at the back of the procession. The Wild Man is

afraid of everything. The Innkeeper offers passers-by a cup of wine. The Baker holds the shovel or peel used for placing bread in the oven. The Bark Man is a shepherd in a costume made from bast, the inner bark of certain plants. The Basket Woman is an ugly old woman carrying her drunken husband in a basket. The Pine Man is Pust's brother, dressed in pine branches. The Evil One, who terrorises children with his pitchfork, is reminiscent of the devil.

The *Laufarija* traditions of the Cerklno area are also presented in the local museum, in the centre of the town; where there is a permanent exhibition called 'Pust is to Blame'. The history of the *laufarija* is shown in words and pictures. The exhibition also covers the preparations for Carnival, making the masks, wassailing, digging up the mallet, and the trial and execution of Pust. •

Preparations for the Carnival in Cerklno begin soon after the New Year, because the young men have to gather moss, ivy and pine branches, sew their costumes and compile the list of charges against Pust. Four Sundays before Carnival, the Thread Man appears on the streets of Cerklno. On the Sundays that follow, he is gradually joined by the other *laufarji*. In the pre-Carnival period, the *laufarji* also perform the function of wassailers and visit the neighbouring villages, where they collect the 'material basis' for their work, i.e. thread for sewing their costumes, although they are not averse to home-made sausages or brandy either.

In Slovenia a number of ancient Carnival rituals have survived to the present day. One such example is the *Korantija* in the Ptuj and Dravsko Polje area. The masks may have been transformed, but they are still part of a heritage that we live with and continue to develop. We do not know today what the *kurent* will be like in a hundred years' time, but we will be happy if it continues to develop. The typology of masks in Slovenia thus includes a continuity of heritage, with uninterrupted historical development, that today, however, has a contemporary image. A second group is represented by all those Carnival events that are an interpretation of rich history and no longer have a deeper connection with the everyday life of the population.

Dr Janez Bogataj

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Tina Maze
Photo Stanko Gruden / STA