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QUOTES OF THE FORTNIGHT



Darijan Košir (Daily Delo): **Modern Slovenia a product of Janez Drnovšek 's work**, Ljubljana, 25 February: Slovenia has lost one of its few true statesmen and a politician who greatly influenced events in the country over the past 20 years. Much of what modern Slovenia is, is the work of deceased Former President and Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek . He will be a role model for Slovenian politicians for years to come. Drnovšek helped to create Slovenia with moderate, tolerant and gradual policies. Drnovšek made his name abroad by being different than all the other Yugoslav leaders before him. This had such an impact that it opened many doors later, when Slovenia needed them opened to join Europe.



Javier Solana /High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy/: **The EU mission will operate throughout the whole of Kosovo**, Priština, 19 February: The EU Mission in Kosovo (Eulex) will perform its duties throughout the whole of Kosovo. The European Union strives for the European perspective of all Balkan countries. I call upon the people of Kosovo to direct their joy, which they showed during the celebration of the independence declaration, into positive energy for further political and economic development, respect for minorities, as well as their own and common cultural heritage.



Hans-Gert Pöttering / President of the European Parliament/: **I call for prudence and calm regarding Kosovo**, Strasbourg, 19 February: I call for 'prudent and peaceful action' on all sides involved in Kosovo. The task of the EU is to enable the authorities in Kosovo to assume responsibility for the establishment of democratic institutions. I believe that everybody, Serbs in Kosovo as well as Albanians, strive for stability and progress in their regions, which is the goal of the European Union and the European Parliament as well. Kosovo's declaration of independence reflects the will of Kosovo's citizens who wish to take their political fate and the implementation of independence into their own hands.



Bernard Kouchner / head of French diplomacy/: **Highly symbolic step for the Slovenian Presidency**, Brussels, 18 February: It is highly symbolic that today's decision of the EU after the declaration of Kosovo's independence has been made under the Slovenian Presidency. Slovenia was once a Yugoslav republic and now holds the Presidency of the EU. Slovenia is therefore at the very centre of the search for a solution which will stop the division of Yugoslavia. This is the end of a very long crisis. I really hope it is all over and that a period of conciliation can begin.

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EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Less than two years ago in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the Prime Ministers of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia presented the programme and priorities of the 'Trio' Presidency for the next year and a half. At the European Union level, the 'period of reflection' following two unsuccessful EU Constitutional Treaty referendums was coming to an end. Germany's goal was to reach a consensus on the new institutional basis of the Union. There were few people who believed in its success.

It was also the period of so-called enlargement weariness. Numerous sources declared a long break before taking the next steps to fulfil the Thessaloniki Agenda requirements. The western Balkan countries felt that the wind was not favourable. There were many people who pointed to a decline in 'reform ambition' in these countries due to the remoteness of membership. Nevertheless, Slovenia put the territory of the western Balkans in the context of enlargement and European perspective discussions as one of its core activities during the six-month Presidency of the Union.

Even if Slovenia had not done so, the aforementioned would still be the central topic during the first two months of the Presidency. Kosovo has declared independence and thus become the main topic of discussions at the EU level and globally. Defence Ministers, Ministers of the Interior and Justice Ministers are all talking about Kosovo (as well). Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the other hand are talking first of all about Kosovo. In this Sinfo issue, you can read an interview with the President of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, Dimitrij Rupel, who coordinates the work of his European colleagues.

At the mentioned press conference held in the European Parliament one year ago, the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, stressed: "The place of the western Balkan countries is in the European Union." About 400 days later, all representatives of the European Union are pointing this out, so to speak. The western Balkan countries have an ideal opportunity to move towards the Union and carry out all necessary reforms. This time, the European wind is blowing directly behind their sails.

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

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The EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana (left) and Slovenian Defence Minister Karl Erjavec after an informal meeting of EU defence ministers.

DEFENCE MINISTERS HIGHLIGHT SHORT-COMINGS IN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

EU defence ministers are satisfied with the development of the bloc's military capabilities. »The Progress Catalogue 2007 identified both deficiencies and surpluses, and the ministers agreed that it was necessary to continue activities for eliminating the deficits,« Slovenian Defence Minister Karl Erjavec told the press on 22 February at Brdo pri Kranju. »There is political will, but it is also necessary to secure concrete contributions,« he added. The EU is pressed for air transport capabilities, in particular helicopters, for its missions. »Some countries have these capabilities, but they have not been made available for operations as they are needed for other national security tasks,« he said. Erjavec said additional efforts were needed to beef up such capabilities. He noted that Slovenia was buying transport planes, which were planned in the medium- and long-term armament plans. Securing such capabilities will also be one of the tasks of the European Defence Agency, which, Erjavec said, must »must work on solutions to tackle burning issues such as transport in EU operations«. Overall, however, the agency has made headway in the short time since its inception, said Erjavec, whose view was shared by the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. Touching on relations with NATO, Erjavec said cooperation was good, but cooperation on the ground may not be let to coincidence, it must be upgraded with systematical solutions. »Existing forms of cooperation at the tactical level must be upgraded at strategic level,« he said. The ministers also confirmed the EU's commitment to further strengthen the cooperation with the UN, including the field of post-conflict reconstruction and crisis management.

MINISTER RUPEL MEETS UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS LOUISE ARBOUR

Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitrij Rupel met in Ljubljana on 31 January UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour. They talked mainly about the situation of human rights in the world, and in this respect Minister Rupel underlined the "need for drawing attention to this issue". Minister Rupel explained to High Commissioner Arbour that through the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Europe-

Text: RAMÓN MIKLUS, Photo: STA

an Union will also enter into force. According to the Minister this will "provide more support for human rights in terms of norms and concepts". As regards human rights, Minister Rupel explained that during its presidency, Slovenia will draw special attention to children in armed conflict, gender equality, freedom of religion and belief, and respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism. In addition, Slovenia will "carry on the established EU dialogue and consultations on human rights with third countries".

EU TROIKA VISITS THE SOUTH CAUCASUS STATES

The EU troika led by Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, the current president of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, **accompanied by the EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Dr Benita Ferrero-Waldner** started tour of the Caucasus on 4 February with a visit to Azerbaijan, where talks focused on the country's potential as an energy supplier to the EU. Ferrero-Waldner said that energy was »very high on our mutual agenda« and pledged support for a proposed pipeline to ship gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan across the Caspian to Azerbaijan.

On 5 February the EU high officials visited Georgia, where Minister Rupel stressed that the European Union supported territorial integrity of the country and also the efforts for solving the issues related to the pro-Russian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Saying that the EU supports territorial integrity of Georgia, Rupel welcomed the recent contacts between Georgia and Russia as well as endorsed the dialogue between the countries whose relations have been very tense since the end of 2006.



President Danilo Türk speaking at the traditional reception for the diplomatic corps in Slovenia.

PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER RECEIVE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

President Danilo Türk and Prime Minister Janez Janša hosted on 4 February a traditional reception for the diplomatic corps in Slovenia. Türk said in his speech that 2007 had been a successful year for Slovenia. Türk said that Slovenia had managed to cope with the problems characteristic of fast economic growth and development, international peace and political stability. Regarding the fight against global warming, the president said that a timely conclusion of negotiations and the replacement of the Kyoto Protocol with a new and more efficient international instrument was necessary. He also emphasised efforts for the realisation of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, more efficient aid to Africa, provision of safe potable water, successful continuation of the

world trade negotiations and crisis spots around the world. The EU is fully engaged in settling the issue of Kosovo and a great deal of this year's efforts will be dedicated to this problem, said Türk. According to Türk, only a stable framework can provide for a successful resolution of problems that individual countries of the region face.

SLOVENIAN, FRENCH MINISTERS DISCUSS MIGRATION POLICY

Interior Minister Dragutin Mate met French Minister of Migrations Brice Hortefeux on 4 February to discuss illegal migration, asylum policy and the legalisation of illegal immigrants, the Interior Ministry said in a press release. The pair also discussed a draft EU directive on common standards for returning illegal immigrants to third countries, which is to be adopted shortly, the ministry said. Touching on asylum policy, the ministers agreed that more needed to be done to harmonise the asylum status and associated rights. The legislation, adopted at the European level and integrated into national legislation, needs to be interpreted identically in all member states, the ministry stressed. Hortefeux also presented France's EU priorities in the field of migrations, which include drafting of a pact on migration that would serve as a cornerstone in the long-term development of the EU's migration policy.



Prime Minister Janez Janša (right) received his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico.

SLOVAKIAN PRIME MINISTER FICO VISITING SLOVENIA

Prime Minister Janša on 4 February held a brief working meeting with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovakia, Robert Fico. Prime Minister Janez Janša and his Slovakian counterpart exchanged positions on the energy and climate package proposed last month by the European Commission, welcoming it as a major step in the direction of fulfilling EU commitments in terms of combating climate change. They also discussed the enlargement of the European monetary union and Slovakia's efforts to join the eurozone next year. The Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, congratulated his Slovakian counterpart on the country's good economic results and assessed that, on that basis, Slovakia would be able to meet the criteria for entry into the eurozone.



Greek Prime Minister Kostandinos Karamanlis (left) and Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša speaking to the press after talks.

PRIME MINISTERS JANŠA AND KARAMANLIS FOCUS ON THE WESTERN BALKANS (

The Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Kostas Karamanlis, paid a working visit to Slovenia on 5 February at the invitation of Prime Minister Janez Janša.

»Both Slovenia and Greece support the European perspective for all Western Balkan countries, provided that these countries fulfil the same conditions for EU membership that were required of other countries that are now Member States,“ said the Slovenian Prime Minister. The two countries also share the same view on efforts to stabilise the situation in the region and deploy a civilian EU mission in Kosovo. “As to the future status of Kosovo, we are both striving for a solution that will stabilise the region in the long term and preserve the unity of the European Union on the matter,“ said PM Janša. Both Prime Ministers also welcomed the recent presidential elections in Serbia, in which the people of Serbia had, in the opinion of the Slovenian Prime Minister, chosen to follow the European path. In addition, the Prime Ministers touched on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's prospects of a future in Europe. In this regard, the Slovenian Prime Minister said he hoped that this country would take up serious talks with the Greek side with a view to seeking a constructive compromise on the name issue.

EUROBAROMETER SHOWS SLOVENES SATISFIED

Slovenes are the most satisfied among the 2004 EU newcomers, as 87% of the respondents in the latest Eurobarometer survey said they were happy with their lives, a 4 percentage points drop over the spring edition of the survey.

The majority of those polled (56%) believes that EU membership is a good thing, a 2 percentage points drop over spring, while 7% think that the membership is a bad thing. In the EU27 the numbers stand at 58% and 13% respectively. The share of those who think Slovenia has benefited from EU membership is 71%, which is 4 percentage points down compared to spring and 13 percentage points above the bloc's average. The survey also shows that 69% of Slovenes agree with the statement that the voice of their country counts in the EU, while 29% believe the opposite. 56% of the respondents also think that Slovenia's influence in the EU will increase. The survey highlighted strong support for the euro (86%), strengthening of common foreign policy (81%) and further expansion of the bloc (66%). Slovenes remain optimistic about the EU's fu-

ture, as 73% (7 percentage points less than in the spring) see bright future ahead for the bloc. The survey carried out in the autumn 2007 also showed that 85% of Slovenes knew then that Slovenia would be taking over as the EU president on 1 January. 86% meanwhile believe that the presidency was a good thing.

MINISTER RUPEL: PEACE, STABILITY AND WELL-BEING ARE THE COMMON CONCERN OF BOTH EUROPE AND THE ARAB LEAGUE

Foreign Minister Rupel, the current GAERC president, participated in the EU-Arab League ministerial meeting that started in Malta on 11 February.

In his introductory address, Minister Rupel stated that peace, stability and well-being are the common concern of both Europe and the Arab League, and that "mutual understanding and dialogue among cultures are essential for peaceful and successful coexistence; the European Union and the Arab League may contribute substantially to this." The Minister also explained that the Union appreciates the important role of the Arab League and welcomes its initiatives, which are part of efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. Minister Rupel added that the European Union welcomed the contribution of Arab states to the conference in Annapolis and the donor conference for Palestine in Paris in December. The process initiated in Annapolis must be supported by all players, and the active engagement of Arab states is essential for success. Both sides must be supported and encouraged to take all possible measures to improve the situation in the region. The Arab League may also contribute significantly to intra-Palestinian dialogue; the Union is particularly interested in the establishment of Palestinian institutions, particularly in the field of security. Efforts to improve the situation on the ground are necessary as well and Israel must demonstrate its engagement in this regard; it must freeze the construction of settlements that undermine the spirit of trust in the peace process; at the same time, Israel should improve the conditions regarding access and free movement, which are the essential prerequisites for improving the economic situation in Palestine. Minister Rupel went on to underline that violence in the Gaza region must stop: rocketing from Gaza and Israeli military retaliation. The Slovenian Foreign Minister also underlined that initiatives are necessary on both sides to establish mutual trust as a basis for advancing the political process.



Environment Minister Janez Podobnik at a debate on climate change in the UN General Assembly.

ENVIRONMENT MINISTER SAYS CLIMATE CHANGE MAJOR CHALLENGE

Environment Minister and the current chair of the EU Environment Council, Janez Podobnik, said at 12 February's general debate on climate change in the UN General Assembly in New York that climate change was one of the biggest challenges, requiring immediate measures.

Podobnik said that the consequences of climate change could already be felt and that they posed a threat to future generations, and added that there are no doubts that humans were responsible for the issue.

He mentioned last year's report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which established that greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70% as a consequence of human activity between 1970 and 2004.

Podobnik said that climate change was high on the EU's agenda and that the bloc would continue to act towards reaching an international consensus for more determined measures after the Kyoto Protocol expires. He pointed out the EU's commitment to reduce by 2020 greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990.

»We are convinced that the transformation of Europe into a highly energy-efficient economy with low levels of carbon emissions will improve our energy security and strengthen our competitiveness,« Podobnik said.

MINISTER RUPEL HEADS EU TROIKA-RUSSIA MEETING

FM Rupel headed a foreign ministerial level meeting between the EU Troika and Russia, which took place on 13 February at Brdo Castle. Apart from Minister Rupel, the EU was represented by Javier Solana, High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union, Dr Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, and Jean-Pierre Jouyet, State Secretary responsible for European Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry. The Russian delegation was headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

At the meeting, Minister Rupel stressed the long-standing successful cooperation between the European Union and the Russian Federation, and pointed out that Slovenia is the first Slavic country to have assumed the presidency of the EU Council.

The Slovenian Foreign Minister also emphasised that Russia and the European Union together contribute to the consolidation of peace and stability in a region sharing a common history and civilization. These topics will also be at the core of a number of initiatives in the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which is also one of the priorities of the Slovenian presidency.

The meeting also addressed a number of foreign policy issues, particularly the situation in the Western Balkans, and Minister Rupel reiterated the Union's readiness to guarantee the European perspective for the entire Western Balkans, and as well highlighted Slovenia's endeavours to accelerate Serbia's drawing nearer to the EU. The Slovenian Foreign Minister referred to Kosovo as a European issue, which was indirectly confirmed by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who expressed his expectations regarding the EU's enhanced engagement.



Press conference held as part of the EU troika-Russia meeting. From left to right: External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero Waldner, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana.

SECURITY TOPS EU TROIKA - AFGHANISTAN MEETING

Brdo pri Kranju, 21 February (STA) - The EU troika discussed the situation in Afghanistan as they met Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta at Brdo pri Kranju on Thursday. Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said there was encouraging information on progress, but also lingering concern over the security situation there.

»Even though the army has been achieving successes, it is still tense,« Rupel told the press after the meeting. He said there was progress in the economy and, to a certain extent, in human rights, whereas the main issues include narcotics, inefficient administration and corruption.

The Afghan foreign minister said the situation had improved in the six years since the fall of the Taliban, but there were still problems with terrorism, drug production and trafficking, and weak state institutions.

According to European External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Afghanistan is a long-term project. »It is always good to have a moment to take stock.«

She noted that the security situation had deteriorated since last year's meeting, but the EU and Afghanistan share a common goal: making efforts for the general stabilisation and consolidation of the country.

The EU's special representative to Afghanistan Francesco Vendrell announced today that an EU police mission in Afghanistan is expected to be ready for full deployment by April. Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said the mission was important in order to improve policing.

WWW.SLOVENIA.SI - SLOVENIAN VIRTUAL IDENTITY CARD

This year, the World Wide Web has become richer with the addition of a new web portal: www.slovenia.si. It has been published on the World Wide Web by the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia. The www.slovenia.si portal (accessible also on www.slovenija.eu, www.slovenia.eu) is designed as a central national point of entry to

Slovenia and its virtual identity card. The portal strives to become a national gateway known for its user-friendly access to information on Slovenia in various areas. This is especially important during the time of the Slovenian Presidency over the EU Council and the significantly increased interest in Slovenia from abroad. Information and links on the portal lead to the most important institutions and organizations in the Republic of Slovenia as well as to other contents of interest arranged according to different subject matters. Current information (news and focus) and events taking place in Slovenia (calendar) form separate subjects. The portal presents the most important information regarding the country, its people and events, all in one place. The portal is non-commercial. Some of the contents are also interactive so that web site visitors can add comments.

EU CONDEMNS USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS

In a presidential statement that wrapped up a day-long meeting the UN Security Council on 12 February once again addressed continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and other grave offences against children stressing the need to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention, which would address the root causes of armed conflict, in order to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis. Speaking on behalf of the European Union, Slovenia's representative, Ambassador Sanja Štiglic welcomed the work already carried out by the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and complimented the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for the concrete conclusions it had adopted. She strongly condemned use of children in armed conflicts and sexual violence against them, especially in Darfur.

Furthermore the EU condemned the use of children as human-shields and in suicide attacks. Ambassador Štiglic in her statement on behalf of the EU also encouraged the Council to take appropriate and concrete measures against the parties listed in the annexes, and called on it to take appropriate account of all categories of grave violations - as a first step, the Council could expand the criteria by including the crime of rape and other grave sexual and gender-based violence against children.



How Else Could the Government Hedge against Inflation?

Photo: STA

Slovenia now has an official explanation of inflation. The National Assembly has decided that inflation is primarily a consequence of increases in food and oil prices in the world and not enough competition on the domestic market, and not a consequence of fiscal policy. It recommended that the Government increase competition and prepare a supplementary budget, on which the Government is already working. The expectations of the opposition, which suggested an extraordinary session on inflation in order to put the blame on the Government and impose additional measures, have not come true. Would these additional measures really be necessary?

The main allegation against the Government is that it spurs inflation with its wasteful fiscal policy. Yet the amount of public expenditure compared to GDP has decreased by three percentage points, which no government has achieved before. Last year, structural shortcomings reduced as well, which means that fiscal policy actually did not contribute to inflation. The European Commission in its stability programme does not point to public finance as a cause of inflation, either. The only fiscal policy weakness is in its plans for this year, since it envisages a budget deficit of about half of the GDP percentage, while the year 2007 closed with balanced books. The Government has already announced a supplementary budget and it would be right if it envisaged at least as favourable a financial result as last year.

The second allegation against the Government is that it encourages high borrowing abroad and thus creates too much demand. According to the Bank of Slovenia, the government sector contributed only a tenth to gross external debt increase last year. Therefore, it is mainly the private sector that incurs debt. Perhaps some private companies or banks are secretly hoping that the state will help them if they get into trouble – like the German and British governments saving their banks last year by granting substantial subsidies. This kind of danger exists especially in companies where the supervisory board also comprises state representatives who control important infrastructure investments. It would be useful if the Government sent them a clear message not to count on it in the case of heavy debts. It cannot do much more than that against the indebtedness of the private sector in a market economy.

The third recommendation of the National Assembly to the Government is to increase competition. Market structure is certainly one of the promoters of inflation, which the European Central Bank points to as the key cause. Last year, the Government replaced the head of the Competition Protection Office, whose actions are now more decisive. Since this involves long procedures and strong ties established throughout the entire transition period, results cannot be expected very soon. The up-to-date publication of price comparisons between different traders initiated by the Slovene Consumers' Association with the support of the Government could produce the fastest effect.

The fourth warning concerns pay rises. Last year, they increased less than productivity and therefore did not contribute to inflation. This year, an agreement on salary increases, which from the inflation point of view will not be too high, has to be reached as well. The current government is the first to waive the role of intermediary in pay negotiations in the private sector. It would have a harmful effect on the market economy's development if the Government took the reins into its own hands again. Its task is to warn partners about possible consequences and to help those people to whom inflation poses the greatest threat. This has already been done by taking fiscal and social measures in January. The Government will have to face another difficult task of seeking a reasonable agreement with trade unions in the public sector.

Therefore, the data does not support the thesis stating that the Government is to blame for inflation and that it could do much more. In a recent public inquiry, two thirds of respondents nevertheless believed that the Government is to blame for inflation. Slovenian citizens obviously want the Government to take actions all the time even if there is no real need to. They want to see the worried face of the Minister of Finance and hear promises from the Government that it will do everything that is right and possible. That is why it would be wise if it accepted the play of politically and psychologically important social dialogue. Not because Slovenia needs a new anti-inflation programme, but to calm down the inflation fever a bit. Parliamentary sittings where all serious discussions turn into political polemic are by no means the right way.

Former President Janez Drnovšek passed away

Having led four governments between 1992 and 2002 with a brief intermission in 2000, Former President Janez Drnovšek, died on 23 February aged 57. He was one of the most influential Slovenian politicians of the past 20 years and a seminal figure in the country's transition to a market economy and successful bids for NATO and EU.

Born in the city of Celje in 1950, Drnovšek, a doctor of economics with a banking career, was catapulted to the political scene in 1989, when he was somewhat surprisingly elected the Slovenian representative to the Yugoslav collective presidency at a time of mounting tensions in the former republic. He chaired the former Yugoslav presidency between May 1989 and May 1990, a crucial time for Slovenia's independence drive. After Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Drnovšek left the Yugoslav presidency and became the chief negotiator brokering the withdrawal of the Yugoslav People's Army from Slovenia after the ten-day independence war. He described his view of the breakup of Yugoslavia in the book »My Truth« in 1996. Drnovšek initially held back from daily politics, but he entered the scene again in 1992, when he was elected in March the leader of the newly-formed centre-left Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS). Only a month later he became the second Prime Minister in independent Slovenia, a post he held for nearly a decade with the exception of a six-month period in 2000, when he sought a no-confidence vote due to squabbles in his multi-coloured coalition. Drnovšek was always considered a pragmatic politician who shunned ideology. Indeed, the move no-confidence vote proved a stroke of genius, as the LDS won the election in 2000 in a landslide, mostly due to the perception that what had come to be called the »caretaker government« of centre-right parties was incompetent. That year Drnovšek went on to form his fourth cabinet, only to announce in 2002 that he would give up the post and stand for the presidency. He hand-picked his successor, Anton Rop, then finance minister, much to the dismay of many senior figures in the LDS. Drnovšek won the presidential election in the second round of voting in December 2002, defeating prosecutor Barbara Brezigar, although by a smaller margin than he would have liked. His presidency was marked by a major personal transformation in which he turned from a pragmatic, technocratic politician into a vocal advocate of healthy living and positive thinking after medical tests showed that a kidney tumour doctors had removed in July 1999 reappeared. Surprisingly, Drnovšek announced that he had stopped following instructions of traditional doctors and instead changed his lifestyle. He sold his house in Ljubljana, moved to a nearby village and started eating healthy, vegetarian food and baking his own bread. The change in lifestyle also brought with it a change of attitude, and Drnovšek walked out of the suspended membership of the LDS in January 2006 and instead formed an altruistic movement, the



Movement for Justice and Development, with the aim of making the world a better place. Even though he insisted this was a non-political forum with noble goals, many politicians saw it as a move back into active politics. Drnovšek first signaled his departure from politics when he announced in mid-2006 that he would not seek a second term as president, but would instead focus on his Movement for Justice and Development, and write another book on top of the best-selling »Misli o življenju in zavedanju« (Thoughts on Life and Awareness). In 2007 he published »Pogovori« (Dialogues). In what is widely considered as an indication that his sickness was serious indeed, Drnovšek rejected the public belief that he favoured alternative medicine over conventional when he inaugurated the new premises of the Oncology Institute in October 2007. »I was not helped by healers as I often get to hear or read. The best help came from nature, which I think is the best healer,« he summed up what had become his philosophy in life.

PM DEEPLY SHOCKED OVER DRNOVŠEK'S DEATH

Prime Minister Janez Janša signed on 23 February the book of condolences for Former President Janez Drnovšek. Speaking to the press after the signing, he said he was deeply shocked by the death of one of those Slovenes who left an important mark on Slovenia in the last 20 years. Drnovšek helped to create Slovenia and made an important contribution when its foundations were being constructed, Janša told the press. »I remember his role during Slovenia's efforts to gain independence, his irreplaceable efforts when the country was joining NATO and the EU and his decision to organise talks on Slovenia's future,« the Prime Minister said. »These were some of the important turning points at which Drnovšek left an indelible mark on Slovenia as we know it today. His works will remain not only in the memory of our generations but also of our successors«.

The government decided at its correspondence session on Saturday to declare Monday a day of mourning for the Former President Janez Drnovšek. On the day, all cultural, sport and entertainment events were to be canceled and while TV and radio broadcasters were called on not to air shows of an entertaining nature. Flags on national buildings will fly at half-staff from Saturday to the end of the day of the funeral.

ECONOMIC CRIME: CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION IN CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES

text: VESNA ŽARKOVIĆ, Photo: STA

On the 12th February, Slovenia unexpectedly received news of a police investigation of Slovenia's leading construction companies, SCT, Vegrad and Primorje, concerning alleged bribery in the construction of the control tower at the Jože Pučnik Airport. After the spectacular arrests, the three directors of the leading construction companies; Ivan Zidar, president of the management board of SCT, Hilda Tovšak, president of the management board of Vegrad, and Dušan Črnigoj, director-general of Primorje; were released from police custody. The police spectacle made caused quite an uproar in the country. 110 criminal investigators and 52 uniformed policemen were involved in the operation.

The police predict that the investigation will expand, perhaps even abroad. So far, twenty-nine homes have been searched, and seven suspects linked to the economic crime investigation have been detained; along with the three directors and the head of the SDS municipal board in Kočevje, Srečko Gabrič, three other individuals suspected of a criminal offence of offering illicit gifts in the procedure of public procurement were detained. Criminal investigators also confiscated documentation related to the tender for the construction of the control tower at the airport. The pre-trial chamber of the district court in Ljubljana has decided that six suspects in the alleged economic crime investigation are not to be detained; only Tomaž Žibert of Slovenia Control, Slovenian Air Navigation Services, remains in custody. He is supposed to have enabled two bidders to replace the documentation after the closing date for submitting tenders, while promising that the expert committee would recommend the joint offer by Primorje and SCT as the most favourable to the Slovenian air traffic control. Zidar and Črnigoj allegedly agreed to the demand made by Žibert to include Žibert's brother-in-law as a sub-contractor for the electrical installations in the contract, which raised the price of the primary offer by half a million Euros. During the investigation, suspicions of SCT running business through fictitious companies were raised. Real estate business operations in Fiesa are also to be thoroughly investigated.

Aleksander Jevšek/The head of the police Criminal Investigation Department/: I am very satisfied with what was done so far. I think that the work carried out by the investigators and the police officers was professional, legitimate and efficient. We have been investigating the economic crime since the middle of last year and it is a good sign for the police that this information did not leak out. We



have been working together with the Office for Money Laundering Prevention and the Tax Administration, and we plan to involve experts on the securities market and other supervisory financial institutions in the following investigation; we expect cooperation with foreign security authorities as well. The home searches were well planned and preformed at the correct addresses, which has also been confirmed by the amount of the documentation confiscated.

Harij Furlan/The head of the group of state prosecutors for the prosecution of organized crime/: The group of state prosecutors for the prosecution of organized crime filed a request to the district court in Ljubljana for the investigation of eight individuals on the grounds of reasonable suspicion of the criminal offence of offering illicit gifts in the procedure of public procurement. The reasonable suspicion of a criminal offence of offering illicit gifts was filed against six individuals, and reasonable suspicion of a criminal offence of accepting illicit gifts in the procedure of public procurement for the construction of the control tower at the Jože Pučnik Airport was filed against two individuals. On the grounds of the danger of so-called personal collusion caused by the existing circumstances that show that the individuals, unless kept in custody, would tamper with witnesses, the state prosecutor requested the detention for seven individuals; among them were the president of the



management board of SCT, Ivan Zidar, the director of Vegrad, Hilda Tovšak, and Tomaž Žibert of Slovenia Control, Slovenian Air Navigation Services, who was then placed in custody. One suspect was not brought to the hearing before the investigating judge; he was released from custody by the police, pleading immunity. That was the head of Primorje and state advisor, Dušan Črnigoj. The office of the Prosecutor sent a request to the president of the National Council to waive the suspected state advisor's immunity in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. The home searches were performed for a larger number of suspected criminal offences, not only for the one mentioned. However, due to the investigation's extent, they did primarily focus on the mentioned suspicion of criminal offences for which they were able to collect the most evidence. The rest will be performed gradually, in relation to the analysis of the evidence. The evidence in the pre-trial criminal procedure that was acquired on the basis of secret actions and house searches affirm the validity of the suspicion that the suspects committed the alleged acts, and we therefore expect the court to start the investigation soon.



SCT chairman Ivan Zidar
Head of Primorje Dušan Črnigoj
Hilda Tovšak, the boss of construction company Vegrad



Protesters Break Slovenian Embassy in Belgrade

Photo: STA

Demonstrators who were protesting in Belgrade against Kosovo's declaration of independence broke into the premises of the Slovenian embassy on 17 February smashing windows and destroying equipment. According to a report, the protesters even ripped out furniture and torched it, together with flags of Slovenia and the European Union. The damage is still being estimated. While police have allegedly managed to reestablish order, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel personally protested with his Serbian counterpart Vuk Jeremić over the incident. Rupel demanded that the Serbian authorities secure safety for Slovenian diplomats and other Slovenian diplomats. The Government of the Republic of Slovenia was informed of the protesters' attack on the Slovenian Embassy in Belgrade and severely condemned it, and asked the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to demand from the Serbian authorities compensation for all the damage incurred. The Government also expects that the Serbian authorities will do everything necessary to protect the Slovenian diplomatic representation, staff and property of the Republic of Slovenia in Serbia. The same applies to the protection of Slovenian citizens and companies. The Slovenian Government expects that the Serbian authorities will identify and punish the persons responsible for the attacks and damage. The Government expects that, in future, Serbian officials will refrain from actions and words directed against the Republic of Slovenia, its citizens and economic and other subjects.

President Danilo Türk: Belgrade embassy incident breach of international law Ljubljana, 18 February :

»I condemn these acts that led to the devastation of the Slovenian embassy and desecration of state symbols of the Republic of Slovenia and the EU. The failure to protect the Slovenian embassy was a serious breach of international law.

Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers condemned on Monday »recent acts of violence in Belgrade, Mitrovica and other places, in particular against foreign diplomatic missions and urged respective authorities to ensure security and safety of the EU citizens and their property.«

PM Janez Janša: I expect all sides in Kosovo to refrain from violence, Ljubljana, 17 February

»I expect all sides in Kosovo to »act prudently and refrain from violence« after the Kosovo Assembly declared independence on

Sunday. The decision does not change Slovenia's policy on Kosovo - the focus remains on solutions that will guarantee stability in the region and maximum EU unity. As the presiding EU country, Slovenia has a particular interest in coordinating and implementing such solutions. Slovenia would strive to have the EU meet the expectations of countries in the Western Balkans, but the same applies vice-versa.

The EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana: I Regret Situation in Serbia, Brdo pri Kranju, 22 February:

»I regret the violent protests in Serbia during which the embassies of several Western countries were attacked. «I don't think these acts of violence lead anywhere.« The unrest in Serbia should be condemned and all the sides should be asked to accept the decision on Kosovo (which declared independence from Serbia on Sunday). Solana also hailed the reaction of Tadic, who urged protesters yesterday to calm down. »The reaction of Serb President Boris Tadić was very good. I think that is a line which supports behaviour that is compatible with international standards. Solana also stressed that embassies needed to be protected and those countries whose embassies had been attacked had complained, which was an appropriate reaction.



At Brdo pri Kranju, in the framework of the Presidency of the EU Council, the "e-Government Days" were held, this year's biggest European event in the field. As the presiding country, Slovenia tried to encourage and invite with its own examples of good practice other Member States to develop quality public administration. The "E-Government Days" were held in two parts – a conference, "Alliance with Users", and "e-Government Services: IDABC and Beyond". The main emphasis of the first conference was on the relationship between the public administration and users. In the introductory part, the participants were addressed by the Minister of Public Administration, Dr Gregor Virant, who pointed out that e-Government can improve the satisfaction of users, facilitate accessibility to services, increase efficiency, lower costs, strengthen transparency, and speed up access to public information. At the "Alliance with Users" conference there were several lectures, at which various examples in connection to e-government were presented, such as the removal of administrative obstacles, e-public procurements, the future of e-government, the financial perspective of the field of e-government, and the Centre for e-Governance development for South-Eastern Europe. The "Days of e-Government" were also attended by the Vice-President of the European Commission for Administrative Affairs, Audit and Anti-Fraud, Siim Kallas. At a press conference, he pointed out that the European Union, in addition to the free flow of goods, services, capital and people, also needs a free flow of electronic services, highlighting the difficulties with the mutual recognition of electronic identity and electronic signature. He also mentioned the facilitation of easier access of companies

to public tenders in other Member States, which should improve the competitiveness of these tenders. Within the framework of "e-Government Days", the conference "e-Government Services: IDABC and Beyond" was also held, which supports the operation and integration of e-government in Europe. As Minister Virant said, Slovenia promised even before the Presidency, that it would try to take an important step ahead in this field, first within the European Commission IDABC programme. "We decided to choose two important services; namely, the registration of a temporary residence for foreigners, and the establishment of a limited liability company with sole partner", added Gregor Virant. In the field of the integration (interoperability) of e-government Dr Virant mentioned a pilot project prepared by Slovenia and invited all EU Member States to join in. The countries that joined were Austria, Estonia, Finland and Portugal, which are developing the first actually operational pan-European services, namely the registration of temporary residence for foreigners, and the establishment of limited liability companies with sole partner. The IDABC conference and thus also the "e-Government Days" were concluded by the Director General of the European Commission Directorate for Informatics, Francisco Garcia Moran, who said that the European Commission was committed to amending the legislation in the field of interoperability between states and the removal of unnecessary (electronic) barriers. Another project of the European Commission Directorate for Informatics is the establishment of an "e-European Commission" with the purpose of increasing its efficiency and transparency.

Slovenian Minister of Health Zofija Mazej Kukovič.



The burden of cancer – how can it be reduced?

A two-day conference entitled ‘The Burden of Cancer – How Can It be Reduced?’ is the main event in the field of health care during the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council. “The data show that, in spite of achievements in cancer prevention and treatment, the number of cancer patients has been increasing among women as well as men in most European countries. Every third citizen of the European Union will develop cancer and every fourth citizen will die from it,” emphasized the Slovenian Minister of Health, Zofija Mazej Kukovič. She also said that due to the ageing of the population, a rise in the number of sick people could be expected, as a result of which the burden of cancer will only increase in the next years and decades. “Our goal should be to prevent what can be prevented! Namely, at least one third of all cancer diseases can be prevented. Prevention has been shown to be the most effective and therefore the strongest means of reducing the burden of cancer in every country.”

Slovenia chose cancer as a health care priority during the Presidency, since the data have shown that in spite of achievements in disease prevention and treatment, the number of patients suffering from cancer is increasing in most European countries. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in developed countries, and shares several common risk factors with cardiovascular diseases. Successful cancer control will require an integrated approach at all levels, from disease prevention, organised screening and early detection, to optimal treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care, as well as investment in research in all these areas.

Representatives of EU Member States, the European Commission, the European Parliament, experts in studying and controlling cancer, and representatives of expert associations and non-governmental organisations participated in the conference. This was a good opportunity to exchange information, experience and the good practices of integrated cancer control, with special emphasis on the possibilities of common and more effective action at the EU and national levels. The Slovenian Presidency, with

its initiative, is approaching the main goals: how to reduce the burden of cancer in the future and how to reduce the inequality in morbidity and survival rates of cancer patients in the EU. The first step towards achieving this goal is to review what has already been done in the field and determine key recommendations for future measures. This was the primary purpose of the conference.

Cancer will be the main topic of discussion at the informal ministerial meeting held this year in April at Brdo pri Kranju under the chairmanship of Slovenia as the presiding Member State. Based on the discussions at the conference, the Presidency plans to prepare conclusions on cancer to be submitted to the Council for adoption at the June session in Luxembourg.

In her concluding speech, Mrs Kukovič again emphasized the fact that huge differences among EU Member States regarding the available financial and human resources are one of the main problems “which lead to different results in the field of health care and unacceptable differences.”

She informed the representatives of EU Member States that a cohesion policy and structural fund resources present appropriate instruments to help ensure the implementation of integral health strategies, which include integral cancer control. “Investment in health must become a priority at the national level, and each country should make sure that common funds will be provided for the development of health services,” stressed the Minister.

She recalled improvements in the field of health prevention which the EU has achieved by limiting tobacco. “We have to strive for Europe to become a tobacco smoke-free environment in all public and work places,” said Mrs Mazej Kukovič, pointing out that tobacco is still the most important cancer risk factor.

The data of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) show that every third European will develop cancer, and every fourth European will die of it. Every year in Europe 2.2 million new cases of cancer are diagnosed and more than 1.1 million people die of it. This means that every day over 6,000 Europeans find out that they have cancer and 3,000 die of it.

Text: GREGOR ŠUC, VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: Bobo

Dimitrij Rupel (Minister of Foreign Affairs):

In the sphere of foreign policy, the central priority of the Slovenian Presidency is undoubtedly ensuring a European future for the Western Balkans



Most members of the European Parliament agreed in the discussion on Kosovo at the plenary meeting in Strasbourg (20 February) that the declaration of independence of Kosovo was inevitable. "The EU predicted in the Thessaloniki Agenda that the countries of Western Balkans would be members of the EU sooner or later. Now it is time to remember our commitments," said Rupel, and in the name of the Council of the EU emphasised that the doors and windows of opportunity for the Western Balkans, also for Kosovo, are open. "Kosovo is really a special example – sui generis – so it does not call into question the validity of the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states." The conviction that the EU should assume responsibility for Kosovo was, according to Rupel's words, confirmed by the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU. "After everybody predicted lack of unity, we after all showed unity. The decisions were, after long negotiations and harmonisation, adopted unanimously," explained Rupel, and he was congratulated for successfully presiding over the meeting by some members of the parliament. The Slovenian government, at its meeting on 21 February, passed a proposal for a decision to recognise Kosovo, and sent it for reading to the National Assembly.

THE CENTRAL TOPIC IN THE SPHERE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE MOMENT IS CERTAINLY THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO. WITH REGARD TO THIS QUESTION, MOSCOW AND BRUSSELS STAND ON OPPOSITE SIDES, AS RUSSIA HAS VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO. IT ALSO DOES NOT AGREE WITH SENDING AN EU MISSION TO THE AREA. ACCORDING

TO STATEMENTS FROM MOSCOW, THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT IN INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND RECOGNITION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO WILL ENCOURAGE SEPARATISTS IN THE AREAS BY THE RUSSIAN BORDER AND AT THE SAME TIME UNDERMINE THE AUTHORITY OF THE UN. HOW DO YOU REGARD THAT; WHAT IS THE POSITION OF SLOVENIA IN THIS?

It is true that Brussels and Moscow have different views regarding the status of Kosovo. But we have to stress that Kosovo is a European problem, a problem of the European Union. The whole Western Balkans is a problem of the EU, as it is surrounded by Member States of the EU. The Thessaloniki Agenda envisaged a European future for the whole area, which means membership in the EU, whenever the conditions are met. Also, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, established that the European Union's growing institutional commitment in Kosovo is important. These facts were a basis for sending an ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) mission to Kosovo, which was unanimously decided by the Council of Europe in December last year. That was by far the most important decision, as it specifies the direct engagement of the European Union in Kosovo. And for the implementation of a European perspective, with which the Secretary-General also agrees, the engagement of the European Union is absolutely necessary.

It was obvious that the situation in Kosovo was unsustainable. Let me mention once again the position of the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, who, upon establishing that the situation in Kosovo was unsustainable, also said that insisting on this situation would seriously endanger the mandate of the UN in Kosovo.

I have explicitly mentioned a series of statements by the Secretary-General in the report which was published on 3 January this year, to answer that part of the question concerned with undermining the authority of the UN. After all attempts at an agreement between the sides failed, in that very report the Secretary-General to the seriousness of the problem and to the danger of the situation if no changes occurred. Intervention by the European Union was therefore vital. In the position adopted on 18 February in Brussels we clearly stated that Kosovo is an exceptional case, as it has been managed by the United Nations via UNMIK since 1999, and it cannot be compared to any other region in the world. Serbia considers Kosovo its property, regardless of the fact that since 1974 it was equal to the Republics in terms of the highest representation of Yugoslavia. Kosovo cannot be a precedent. These are the positions of the European Union, and Slovenian views on the problem of Kosovo are the same as the other Member States of the EU.

WHAT DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATIONS WITH SERBIA DO YOU EXPECT WITH REGARD TO THE LATEST EVENTS IN BELGRADE AND IN KOSOVO?

I would like to repeat that the European Union offered Serbia a political agreement with the purpose of speeding up its integration in the European Union. It is an important positive attitude of the EU, but Serbia has not signed the agreement so far. Our offer is, of course, still valid, as we really want Serbia to become a member of the European Union as soon as possible, of course when it meets the conditions for that.

It is also understandable that the declaration of independence decided by the parliament of Kosovo is a difficult moment for Serbia. In recent presidential elections, the candidate Tadić was elected on the basis of two catchwords in the election campaign: for Serbian accession to the European Union and against the independence of Kosovo. We have always claimed that these are two separate questions, and we are still convinced of that. I don't understand why Serbia is punishing itself because of the decision of the Kosovo parliament, and does not accede to a political agreement which would make its integration in the European Union easier.

We are, of course, worried because of the violent demonstrations which occurred in Belgrade and some other cities, and especially the vandal attack on the Slovenian embassy in Belgrade. We have vigorously protested against these acts. These events are contrary to international law, as the Serbian authorities were responsible for protecting the Slovenian embassy. I think that it is clear to every-

body that violence is not the way to resolve questions; in the past two decades we've had too much violence in the Western Balkans and we are sincerely hoping for peace.

THE RECENT MEETING OF THE EU-RUSSIA TROIKA IN BRDO DID NOT DECIDE TO DETERMINE NEW RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA, BUT THE RE-DEFINING OF THE EUROPEAN-RUSSIAN PARTNERSHIP IS HEADING FOR SOME TURBULENT MONTHS. HOW DO YOU PREDICT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE RELATIONS?

The European Union and Russia are neighbours; they collaborate well and are interdependent in many areas. Russia is an important strategic partner of the EU and both sides have an interest in even closer and more effective relations. Trade in goods between the EU and Russia is growing year by year and in 2007 it amounted to approximately 200 billion euros. Slovenia contributes to that with more than 1 billion euros in mutual trade in goods. Also, political dialogue between the EU and the Russian Federation is happening in numerous areas and at various levels, and is more extensive and successful than ever before. Also in the area of four common spaces, collaboration is good and in recent years we have achieved considerable progress. Slovenes and Russians simply love each other. Look at the Forum of Slavic Cultures.

Slovenia as the state holding the Presidency of the EU supports the efforts to start negotiations about a new framework agreement to succeed the current PCA as soon as possible. We are hoping that the Council of the EU will soon be able to pass a negotiating mandate for a new agreement between the EU and Russia, and that negotiations with the Russian Federation could start even before the termination of the Slovenian Presidency. And in the bilateral area, Slovenia is striving to maintain excellent relations with Russia, which was confirmed in addition to the last meeting of EU Troika with the Russian Federation at the level of foreign ministers in Brdo on 13 February.

The European-Russian partnership is perhaps really heading for 'turbulent months', but in a positive sense. The numerous talks and negotiations that are planned during the time of Slovenian Presidency of the EU as well as later will lead to an even higher level of collaboration and trust between the EU and Russian Federation than so far.

In June, in Hantij Mansijsk in Siberia, an EU-Russia summit will



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take place, where the governing body of the EU will meet the new Russian president. This will also be an opportunity to convey the main messages and directions of the EU to the new Russian government.

THE RECENT MEETING BETWEEN YOURSELF AND THE CROATIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS JANDROKOVIĆ IS UNDOUBTEDLY A GOOD SIGN FOR A NEW BEGINNING IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES, AND NECESSARY FOR SUPPORT TO THE PROCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN CROATIA AND THE EU. THE CONCLUSION WAS THAT A PATH HAS TO BE FOUND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO OPENING THE CHAPTER ON FISHERY, WHICH SLOVENIA IS BLOCKING DUE TO THE CROATIAN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTECTED ECOLOGICAL-FISHERIES ZONE (EFZ) IN THE ADRIATIC FOR MEMBER STATES OF THE EU. HOW WILL YOU APPROACH SOLVING THE QUESTION OF THE BORDER BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES?

The meeting of the foreign ministers would be better called an event which will, hopefully, stimulate new dynamics in relations between two friendly states, Slovenia and Croatia. I am glad that we, the Foreign Ministers, met after an interruption which lasted one year.

As for the question of the Croatian protected Ecological-Fisheries Zone, there is no blockade that Slovenia would be implementing with regard to that. It is simply an obligation that Croatia has towards the EU and which it has to solve in a dialogue, talks with the European Commission, Slovenia and Italy. It is not a bilateral question; that was on Monday, 18 February again confirmed by the Foreign Ministers of all Member States of the EU, which have again called upon Croatia to respect the assumed obligation that it will not implement its zone for the Member States until a solution is reached which will be acceptable to all interested states. If Croatia does not solve this question as soon as possible, it will face consequences in the accession negotiations with the EU, but the European Commission will primarily deal with that.

The Zone should not be linked to solving the border. The non-implementation of the Zone is an obligation that Croatia has to the whole EU and needs to discuss in that forum. With regard to the border, the Prime Ministers of both countries agreed in August last year that this question could be solved with the help of a third party. For that purpose, we have formed expert groups in the Foreign Ministry, and this dynamic continues carried out separately from solving the question of the Zone. But it is true that it is in our interests, and above all in the interests of Croatia, that the question of the non-implementation of the Zone is solved as soon as possible. Without this solution, we cannot expect progress on the border or anywhere else. Also, the Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, has warned Croatia of that several times.

MR. RUPEL, ALMOST THE SECOND MONTH OF SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU IS BEHIND US. OUR COUNTRY IS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITS HISTORY IN SUCH A 'HIGH' POSITION. HOW DO YOU ASSESS THIS PRESIDENCY IN GENERAL, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR OUR COUNTRY?

There is no doubt that the Presidency of the EU is a very demanding project for Slovenia, and at the same time a big recognition for our country. Never has Slovenia appeared in the European and world public as much as in the past two months, which means that with the Presidency we have increased our visibility and drawn people's attention in Europe and around the world to us. This can be a strong stimulus for our economy, an opportunity for tourism, as people get to know and describe Slovenia as a beautiful and friendly country, also due to the extraordinary environment of the Congress Centre at Brdo, where the majority of the Presidency events take place; but it is also an account that also a small country that became a Member of the European Union recently can take the reins of the EU in its hands.

HOW DO YOU THINK SLOVENIA IS DOING IN THIS ROLE?

Perhaps others would be more appropriate to assess how we are doing. The Presidency is a very complex matter - it includes the Prime Minister and numerous Ministries; I can talk above all about the Foreign Ministry and I must say that the Presidency is very strenuous, but I am content with the results after the first two months. In the area of foreign policy, the central priority of the Slovenian Presidency is ensuring a European future for the Western Balkans. These are difficult questions, where complications might arise, as not all Member States have the same policy in this area. Harmonisation of the 27 states is therefore a very demanding task, and we have done a big job here, and the results are even better than expected. Already at the January meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council we reached consensus with regard to a political agreement with Serbia, with the purpose of avoiding the difficulties which prevented signing the Stabilisation and Association agreement with Serbia. I have myself put a lot of work into that - I have visited Holland, where the obstacles were the greatest, and I talked to representatives of parliamentary parties, to the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, and in the end we unanimously offered Serbia a political agreement, which the authorities in Belgrade have not signed so far, but in a way it has already had a positive effect.

Even more demanding was the work related to Kosovo, where differences between the Members of the EU are greater. Here we had to consult almost all Member States, and even at the meeting of the Council on 18 February, much harmonisation was still required. But we were successful also in this and we achieved a common position. We should stress that this position includes all basic elements related to the status of Kosovo. The approval of this position, which many doubted even the day before the meeting, is therefore an important success, which reflects the unity of the European Union and a European perspective for the Western Balkans.

Text: RAMÓN MIKLUS, Photo: STA



Slovenian Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk (STA).

SLOVENIA AND COMMISSION SIGN EU FUND PHASING CONTRACT

Finance Minister Andrej Bajuk and Regional Policy Minister Ivan Žagar signed with European Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübner a contract of confidence in Brussels on 12 February. Hübner praised Slovenia's EU fund phasing achievements, highlighting Slovenia and Estonia were the only new EU members to have signed this agreement so far. The contract means that the Commission will narrow the scope of its audit activities related to European regional development and cohesion funds, which entails extended responsibilities for the national monitoring bodies. Hübner praised Slovenia's phasing results, highlighting that the country was able to draw 91% of the funds available to it as part of the largest structural fund, which puts it second only to Sweden. Slovenia was also among the most successful members in phasing regional funds, its rate in the 2000-2006 period standing at 91%, which compares to the EU average of 83%. Slovenia was entitled to EUR 188m in cohesion funds in the 2004-2006 period and to EUR 237m from the European regional development fund (an additional EUR 30m was awarded to it as part of the Interreg and Equal initiative).

SINGLE EURO PAYMENTS AREA (SEPA) PROJECT LAUNCHED

First services in the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) project are available in the 27 EU member states, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and nine territories under administration of EU countries, in what is seen as the first step towards a

more efficient and transparent payments in the EU. SEPA provides an environment in which individuals, companies and other users of payment services in banks make and accept payments in euros regardless of whether the payment is within a single state or between states in SEPA. The project is to be fully running in four years. As of 28 January, pan-European payment instruments are available for credit transfers, which will be possible between customers with bank accounts. About 80% of the banks in the SEPA area are capable of receiving such credit transfers, among them 21 banks in Slovenia. Direct debits will be available as of 2009, while payments with smart cards will be possible as of 2011, when cards are to be used in all terminals in SEPA countries. The system is to reduce costs and facilitate cross-border operations for companies and individuals. The payments from and to abroad are to become safer and simpler.

UNEMPLOYMENT IN SLOVENIA DOWN

Slovenia's registered unemployment rate stood at 7.3% in November 2007, down from 8.6% the year before, a national Employment Service official said on 28 January. The number of the registered unemployed registered dropped to 68,411 at the end of December 2007, down 9,892 year-on-year. The average number of registered jobless for 2007 was 71,336, down 16.9% on 2006. Employers reported 242,927 vacancies to the service last year, which is up 6.6% on the year before. Most of these (76.6%) were for fixed-term jobs. The share of such jobs stood at 79.7%, up one percent on 2006. The biggest demand for workforce was in the services (60.6% of vacancies). According to the head of the Employment Service Marija Poglajen, the latest trend is for employers to hire workers for a fixed-term and then, in two to three years, give them contracts for an indefinite period. This serves as a safeguard for employers. The institution spend EUR 68m on active employment policy measures last year, a sum that is increase to EUR 72m this year. While unemployment is in decline, structural unemployment is on the increase. Poglajen said that the lack of workers was still acute in construction, metal industry and machine construction, tourism and the hospitality sector as well as highly-skilled personnel, in particular medical staff. The official also pointed to an increasing percentage of those who are difficult to employ; 53.7% of the jobless are women, 16.4% are under 26 years old, 50.8% are the long-term unemployed, 39.6% lack qualifications and 19.5% are first-time job seekers.

AERODROM LJUBLJANA PLANING FURTHER GROWTH IN PASSENGER NUMBERS

The airport operator Aerodrom Ljubljana said on 29 January that it had recorded a 14.2% increase in the number of passengers in 2007 over the previous year and was planning an additional increase of 11% for this year. The number of arrivals and departures was up 13.5% over 2006 and the amount of cargo transported increased by 42%. Plans for 2008 meanwhile envisage increases of 13% and 17%, respectively. The operator of the Jože Pučnik Ljubljana airport, which accommodated a total of 1,524,028 passengers in 2007, plans to give more focus to passengers from Italy and Austria in 2008, as well establish new routes with Germany, Spain, England and Scandinavia. The company wants to uphold its intensive investment cycle, aying competition from neighbouring airports made growth in revenues dependent above all on turnover. Investments in facilities and new equipment are expected to stand at EUR 28.6m, the company also said.

NET PROFIT AT TRIMO UP 36%

Trimo, the Trebnje-based maker of prefabricated components for the construction industry, and its 14 subsidiaries posted revenues of EUR 217.7m for 2007, an 26% increase year-on-year. Net profit soared 36% to EUR 8.6m, Trimo chief executive Tatjana Fink told the press on 5 February. Last year was marked by numerous business achievements, Fink said. The company has made several investments, including a EUR 1m facility for the manufacture of containers in the United Arab Emirates, and a EUR 12m factory in Serbia. Trimo now owns five facilities - two in Slovenia, and one each in Serbia, the United Arab Emirates and Russia. Together with its subsidiaries, the company spent some EUR 30m on investment in the past year. Slovenia was the company's biggest market, accounting for 32% of total sales, compared to 23% in Western Europe, 15% in each of the countries of the former Yugoslavia and Central Europe, 10% in Russia and the Baltics, Fink explained. In 2008, Trimo plans to increase revenues by 7% and net profit by 5%. According to Fink, the low figure is because of the slowdown in certain markets. The company plans to continue the ongoing process of development, focusing also on completely new products, including a modular sports facility and photovoltaic systems.



Luka Koper, the main seaport of Slovenia

KOPER PORT FIRST IN THE WORLD WITH FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATE

The port of Koper has become the first port in the world to have obtained the International Organisation for Standardisation's (ISO) 22000:2005 standard for food safety, port operator Luka Koper said on 7 February. The 22000:2005 food safety management standard is a new ISO standard that has combined previous standards in the field, Luka Koper explained. The company said it was among the first companies in Slovenia to have successfully completed qualifications for the standard and the first transport company. In order to be certified, the port had to meet a number of standards in food management with the aim of providing for all the risks to food safety, the company added. Food represents an important share in the overall transshipments at the port, amounting to 880,000 tonnes last year. Most of that is made up of cereals and soy, while the amount of fruits and vegetables has been rising steeply in recent years, Luka Koper said.

TRADE GAP FOR 2007 AT EUR 2BN

Slovenia's exports increased by 15.5% last year to EUR 19.35bn, while imports rose by 16.7% to EUR 21.41bn. This means that the trade gap for 2007 stood at just over EUR 2bn, exports covering 90.4% of imports, according to a preliminary report from the Statistics Office. In December 2007, exports rose by 2.4% year-

on-year to EUR 1.37bn, while imports rose by 1% to EUR 1.67bn. The trade gap for December stood at nearly EUR 298m, the export-import ratio at 82.1%. This is down from 88.9% for November. Exports to EU markets that month represented 67% of all exported goods, being worth EUR 916.6m. Imports from those markets totalled EUR 1.32bn or 79% of all imports. Exports to non-EU countries amounted to EUR 450.6m, while imports from there totalled EUR 350m.



From left to right: Insurance company Zavarovalnica Triglav chairman Andrej Kocič, followed by workers' director Vladimir Mišo Ceplak and management board member Borut Eržen at a news conference presenting the insurance group's unconsolidated results for 2007

INSURER TRIGLAV WITH 15% MARKET SHARE IN SE EUROPE

Zavarovalnica Triglav, Slovenia's largest insurer, holds a 15% market share in SE Europe, Triglav chairman Andrej Kocič told the press on 12 February as he presented the group's unconsolidated business results for 2007. According to Kocič, Triglav is the biggest insurance group in the region. It was joined by two new insurers last year, Krajina Kopaonik from the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vardar Osiguranje from Macedonia. The group opened a company for pension insurance in Serbia and a new subsidiary in Slovakia. Triglav was present in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The core company, Zavarovalnica Triglav, collected EUR 707.6m in premiums in 2007, a 7% rise over 2006, while paying out EUR 367.6m in claims, also 7% more than in 2006, Slovenia's largest insurer said. Its market share in Slovenia stood at 42.9%. The remaining companies within the group also managed to increase their market shares in 2007. Health insurer Triglav zdravstvena zavarovalnica, which operated in the black for the first time last year since being set up in 2003, upped its share in health insurance to 15.2% and collected EUR 51.6m in premiums.

SLOVENIA AMONG THE BEST IN TRANSPOSING INTERNAL MARKET DIRECTIVES

Slovenia ranks sixth among EU members when it comes to transposing EU internal market directives into its legislation, the European Commission said on 14 February. Slovenia still needs to transpose 12 directives, which is 0.7% of all the directives that should have been transposed by the end of 2007, while the EU average is 1.2%, 0.3 percentage points better than the targeted 1.5%. Slovenia is also among the four countries that have already transposed more than 40% of the 41 directives that the members had to make part of their national laws by the end of April. It has also transposed all the directives over two years old. Slovenia was also among the 12 countries that had improved or equaled their best score so far. The Commission said that Slove-

nia had been persistently trying to improve its already excellent result. The most industrious member in transposing the directives last year was Slovakia, which only has 9 directives left, followed by Denmark, Latvia and Lithuania, with 10 directives each, and Netherlands (11).

AVERAGE NET WAGE IN 2007 EUR 835

The average net wage in Slovenia in 2007 amounted to EUR 834.50, a 7.9% increase over 2006, while the average gross wage stood at EUR 1,284.79, up 5.9% compared to the year before, the Statistics Office said on 15 February. In December, the average gross wage amounted to EUR 1,342.80, 10% less than the month before, while the average gross wage in November was 14.4% higher than in October. The average net wage in December amounted to EUR 870.70, which was 7.9% down on November. In real terms, the average gross wage in December was down 10.4% month-on-month. The fall in the average wage in December over November was due to bonuses, which had mostly been paid out to workers in November, the Statistics Office said. The average wage in 2007 went up year-on-year in real terms as well, namely gross wage by 2.2%, while the average net wage increased by 4.2%. Average wages increased the most in mining and quarrying, the processing sectors and in the services sector, while health care had the lowest increases in 2007 over 2006.

SLOVENIAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION IN US HOLDS INAUGURAL RECEPTION

The Cleveland Slovenian Business and Professional Association (CSBPA), an initiative bringing together US entrepreneurs with Slovenian roots, conducted its inaugural reception in Cleveland on 15 February. Established a year ago, the CSBPA already numbers around 200 members. The CSBPA was established in Cleveland, home to the largest Slovenian community abroad, at the initiative of Slovenian Consul to the US Zvone Žigon. Eight independent sections formed within the association in 2007 and several meetings have already been held at the consulate. The CSBPA's first general meeting was meanwhile attended by more than 80 members, the programme including video greetings from Senator Amy Klobuchar and the office of Senator George Voinovich. The goal of the CSBPA is to foster an environment for frequent and accessible contact among its members, who are native Slovenians, descendants of Slovenians or friends of Slovenia; to preserve and celebrate Slovenian culture and heritage in the US; and to encourage active cooperation between the Slovenian homeland and the US, for various purposes, the CSBPA's website says.

PETROL PROFIT UP 7% TO EUR 53M

Energy group Petrol generated revenues of EUR 2.1bn in 2007, 9% up on the year before, the group said on 18 February. Its net profit rose 7% to EUR 53.3m. The group said it had sold 2.1m tonnes petroleum products in 2007, a rise of 4% on the year before. Meanwhile, sales of assorted products in its petrol station shops generated EUR 262.9m in sales, up 22% on the year before. The company was operating 380 petrol stations at the end of 2007, including 307 in Slovenia, 36 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 32 in Croatia, three in Serbia and two in Kosovo.

SWISS-SLOVENIAN CONSORTIUM BUYS SERBIAN COMPANY

Slovenian agriculture machinery manufacturer SIP and Swiss company Home Art and Sales Services will buy Serbian maker of farm equipment IMT for EUR 121.1m, the Serbian Privatisation Commission said on 5 February. The Swiss-Slovenian consortium won the bidding in the second tender for the privatisation of the Belgrade-based IMT. The two companies pledged they would provide a further EUR 10.2m for investment. IMT is the biggest maker of farm equipment in Serbia. It used to be famous across the former Yugoslavia, in particular for its tractors. SIP, a privately-owned company based in Sempeter v Savinjski dolini, is meanwhile the biggest company of its kind in Slovenia.

BOVEC MUNICIPALITY TO HAVE 30% STAKE IN ATC KANIN

The Alpine town of Bovec (NW) is to buy a 24.66% stake of the bankrupt French group Transmontagne in ATC Kanin Group, raising its stake in the manager of the local ski resort to over 32%, Bovec Mayor Danijel Krivec said. The acquisition was approved on 15 February evening by the local council, Krivec said, but he declined to speculate when the acquisition procedures would be completed. In nominal terms, the Transmontagne stake is worth nearly EUR 800,000, but the Bovec authorities reached an agreement with the Lyon-based court that declared the bankruptcy of the French company to buy the stake cheaper. With a 32% stake Bovec will become the second largest shareholder of ATC Kanin after Nova Gorica-based gaming company HIT, which owns 40%.



Kanin, Photo: B. Burger



Pipistrel across the top of the world, Mount Everest



A businessperson from Ajdovščina, Mr Ivo Boscarol, by many addressed simply as Mr Pipistrel, dealt with the world competition in 2007 with his two-seater sports airplane Virus and received the US NASA award in the competition of 172 airplanes for the best sports plane of the future, which might also become an air car. This success is certainly a confirmation for him and his team that they really are excellent at what they do and that they are in the world class. In the company, they have also set ambitious targets for the future, which some people consider to be too high. Mr Boscarol only smiles here and accepts such remarks as additional motivation. One of the aims is to create such a plane to enable Matevž Lenarčič to repeat his journey around the world, but this time without complications and in a rather more demanding variant. He will have to fly across the Earth over the North and South Poles and the highest peak of the world, Everest. Mr Boscarol is convinced that this project, envisaged for 2009, will prove again to NASA that they are the best among the best. Such great self-confidence helps to meet targets at work and the atmosphere of the team itself.

BILATERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND THE USA IS ESSENTIAL FOR MAINTAINING SLOVENIAN ORIGIN OF PLANES OF THE WORLD RENOWNED NAME

Ivo Boscarol, the director and founder of the company Pipistrel d.o.o. from Ajdovščina, which employs 35 people, has created world recognition with ultralight airplanes. For the trademark, Americans have offered them ten times the company value for the sake of the famous, and in the aircraft world highly valued, NASA award. Unfortunately, this does not really mean that in the USA aircraft sales will increase soon, in spite of the high demand, since Slovenia has not yet signed a bilateral aircraft agreement with the USA. This is actually a big problem, since Boscarol will have to transfer the company abroad if the agreement is not signed soon, which would be a large economic loss for the Vipava Valley, where the headquarters are located at the moment, and for the whole of Slovenia. In the US market, they expect sales of from five hundred to a thousand planes, which is too great a potential to reject. Discussions of manufacture transfer have already been held in Guatemala, where they offered the company ten years' exemption from all taxes, besides premises equipped for production. This is certainly a tempting offer; however, research shows that this country unfortunately does not offer the best conditions for airplane construction. The problem lies principally in temperatures and efficiency of the labour force; therefore, they are searching for a new location in Central America and also in Canada, although they still hope for the signing of the bilateral agreement between the countries. It would be a pity to sell planes of such quality under the name of some other country, and not as a Slovenian product, since they have enough added value to be constructed in Slovenia.

WHO IS IVO BOSCAROL?

Ivo Boscarol acquired his business knowledge at the Faculty of Economics. He knows well that it is hard to sell even a very good product without knowing how to market it or without knowing how to efficiently connect development, manufacture, production, sales and customer response. During his studies, he earned money from photography and he was the official photographer at Šentjakob Theatre, where he met a lot of people, using his open-minded spirit, and today he still meets them for business and privately. He travelled a lot with his friend, Tomaž Domicelj, made photographs at concerts all over the world and sold the photos afterwards. During his travels, he encountered a novelty for the Slovenian market of that time and started to sell badges with the slogan 'Slovenija, my country'. Beside the badges he was also printing posters of all types and shapes. Both products had a strong influence on his sense for



business and this work opened quite a few new viewpoints. One of the more important innovations introduced by Boscarol and still in use in his company is called production allocation. This means one does not need a large production, since it can be divided among several places, but one does organise the business, perform acceptance tests, supervise quality and sell.

A TRADEMARK ADDS VALUE TO THE PRODUCT AND THE COMPANY

Since he was a little boy, he has been constructing model plane and spending a lot of time at Ajdovščina airfield. Over the years, he started to fly; however, time did not allow him to fly as much as he truly wanted to. To his great pleasure, and actually for the further development of the company, a novelty came on the market which totally captured him and made him an addict. One's own aircraft machine that could be put on a car roof completely changed the way he perceived aviation. He bought the first motor hang-glider and freed himself from the local flying club. After several flights, he wanted to improve the machine and the story of aviation actually began with the first improvement to the motor hang-glider. Serial production of motor hang-gliders started and in October 1987 he officially became the first private aircraft manufacturer in Yugoslavia. Thus he proved that the impossible was possible, that every aim could be attained, only if set high enough not to let motivation fall. Persuaded of the necessity to have his own trademark, he created Pipistrel, since he already knew at the time that besides quality and productivity, a trademark is something which gives and increases the value of a product and company. The word pipistrel (in Latin bat) became their trademark.

"WHATEVER I DO HAS TO BE THE BEST"

Immediately after the start-up, the hang-gliders were exported all around the world. His motto is that whatever he does has to be the best, so his hang-gliders began to set standards. They were the first producers in the world whose hang-gliders were used by NATO. Boscarol is aware that innovation in their products is the key for such global attention. He believes the complementary innovations contributing to the first innovation are important; however, even more important and of key significance for success are revolutionary innovations which really constitute a breakthrough. In that time, the ultralight airplane turned up as a revolutionary innovation, being the size of a larger plane, but belonging to a lower class and having a closed cabin. The appearance of new, lighter materials only im-

proved production, and ideas started to be realised that had seemed to be pure insanity until then. The innovation of the company, which was on the covers of world magazines, was the construction of an ultralight motorglider, meaning that one can glide or travel fast. Suddenly, they had work to do for a few years ahead and the money to finance further development. According to Boscarol, one can be successful and quality; furthermore, vision, one's own development, one's own trademark, an innovative product, motivated team, rational production and one's own market are indispensable.

DEVIATION FROM THE AVERAGE WAY OF THINKING IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

When searching for innovations in the company we frequently meet with disagreements, different opinions, which is normal and welcome for a healthy team. More experience together may account for a better result. When creating an innovation, Boscarol always sticks to making sure the customers feel good, safe and comfortable, since it is mostly not only about overcoming distances. Their pleasure also ranks high, and at Pipistrel, they are well aware of this, which is largely reflected in their products

WE AND NOT YOU ARE PIPISTREL

Development is extremely important for the company from Ajdovščina, which is why they are building a new developmental centre of 2,400 square metres, where the mere process of equipping the laboratories will take two years. In this centre, all the knowledge acquired in the long years of work and experience exchange will be collected into one place. According to Boscarol, they would like to create knowledge centres as Krka and Hidria have done. Currently, they manufacture four models: one is produced every four to five days; in addition, they are preparing two novel aircraft and four types of motor hang-glider. In the last year, they generated turnover of over four million euros, increased production by 36 per cent and total sales by 32 per cent. Boscarol is aware how important a satisfied and motivated team is for the company. The worker's satisfaction does not end with a good salary, but it is also measured by willingly coming to work, having good working conditions, being awarded for improvements and participating in the profits. All this is reflected in the workers, who bear the company's name at every step. In addition, Mr Boscarol knows that the steps of his employees reach farther than Europe. Thus, satisfaction and a relaxed atmosphere count.





Text: JOŽE OSTERMAN, Photo: STA

TRUBAR YEAR BEGINS WITH UNVEILING OF STATUE

The President of the Republic of Slovenia, Danilo Türk, unveiled a statue of Primož Trubar, by Tine Kos, thus officially opening Trubar Year. Trubar Year commemorates the 500th anniversary of the birth of a man regarded by many as the most important figure in Slovenian history. A day before, an honorary committee, consisting of representatives of the most important Slovenian cultural, scientific and political institutions, convened and reviewed the programme of events marking the occasion at home and abroad. The anniversary has also been included in the UNESCO list of important events. The main events will include primarily the Reformation Day state celebration, an international symposium organized by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and a major folk celebration at the Trubar memorial museum in Rašica, Trubar's birthplace, marking his birthday in June. A number of events are also planned in Germany, where this religious reformer lived and worked for a good portion of his life.

VIENNESE BURGTHEATER RETURNS TO LJUBLJANA

The Burgtheater, considered in Slovenia to be an example of a successful and established national theatre, once staged fairly frequent guest appearances in Ljubljana at Drama, the Slovene national theatre, while exchanges of theatre artists, particularly of directors, were even more frequent. Almost fifty years later, this famous theatre presented itself to the Slovene public with a production of *Babel*, a play by the Austrian Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek. The production was directed for the Burgtheater by the German director Nicolas Stemmann. The first part of the play addresses the decline of Western culture; the second considers the special relationship between mothers and sons, finding in it the cause of modern-day barbarities; and the third part explores our desensitization to war and other atrocities with which the media bombard us; all this, a consequence of the war in Iraq, is pushing humanity towards an unpredictable future and the closing off of society. The guest production attracted considerable attention, and the splendid Austrian actors, who – since the play is a type of an allegory of the present – utilized puppets and numerous musical numbers, delighted the demanding public. Both perform-

ances were held before full-capacity audiences at the grand hall of the Cankarjev dom cultural centre.

SCULPTOR LENASSI DIES



The end of January saw the death of Janez Lenassi, one of the most important Slovene sculptors of the older generation. Lenassi created an extensive oeuvre, characterized by sculptures of abstract physicality, usually carved from stone. Additionally, Lenassi is distinguished by a special sense of symbiosis between his works and his environment, and by his sophisticated choice of materials. His most well-known works include the monument to Edvard Rusjan in Nova Gorica (1960), the monument to railroad workers on Mt Vogar (1962), the monument to fallen fighters in Ilirska Bistrica (1965), the monument to seamen in Koper (1977), and the Independence Arch, his last major work, unveiled last year in the port of Koper, to commemorate the withdrawal of the last former Yugoslav Army soldier from Slovene state territory. Lenassi was also quite involved in theatre stage design and, along with fellow sculptor Jakob Savinšek, initiated and organized sculpture symposia in Slovenia, which he dubbed *Forma Viva*. The most noted of these gatherings is held in Piran and was dedicated to him last year.

EGYPTIAN CULTURE IN CANKARJEV DOM

This year, Egypt gets its turn at the now-traditional festival of foreign art, organized for the sixth time in a row by the Cankarjev dom cultural centre. The festival, called 'Egypt in Ljubljana', was opened at the end of January by a concert of Sheikh Ahmed al-Tuni, one of the last great ritual and religious singers of Upper Egypt, while on February 8th, the Slovenian cultural holiday, the percussionist Mahmoud Fadl and the group Cairosonic gave a concert in Cankarjev dom. At the beginning of March, Ljubljana will host Omar Kheirat, one of the most well-known Middle-Eastern composers and pianists, who combines Arab and African folk motifs with elements of jazz, pop and blues. But, of course, what has sparked most interest is the great archaeological exhibition 'Pharaonic Renaissance: Archaism and the Sense of History in Ancient Egypt', mounted by the Italian Egyptologist, Francesco Tiradritti, which will be held from March 4th until June 20th. The exhibition was conceived as a general overview of this ancient civilization. The exhibits are on loan from the most important Western European museums of Egyptian art: the British Museum, the Louvre, and by museums in Vienna, Berlin, Munich and Florence, as well as from collections in neighbouring Hungary, Croatia and Italy. It promises to be one of the great exhibitions which have attracted a great deal of public attention and generated matching attendance numbers in recent decades. Other examples include the first Egyptian exhibition and an exhibition on Chinese history. The festival's diversity will be further enhanced by a production of Trieste–Alessandria Embarked – a play by the author and director Neda Bric about "Alexandrines", women who, a century ago, travelled to Egypt to seek employment with local rich people as governesses, maids and cooks – and by Egyptian Film Days, where 11 films from all periods of Egypt's 100-year cinematic history will be screened.

SAINT CANZIAN ALTARPIECE FROM BRITOF, PRIMORSKA REGION NOW IN LJUBLJANA

At the beginning of February last year we witnessed an event at the National Gallery in Ljubljana that has intricately linked works of art by masters of the 16th century with those of today. Thanks to the knowledge and modern technology at the disposal of the Restoration Center of Slovenia, we could also see in its full glory the late Gothic wing altar of Saint Canzian. It consists of a central shrine cabinet, with the church's patron saint depicted in the middle with St Bartholomew and St Gereon. Two folding side wings adorn the paintings of St Simon and St Jude. The outer sides of the wings that can be observed when the altar is open bear the motif of the Annunciation. This work of art, which was estimated by professionals



to have been created in the year 1530 and is famed to be one of the most valuable relics of Slovenian cultural heritage from the Gothic period, expresses different regional influences and is tied to the late Gothic tradition, containing elements already showing the influence of the Renaissance. It found its domicile, or as will be seen, had it in a modest church whose main portal bears a carved inscription from the year 1505, which tells us the year it was built. It took its name from the aforementioned saint and stands in the village Britof at the westernmost edge of Slovenia, where the Goriška Brda Hills end, or we could say begin. Although modest, it is an intriguing example of late Gothic architecture because, as opposed to the churches built at that time in Western Slovenia, it departs from the stylistic characteristics that can be found in that region.

MARUŠA KRESE RECEIVES DNEVNIK AWARD

The Fabula short story festival, a commendable cultural project of the Dnevnik daily, held biannually to honour the best collection of short stories – along with Kresnik, a similar project by the Delo daily, this is a pleasant indication that newspaper publishing has not forgotten about literature – was concluded by an award ceremony this year, following an extensive, high-quality accompanying programme in various Slovene towns. The judging panel awarded the prize to the writer and journalist Maruša Krese for her collection Vsi moji božiči (All My Christmases). The collection's 30 short pieces depict Christmas evenings spent in very different places and with very different people, summarizing the author's interesting and rich life. It should be noted that Krese competed for the award against several extraordinary writers, such as Milan Dekleva with his collection Izkušnje z daljavo (Experiences with Distance), Franjo Frančič with Trkaj, trkaj na nebeška vrata (Knock, Knock on Heaven's Door), and Urška Sterle with her debut Vrsta za kosilo (Lunch Line). Maruša Krese has been living in Berlin for a long time, but writes in Slovene. Her book was published last year by Mladinska knjiga.

HIGHEST STATE ART AWARDS GO TO AUTHOR, DESIGNER

The Prešeren prizes for lifetime achievements went to author and translator Janez Gradišnik and graphic designer Miljenko Licul. Prešeren Fund prizes for individual achievements were also conferred at 7 February ceremony in Maribor. Gradišnik was awarded with the highest national commendation in the arts, the Prešeren Prize, for his literary work, literary translation and work in the field of linguistics. Being too ill to attend the ceremony himself, the speech by the



90-year-old author was delivered by his wife. Gradišnik wrote that a respectful attitude to a mother tongue reflects the level of culture of a nation. Licul was meanwhile honoured for his rich creative opus in design. Perhaps most famed for his design of the former Slovenian national currency, the tolar, Licul said in his speech that the omnipresent freedom of speech was destroying the dignity and culture. »The quality of communication in the public is problematic, to put it mildly. Those most responsible for such a situation are media owners and managers. Media, big clients and creators and designers of media messages often forget the basic ethical ideals in their fight for profit,« Licul said. The Prešeren Awards and Prešeren Fund Awards, named after Slovenia's best known poet France Prešeren (1800-1849), are the most prestigious awards in Slovenia and are traditionally handed out on the eve of Culture Day, 8 February.

HOLIDAY MARKED BY SOLEMNITY AND PRIDE

Slovenia, one of the very few countries who honour their cultures by official holidays, has undoubtedly endowed its holiday with content that affirms it and makes it particularly meaningful. This year was no exception. Torrents of visitors filled museums, theatres, and attended special events, proving that they care about culture. Putting aside the Prešeren awards ceremony, the traditional central celebration, it warms the heart to regard the increasingly enthusiastic responses of a wide range of people, who until a few years ago considered the cultural holiday simply as another day off from work. Lately, many who spend the day itself on the ski slopes have been taking in cultural events in the evening. In Ljubljana, a large crowd attended the traditional recital of Prešeren's poems in the central city square. The situations were similar in Vrba, the poet's place of birth, where 4,000 people turned out, and in Kranj, where Prešeren lived for a long time and died. Kranj, proclaimed the City of Prešeren, staged a veritable parade of historical costumes from the poet's time, and hosted a fair with products and artistic items reminiscent of the period.

SLOVENIAN ARTISTS IN WINTERY SARAJEVO

The famous Sarajevska zima (Sarajevo winter) cultural festival, which first took place in 1984 following the Olympic Games in that city, and was not even interrupted by the horrible war in Bosnia, is one of the most beautiful traditions of the Bosnian Federation's capital, a city becoming increasingly multicultural once again. Ever since its inception, the festival has cherished its Slovenian artistic guests, who contributed significantly to this year's programme. Musicians of the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra travelled to Sarajevo for the festival's opening. On February 8th, they played a concert there, conducted by Toshihiro Yonezu, and two days later Ljubljana City Theatre gave a performance of *The Fiddler on the Roof*, in which a large crew of 73 actors and other assorted theatre workers participated.

THE FAVOURITE FOREIGN DIPLOMAT IN SLOVENIA IS RUSSIAN MIHAIL VALENTINOVICH VANIN

The two Slovenian media for foreigners, the newspaper *The Slovenia Times* and *Radio Slovenia International*, have announced their most popular foreign personalities in Slovenia. The favourite foreigner among diplomats is the Russian ambassador, Mihail Valentinovič Vanin. Mr Vanin began his mandate in Slovenia in 2005. His work combines a range of activities in politics, the economy and culture. He is keen on studying Slovenian history, literature and art. He is striving for the active strengthening of traditionally good relations

between the countries, the symbol of which is also the annual ceremony at the Russian Chapel under Vršič, for the renovation of which he successfully raised funds from Russian banks. Slovenia has, as he says, changed a lot since he arrived. In addition to new hotels, highways and other buildings, it also achieved a lot in the diplomatic area. As important achievements, he mentioned the presidency of the OSCE and EU, and joining the Euro and Schengen. He sees Slovenian political culture as transitional, which reflects the previous state of Slovenian statehood and democratic development, and at a very high level. The latter is the reason that Russian diplomats want to serve in Slovenia. As the favourite foreign personality of 2007 in the area of culture, Australian musician Kate Hosking, who was enthusiastic about the "beauty, courage and intellect of Slovenian musicians" was selected. The favourite foreign sports personality is 25-year old Delano Thomas, a Californian volleyball player who plays for ACH Volley from Bled. Among economists, the flattering title went to Blaine Callard, the manager of the trading company Harvey Norman Slovenia, a company with two stores, which employs 150 people and actively seeks ways to expand its business operations. Already this year, the parallel building of three new stores is planned. He is spreading his knowledge to coming generations of traders and businessmen. Last year, he was a guest at the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana, and this year he is a mentor to young entrepreneurs in the CEED programme. Slovenia is in his opinion becoming more and more European – it has better restaurants, goods in the shops, better cars and more style in clothing.

REBEKA DREMELJ FOR EUROSUNG THIS YEAR

This year's 'Ema', the Slovenian Eurosong selection contest, was won by the young singer Rebeka Dremelj, whom listeners awarded the most votes by televoting. The competition was close, since the first runner-up, who received more than 56,000 votes, fell behind by a mere four hundred. While Rebeka Dremelj is a congenial and hard-working singer, her song is tailored to fit the demands of a contest that rewards appearance and congeniality more than it does the quality of the music. In any case, many believe that Eurosong is in a state of crisis, which will either cause the rules to be changed, or leave the contest an empty shell, driving off the remaining exceptions who strive to maintain a vestige of quality.



Text: BOGI PRETNAR, Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik



Good Restaurants: Raduha, Luče trout prepared by the cook of the year

Two generations: Emika and Martina Breznik

It was a prestigious cooking competition in one of the newest and most renowned Ljubljana hotels. Three cooks (excluding their assistants) made it into the finals: two well-known men – one from a region much praised for its cuisine in northern Primorska and the other from one of the three finest and most expensive restaurants in Ljubljana – and one woman. She came from a local inn situated in one of the most beautiful places in Slovenia, so remote that you would go there only for a vacation. Twenty judges from a culinary academy were inspecting dishes, smelling them, cutting meat and fish into thin slices, checking sauces with fork points, tasting, raising eyebrows and taking notes. The general audience expected victory by the cook from Ljubljana. But the evaluation score of the culinary academy proved otherwise: the winner according to the Cook of the Year became Martina Breznik!

Let us find Martina and see how she is doing after nearly three years since winning the competition. We must travel to Luče in the Upper Savinja Valley. There are two ways to come to Luče: either by driving through Kamnik and crossing the Černivec mountain pass to Gornji Grad (or taking a short cut at the signpost showing the way to Podvolovljek) and towards the Logarska Valley; or by driving on the motorway towards Maribor and taking the exit to Mozirje, and from there towards the Logarska Valley. The village of Luče sits on the edge of the Logarska Valley. A view of the surrounding mountains accounts for the difficult roads. The Raduha boarding house is located at the entrance of the village. It is a house where the first guests were served in the 1870's. Today, everything is different and modernised, but local people still call the place "pri Medetu".

Martina is the fourth generation behind the kitchen-range. Former guests knew Martina's grandmother and mother, passionate collectors of old recipes. Today everybody knows Martina. Apart from her husband who knows a lot about wines since he is a sommelier, there are also three children helping Martina, who is not very young anymore.



A pear with marzipan

GOODSLOVENIANINNS

Guests ask for the menu out of habit, maybe to browse the offering for extremely slow eaters. But there is only one best proven method: let them recommend to you the dishes of the day. Most importantly, the possibilities depend on the season. Almost everything actually comes from what nearby fields, pastures and stables have to offer, what can be bought from local suppliers and what is growing in the garden on those days (vegetables, aromatic plants, etc). One would not believe what all they can do with homemade cheese. They are real masters of variation.

If you are weary from the road, you will get home herbs soaked in brandy. Women typically prefer the bilberry brandy. You will probably want to find out which dishes brought Martina victory at the competition and the Cook of the Year title, although you might not be able to order all of them on the day of your visit. For the appetizer she prepared an artful composition of salmon embracing smoked trout. The main course consisted of a baked trout roll wrapped in pork membrane accompanied by avocado puree and a daring yellow sweet pepper sauce with rosemary and forest honey. For the dessert she produced bean cake, yes bean cake, with marzipan. With Martina's victory, trout from the Savinja River gained a strong reputation. They have been praised for centuries, especially by high church officials from Gornji Grad and Ljubljana who enjoyed good food.

"Awarded cook of the year trout" is always on the menu and so is the homemade smoked trout pate, accompanied by fennel. Trout in lemon mousse is also worthy of sin. You will likely be able to treat

yourself to a pork filet filled with dried apricots - or even better with home dried pears, and rolled in minced herbs and breadcrumbs producing a wonderful herbal crust which sealed in the meat juice while baking. Martina always adds something new to her recipes; that is why on this occasion she does not enrich the sauce only with cabernet but with port and coffee as well.

Apart from the ordinary soups on the menu, in the wintertime apple and nettle soups and cold cucumber soup are the most renowned. Green nettle juice is added to some homemade pasta giving it a nice colour while the filling is made of minced game and spruce juice. They really know how to prepare game. Different types of honey are often on the menu as well. Sometimes they are made in combinations which make you raise your eyebrows but taste so good that you can only sigh. One thing is sure and certain: in the kitchen, Martina is not afraid of any new ideas. This means that dishes are based on local customs and food, but under Martina's hands the cuisine of the Savinja Valley becomes European cuisine. Many evaluators acknowledge this fact, let alone other gourmets.

Kohlrabi is an ordinary vegetable, not highly praised and suitable only for a stew. People used to say it is "only good for pigs". Martina turned this insignificant vegetable into a sophisticated pudding with orange sauce and a touch of ginger, which is like the icing on the cake. Vegetable soufflés, juicy as well as light ones, are enriched with herbal sauces. Speaking of herbs from Martina's garden, thyme is one of her favourite aromatic plants, especially when preparing a young goat or a lamb. A foal is not a bad choice either. Now we will piece together a vibrant menu which will show us Martina Breznik in her true colours. In the springtime we shall start with lamb pate, buckwheat bread and walnuts, followed by cheese mousse with elder juice and nettle or wood garlic soup. Traditionalists will probably prefer mushroom soup. For a warm appetizer we will have slightly roasted aromatic porcini mushrooms with spoon dumplings made of paljeno testo (a special kind of dough produced by pouring flour into boiling water with butter and stirring until the dough comes away from the pot. The dough cools in a different pot, and when it is lukewarm it is formed with decorating bags and tips). The main course will consist of a pork filet filled with dried fruit and rolled in herbs accompanied by cabernet sauce. And for the dessert we will order a pear with marzipan and pine nuts. And what will we drink? What the men of the house will recommend, of course. At the Raduha inn, you can choose from Bijana sparkling wines to the Veliko rdeče red wine from Movia and anything worth mentioning in between. If your mouth is overwhelmed with flavour and the Upper Savinja Valley's beauty is too much for your eyes, you can relax and spend the night since the inn is a boarding house as well. This way you will not have to worry about your breakfast either!



Pork filet filled with dried fruit



Porcini mushrooms with spoon dumplings made of paljeno testo



Text: JOŽE PREŠEREN

Photos: Slovenian Philharmonic Archive

100 Years of the Slovenian Philharmonic

The Slovenian Philharmonic, the most distinguished Slovenian professional orchestra, is celebrating two anniversaries in 2008 – one hundred years since the founding of the Slovenian Philharmonic as a musical association cultivating orchestra music, which arose from a former semi-professional ensemble called Društvena godba ('Society Band') in 1908, in the last years of existence of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; that orchestra performed successfully until autumn 1913. A musical institution intended above all for the cultivation of orchestral music was established anew under the name Slovenian Philharmonic in 1948, 60 years ago, right after the 2nd World War and the beginning of the People's Republic of Slovenia as a member of the Yugoslav Federation. This time, the Slovenian Philharmonic started working as a symphony orchestra, a string quartet, a mixed and youth choir, and as a concert agency.

ONE OF THE OLDEST CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN EUROPE

The Slovenian Philharmonic, whenever it was established, is in any case continuing a rich musical tradition, as the first musical institution here, in Ljubljana, was established in 1701 as Academia philharmonicorum. It was set up following the example of similar associations in Europe at that time and brought baroque music to Slovenia. The initiative for setting up this musical association came from Academia operosorum, a society of Ljubljana scholars of the baroque era, which was established in 1693 and later became a literary-linguistic society of the enlightenment period.

The orchestra of Academia philharmonicorum occasionally performed with more than 50 musicians, and participated at various

church and secular celebrations; among the most important performances was a concert on the day of their patroness St Cecilia. They also used to give an annual evening concert on a boat travelling the River Ljubljanica.

Among the predecessors of the Slovenian Philharmonic was the Philharmonic Society, established in 1794, the particularity of which was that it attracted numerous outstanding European musicians as collaborators. Its members included Beethoven, Haydn, Paganini, Brahms; and for a while, Gustav Mahler, a renowned Austrian composer, was active in Ljubljana as a conductor and pianist. Mahler was undoubtedly the most important music personality that ever worked in Ljubljana; and not only Ljubljana, but the whole Slovenia is proud of that.

EXTRAORDINARY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE REVIVED SLOVENIAN PHILHARMONIC

In the general enthusiasm for new acquisitions after the 2nd World War, the activities of the Slovenian Philharmonic were also renewed. Composer Marjan Kozina, whose bust was unveiled at this year's anniversary, was appointed as the first manager. In the founding decree issued by the Slovenian government of that time, which entered into force on 1 January 1948, it is stated that one of the tasks of the Slovenian Philharmonic is to 'provide for the performance of works of domestic music creators and works from the world music canon...'. Another task of the Slovenian Philharmonic as the central national musical institution was the organisation of cultural events, publishing, and representing Slovenian music in other republics of the federation and abroad.

CULTURAL TRAILS



The new institution, the financing of which was completely taken care of by Slovenian government – which via the Ministry of Culture is still done today – therefore had its own symphony orchestra, which was composed mainly of musicians from Radio Ljubljana, a mixed choir; the permanent conductors were Jakov Cipci and Samo Hubad.

The first concert of the revived Slovenian Philharmonic was on 13 January 1948, and Spanish conductor Salvador Bacarisse and pianist Roger Machado appeared as guests. Only works by Spanish composers were on the programme. Soon, more new concerts followed, so numerous that it is difficult to believe these statistical data today: in six months of operating, the Slovenian Philharmonic organised 236 musical events, of which 86 were in Ljubljana and 150 around Slovenia; of these, 35 were orchestral concerts, 6 vocal-instrumental, 44 vocal, and 13 concerts with a mixed programme etc. The orchestra played Mozart, Beethoven,

Grieg, Dvořák, Strauss, Schubert, Smetana and others. They also began to include more works by Slovenian composers.

One success followed another, but also numerous reorganisations happened, as separate units became independent, such as the string quartet or the concert agency, while some choruses or groups were dismissed. The choir of the Slovenian Philharmonic was active until 1976, and various chamber groups arose from the symphonic orchestra. Throughout the years, there were numerous managers, art directors and conductors. The orchestra became, as the central Slovenian orchestra, important and reputable also in European terms. Its cast of 100 members is distinguished by the harmony between the strings, brass and woodwind instruments; all members of the orchestra are highly trained and disciplined. The orchestra often performs abroad – it has performed in almost all European countries and twice toured the United States.

THE PHILHARMONIC DURING THE EU PRESIDENCY

In the last three years, the orchestra of the Slovenian Philharmonic has been conducted by American conductor George Pehlivanian, and under his guidance they have achieved enviable artistic development and successfully performed in numerous respected European concert halls, as well as in Japan. Also, in the year of Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, numerous concerts have been arranged in several European countries. They are most delighted about the concert on 12 March in the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels. They will perform Mahler's 2nd symphony 'Resurrection', and concert soloists Marjana Lipovšek and Sabina Cvilak will join them. As part of this year's anniversary celebrations, the Slovenian Philharmonic will also perform in Hungary, Slovakia, in Cannes, Vienna, Zagreb and elsewhere.



Text: ANJA HREŠČAK, Photo: STA



Petra Majdič:

Slovenia's best athlete
"I discovered myself in
cross-country skiing."

Four World Cup victories coupled with this year's Sprint in the classic discipline at Otepäi, last year's World Cup victory in Obersdorf, and two World Cup victories two years ago in Drammen and Kuusamo, as well as the silver medal at the Sapporo World Championship in Japan are some of the successes that have put the Slovenian cross-country skier, Petra Majdič, into world record history for this sport.

After one of her many victories at Kuusamo in Finland at the end of 2006, she said, "To win the World Cup Competition in cross-country skiing was very difficult. To come from Slovenia and win the World Cup Competition in cross-country skiing, even more

so." With iron will and determination Petra Majdič worked her way through to the elite group of cross-country skiers, where, from the moment she appeared, Slovenia became a recognizable member of the group, otherwise traditionally dominated by the Scandinavian countries and Russia.

"I LEAD A LIFE I ALWAYS WANTED TO LIVE!"

The list of extraordinary rankings of cross-country skier Petra Majdič is quite lengthy. During her career she has won seven victories altogether, including three just last season. And it was »not a dead loss« either. "The last season was truly wonderful. I lead

a life I always wanted to live. Cross-country skiing has given me a lot, and most of all it taught me that everything depends on me and my mind. I learned that one needs to take one step backwards so as to take two forward," was how Petra commented her own achievements at the close of last year's season. Last year's season she ended ranked third in the World Cup Total. Undoubtedly, her greatest success is represented in the silver medal she won in the World Championship at Sapporo in Japan. She has lifted the sports discipline of cross-country skiing, at least concerning Slovenian competitiveness, to a completely new level, and with all her successes she undoubtedly deserved the title "queen" or "princess" of cross-country skiing. The silver medal that she won in Japan more than a year ago is also the first Slovenian medal in cross-country skiing at the highest level in the biggest competitions. With this Petra undoubtedly realized her great wish, since, before her departure for this competition she said, "At Sapporo I want to set a new milestone in cross-country skiing in Slovenia." And she did. The world's second best cross-country skier commented on her success for Radio Slovenia after the competition in the following manner: »Before the championship the pressure was enormous. In fact, I could hardly wait for everything to start because I really did not have any more patience from anticipation. I managed to pull through an excellent performance. From lap to lap my skiing was better, and in the end I have to admit, I imagined myself with the gold medal around my neck. Unforgettable, the only thing I could say is – we kept waiting for this.«

Yet, Petra Majdič is not only a specialist in sprint performance, where she has posted her best results. At the beginning of last season she proved by winning a 10-kilometer classical style competition in the prestige series Tour de Ski that her talent is not restricted to exceptional results in one discipline only. In 10-kilometer performances she later won the medal two more times. A special place in her collection of achievements is also held by ranking 3rd in the famous 45-kilometer marathon performance at Vasaloppet, which is perhaps the most prestigious competition in the world of cross-country skiing. But where does she again and again find the will and motivation for all the effort that is required in this sport? "I discovered myself in cross-country skiing, and this is all the motivation I had all these years: To be with oneself by oneself and returning back to oneself and nature. If you like it and if it presents a challenge for you, then cross-country skiing represents a joy. Of course, later on you are drawn by the results also," Petra admitted to Slovenian journalists not long ago.

All of her achievements in the sports field have given her another honorary title, that is, Petra Majdič has for the second year in a row received the title of Slovenia's Best Athlete of the Year, voted by the Slovenian Sports Journalists. When she came on stage to receive the award, she must have also impressed the hearts of those who are not such fervent supporters of sport with her moving speech. "The year 2007 was most of all very successful, since at the moment cross-country skiing is my life and according to the results at the end of the last year's and at the beginning of this year's season, it proved to be super successful yet also extremely hard. In all these years I mostly learned that there are no boundaries; those are rather in the minds of people," she acknowledged. She also added that she is fully aware of the responsibility she has as a top athlete who can influence the younger generations with their achievements. She can encourage them to participate in sports, and that is why top sportspeople must bear their own share of responsibility.

FIRST-TIME ENVIABLE RESULTS AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The first time she probably drew attention to herself was at the 2002 Olympic Games, taking place in Salt Lake City where in the pursuit competition she took an impressive sixth place. This ranking has until today been the best Slovenian ranking at the Olympic Games in the discipline of cross-country skiing. Otherwise, Petra finished ninth in that very pursuit competition, but after two full years passed three Russian cross-country skiers were officially disqualified for doping, so Petra was awarded sixth place. And these were only the first Olympic Games she had participated in. She repeated her success at the Olympic Games in Torino two years ago where she again won sixth place. Due to wet snow she was forced into using somewhat less optimal equipment, and for this very reason, she later told us, missed a higher ranking. She remains optimistic regarding her expectations for the next Olympic Games, which shall be held Vancouver in two years, as she has acknowledged to the Slovenian media.

In the beginning everything did not look so promising. On her webpage she wrote that her first experiences on the snow were so disappointing that she left training; this could have almost prevented her from continuing. At the first training when she did not know how to cross-country ski, other peers left her far behind; this was so depressing for her that she decided to stop training for good. It was fortunate that the coach later persuaded her to continue, since Slovenia would otherwise be left without one of the best sportswomen and certainly the best cross-country skier. Training during the first two years was mainly carried out through game. Petra had already started training when she was eleven. Later everything did not run smoothly either because for some time Petra's parents opposed her frequent absences from home, even after she had totally dedicated herself to cross-country skiing. Eventually they were in wonder over her decisiveness and zeal. As she acknowledges on her web page, she received similar responses from the surrounding environment, since living in a small village, as is Dol pri Ljubljani, it seemed unusual to see a young girl constantly up and about – cycling and roller skating. In her spare time, of which there is precious little as one could conjecture from her arduous timetable, Petra wrote on her web page that she likes to read, in particular "The Little Prince" and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn«. She also likes watching interesting movies, such as "La Vita é Bella/Life is Beautiful« and taking shorter strolls in Ljubljana with her friends. There is no rest for the sportswoman even in her spare time. Even then she likes to stay active, so she cycles, skates, rows and goes mountaineering. Petra is otherwise a student of the Human Resources and Social Management study programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana. As much as it is possible, she tries to balance her study-related obligations with her tiresome training, travel and competitions, which has become an even more difficult task now that she worked her way through to the very top of the world of cross-country skiing. She has also written that due to the perseverance she claims to possess, there is no doubt that she shall prove successful.

Text: POLONA PREŠEREN, Photo: Katarina Krmelj



Heading: Pokljuka – winter fairy tale

"I wonder who invented this sport," said a cross-country skier in a breathless voice who happened to pass by on my left hand side. "Indeed," I thought to myself, but my body will be grateful later. A Sunday trip to Pokljuka, a plateau on the edge of the Julian Alps, alone compensates for all the torments of this difficult but beautiful sport. It is remarkable that in spite of a relatively warm winter, when the snow covered only the Alpine peaks and the largest ski slopes in Slovenia, it is still possible to find a place with neatly arranged cross-country ski trails. It did not look promising at all when the photographer and I were driving from Ljubljana to Bled, through a village called Gorje and following signposts showing us the way to Pokljuka. Her sceptical looks were saying: "Are you sure there is snow up there?" Of course, there is snow on Pokljuka. And we were greeted by a real snow fairy tale. The sun was shining on the vast spruce forests, although the valley was still wrapped in fog. This only increased our satisfaction. Pokljuka hides and reveals many treasures. Vast forests and meadows are interwoven with paths inviting one to take a walk or a trip. Paths are arranged in winter time as well, when they are accompanied by cross-country ski trails. In summer, Pokljuka is an ideal starting point for various mountain tours. For people who want to take the easier way to Triglav, the highest Slovenian mountain and national symbol, they should start on Pokljuka. This is why it is not surprising that Pokljuka is among the most popular destinations for cross-country skiing. The cross-country ski trails are exceptional and lead through quiet forests and wide high-alpine meadows. I recommend it to the more experienced cross-country skier, due its numerous ascents and descents. This extraordinary plateau is actually the largest fossil gorge in Slovenia resulting from melting of glaciers in the last ice age and streams dissolving the limestone rock layers. On the Pokljuka plateau, visitors can admire different karst phenomena, such as nat-

ural bridges, overhanging walls, sinkholes, cave passages, natural windows, vast swamps, hummocky meadows and other forms created during the last glaciation. These days, there is real fairy-tale scenery on Pokljuka. And, while walking or running through the Pokljuka forests, you hear only the gentle rustling sound of the centuries-old spruce forest and breathe deeply, you can really feel Slovenia.



**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**

