

Sinfo

ISSN 1854-0805

(business culture environment politics sports)

04

April 09

Slovenia Ready to Head the Council of Europe

First five years in
the European Union



contents

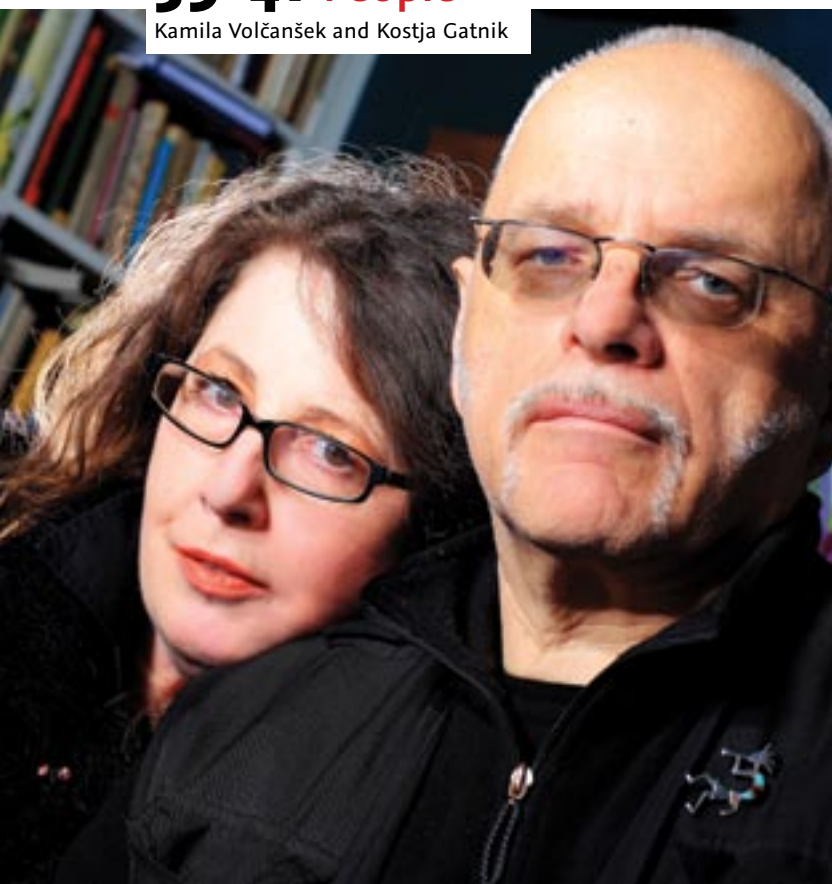


25 Art & Culture

Roma culture month – Romano Chon in Roma – enraptured Slovenia

39-41 People

Kamila Volčanšek and Kostja Gatnik



36-38 Sports

Fairways on the sunny side of the Alps

29-31 Our Excellence

Spinalis – chairs to bring back your health



32-35 Slovenian delights

The Region beyond (and around) the Mura River



Veronika Stabej

Slovenia ready for new milestones

This issue of Sinfo is dedicated to Europe: to the Presidency of the Council of Europe and the fifth anniversary of Slovenia joining the EU. In both cases, these are important events for our country. With the experience gained since independence, during its Presidency of the OSCE in 2005, and during its Presidency of the EU in 2008, this will be Slovenia's third presidency of a major international organisation. In the first five years of its membership of the European Union, Slovenia has continued to grow in international prestige and recognisability, and a number of significant milestones have contributed to make us feel truly at home in the EU.

During its Presidency of the Council of Europe, Slovenia will devote particular attention to the rights of minorities and Roma. We will strive to ensure that the legally regulated position of the Roma ethnic community continues to improve. April was notable for, among other things, the Month of Roma Culture, which filled the premises of some of Slovenia's principal cultural institutions with its exuberance and openness, and attracted enthusiastic visitors to numerous events.

In this issue we also look at foreign property owners in Slovenia. Since Slovenia joined the EU, 3,060 properties have been bought by foreigners. Estate agents and others are fond of saying that foreigners consider Slovenia a very beautiful country, that it has an incredible natural diversity despite its small size, and above all that the Slovenes are very friendly people.

Golfers from all over the world are full of praise for the 'greens on the sunny side of the Alps', in other words Slovenia's golf courses. With new courses appearing all the time, Slovenia is becoming an increasingly interesting destination for this form of tourism.

And since the way to the heart is through the stomach (as the saying goes), we have not forgotten about good food. This time we have gone to Prekmurje, famous for its utterly distinctive and unusual cuisine. As well as the classic gibanica (layer cake) and bograč (a kind of goulash), we present a variety of other specialities from Prekmurje. And invite you to come and sample them with us.

Sinfo – Slovenian information

Editorial: Government Communication Office, Director: Veronika Stabej, Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana, tel. +386 (0) 1 478 2630, fax + 386 (0) 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Editor-in-Chief: Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si
Editorial Board: Albert Kos, Mateja Malnar Štembal, Valerija Mencej, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Andreja Šonc Simčič, Branko Vidrih
Photo Editor: Maja Slavec
Production: Nuit d.o.o., Translation: PSD d.o.o., Printed by: Mond Grafika
Number of copies: 4600
Available also at: www.ukom.gov.si/eng/slovenia/publication/sinfo
Cover photo: © European Communities, 1995-2009

Government Communication Office: www.slovenia.si
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>

Andrej Savelli

Katarina Kresal survives interpellation

At the beginning of April, members of parliament rejected the interpellation of the work of the Minister of the Interior, Katarina Kresal, submitted by SDS Party members due to the supposed inadequate settlement of the issue of so-called erased persons. Thirty-one MPs voted in favour of the interpellation, and forty-eight against. During the debate, the Minister rejected the objections raised by the authors of the interpellation. Commenting on SDS's intention to establish a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry and to use all legal remedies, she explained that she expected them to do so. She added that "the project of issuing supplementary decisions will be completed; we will also bring into force laws regulating other erased persons, and this project will be completed, whether SDS likes it or not." Referring to the announcement of the SDS president, Janez Janša, that each decision issued will be an opportunity to submit a new interpellation, Kresal was of the opinion that she would participate in others. "If not in this area, they will make something else up, since we who are taking the legal path, apparently represent a thorn in the flesh of SDS," explained the Minister. As she recalled, it was she who said several times that it would have been correct for politicians to give the erased persons "moral acknowledgement of all the injustices they had suffered." The form of such acknowledgement or apology should be suggested by politicians, she said.

At the beginning of April, members of parliament rejected the interpellation of the work of the Minister of the Interior, Katarina Kresal, submitted by SDS Party members due to the supposed inadequate settlement of the issue of so-called erased persons.

photo: STA



Still no progress in the Slovenia-Croatia dispute

On 30 March, Slovenia responded to the latest proposal of the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, regarding the Slovenia-Croatia border dispute. Since Croatia did not submit its proposal within the agreed time limit, the meeting announced for 1 April between Commissioner Rehn and the Foreign Ministers of Slovenia and Croatia, Samuel Žbogar and Gordan Jandroković, respectively, was postponed indefinitely. Therefore, Commissioner Rehn met the EU Trio Presidency of France, Czech Republic and Sweden, which called on Slovenia and Croatia to cooperate constructively in order to achieve results prior to the negotiating conference with Croatia, announced for 24 April. Upon joining NATO, the Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, expressed his opinion that this would help lift the Slovenian veto on Croatian negotiations with the EU. Sanader also announced that at the meeting with his Slovenian counterpart, Borut Pahor, which should take place on 24 April, he would demand Slovenia lift the veto on Croatian negotiations with the EU. Meanwhile, the former Finnish president and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Martti Ahtisaari, who has been proposed to lead the mediation of the border issue between Slovenia and Croatia, said that the dispute could be resolved by arbitration; at the same time, he hinted that he would probably not accept the mediating job, as these were legal issues and he is not a lawyer. On 9 April, after a cabinet meeting, Minister Žbogar said that the Government had again discussed the report on Commissioner Rehn's initiative, but resolutions would not be adopted until after discussions with members of the Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee. Mr Žbogar recalled that the Croatian Government has not submitted its comments; therefore, he estimated that Slovenia could take some time to discuss the Rehn initiative. Prime Minister Pahor indirectly responded to the newly exacerbated positions of the government in Zagreb regarding border issue, and considered that we should not be alarmed by the "grand rhetoric of the Croatian party". It is important to "act without exacerbating the matter". In closed session on 14 April, the Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee discussed Commissioner Rehn's proposal, expanded the Government's basic positions and added some suggestions as to how positive the answer to the Rehn initiative should be. The Slovenian media also revealed that Rehn's proposal was for ad hoc arbitration including five arbitrators. The European Commission should propose the leader, who should in turn appoint two assistants; Ljubljana and Zagreb should appoint one member each. A new tripartite meeting between Commissioner Rehn and the Slovenian and Croatian Ministers of Foreign Affairs could be held around 20 April.

The government presents a third package of measures against the crisis to social partners

On 10 April, the social partners in the Social and Economic Council were informed of proposed new government measures to mitigate the consequences of the crisis. These are proposals relating to employment and social policy, as well as economic development and the public sector. The proposed new measures were presented at an Economic and Social Council session by the Minister of Development and European Affairs, Mitja Gaspari, together with the Minister of the Economy and the Minister of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, Matej Lahovnik and Ivan Svetlik. Social partners have fourteen days to consider them, and prior to that, they will determine the priority of the measures. The Government has proposed both short-term and structural measures. Among the first is the introduction of subsidies paid to employers for employees directed to "wait for work". According to the proposal, instead of dismissing employees, employers could direct them to wait for work for up to nine months, which the trade unions say could be extended to a year. The Government also proposes changing the established subsidies for working time reductions, so that only companies reducing working time to 36 hours - and not also to 32 hours - would be entitled to receive subsidies. After meeting union representatives, Prime Minister Borut Pahor assured that the Government would not propose a third package of measures until making them acceptable to social partners.

The social partners in the Social and Economic Council were informed of proposed new government measures to mitigate the consequences of the crisis.

photo: STA



photo: Bobo

Prime minister Pahor at the summit marking the 60th anniversary of nato and the EU-USA summit

On 3 and 4 April, the Prime Minister, Borut Pahor, attended the jubilee NATO summit in Baden-Baden and Strasbourg. Mr Pahor was accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samuel Žbogar, and the Minister of Defence, Ljubica Jelušič. As part of his first tour of Europe, the new President of the USA, Barack Obama, was also attending the summit. The heads of twenty-eight NATO Members began their second day of the meeting by walking across the bridge over the Rhine from Kehl to Strasbourg, thereby symbolically confirming the spirit of the alliance. At the summit, Croatia and Albania joined the organisation, and the new Secretary General, the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, was appointed.

The following day, Prime Minister Pahor and Minister Žbogar attended an informal EU-USA summit in Prague. In addition to saving the global economy from the worst crisis after the World War II and new strategies for Afghanistan, the main issues were climate change and energy security. After the meeting, Prime Minister Pahor said that the EU-USA summit had fulfilled the hopes and high expectations, since both parties showed a desire to cooperate and overcome the challenges confronting them together, in a "coordinated, persistent and courageous manner". Due to the commitment of all participants in trying to use the period of crisis to invest in low-carbon and renewable energy infrastructure, Prime Minister Pahor also estimates that expectations regarding the fight against climate change expressed at the EU summit, together with the new president of the USA, seem more probable than those expressed a few years ago. Furthermore, he said that Slovenia is also undertaking measures in this direction – the Government is preparing a memorandum which will soon be submitted to the National Assembly.

Whilst attending the Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations session, which took place in Istanbul on 7 and 8 April, the President of the Republic, Danilo Türk, also met the American President, Barack Obama. With his American colleague, Türk primarily discussed the development of the Transatlantic Partnership.

Damjan Bergant, Head of the Project Group for Holding the Presidency of the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Council of Europe, photo: STA



Slovenia Ready to Head the Council of Europe

European Parliament, photo: STA



From 12th May to 18th November the Republic of Slovenia will preside over the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe is the oldest pan-European organization, and includes forty-seven Member States. Upon joining the organization, states vow to respect fundamental human rights and freedoms, establish democracy and the rule of law.



Council of Europe
Slovenia 2009

The Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (the Council of Europe) is organized alphabetically and lasts six months. It is the first time that Slovenia will hold the Presidency of such an organization. It is the third in a sequence of Presidencies of 'large' international organizations. Experience obtained during the period of independence and presiding over the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the year 2005 - and let us not forget the Slovenian EU Presidency of 2008 - will prove useful here. It is the positive experience obtained in all the previous Presidencies that fill us with optimism, including the Presidencies of smaller initiatives and international organizations (such as the Central European Initiative, Human Security Network), and membership of the United Nations Security Council. That is, we can be assured that Slovenia, regardless of its limited resources, both human and financial, in comparison to other Member States, will show that it can actively and successfully lead an organization and its membership, contributing to the development of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the international community. And at the same time, promote itself in the world.

Preparations for holding the Presidency of the Council of Europe started a year ago - that is, at the time of our EU Presidency.

Although the focus was on very important activities in the framework of the EU Presidency, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs established a so-called inter-ministerial working group for the Presidency of the Council of Europe. This includes almost all government sectors and offices. It must be stressed that the Council of Europe is concerned not only with foreign affairs, but also with other sectors. It should be stressed that these sectors, more precisely, their experts from individual fields, have



European Court of Human Rights Building in Strasbourg, photo: STA

been active for decades in the so-called expert committees of the Council of Europe. These experts are also active in implementing individual partial agreements and conventions of the Council of Europe. Slovenian experts are known and appreciated in Strasbourg for their work on minority rights, bioethics, disabled persons, fighting organized crime and corruption, and in the fields of social charters, the media, etc..

The inter-ministerial working group started work last May, and outlined the first proposals for Slovenia's EU priorities at the time of the Presidency of the Council of Europe. As the coordinator of the Presidency and group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted proposals to the Secretariat of the Council of Europe. In turn, they issued proposals and remarks regarding the current work of the Council of Europe. A priority proposal was outlined in the next round of coordination within the group and the Secretariat. They were confirmed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in the beginning of February 2009.

The priorities of Slovenia's Presidency of the Council of Europe are based on the priorities of the last summit of the Council of Europe in Warsaw in 2005. Slovenia outlined its own proposals based on its other priorities.

In this context, Slovenia will focus on the rule of law, democracy and respect for fundamental human rights, including the rights of children, minorities and the Roma community. In addition to this, Slovenia will address the fight against terrorism, organized crime and corruption, and bioethics, intercultural dialogue and cooperation with other international organizations (in particular, the European Union).

Of course, Slovenia intends to dedicate considerable attention to current matters in the framework of the Council of Europe. The question of reforming the European Human



photo: STA



photo: STA

Rights Court is very urgent. For the time being, the reform has stopped, since the Russian Federation has not ratified the convention, that is, Protocol 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights. This would make work easier for the court. At present, both professional and political debates related to the issue are going on at Strasbourg. A possibility of moving from the deadlock appeared at the meeting of the Committee of Ministers on 12th May in Madrid. That is, immediately before the acceptance of Slovenia's Presidency.

Let us not forget the regional matters with which the organization deals. Here, Slovenia intends to dedicate special attention to the countries of South-eastern Europe and the Caucasus, in particular. It is the countries of the South-eastern Europe that are subject to very strict monitoring of the state of human rights. Based on this, they are among the priorities of the Council of Europe. Regarding the southern Caucasus, the issue of Georgia remains open. After last year's events in August, the Council of Europe started to participate actively in resolving the situation, especially in the field of human rights. Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe is active in this field, and Slovenia encourages his activity.

It appears that Belarus will be one of Slovenia's concerns during its Presidency. Individual changes in the relationship between Belarus and the Council of Europe are becoming more and more evident, which shows that the status of Belarus as a guest in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be renewed. And let us not forget

the opening of the so-called Information Point in Minsk. All this can bring Belarus closer to the Council of Europe. If things develop in this direction, Slovenia will see that further steps are undertaken to facilitate Belarus' membership of the organization.

In short, there is a lot of work and activity ahead of Slovenia during the Presidency of the Council of Europe. The project group for holding the Presidency of the Council of Europe, which I lead, will coordinate both work at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and work on a broader scale. Furthermore, its primary role will be to assist the foreign minister Samuel Žbogar, who will preside over the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe, in his activities. And there will be many. This will only further burden the minister. That is why we will try as hard as we can to make his work and tasks in the Council of Europe easier.

Putting everything else aside, this is yet another experience we will acquire in diplomacy. I am sure that, together with our team in Strasbourg and the one in Ljubljana, we will successfully carry out this Presidency. That is, the third in a row. Slovenia's profile in the international community will only be enhanced, this time in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Council of Europe deals with the most significant issues of European society, except issues related to national defence. Its programme includes human and minority rights, media, legal cooperation, social issues, health service, environment, education, culture, sports, youth, local and regional self-government, cross-border cooperation, etc.

Slovenia requested full membership of the Council of Europe on 29th January, 1992,

and this was granted on 14th May 1993. In its opinion on the membership of Slovenia, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe did not specify any particular conditions to be met upon joining the organization. In the meantime, Slovenia affirmed its status as a successful Member State, with a high degree of respect for human and minority rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law.

On 11th May 2007, Montenegro was the last country to become a member of the Council of Europe. Meanwhile, Belarus still awaits membership. On the other hand, Kosovo has not requested membership yet.

From 1993, when Slovenia started its activities in the Council of Europe, it has been active in all the relevant fields. During regular work, it dealt with improving the state of the Council of Europe opera-

tions locally. On the other hand, it offered constructive help in improving the state of human rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law in all other Member States of the Council of Europe. Four permanent representatives, who represented Slovenia in Strasbourg, greatly contributed to this. They are the late ambassador Andrej Novak, who can take most credit for Slovenia joining the Council of Europe. Then there is former ambassador Darja Lavtižar-Bebler, who is still active in the Council. She leads the Slovenian parliamentary delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The ambassador Magdalena Tovornik, who had and still retains a connection with the Council. And lastly, let us not forget another former ambassador, Meta Bole, the current permanent representative of Slovenia at the Council of Europe. This year she is chairing the Committee of Deputy Ministers in Strasbourg.

photo: STA



Photo: © European Communities, 1995-2009

Nataša Bušljeta

FIRST FIVE YEARS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The first day of May 2004 will go down as an important milestone in the history of the European Union and Slovenia. The European Union's fifth and largest ever enlargement took place, with 10 new countries, including Slovenia, joining. The first five years of Slovenia's membership of the European Union have been marked by many different achievements and new experiences.

SLOVENIA HAS GAINED INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL VISIBILITY.

By joining the European Union, Slovenia achieved one of its key strategic goals. Preparations for membership marked the beginning of a period of increased economic development and stability. EU membership brought new major challenges. Major projects included the adoption of the euro, joining the Schengen area and holding the EU Council Presidency. In June 2004, Slovenia for the first time elected seven Slovenian representatives to the European Parliament. In November of the same year, the first European Commissioner from Slovenia, responsible for science and research, was sworn in.

NEGOTIATION ON THE EU FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PERIOD 2007-2013 WAS ONE OF THE FIRST MAJOR TASKS FOR SLOVENIA AS AN EU MEMBER STATE.

From the national viewpoint, the negotiations can be assessed as very successful, since Slovenia succeeded in maintaining its budgetary position as a net recipient of EU funds until at least 2013.

IN JANUARY 2007, SLOVENIA ADOPTED THE EURO AND BECAME THE 13th MEMBER OF THE EURO AREA.

The advantages of the adoption of the euro are particularly evident today, when Slovenia is dealing with the financial and economic crisis, as this makes it less vulnerable to severe shocks.



IN DECEMBER 2007, SLOVENIA JOINED THE SCHENGEN AREA;

it first lifted internal border controls at internal land and sea borders and then, in March 2008, also at air borders. Borders within the Schengen area can now be crossed freely, without undergoing border checks or passport control.

IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2008, SLOVENIA HELD THE EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY –

it was the first of the new Member States to do so and the first Slavic country to be at the helm of the European Union. In terms of content and organisation, this was probably Slovenia's most demanding task since independence. Slovenia achieved the priorities it had set for itself, and participated in the drafting and adoption of a number of legislative documents and other decisions having a direct impact on citizens' daily lives, companies' operations and poli-

cies in the public sector. By holding the EU Council Presidency, we have gained knowledge and experience, and established important contacts that may now help us in implementing new projects.

IN THE FIVE YEARS SINCE EU ACCESSION, SLOVENIA HAS ACHIEVED GREATER VISIBILITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND SECURED INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND IN FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS GOING BEYOND THE LIMITS OF A STATE OF ONLY 2 MILLION PEOPLE.

In five years of EU membership, Slovenia has undoubtedly demonstrated that, with its knowledge and commitment, and by acting in a responsible manner, it is capable of carrying through the most demanding tasks.

What benefits has EU membership brought to citizens?

The impact of membership of the European Union on the lives of Slovenians is likely to be greater than it appears at first sight, as EU law provides rules applying to a variety of areas that are directly relevant to our everyday lives. In addition to enjoying the advantages of the Schengen arrangement and the adoption of the euro, Slovenes, as EU citizens, have the right to elect representatives and be elected to the European Parliament. In June this year, we will be electing Slovenian representatives to the European Parliament for the second time. EU law entitles us to shop in other EU Member States without having to worry about paying customs duty or additional VAT when returning home. EU law ensures high standards of product safety and prohibits misleading advertising and unfair selling practices. It also guarantees cheaper mobile calls abroad, provides a number of opportunities for education, work and employment seeking, as well as the possibility of retiring in another Member State, entitlement to health services when they relate to

urgent or necessary treatment during a temporary stay in another Member State, etc. Apart from legal benefits, EU membership also has financial benefits. By drawing on EU funds, we can improve or build our transport infrastructure, improve the supply of clean water and energy, build purification plants and other infrastructure facilities, benefit from education and training, as well as encourage entrepreneurship, tourism and measures promoting rural development.



New challenges and trials ahead

There are already new challenges facing the European Union and Slovenia, requiring an active approach and innovative solutions: the institutional deadlock, climate change, energy security, further enlargement of the European Union, and recently also the deepening financial and economic crisis.

After five years of EU membership, Slovenia is well aware that, thanks to membership, it can deal more effectively with challenges posed, since integration makes countries stronger, but only if they respect common rules and take their share of responsibility. And we are also aware that membership is important for the citizens of Slovenia, who have now the right and opportunity to take part in shaping the future development of the country and the European Union as a whole.



Council of Europe
Slovenia 2009

Igor Kovač, President of Slovenian Pan-European Youth:

For Slovenia, 9 May 2004 is a key date in its history. Prior to the implementation of the referendum on Slovenia's accession to the EU, on 7 May 2004, the Slovenian Pan-European Movement issued a declaration entitled 'Historical Opportunity'. All the major public opinion makers of that time signed it. In the declaration, we noted that by acceding to the EU, Slovenia was returning to the European cultural and political circles which had enabled us to become a nation. The exclusion of Slovenia from European integration would mean international isolation, endangering not only our statehood, but also our national survival.


Accession to the EU enabled the Slovenian economy and companies to access a large market; students and teachers were provided with the free movement of knowledge, and Slovenia was allowed to co-decide the policies of one of the main global actors - the EU.

All these successes should not blur our critical view of the EU, which includes Slovenia. The EU still faces a great dilemma. The main task of the EU is to provide efficiency and at the same time ensure the equality of all European nations. This issue is qualitative, and it cannot be resolved by treaty alone (such as the Constitutional Treaty or the new-

er Lisbon Treaty). A further qualitative shift in relations between the nations of Europe is required. The beginning of this shift was actually the emergence of the EU or ECSC, respectively. On the basis of a different paradigm, European countries began to regulate their mutual relations. Today, we can unfortunately see that this noble idea is getting lost in European bureaucracy, technocracy and the so-called 'spill-over' approach. The Pan-European idea represents this new paradigm, and therefore the role and mission of the Slovenian Pan-European Movement did not end with Slovenia's accession to the EU, but began again in a new way.

Where is Slovenia within the EU? Although we have established that Slovenia gained a great deal by joining the EU, and has proved to be excellent within it, we can criticise the search for true Slovenian positions within the organisation and related to it. This was also demonstrated during the Slovenian EU Council Presidency. Here, we proved to be excellent organisers and promoters of Slovenia. However, not enough was done to promote and implement Slovenian positions. Until the EU enters into – to borrow Kant's idea – a period of eternal peace, which can also be called the period of Pan-European idea realisation, an active, innovative and highly independent Slovenian foreign policy remains our best defence against political and economic pressure from the larger countries.

The Slovenian Pan-European Movement is convinced that there will be further successes for Slovenia within the EU, and thereby the EU project, based on the realisation of the Pan-European idea.



Vesna Žarkovič,
photo: Mateja Jordovič Potočnik

Irena Brinar

Head of the Office of International Cooperation
at the Faculty of Social Science,
University of Ljubljana:

**The European structure should
be filled with knowledge and
concern for the people**

INTERVIEW

Mrs Brinar, you have been part of the European story since the very beginning, before the negotiations started. What are your memories?

Right now, I only remember the event that happened at the end of the 1980s, when we were discussing an agreement between Yugoslavia and the EU. I was at the beginning of my academic career, and I was explaining my vision of it. At the time, I was reproached for seeing those things in an overly academic manner and for taking integration in an overly theoretical manner - in the sense that I was teaching.

Are you still doing that?

I hope not in a negative sense.

Five years of EU membership are behind us. How do you assess this period?

Those five years passed very quickly. Generally, I can say that all the twenty-five years that I have been engaged in the accession of Slovenia to the EU passed so quickly, that I am not even aware that half of my academic career has passed. I experience it like this, as something is constantly going on. Not only something - a lot is going on. All this multitude of events has to be followed - both those happening within the EU and in Slovenia. Every year has been different from all the others; so my subject of research changes every year. Such dynamics keep you in a constant state of tension.

What were the subjects you studied the most?

The EU is constantly changing, both inwardly and outwardly, in its responses to the international environment. Before and after Slovenia's independence, we were included to some extent in discussions about how Yugoslavia should continue its co-operation with what was then the European Economic Community. After independence, European affairs simply dragged us in; between 1991 and 2009, many new things happened which have significantly affected the inclusion of Slovenia: from the initial approaches, a series of agreements, negotiations, accession, European elections, monetary union, Schengen, to the Presidency... Now, we are already at the fifth anniversary. In the last 20 years, many historical turning points in the EU shaped its internal constitution. Following all this, from the preparations, the course of events, the direction of discussions, to the

results, it is always demanding, and you try to capture it with all the modifications; then, you are already half-way to the next reform. All this is happening so rapidly that there is no time to pause, or for a final evaluation of what has been achieved, let alone to identify the problems. It feels like rushing from one document to another, without realising where we actually stand. I have the feeling of running without a compass in different directions.

It sounds as if the EU is not stable.

In terms of integration, it has always been a moving target. When we negotiated, it was always about a certain issue, and we did not know the final decision. Therefore, they had to be redefined, which is nothing unusual for an integration process. It is just a process. The feature of a process is modification. The EU was never a final construct, constituted by some basic acts, with all the parameters known. The system and relations between the main institutions of this system are known, but it is a very complex area of constant change. The nature of matters is such that we always tend towards a balance, but only a temporary one. Therefore, the EU always seeks a balance between institutions, between Member States, between the Union and third countries. This should also be understood in the light of changing the global world. A *modus vivendi* between the Member States and their whims - called national interests - should always be sought, and between the constantly changing leaders of European institutions.

So, there is no peace in studying the EU?

No, there is not, and I rather like it. The research does not allow you to stand still, or boredom with one's own subject. On the other hand, this can become tiring, especially if it persists for a longer period. We scientists have our fields of specialisation, but in the European story, you need to follow many fields.

Where are we now, after five years?

I would compare our membership with a game on ice. The surface is shiny. We can be reasonably satisfied with this surface. And also because, in five years of EU membership, Slovenia has not taken a break, not even a short one. Slovenia became a member in a year and a half, after tiring accession negotiations, which concluded in 2002; then,

it began to prepare for monetary union, and then there was entry into the Schengen area, which was less visible to the public. Notably in this field, Slovenia showed a high degree of activity, it took a very active part in entering the Union with other Members. Without our initiative, we would not have entered the Union. Also, there was the Presidency, which was nothing like any of the previous activities. The stakeholders, public inclusion, the people implementing it – everything was different. Each activity was a separate lesson. I would like to emphasise that Slovenia is rather good at performing in precisely defined roles, when the parameters are known, when we know what to do. We are extremely good at that.

And in what ways are we not?

Our biggest defects are lack of self-confidence, initiative and being proactive. It is not enough simply to respond passively to a given, known thing, which has to be accepted and adapted to... As I already said, we are good at that. We fail when we should reflect on what is really going on, and what should be done to land on solid ground, when necessary. In order to know for certain what to do, when it will have to be done. Unfortunately, it is not only the first winter snow that surprises us, but also things that should be anticipated if one had the right analytical approach to them.

Therefore, the five-year period is the tip of the iceberg, as you say; how do you see the iceberg below the surface?

Ninety per cent of this iceberg is below the sea. Unfortunately, it is not very interesting to the media. It is true that we were successful in the results following the negotiations, but it is not enough. By which I mean that successful negotiations do not suffice for true success, if we are not able now to realise and use the agreement. The iceberg below the surface represents the Slovenian qualification of local communities, various expert services, the education system and other institutions for making the most of our negotiating achievements. The best example is the utilisation of funds. We were very good at negotiating our funds - that was a great success for our negotiators, both in the field of regional, budget and agricultural policy. However, being entitled to receive funds does not mean you receive them. If money cannot be used through projects and expert groundwork, if there are not enough qualified people, then it is useless, however much there is. If you cannot bring it to Slovenia, there might as well be none. The reason we are not sufficiently active

is our lack of knowledge. It is all about that. We lack self-confidence because we lack knowledge. Only knowledge can put you alongside other EU Members. We say we are equal in institutions, in taking decisions; we say that the small are equal to the big. Legal equality is an indispensable condition, but not sufficient. If you are not an equal partner in dialogue, and an equal interlocutor, you cannot be equal in taking decisions. You can only be an equal partner in dialogue, if you have knowledge and if you are professional enough.

How does Slovenia compare with other new Member States?

Slovenia was extremely successful during extensive negotiations, particularly in joining the monetary union. Now, when this is not the political elites' project, the project of twenty-five people representing their country, now that it is the project of all of us, we are losing it. No one will come knocking at your door to offer things. It is necessary to have people with knowledge to achieve something, people who are also aware of their responsibility. Recently, there has been a lot of talk about businessmen who should be socially responsible. Of course, it is right for them to be so, but there are other fields in which we should be responsible, too. If we compare, I have to say that the Austrians had similar problems. Their negotiations took less time, but membership caught them unprepared; they needed a lot of time to establish how the project really functions. In negotiations, you only get an external picture; when you are inside, you see how it should function. Some have problems even after 20 years of membership; for example, Greece still has.

What has disappointed you the most?

I expected more motivation from people. Maybe I was too idealistic. Of course, I speak of those who have the task of finding true opportunities in Europe. During negotiations, we were leading the group, the Commission followed our analyses; but now, many new Member States outmatch us. So the criterion is recognition by the people who are creating Europe. It is true that we are small, and few in number, but others are more recognisable for their self-confidence. Before joining the EU, we were used to following the Commission's orders; now, after accession, when we are on our own and nobody gives us homework, it is our task to find it. We are weak here. We do not have enough people in Brussels; we also lack people outside the prescribed quota. It seems Slovenians are not interested in living and working in Brus-

INTERVIEW

sels. There are many bureaus and representative offices – a small Europe – but unfortunately, there are hardly any Slovenians there. The EU is much more than it appears; there are many things going on outside the official European institutions. There are hardly any Slovenians in these offices. If we do not know what to do in Brussels, who does? We have an unusual practice of thinking we can resolve everything with a phone call, without being there. That is not the way to do it. We should be aware that the Brussels bureaucracy works for twenty-seven countries, in which 450 million people live, and that our problem is not the only one. We conduct ourselves as if we are the only one and something special, as if our problems and ideas are the only ones. Until now, somehow, we have managed to get over it, but it is only a matter of time before we will not be able to do so anymore. We console ourselves that we still have enough time, but actually, we do not. The current crisis has brought us down to earth and we are beginning to be aware that every amount of money is very important. We should be aware that funds from Brussels are hard-earned. The competition is stronger, because demands and obligations are higher. It will become more and more difficult to get funds.

How do we navigate between national interests and common, European interests?

During the approach to the EU, we knew exactly what our priorities were; it never occurred to us to sacrifice a project to the interests of political parties. That time was one of the rare moments in history when Slovenians were able to stand together, which is praiseworthy. Today, the crisis is our priority. Here, the priorities for Slovenia should be clearly defined - we should not be caught up in problems with Croatia and Russia and, finally, by national affairs. We are overly engaged in them, which is wasting too much strength. Opportunities pass and are lost forever. As we were able to stand together during the approach to the EU and were able to find real experts, so we should act today. They should be found and invited to participate in projects in which political guidelines should not be the criteria. Slovenia should absolutely find a consensus in the greater inclusion of people in projects. Instead, various expert groups form, and compete with each other. It is a great loss for the nation. We cannot afford this, since we do not have enough people. Those who cannot find satisfaction and recognition here should go somewhere else. Countries used to have a monopoly on citizens' knowledge; now, that has gone. Just as they do not have a monopoly on goods, services and capital, they do not have a monopoly on people. We cannot expect experts to wait to be asked for their opinion by the state. EU membership is an opportunity which should

be used well. Membership itself is an indispensable condition, but far from sufficient.

And your vision of the future?

After all I have said, I still do not see the European story so pessimistically. Despite everything, our smallness, flexibility and 'Balkan mentality' are saving us. We are used to improvising; and, on the other hand, we are used to working and maintaining order. We never conducted great diplomacy in order to achieve our goals by greatness or power; we had to work hard and well. Nothing was given to us. It is an experience to learn from. In particular - a lot of work is needed, one should be persistent and not all results which are good for Slovenia are also good for Europe.

Probably, a kind of balance between national and European interests is required.

In this moment of crisis, the search for balance is more difficult. In Europe, it is a matter of redefining national interests. When we are doing well, no one looks in anyone's pocket, since everyone has enough, and then it is easy to speak of common, European interests. However, these are always at stake when economic activity declines. This recurs every 20 years. The need for self-preservation arises and, in such moments, national interests are considerably more expressed. Small countries tend more towards general interests than towards the individual. They obtain more from common interests than from just defending their own, while large countries are so large that the European interest represents added value to them, but not the basics. We should be aware that Slovenia will be as strong as the EU. If the EU falls apart, that will also be Slovenia's fate, since we share the EU sovereignty and participate in it. We share only a fragment of sovereignty, but we participate in a large part of European sovereignty, in the economic, political, military or scientific fields.

What further developments would you like to see?

Slovenia should strive to change the European project from a marketing and unduly economic project functioning only for the benefit of capital, to a social project. Now it is time to do more on the social project in order to prove that Europe is also a social project. With respect to all the concessions obtained by capitalists, workers do not represent the concerns of an individual country; solutions should be found within a wider, European framework. If we let the holders of capital use all the benefits for themselves, and leave redundancy and workers' problems to individual countries, this will not function. The European structure should be filled with knowledge and concern for the people. This is my vision of the future Europe.



BU\$IN€SS

Vesna Bertonceelj Popit, DELO, photo: STA



Niko Toš, head of the Centre, explains that these answers show how capitalism has taken deep roots in Slovenia.

According to 'Politbarometer', a public opinion survey by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenians feel most affected by the economic and financial crisis in reduced incomes, falling real estate values and the low value of stock, and only after these three, by the threat of losing employment. Niko Toš, head of the Centre, explains that these answers show how capitalism has taken deep roots in Slovenia.

But before the survey had been completed, unemployment had risen to almost 80,000 - by the end of March. According to some evaluations, this number could rise to 100,000 by the end of the year. Some of the worst forecasts even predict it could exceed the number of unemployed in the period after Slovenia gained independence, when it reached 130,000. Few companies are not announcing lay-offs, and even fewer are planning to recruit. While the President of the US, Barack Obama, substantiated the need for one of the crisis packages by stating that circumstances are improving, Slovenia is not that optimistic yet, even though there are reports of improvement in some sectors. What came as a surprise were great

differences in estimates of how far the Slovenian GDP might fall this year. The government Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development predicted a 4% drop. Other economists declared this to be too dire, and the Governor of the Bank of Slovenia, Marko Kranjec, predicted a 2% drop. Others again thought Kranjec's predictions out of date; for instance, Mojmir Mrak, of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana estimates that in these rapidly changing circumstances, even two-week-old predictions could be out of date. But the competition among institutes predicting economic situations is a good thing, says Mrak, because it enables more accurate predictions.



Mojmir Mrak estimates that in these rapidly changing circumstances, even two-week-old predictions could be out of date.

Toll-road vignettes and ideas of raising the age of retirement in order to ensure the stability of public finances has attracted greater public attention than these predictions of economic activity or government measures to help companies and banks. The Slovenian public supported the idea of introducing short-term and cheaper vignettes for vehicles of foreign citizens who only visit Slovenia for a short while or even just pass through. But the final agreement with the EU as to how much the vignettes should cost does not seem to have been reached yet. What is important for Slovenia is that the revenue from the sale of

vignettes ensures some funds for the payment of the loans Slovenia took to build the motorways. The Ministry of Transport assesses that the sale of vignettes will not raise as much revenue as expected, and announced that half-yearly vignettes would be withdrawn.

When the Government declared it would present new ideas for pension scheme reform in the summer, some wondered if the vacation period was the best time for such an important discussion. In the past few days, a government proposal has emerged to raise the retirement age and equalize it for both sexes at 65 years of age. It has provoked harsh criticism from unions, who have announced demonstrations, and employers, despite the fact that the latter have been more sympathetic to the retirement proposals. Public employees have also announced protests if the government intends to interfere with their salaries again. The Government response is that their only choice is between lower salaries for all, or firing some public employees, whose jobs at the moment are among the safest. Following an example from abroad, the first 'SOS store' has opened in Ljubljana, selling essential consumer goods to those most in need at significantly lower prices. The managers intended to open more stores in other Slovenian towns, but the first attempt to open an SOS store in Slovenia failed, and the store closed temporarily due to empty shelves. In the meantime, other Slovenian retailers are advertising extra cheap wares. In December last year, for instance, Spar had sixty-four outlets and eleven Interspar mega markets in Slovenia. An average of one hundred thousand customers used



photo: Mateja Jordovič Potočnik



Zdenko Pavček met his Croatian counterpart in Zagreb, where they agreed that the two countries do not focus enough on economic issues.

these shops every day last year, and the managing director of Spar, Igor Mervič, finds that this year customers are more interested in cheaper products, but also in eco-products, which are more expensive than average.

The President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, Zdenko Pavček, met his Croatian counterpart in Zagreb, Croatia, where they agreed that the two countries do not focus enough on economic issues. Croatia is the third largest buyer of Slovenian goods and the sixth largest supplier of the Slovenian market. The exchange of goods between the two countries reached two and a half billion euros last year, of which 1.7 billion was in Slovenian exports to Croatia, and 832 million in imports from Croatia. Apart from that, in the last three years, most of Slovenia's foreign investments have been in Croatia. In the light of the political uncertainties between the two countries, there is concern in Croatia that fewer Slovenian tourists will be spending their vacations there this year. So Croatian tourist organizations have launched special campaigns to welcome Slovenian guests and persuade them to come by reminding them that they did not stay away from the Adriatic coast even during the war in the Balkans.

The General Manager of the Chamber, Samo Hribar Milič, visited Kosovo with thirty representatives of Slovenian companies. Last year, Slovenia exported 80 million euros worth of goods to Kosovo, with imports at 3 million euros;

meanwhile, Slovenian investments in Kosovo amounted to 200 million euros and there are a number of companies still interested in investing there. The Revoz company and Adria Mobil from Novo Mesto have announced that Adria Mobil would lend some workers to Revoz to start working night shifts in April this year. At the same time, the decision of Renault to transfer part of their Clio 2 production to France attracted a lot of attention in Slovenia and in the EU. President Sarkozy explained the matter, as requested by the Slovenian Prime Minister.

The Government called on the management boards of banks and state-owned companies to reduce salaries and executive bonuses. With rising unemployment, a similar campaign is spreading throughout the world, but as in other countries, it is not going smoothly in Slovenia, either, as most executives are not prepared to reduce their incomes without significant public pressure.

When reconsidering the costs in the real as well as the public sector, a number of reports are emerging of extremely high payments made for various advisory and other services, which proves that along with the rest of the world Slovenia paid too little attention to, or even consciously allowed extremely high payments for various purposes which would probably have remained hidden had it not been for the financial crisis.

Due to the fact that the demand for domestic products has fallen, the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia decided to stimulate consumers by launching a campaign called 'Buy Homemade' ('Kupujte domače'). They

say that homemade products need to be promoted better. They are promoting greater self-sufficiency, as Slovenia imports half of its food, including 70% of vegetables.

The conference on constructing low-energy and passive buildings, which took place during the Construction and Building Materials Fair 'Megra' in the town of Gornja Radgona, showed that at the moment passive houses are selling well in Slovenia. But the enthusiasm for more complicated and expensive buildings did not happen over night. Slovenian experts have been promoting them for years, and even established a consortium, combining the Faculty of Architecture and thirty-six companies in the low-energy and passive building construction business.

According to the latest findings of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, approximately 58 per cent of population of Slovenia use the internet, which puts Slovenia below the European average. Slovenia is statistically also below the European average in numbers of broadband connections. Slovenia reached the fifty per cent mark of internet users in 2006 and, according to modest predictions, three quarters of Slovenians should be using the internet by 2015. In the most developed countries as many as 90 per cent of the population aged 10 to 74 use the internet.

According to provisional data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian exports of goods in the first two months of this year fell by a quarter compared with the same period last year, while imports fell by 30 per cent. Inflation in Slovenia in March was 1 per cent.



photo: STA



Rt. Hon. Terry Davis

Secretary General
of the Council
of Europe

The chairmanship of the Council of Europe provides Slovenia with an opportunity to complete what I would call a grand slam in international relations. For the next six months, it will be at the helm of the European intergovernmental organisation created in 1949 to defend and extend democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Council of Europe – which is completely separate from the European Union, and has 47 members compared with the EU's 27 – is the guardian of the European Convention on Human Rights, enforced through the European Court of Human Rights.

We are organised around three pillars.

The first pillar is the European legal space, which is the term used to describe the list of Council of Europe conventions – more than 200 of them. The new generation of Council of Europe conventions, such as our Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and our Cybercrime Convention, not only combines strong human rights safeguards with innovative approaches in international legal cooperation, but also is open to non-European countries. We propose global solutions to global problems.

The second pillar is the Council of Europe monitoring system. Most of our conventions have a monitoring body, which significantly improves compliance with the agreed rules.

The results of our monitoring systems feed directly into our assistance programmes – some of them undertaken jointly with the European Union or other international partners – and these assistance programmes represent the third pillar of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe is not a club of perfect democracies. Rather it is a place of work, where governments accept legally binding obligations and voluntarily submit themselves to rigorous monitoring of their compliance with those obligations. Some countries have more difficulties than others, but the fact is that we are achieving progress across Europe.

On 12th May and 18th November, the Republic of Slovenia will preside over the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Similarly to last year, when we presided over the Council of the European Union, we are faced with a unique challenge. The role that will be taken over by Slovenia carries an important responsibility. At the same time, it offers numerous opportunities both for the realisation of our foreign policy goals, and for the recognition and promotion of our country.

We will preside over the Council of Europe when it celebrates its 60th anniversary. The oldest pan-European organisation regards this celebration as an acknowledgement of its work, which constantly faces numerous important challenges. Its membership expanded from 10 to 47 countries. Decision-making is still to a great extent by mutual agreement. Many new European institutions were established which compete with the activities of the European Council in many fields. The current economic situation is also an important factor influencing its budget and, consequently, its operations. It also affects the budgets of member states and their activities within the scope of the organization's values and commitment.

Stepping behind the steering wheel Slovenia accepts the responsibility to successfully confront the above-mentioned issues. Furthermore, it will receive the agenda for the meetings of the Council of Ministers, which covers many issues whose success is extremely important in realising the organization's goals and mission. Slovenia will therefore have to dedicate a lot of attention to reforming the European Human Rights Court, which faces many problems. The post-conflict establishment of peace in Georgia, the situation in the south Caucasus and pending Belarus membership of the Council of Europe are challenges for the country chairing the Council.

The programme of the Slovenian Presidency is founded on the commitments of the organisation that were made during the third summit of the Council of Europe in Warsaw in 2005. During our Presidency, the priorities will be the responsibility to the Council of Europe, as well as the common efforts of the organization and its members to establish a Europe founded on democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. As mentioned, the Presidency offers an opportunity for the country to contribute its share to the development and promotion of the organization. Thus the priorities of the Presidency will express Slovenia's dedication to protecting minorities and improving the state of the Roma community in Europe. In addition, attention will be dedicated to the rights of children, preserving cultural heritage, and rights connected to health and biomedicine. Special attention will be paid to South-eastern Europe. Slovenia will make efforts for greater commitments from the Council of Europe in the fields of the rule of law, democracy and human rights in the region.

The project of holding the Presidency of an international institution with such an extensive membership is demanding. But Slovenia has already shown it is capable of carrying out such a task when it presided over the Council of the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

photo: personal archive



Marjetica Bole

Ambassador –
Permanent
Representative
of Slovenia to the
Council of Europe

**I am looking
forward to
the challenge
ahead of me**



Jože Osterman, photo: National Gallery archive

ZORAN MUŠIČ

AN OUTSTANDING FIGURE OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY SLOVENIAN ART

It is only in recent years that Slovenia has really come to know one of its great artists, Zoran Mušič. A physically striking man, whose physiognomy was a clear indication of the unique spirit that dwelt in his body, and who, despite a life that was never easy or comfortable, lived to the grand old age of 96, he left his mark on the end of the last century. Not only with the works which his friend of many years, the renowned gallery director Zoran Kržišnik, collected into two exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (of which he was director) in 1990 and 1997, or, even more notably, with the important exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris, opened by François Mitterand and Milan Kučan, respectively presidents of France and Slovenia at the time, but above all for the fact that there is practically no major world art collection that does not contain at least one of his works in its catalogue. This year, on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, Slovenia bows to him, enormously proud to call him its son, but also with something of a guilty conscience, since there is no doubt that it brought bitterness to his life in the early post-war years.

Mušič was born in 1909 in Bukovica near Bilje, close to the Soča (Isonzo) Front, where as a boy he experienced

the devastation of the First World War, something which returned to his artist's memory with the burnt trees on the wide plateaux of the Karst. He graduated from the Zagreb Academy of Arts in 1934 and soon began exhibiting his works. When the Germans occupied the Primorska (Littoral) region following the capitulation of Italy, he was arrested and sent to Dachau, where he remained until the end of the war. Dachau shocked and challenged him, and he returned to Ljubljana immediately after the end of the war with over 100 extraordinary drawings of the horrors he had witnessed in the camp. But post-war conditions were strange, and in 1945 he abandoned Yugoslavia, a move that was perhaps prompted by jealous fellow-artists and self-satisfied authorities, first settling in Gorizia and then in 1952 moving on to Paris. Venice and Paris became his homes and the places where he associated with other members of the art world. Veno Pilon was one of those who were closest to him. Gradually, Mušič became an increasingly respected cultural ambassador of Slovenia and Yugoslavia and his exhibitions became known throughout Europe – from Austria via Germany and – hardest of all – to the most prestigious galleries of France. But when we look at the galleries in which Mušič exhibited – the Musée de la Ville in

Paris, the Musée National d'Art Moderne in the Pompidou Centre, the principal art gallery in Munich, the exhibition centre in Kassel – it is easy to see that from this point of view too, Mušič is an artist who has no equal in Slovenia.

His reputation around the world was finally established with a cycle of works inspired by Dachau and entitled *We Are Not The Last*. Next came a series on the perception of the fragility of life, where tangles of roots and burnt trees prevail, and then placid scenes of Venetian churches and landscapes whose tranquil beauty point to the wonder but at the same time the vulnerability and fragility of existence. An awareness of the delicate, sensitive and transitory nature of things, which for this reason must be protected and respected, is the common thread of his oeuvre, which some, viewing it superficially, might even consider visually unattractive, but which then surprises us with its immense spirituality and depth. The decision to make the celebration of the centenary of the artist's birth the main commemorative event of 2009 in the sphere of culture – in other words a sort of Mušič Year – is a deserved recognition of an artistic genius who has finally returned home.



3rd International ART & CULTURE



Albert Kos, photo: STA

41st INTERNATIONAL WRITERS MEETING, BLEĐ

The international gathering of writers in the town of Bled organized by the Slovenian PEN Centre has long been traditional. Each year, writers from all over the world are able to meet and exchange opinions on a number of topics regarding their work and the standing and influence they have in society as writers. This year's 41st gathering took place between March 26 and March 29. Approximately 60 participants from 25 countries attended two round table discussions, where they talked about the role of culture and the media in the process of liberating Central, Eastern and Southern Europe two decades ago. The third round table discussion was dedicated to images of womanhood in literature, particularly the dedication of literary heroines to peace, happiness and prosperity.

The President of the Republic of Slovenia, Danilo Türk, welcomed the participants and participated in one of the discussions. He emphasised the lack of critical thought in today's journalism, stating that political correctness contributes to the impoverishment of today's media discourse, while too often the persuasiveness of arguments is too weak, which leads to insufficient and superficial judgement and understanding of the ongoing processes in the world today. The mayor of the town of Bled, Janez Fajfar, prepared a reception for the guests, as did the mayor of the city of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković, when they visited the capital.

There were several accompanying events at which the participants read their poetry and prose. A presentation of the French poet and translator Marc Alyn was held at Ljubljana City Museum. Marc Alyn is responsible for a number of extraordinary translations of Slovenian poetry into French, as well as for putting Slovenian literature on the world map, whereby an important landmark was the French edition of the poetry of Slovenian avant-garde poet Srečko Kosovel, translated by Marc Alyn and published in 1965 in the famous collection *Poètes d'aujourd'hui* by Seghers of Paris. Unfortunately, due to illness, Marc Alyn could not take part in the event.

The Slovenian PEN Centre was established as early as 1926. Participants at the 1933 World Congress in the town of Dubrovnik were among the first to condemn fascism and Nazism at the international level. PEN was forced to close down in 1941 with the occupation of Yugoslavia, and it did not revive until 1962. In 1965 it organized the 33rd World PEN Congress in the town of Bled. The congress was the first ever to host writers from the Soviet Union, who took part as observers, making the event a landmark in communication between writers of the then divided Western and Eastern world. Ever since, the Bled meetings have upheld and encouraged openness in writers' dialogue and enabled writers to respond to the problems, conflicts and contradictions of the modern world.



Jože Osterman, photo: Nada Žgank

BUNKER OPENS SPACE

In recent decades, both of the largest Slovenian cities, Ljubljana and Maribor, acquired some new cultural organisations, institutions or associations, through which new social, notably cultural and artistic practices were brought to their urban spaces. Subjects such as Metelkova and Bunker in Ljubljana and Kibla in Maribor are now trying to reach the level, which has already become an integral part of urban life in many cities of Western Europe and the USA and represents a focal point of social integration. I intentionally mention only the most established organisations, as otherwise it could be said that in both cities there is already a solid network of small, but innovative and vital non-governmental organisations, which irrepressibly create completely new forms of social integration.

In many aspects, Ljubljana Bunker paved the way. From a small group that ten years ago primarily produced low-budget dance and theatre projects, a non-profit institution grew, which is formally still intended for the organisation and performance of cultural events. Although the number of people working for the organization is not much greater than at the beginning, they have developed into one of the most interesting creative teams in the country in terms of their innovation, intensive work and the broadness of their programmes. Nevenka Koprivšek, the founder of Bunker and today still its creative director,

is undoubtedly the conceptual mother of this development. In 2004, Bunker took over the management of part of the old city power station and, in agreement with the Ministry of Culture and the electricity distribution company, converted it into an excellent space for cultural activities. Under Bunker's management, the old power station has become an exceptionally lively cultural centre, with an unbelievable range of events, where many non-institutional local and foreign artistic groups participate. "There is so much on offer, that it is difficult to make a selection," says Koprivšek, who adds that, despite the interesting and diverse organisation of this part of the programme, she is sorry that Bunker cannot obtain more funds for its own productions, as they are able to organize only two projects per year on average. However, these are projects that can take your breath away! In addition to its star turn, the famous Betontanc dance group, in recent years Bunker carried out extremely successful projects with the choreographer and dancer Sanja Neškovič Peršin, musician Milko Lazar, and director Jasna Hribernik; its performance called the Choir of Complaints was a high-profile production, and its own trademarks cannot be overlooked: the Young Lions Festival, City of Women and the newer Drugajanja, a project with the Second High School in Maribor, which informs pupils about modern art and promotes its distribution to various environments.



Bunker's latest programmes, with a significant proportion of the financing from European funds, are marked by the desire not only to show artistic production, but use it to flood the social environment, thereby making art a vehicle for active change. Some of their projects deal with issues that could be of key significance for our future, but of which we do not yet have enough knowledge or experience. For example, Sevnica Primary School has an interesting programme for integrating school and culture; the Sotenutto Project (which is led by an organization in Italy, with Bunker being one of many organizations involved) is trying to introduce art into individual communities or city quarters as a behavioural style and an essential element of the urban environment; the international association of Balkan Express Projects is trying to re-establish links with cultural areas in the south-east which were interrupted years ago, and perhaps create new ones; the Art and Climate Changes project should inform people, without moralising, about changes happening in nature and in themselves and about using art as self-reflection contributing significantly to the search for new lifestyles. Koprivšek adds, modestly, that in this field, Bunker is primarily a laboratory attempting what no one has done before, and that it could also fail; but youth and the enthusiasm of her young team is almost certainly a guarantee that at least some things will succeed.

Text and photo: Matevž Lenarčič

THE ALPS – A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

A monograph entitled 'The Alps – a bird's eye view' by Matevž Lenarčič (photos) and Janez Bizjak (text) has been published by the PanAlp publishing house. From 16 April to 16 June, an exhibition of 100 photos will also be on show at the Jakopič Promenade in Ljubljana. Photographs portray the characteristics and specifics of different regions of the Alps with a clear artistic style and understandable viewpoint. Text explain the geopolitical framework of specific regions of the Alps (geology, geography, population, culture, flora, fauna, etc.) with clear guidelines for future sustainable planning.

The Alps are a single geographical and geological entity, yet they also constitute a culturally, biologically and climatically very diverse region. Besides the Mediterranean region, the Alps are the second largest ecosystem in Europe. Even in the distant past this mountain range posed a natural barrier to migration flows, and at the same time provided refuge and a rich setting for habitation. Different relative elevations of the terrain offer varied conditions for a wide range of plant and animal life. The mild influences of the Mediterranean gulfs of Trieste and

Liguria further inland give way to the harsh Alpine climate, with substantial temperature deviations and notable icing conditions. Instead of political boundaries and nationalism, the Alpine region must become a fundamental identity for the population living there. Life in the Alps is universal. The shepherd from the Kamnik-Savinian Alps understands the existential problems of the shepherd living in the French Alps more profoundly than anyone in Paris or Ljubljana. At the same time, the Alps are an outstanding tourist destination, one that must invite the large number of eager visitors with caution in order to preserve these priceless jewels with their unique features that make them so beautiful. There is little doubt that the priority of Alpine development is the balance between tourism and the preservation of the living conditions of the people who inhabit the region. Only when all Alpine nations develop sensitivity and responsibility for this region will we fully realize how to cherish and preserve this unique environment.

Because of the outstanding qualities of the Alpine region, we are obliged to preserve it for future generations.



Jana Bogataj, photo: STO

PROCESSIO LOCOPOLITANA

In the picturesque Alpine foothills of Gorenjska is the small town of Škofja Loka, which, through its well-preserved medieval city centre, attracts numerous visitors. However, very few know what a great treasure is hidden behind the walls of the Capuchin Monastery: the earliest preserved script from the Baroque period in Europe. To offer more and more people the opportunity to share this cultural heritage, plans are in place to revive the Škofja Loka Passion Play every six years. Therefore, this year can be considered a new starting point.

Already from afar, one can see the red light illuminating the Castle of Škofja Loka during Lent and Easter. The red denotes suffering and blood, and the light marks the commemoration of Christ's Passion each year by the inhabitants of this small town northwest of Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana. But this year, the whole town will be wrapped in red, because, after an interval of nine years, this unique passion play, of great world significance, will once more be enacted. The organisers have been particularly careful to preserve as many authentic elements as possible dating back to the year of the play's origin, 1721, so that the visitor can plunge into the Baroque period. The possibilities are abundant:

Škofja Loka, whose city centre was declared a cultural monument in 1987, seems predestined to serve as a setting. The alleyways, with their medieval structures and houses show that, in architectural terms, little has changed since the 16th Century. In addition, the inhabitants have spared no efforts

in making the atmosphere of the town even more authentic: red candles shine in the windows, flags flutter along the walls of the buildings and the smells of medieval dishes issue from the restaurants.

Stages have been erected on four original scenes, where the spectators, while listening to Gregorian chant, wait for the first echo of the trot of horses, which announces the beginning of the Sixth Processio Locopolitana. During the two-hour performance, more than 800 performers move in the form of a procession past the audience – some on horseback, some on donkeys or on movable stages carried by some 20 men dressed in monk's habits, or simply on foot, accompanied by the clangour of medieval tools. The play is about the biblical tradition of Christ's Passion in 20 scenes, which, with a mixture of drama and reproduction of images, depict the story of the human kind from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, through the Last Supper to the salvation of humanity. Indeed, it is presented in the same form as originally written almost 300 years ago.

The origins of the play were in 1598 and 1599, when Slovenia was hit by a plague, which cost lives of hundreds of people. The survivors tried to soothe their fears of the disease and a painful death by organising Good Friday processions in remembrance of Christ's suffering. Following the first penitential processions, which had been held in Ljubljana, the Capuchin friar Romuald Marušič was instructed to organise a passion play. He also wrote the correspond-

ing text and determined the forms of the chant. In view of the domination of the German language, to which the Slovenians had been, under various rule, subjected for around 1,000 years, it is indeed remarkable that he wrote the play in Slovenian, and in this manner went down in history as the first author of a Slovenian drama. This cultural treasure is, of course, especially protected, so that it underwent only small linguistic change.

The director of this year's enactment, Borut Gartner, paid particular attention to preserving the original charm, and, following the tradition of previous performances (1721, 1727, 1728, 1999 and 2000), cast all the parts of the play by exclusively choosing volunteers from Škofja Loka and its surroundings. Three hairdressers and fourteen make-up artists who, in a matter of a few hours, transform the population of a town into figures from the Baroque period, also work on a voluntary basis. Since September last year, dressmakers have been working on fitting costumes, which strongly follow the symbolic colour pattern of white, black and red.

Therefore, it is not hard to realise how much the inhabitants cherish their cultural heritage and cultivate the medieval elements of their identity. Alongside this historical resonance, the focal question raised by the Škofja Loka Passion Play will never lose any of its relevance, concerning as it does the purpose and significance of human existence.



Jože Osterman, photo: STA

ROMA CULTURE MONTH ROMANO CHON IN ROMA - ENRAPTURED SLOVENIA

In April, the Slovenian cities of Ljubljana and Maribor were awaiting an interesting cultural event. Under the spiritual patronage of the Council of Europe, which in 2008 took the initiative to establish Routes of Roma Culture and Heritage in an effort to draw attention to the status of this people (probably the most discriminated and displaced in Europe, who also do not have their own country), Slovenia played its part in this initiative with the first Roma Culture Month. In Ljubljana, it was held in the premises of the main Slovenian cultural institutions, such as the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum (which is also the co-organiser of the festival, besides the Roma Academic Club) and some other eminent cultural locations in both cities. The honorary committee, presided over by the Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, included the Human Rights Ombudsman, Zdenka Čebašek Travnik, the director of Europe Centre in Ljubljana, Kristina Plavšak Kranjc, the president of the Roma Union of Slovenia, Jože Horvat Muc, the director of the Office for National Minorities, Stanko Baloh, and the mayors of Ljubljana and Maribor, Zoran Jankovič and Franc Kangler. This detail indicates the desire of Slovenia to devote maximum attention to our Roma people and proved that we are able to settle all open issues in this field, which are quite numerous. A determination to move beyond prejudices and stereotypes regarding Roma people - which have recently become even stronger - with whom we have to live a normal life, was evident at every event in the festival.

All the best Roma performers appeared at the festival, which began on April 2 and lasted for the whole month. The musicians of Šukar, Nas Three, Kontrabant, paum Tschack (France), Romano Drom (Hungary), Etno Klarentino, Mlada beltinška banda, Little Langa and Koko & Mandovi groups enraptured the public with their extremely melodious Roma music, and a large audience also discovered the artistic achievements of the Roma in the fields of photography, dance, film and literature; there were also special programmes for children. There were altogether more than fifty events, including round tables and lectures on Roma issues, where many experts and Roma people themselves spoke of their situation in Slovenia. This was one of the best organised and most profound events in the independent Slovenia, significantly contributing to mutual understanding between the majority people and an important proportion of its Roma citizens. Parliament Speaker Pavel Gantar addressed the main ceremony marking International Roma Day in Lendava on 10 April saying that this holiday was an opportunity to point to the openness and multiculturalism of Slovenia and the efforts for tackling segregation and discrimination in society. "The Roma community must be recognised and acknowledged as an equal part of Slovenian society, and the interests, wishes and needs of this community should be treated equally and sometimes even seen as more important than the interests of the majority population," Gantar said.



Jože Osterman, photo: archive

CONCERT OF THE YEAR UNDER THE AUSPICES OF KD GROUP - LAIBACH AND WAGNER PERFORMED BY THE RTV SLOVENIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

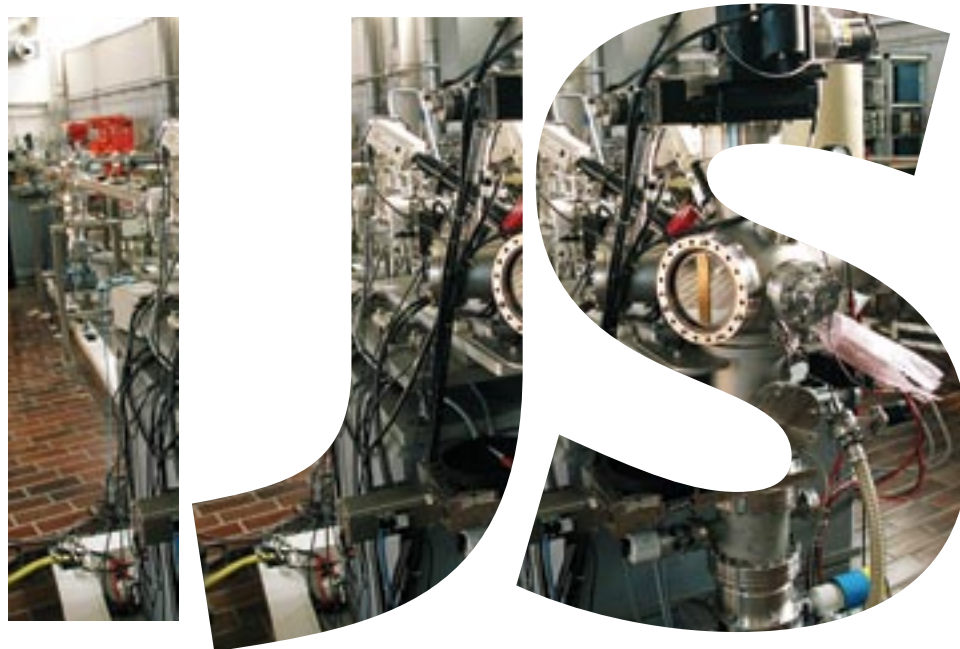
The new musical project entitled VOLK-SWAGNER which took place on 18 April in Gallusova Hall in Cankarjev Dom presented collaboration between the controversial group Laibach and the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra under the guidance of Izidor Leitingner. The performers decided to search their inspiration in the act of reinterpretation, which draws a subtle map of journey from disputed Wagner to decadent Jazz modernists. Wagner was placed on interpretive borders of no man's land between the specific Miles Davis sound and ambient electronic music.



Prof. Boris Žemva, Dr. Boris Pukl, photo: IJS archive

The Jožef Stefan Institute

the largest research institute in Slovenia



IJS conducts a broad spectrum of basic and applied research. The main fields of activity of its approximately 860 employees are natural sciences, life sciences and technical sciences. The Institute performs top-level research and the development of technologies, such as nanotechnologies, new materials, biotechnologies, management and production technologies, communication technologies, computer and knowledge technologies, environmental technologies and reactor technologies. Its scientists have achieved a global reputation.

Research of interaction of plasma with fusion reactor walls

One of the most eminent Slovenian institutions was established in 1949, taking its name from the eminent Slovenian physicist Jožef Stefan, who is also the only Slovenian after whom a physical law has been named (Stefan's Law of Radiation).

IJS is financed entirely through national and international projects, which the Institute obtains through various tenders or directly by marketing in commercial companies. The largest contributor is the Slovenian Research Agency, on behalf of which the Institute executes research programmes, basic and applied research projects and educates junior researchers.

IJS combines and disseminates knowledge and technologies for the well-being of society. It provides top-level education and research and development of technologies at the highest international level. The main goals of IJS are providing expert scientific and applied service and educating top-level staff through procedures, products and consultations.

PHYSICS - FROM BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS TO COMPLEX STRUCTURES

Modern research fields in physics comprise research of basic building blocks of nature, study of the structure of atomic cores and atoms, understanding and manipulation of complex particles of nanometre dimensions and biological structures, and findings in the field of superconductivity and magnetism. Physicists at the IJS study matter in almost every condensed condition form: from liquids to crystals, from thin layers to biological tissues, from magnetic insulators to superconductors, from carbon nanotubes to liquid crystals. They establish the basic properties of these materials and try to find ways of using them.

IJS researchers are important contributors to great international collaborations (Large Hadron Collider in CERN near Geneva and KEK-B in Tsukuba in Japan), which are trying to understand the behaviour of the most basic particles at the highest energies available to humans. In the framework of measurements in the Jefferson Lab (USA) and MAMI (Germany) laboratories, they successfully studied proton structure and for the first time succeeded in microscoping protons. The main thread of theoretical research into basic particles is the unification theory of all basic interactions, with which they tried to explain the origin of neutrino mass.

Researchers at the IJS completely master the nanotechnology of manipulations at the atomic and molecular level, which puts them among an exclusive circle of nine research institutions in the world. They discovered a huge electromechanical response in applicable ferroelectric relaxors, which can be of great significance for future planning and the production of sensors or actuators. Understanding superconductivity phenomenon at high temperatures, magnetism in unusual webs, and the connections between them is a great challenge both for theoretical and experimental research, which was performed on examples of copper oxide superconductors and fullerene compounds.

Research of complex systems, such as liquid crystals or biological systems, has a long-lasting tradition at the IJS. They used laser pincers in nematic colloid systems to study forces between small colloid particles, and discovered that these forces enable the formation of stable two-dimensional colloid crystals. Theoretic and experimental research in the field of biophysics focuses on understanding DNA structure understanding and the forces acting between structures, on viral structure, and particularly on RNA packaging into viruses, the morphology of lipid vesicles and their clusters, and vesicle self-reproduction. Fruitful cooperation between the IJS and the Kolektor Idrija company enabled the development of new, environment-friendly procedure for the plasma treatment of micro-composite intermediate product surfaces.

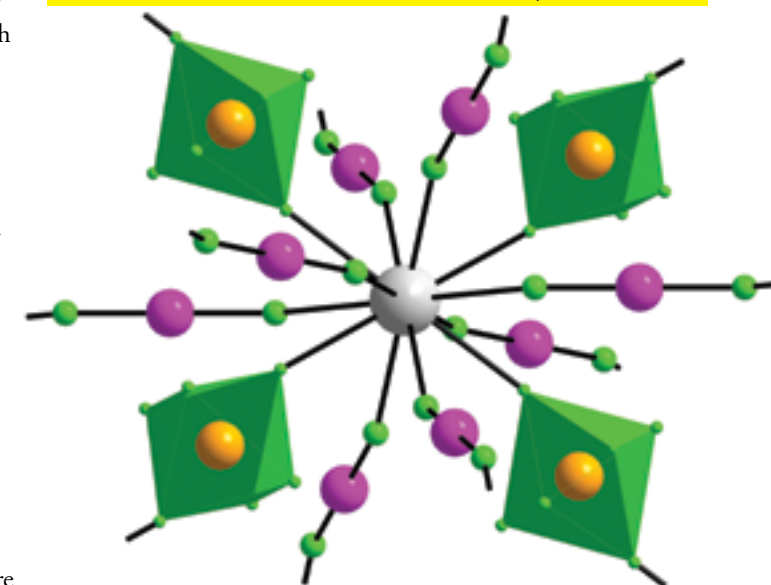
CHEMISTRY, MATERIALS, BIOCHEMISTRY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In the field of fluorine chemistry, the IJS researchers synthesized a series of new binary compounds with metal in the highest oxidation states, and a series of new coordination compounds with unusual ligands, which places the researchers among the best in the world in synthetic chemistry of fluorine compounds.

Research of modern materials enabled the development of new electronic components and clusters for the production

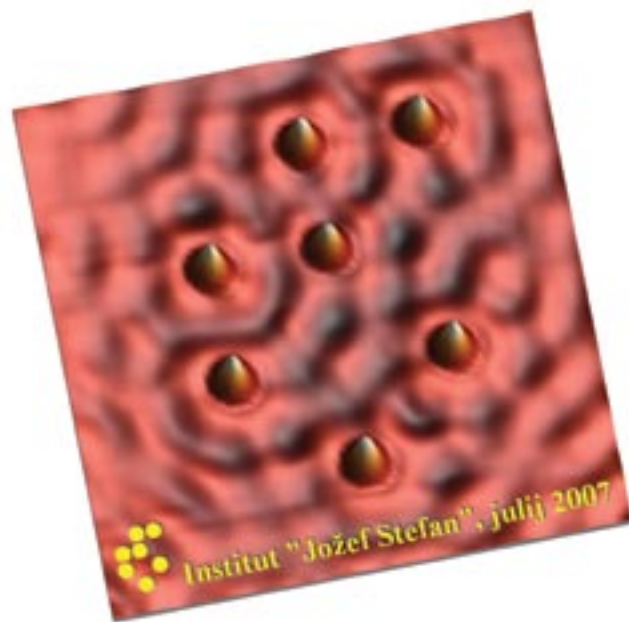
of advanced electronic devices for wireless image and sound transmission. The researchers were the first in the world to synthesize super-paramagnetic nanoparticles of barium hexaferrite using a hydrothermal method. In co-operation with the Iskra Feriti factory, they developed methods to synthesize various nanoparticles of magnetic spinel ferrites and their stable suspensions - magnetic fluids. They developed SiC-based composites to be used in the fusion reactor. They developed a ceramic head for a hip prosthesis with gradient composition, in which the head's surface is made of biocompatible and wear-resistant aluminium oxide. They were the first to prepare rod-shaped and tubular Co-Pt nanostructures with excellent magnetic properties using direct electro-coating. They succeeded in preparing the first lead-free transparent ceramic relaxor, which is distinguished by good di-electrical, electrostriction and electro-optical properties. Together with the Faculty of Medicine in

Environment of Ba²⁺ cation in [Ba(XeF₂)₅](RuF₆)₂ compound



Ljubljana, they introduced into Slovenia research of ceramics on the basis of tetragonal zirconium oxide for use in dental medicine. In the field of biomedicine, they discovered an association between lysosomes and lysosomal proteases and apoptosis, which is extremely important for removal of cancer cells, and on the basis of which some cancer drugs function. In the field of neurology, they were the first to demonstrate, in a mouse motor neuron, that a certain secretory phospholipase A2 can enter the cytosol of a living cell from an extracellular space. In the field of biotechnology, a transgenic potato plant was created which expresses the inhibitor equestatin acting on proteases in the intestines of Colorado beetle, thereby inhibiting the beetle's reproduction. The patent was purchased by the multinational Monsanto company.

In the field of the environment, new chemical and nuclear analytical techniques were discovered, for use in basic and applied research of the distribution of elements and their isotopes, ionic types, and inorganic and organic compounds in nature. They developed a series of environment-friendly technologies.



The >IJS< logo is composed of copper atoms on a copper surface Cu(111) at 9K

INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGIES

For many years, the "Jožef Stefan" Institute has been performing top-level research and developing technologies in various fields: automation, robotics, process management technologies, communication technologies, computer technologies, knowledge technologies and intelligent systems.

The Institute performs research and development projects in the field of bio-cybernetics, kinesiology and environmental medicine, enabling new knowledge to be used in the field of biomedical devices, protective equipment, and in the introduction of modern methods into different types of use in medicine and sports.

The Institute investigates telecommunication systems and technologies, next-generation telecommunication networks, and develops components and integrated systems, as well as information society services and applications. The researchers develop and plan wireless networks, methods and programme tools for modelling, simulating, analysing and synthesising communication systems to provide communication networks security, to develop sensor networks and complex processing of biological signals.

The extensive activity comprises basic research and the development of applications in the field of information technologies, computer systems, knowledge technologies and intelligent systems. The research includes automated planning of computer structures and systems, particularly in optimising problem solving, engineer planning and logistics, advanced information technology for knowledge capture, storage and management, as well as new methods and techniques



Robotic object identification

in intelligent computer systems. The research also includes intelligent analysis of the data, texts and web (machine learning, data mining, discovering rules within the data), semantic webs, social network analysis, speech and language technologies, computer linguistics, decision support, knowledge management, ambient intelligence, evolution calculation, research algorithms, intelligent sensors, distributed control systems and network services.

REACTOR ENGINEERING, FUSION AND ENERGETICS

Nuclear energy and nuclear technology are also important activities. The Institute participated in constructing the Krško nuclear plant, and today contributes significantly to its reliable operation with expert analyses, measurements, staff and training of future plant employees. The Institute performs basic and applied research in the field of nuclear technology and safety, together with various security analyses.

Another important focus of the Institute is on fusion as the basis for future fusion reactors. In the framework of the EFDA (European Fusion Development Agreement) and in association with other European laboratories, the "Jožef Stefan" Institute performs basic research and development projects in the field of plasma physics, structural material development and the nuclear technology of fusion reactors.

The Institute also conducts research, studies and counselling in the efficient use of energy, long-term energy planning, the environmental impacts of energy use and transformation, and activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Andrej Savelli, photo: Spinalis archive

For years, Tomaž Ham managed a company creating advertising banners. Because he spent most of his time sitting down, he developed back pains. In 1999, he saw some physicians and physiotherapists, who advised him to use an orthopaedic ball while working. He noted that using the orthopaedic ball was useful, but during work it is quite tiring and impractical. So he created a chair for his own use. He made it so that it perfectly simulates sitting on an orthopaedic ball. But then, it did not look like a real chair. Nonetheless, customers seeing him about advertisements also noticed it and wanted one. It was only then that he started to think about producing and marketing it. But first he wanted to know what the professional public thought of it.

SPINALIS

Chairs to bring
back your health



He contacted Prof. Janko Popovič MD, an orthopaedist, who sounded rather sceptical during their first telephone conversation. He said that he gets up to 20 chairs for evaluation every year and had not recommended a single one. "Although full of doubts, I visited him. The moment he congratulated me, I felt in high spirits and decided to start production."

He presented the patented invention at the Alpe Adria Dom 2000 Fair. Along with his girlfriend, he made four chairs before five in the morning on the opening day. However, it paid off, because the reaction of people visiting the fair was excellent. And the success continued at other domestic fairs like the Ljubljana Furniture Fair and Celje Trade Fair. Many visitors came to see them in the sales showroom at the close of fair.

The thousandth order for a SpinaliS chair was placed at the 2001 Celje Trade Fair. Going through eleven development stages, the chair finally acquired its form as a modern office chair. And sales are growing daily. Some 35,000 chairs have been sold so far - almost 10,000 just last year. The SpinaliS company has grown, and in recent years increased its production capacities. At the same time, they managed to acquire European Union funds, which they used to automate production with two welding robots. Because they are so successful in the chair business, they gave up their original activity of producing advertising banners.

And what is so revolutionary about the SpinaliS chair? It is because the seat is fixed to a very strong, yet elastic spring, which enables the seat to move in all directions, following the movements of the body. At first, the position when sitting down seems totally unstable because it is like sitting on the therapeutic ball which the chair imitates. In this way you are forced into being active while sitting, thus keeping the right posture. Furthermore, this means that your back muscles are being stretched all the time, thereby becoming stronger. The pressure on inter-vertebral discs is reduced, having a positive effect on the

spine. When using a normal, ergonomically shaped chair, the spine is put 'under severe pressure' in the region of the lower back when trying to lean, causing aches and pains. Sitting passively in ergonomically shaped chairs with a fixed seat causes pain and damages the back, due to uneven pressure on discs. Pressure is put on the spine in the lower back, with every movement of the body damaging the spine and inflicting pain.

Of course, at SpinaliS they offer more than one model of the chair - they have developed eight. The most basic is the Smart model, which comes closest to the orthopaedic ball. It is a stool intended for anyone sitting down for longer periods of time - people who work sitting down, or whose workplace does not have enough space for bigger SpinaliS models with a back or arm rests. It is intended for workplaces in production, shops and banks, for use at cash registers and special technical positions during work. The Hacker model, as already suggested by its name, is for computer enthusiasts who spend much of their time at the computer. The Dent model was developed for the requirements of special positions during work (dentists, dental technicians, ophthalmologists, the electronics industry, etc.) where you have to bend over to examine a patient or work-surface, whilst staying mobile. The last in line is the top-notch "managerial" Pilot model which, due to its construction, includes a somewhat stronger spring than the other models. But you can still sit actively.

In recent years, they have succeeded in foreign markets. They have established a good distribution network. For the moment, they are sticking to a slightly restrictive policy and are not attempting to present themselves more aggressively abroad. They are also very careful in selecting distributors. So it was not long ago that they started to sell their chairs in the USA and the Gulf.

As they say at SpinaliS, 'Buy your own SpinaliS - your spine deserves it.'

Visit their website to see their entire range of chairs, as well as their network of authorized distributors www.spinalis.com.

The people at the company are aware that no patent can prevent forgery or imitation products appearing on the market. That is why they emphasise their knowledge and quality. There was a case of business man in an East European country ordering a copy of a chair in China. But they managed to solve the problem and prevented production and sales.

SpinaliS offers chairs which are a bit more expensive than comparable office chairs. This is (for the moment) the consequence of small-scale and customer-oriented production (the chairs can be ordered in any colour and material). Also, much of the production is still done manually. On the other hand, people at the SpinaliS are aware that you have to invest in your health. In this case, the investment is worth it. It is said that health insurance institutes in some European countries have calculated that it would cost them less if they co-financed the purchase of such a chair. That is, rather than pay for health care for people with back problems.

Tomaž Ham wants as many people as possible to afford the chair. Thus, not long ago they started a pilot project of introducing the chairs to schools - the place where spine problems usually start. "We've had the idea of making school chairs for a long time. Because children do not sit in one position all the time. Since damage and defects from childhood can be observed later, we set a goal for ourselves of developing school chairs for primary school and later stages. When our son went to school 3 years ago, we started a project called "SpinaliS v šole" (SpinaliS for Schools) in cooperation with the primary school in Kolezija, in Ljubljana. We put SpinaliS school chairs (production has not started and they are not yet on sale) in one class. We did not put them in the other class, the control class. The project is being monitored by a physiatrist and a psychologist. They watch the activity of the children in both classes - that is, in the control class where there are no SpinaliS chairs, and in the other one where they use SpinaliS chairs. The results and data obtained in this way will help us develop the SpinaliS school model. The results are promising, and the project is underway. This year we will make a third series of the chairs."



Polona Prešeren, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik and Darinka Mladenovič

The Region beyond (and around) the Mura River

The plains beyond the Mura River may seem distant from the centre of Slovenia, as if time passes differently over there; as if time and space flow in a special dimension. This landscape of plains, river beds, ponds, thermal springs and endless fields, still hides numerous gems. These are places, where people are particularly open and friendly, giving the region across the Mura River a distinctive character.

Prekmurje is the northernmost region of Slovenia. Almost half of it is known as Goričko – a landscape of hills hiding beautiful spots to visit. The southern part of Prekmurje is mostly flat. It was covered by the Pannonian Sea millions of years ago. The sea is long gone, but the extremely rich soil, left when the sea receded, is the basis for successful agriculture and a delicious cuisine.

Paradise for bon vivants

Great food and wine are not the only lures to Prekmurje. The people are the soul of the Mura River region. They are extremely hospitable, open and warm. Despite their special dialect, often incomprehensible to other Slovenians, visitors still love to return to this part of the country. Many crafts are practiced here – above all, pottery, as clay is abundant. After WW II the number of potters greatly decreased, but family tradition passes the knowledge on to younger generations and pottery today is again a common craft. Traditional products include a pitcher, pütra (a pitcher with a narrow neck) and bidrača (a ceramic baking tray).

Prekmurje offers numerous walking paths and is a paradise for cyclists and all who know how to enjoy themselves. Healing springs are inviting and spas offer excellent service. You can visit the Moravske Toplice Spa or the Terme Lendava Spa. Also, before you cross the Mura River, there are Zdravilišče Radenci Health Resort and Terme Banovci Spa.

The Sun House (Sončna hiša)

The Sun House in the village of Banovci (www.soncna-hisa.si) is a wonderful oasis of intimacy and relaxation, where guests discover their paradise. A luxury and designer decorated boutique hotel, it offers an original idea of how to enjoy one's spare time and guarantees a five-star hotel experience. With a personal approach to their guests, unequalled in Slovenia, it is an oasis for bon vivants – the beautiful natural surroundings and the first-class service, cuisine and wines heighten one's senses. Only homemade and healthy food finds its way to the table – jams, salamis and spreads, as well as homemade bread and other culinary delights.

Five luxurious and exclusive suites are available, each uniquely equipped, giving this hotel an additional charm and a personal note: Limegrass, Sea Memories, Natura, Manhattan and the family suite named Stork. And we should not forget to mention the wellness centre, a must for those who know how to enjoy themselves.

Sights of Prekmurje

● **The stork** is a special feature of Prekmurje; 90 per cent of the stork population in Slovenia nest in Prekmurje, and their distinctive nests perched atop wooden poles have become a local symbol. Approximately 200 pairs live in Slovenia, where they are among the most popular birds.

● **The Mura River mill:** a post-card image of Prekmurje, although only two remain today. Seventy years ago, there were over 90 mills. The Babič Mill is still operating and is a great attraction. Visitors can buy flour ground in the mill and see how the mill was traditionally operated.

● **The Island of Love:** near the village of Ižakovci, the Mura River has formed a natural island, named the Island of Love by the people here, due to its heart-like shape, as seen from a birds-eye view. The island is known for the pristine nature and quietness that surrounds it. There is a bridge leading to the island.

● **The wooden ferryboat on the Mura River:** visitors can still use it to cross the river, where in the past wooden ferryboats were the only connection between the two banks. A wooden cross is a traditional ornament on a ferryboat, protecting the people and cargo from harm.

● **Goričko Regional Park:** established to preserve the diversity of the natural surroundings. The park maintains a balance between people and nature, protects biodiversity, and is an ideal place to visit for those who are interested in rich ecosystems.



slovenian delights

Unique cuisine

The Prekmurje Region is known for its unique and exceptional cuisine. Prekmurska gibanica (a layer cake with apples, cottage cheese, poppy seeds and walnuts) and bograč (a type of goulash) are the most recognised around Slovenia. Prekmurska gibanica is a speciality among desserts, unmatched by any other in Slovenian cuisine. Within its multiple layers, a variety of tastes, colours and aromas hides. The original recipe requires a special technique, and a great deal of precision, skill and knowledge. Four different layers of filling are placed on a shortcrust pastry base (poppy seeds, cottage cheese, walnuts and apples) in strict sequence, and separated by layers of filo dough. The sequence of fillings is repeated twice, topped by a final layer of filo dough and sour or sweet cream with egg yolk, or simply with butter. Quite rich and complicated, don't you agree?

Traditionally, prekmurska gibanica was baked only in round ceramic baking trays, therefore the form of slices (triangular) was adapted accordingly. Today, many decide to bake it in rectangular ceramic or tin baking trays which enable them to produce more and give the cakes a rectangular shape.

The Prekmurje Slovenians also like to serve their guests šunka iz tünke (ham preserved in animal fat), bujta repa (pickled turnips), dödöli (a type of hard-boiled mush) and homemade zabil (a type of fat spread, known as zaseka in other parts of Slovenia). Another speciality is pajani krūj (roasted bread) with spread of garlic and zaseka.

Kitchens in Prekmurje also invite with a delicious aroma of posolanke (leavened pastry dough with cottage cheese and sour cream), zlevanke (a type of pancake, salty or sweet), retaši (strudel with various fillings: apple, plum, turnip etc.), langaši (fried leavened pastry dough), pereci (a type of bun), bosmani (a type of flat cake) and many other delights.

Prekmurje cuisine also abounds in homemade jams, liqueurs, spirits and quality white wines. Pumpkin seed oil and hot red peppers are often used as flavouring.

Here are some original recipes from the Prekmurje Region, so that you can get a taste of the delights we are talking about.

Pickled turnips with millet grouts (bujta repa)

Ingredients:

500 g pickled turnips
400 g fresh pork bones (back)
60 g millet
50 g pork lard
50 g onions
20 g garlic
20 g flour
10 g ground red pepper
bay leaf, some peppercorns, salt, marjoram

Put the washed pickled turnips into a pot and add spices during cooking: bay leaf, some peppercorns, salt, marjoram and bones. When almost soft, add washed millet, keeping it on the surface so it doesn't stick to the pot. When the millet porridge is done, make a light brown roux from fat, flour, onions and ground red pepper. Stir cold water into the roux and pour it over the cooked turnip and millet porridge. Take meat from the bone and add to the turnip. Boil for a while and spice to taste.

Pastry hoops (pereci)

Ingredients:

1 kg soft or sharp flour
30 g yeast or 2 bags of dried yeast
2 tablespoons of sugar
3 – 4 dl of milk (or as much as needed)
1 tablespoon of salt
30-40g margarine or 0.5 dl oil

Mix the ingredients and knead until the dough becomes smooth and separates easily from hands and bowl. Sprinkle the dough with some flour and allow to rise in a covered bowl until two or three times its size. Divide the dough into buns as big as a fist and leave to rest for a few more minutes. Use your palms to roll them into long rolls. Twist two rolls together and form a perec (a ring of 10-12 cm wide). Let them rise on a wooden board for another half hour. Coat the pereci with whisked egg, and bake in a preheated oven for 15-20 minutes at 200 degrees. You can make straight pereci by rolling them on a reed (stick), coating them with egg and baking.

Dödöli – potato hard boiled mush

Ingredients:

500 g potatoes
1 small onion
400 g flour
100 g zaseka (lard)
1 tablespoon of fat
1 dl sour cream

Prepare salted boiled water for cooking potatoes.

Preparation

Peel the potatoes, wash, slice into cubes and add to salted boiling water. Parboil only (about 10 minutes). Add sifted flour and blanch. When the water spreads over the flour, lower the temperature and push a ladle handle through the flour. Cook slowly for half an hour. Meanwhile, soften the zaseka in a hot pan. Peel the onions and cut it into thin slices. Dissolve the fat in the pot and fry the onions in it.

Pour off some water from the pot with the flour and potatoes and add hot zaseka. Stir well. If the mixture is too dry, add some of the water you previously poured off.

Use a ladle to take the mixture out of the pot and use a fork to grate it into a bowl (the same technique as when making žganci).

Add sour cream to fried onions, boil and pour over the dödöli.

Dödöli can be a lighter main dish, served with hot milk, although they are usually served with beetroot or red cabbage as a side dish to accompany meat dishes and pickled cabbage or pickled turnip.

Poppy seed roll (genjeni retaš)

Ingredients for stretched dough:

40 dg soft flour
1 egg
1 quarter teaspoon of salt
Approx. 1 dl warm water
1 tablespoon of warm melted butter or margarine
1 tablespoon of sour cream
30 g yeast or 1 bag of dried yeast

Knead an even, somewhat softer dough. Make a loaf, put it on a flour-sprinkled cloth and cover it to prevent a crust from forming. Leave to rest in a warm place for 30 minutes.

Ingredients for dry poppy seed filling:

30 dg well-ground poppy seeds
10dg sugar
1 small bag of vanilla sugar
some cinnamon
Mix all the ingredients to make a filling.

Ingredients for cream topping:

0.5 dl white oil or margarine
2 dl sour cream
1 egg

Whisk whole eggs with sour cream. Spread the dough on a cloth dusted with sharp flour until approx. 1 cm thick. Stretch it with your hands as thinly as possible to the size of a medium-sized kitchen table – be careful not to break it. Sprinkle the dry poppy seed filling on the surface and drip it with cream topping. Cut away the thick edge with a blunt knife, or tear it by hand. Roll it tightly by using the cloth underneath. Cut the roll to the size of a baking tray, using the edge of a plate, then put the rolls in the greased baking tray; they should fit loosely. Glaze with the rest of the cream and egg mixture and bake in a preheated oven at 230 degrees. When golden, lower the temperature to 200 degrees. Don't cut it into slices until it cools down a bit. If desired, sprinkle with sugar before serving.

Text and photo: Aleš Fevžer

Fairways on the sunny side of the Alps



In recent years, Slovenian golf courses have received numerous accolades from players from all over the world, who have swung their clubs on greens around the country. A number of new courses also make Slovenia an interesting golf destination since, in addition to playing, guests can also enjoy the landscape and the culinary and cultural features of each region. This season will be particularly interesting, as courses in Bovec and Smlednik near Ljubljana will be open, and the course in Otočec will be completed, which will bring the number of courses in Slovenia to twelve.

Irrespective of the smallness of our country, golfers can have a diversified golf tour, since they can find something for the soul in each region. Gorenjska will fascinate with mountains, lakes and the oldest course in the country, which put **Bled** on the world golfing map long ago. The King's course in Bled hosted the first players as early as in 1937, when it was built at the then king's request, and, before World War II, it has gained a reputation as one of the most beautiful in this part of Europe. After the maelstroms of war, the govern-

ment had no sympathy for the wishes of domestic tourist workers and guests coming to the jewel of Slovenian tourism. In 1973, the course, which was redesigned by the noted golf architect Donald Harradine, who has left a big mark in the Alpine countries, was reopened. He has designed over 500 courses, including many in Switzerland, Austria and Germany. His recognisable style comprises natural passages between each hole and the preservation of natural features, which is an exception to the rule of today's modern golf urbanism, with artificial lakes and numerous ground

works. Harradine did an excellent job in Bled and designed a champion course, on which numerous professional players have tested their knowledge at professional and nonprofessional tournaments of the highest rank. Among the most high-profile are the European Challenge Tour for men and the Ladies European Tour, for which the best European professional women players gathered 15 years ago in Bled. Many top-level players (the most well-known being the Spaniard Sergio Garcia) played in Bled 10 years ago, when they competed at the European Junior Team Championship;

and last year, the King's course, as it is called now, hosted the seniors. In addition to the eighteen holes on the King's course, golfers can use the additional 9 holes of the Lake course, which is distinguished by a single putting green for the second and ninth holes, which are also the most difficult, as they are protected by a large barrier of water. Players cannot stay indifferent when they play in Bled, as in addition to the excellent arrangement of the courses, it offers an unforgettable view of the Karavanke mountains with Mt Stol and Julian Alps with Triglav, which at 2864m is the

highest Slovenian mountain. This year, the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, and its surroundings will be able to boast three courses intended for all types of players. The oldest is in

Arboretum, which has 18 holes and is closer to Domžale and Kamnik than to Ljubljana, but is only a 25-minute drive from the city centre. Even

quicker to access is **Trnovo**, situated near the bypass; with its nine holes and spacious driving range, it is a



true meeting place for golf lovers living in the capital. It features a view of Ljubljana Castle, the city skyline, Rožnik and Kamnik Alps, and the narrow putting greens requiring accurate playing. This summer will also see the opening of a new 18-hole course in Smlednik under Šmarna gora, which with its spacious ground will meet the demand for golf in the capital and its surroundings.

Slovenians are very proud of the Lipizzaner

horses in **Lipica**, where Donald Harradine designed his second course in

the country, making it wind through the wonderful Karst world around the stud farm. Lipica has only nine holes, but is the only Slovenian course open throughout the year, and is therefore particularly well visited during winter. The Karst region, renowned for prosciutto and Teran wine, frequently surprises with the bora wind, which is a real test for any player in winter, as its strength and direction dictate the choice of club – one which would certainly not be used in calm conditions. So at some holes, a driver can be used to play against the wind, and a pitcher to play with a back-

wind reach similar distances. The third oldest Slovenian course was also designed by Donald Harradine, who demonstrated all his knowledge in the surroundings of

Mokrice Castle, notably at the tenth hole, where a par 3 putting green lies next to the castle wall. Even more spectacular is the first swing at the 11th hole, since there is more than 60 metres of air distance, which means that the ball flies more than 100 metres high. Mokrice is on hilly terrain among fruit gardens and vineyards, and requires some





stamina, especially in summer, when many like to refresh themselves in the nearby Terme Čatež spa. This summer, a twenty-minute drive from Mokrice towards Novo

mesto, the **Otočec** course will be expanded to 18 holes in total. Otočec is already one of the best courses in Slovenia, as in the last two years it was declared Best Slovenian Course. The expert commission evaluated quality of maintenance, arrangement and hospitality of the stuff, and the players also provided their opinion. Otočec is also on hilly terrain, near the Krka River, and his biggest attractions are

spacious and very fast putting greens, and flawlessly arranged teeing grounds and fairways.

Štajerska, a Slovenian wine-growing region, boasts three courses which really have something to offer guests. The nine

holes in **Olimje** and Slovenske Konjice are truly pleasant on the eye, as both have their own soul. In particular, **Konjice**, which is situated among vineyards on Zlati Grič, and in autumn, thrills with the golden brown colours of the vine leaves. The nearby wine

cellar offers an opportunity to gather your impressions after the game has finished by drinking a glass of Riesling, Chardonnay or Blaufränkish wine.

The oldest Slovenian town, **Ptuj**, pampers hotel guests with an excellent culinary offer, spas and a course, which is hosting the Alps Tour - the only professional tournament in the country - for the second time. A special feature is the hole 14 putting green - which is on an island - and water barriers are also important factors in the final result. Prekmurje, in the north-eastern Slovenia,



boasts the champion **Livada** at **Bovec**, nine holes of a new course will be opened just beneath Kanin ski resort. This year's abundant snow, with a record-breaking 9 metres, will ensure a spectacular opening tournament, as the players will play the first nine holes in snow more than 2000 metres above the sea level, then they will use the gondola to descend to Bovec and play nine real golf holes on the course winding between brooks, pastures

and meadows, with a wonderful view of the nearby mountains. In the coming years, small jewels such as Bovec will keep golf as one of the tourist trademarks of Slovenia. Accessibility, design, top quality with respect to the price, and hospitable staff are Slovenian trademarks, and although I have played golf all over the world and on every continent, I can assure you that you will remember playing on Slovenian courses for a long, long time.



Andrej Savelli,
photo: Barbara Jakše Jeršič

Kamila Volčanšek and Kostja Gatnik: Does Humour Belong in Art?



In Slovenia, it is difficult to escape the images created by Kamila Volčanšek and Kostja Gatnik. A fairytale that we read to our children before bedtime is very likely illustrated by one of them. Kostja also designed numerous literary and school books; he was the art editor of the Tribuna student magazine in the nineteen-seventies; he designed covers for Mladina magazine; his posters announced concerts; album covers were decorated by his photos; and he created the cult comic book Magna Purga. When the Slovenian President decorates meritorious individuals, he pins to their chest the Order of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia, designed by Kostja. Many companies are adorned by his logos; numerous advertisements were filmed on the basis of his storyboards. The popular 'Lumpi', which Kamila created for the largest Slovenian retailer, advertises children's products. In recent years, Kamila also established herself as a successful painter. Both she and Kostja have recently had successful exhibitions. Kostja marked his 40 creative years with a retrospective in the National gallery and a comprehensive monograph (also available in English - Kostja Gatnik: What I Have Seen 1968–2008). Kamila put on display her newest paintings in the A+A gallery in Venice.

Their common pathway began at college, when Kostja, who was already an established artist with a degree from the Academy of Fine Arts (ALU), was preparing Kamila for the ALU entry exams, which she later successfully passed. Kostja jokes that he is actually sorry about that, since Kamila was then enrolled in the Faculties of Law and Economics and so they would have been better off now.

One of the numerous things Kamila and Kostja have in common is illustration, which has made them known to most of their audience, particularly children and the parents who read them fairytales. Kamila: "When Kostja started to illustrate, he introduced a completely new approach into illustration in Slovenia. Until then, nice, pretty, feminine illustration was known, and he completely revolutionized illustration with his mildly aggressive, comic strip approach, and since then, illustration in Slovenia has been something completely different. When I started to work on illustration, Kostja gradually stopped doing it. My illustration was known as non-feminine, non-pretty, non-beautiful, funny. Children and parents

liked it very much that I draw spaghetti-like hair. So even now, many children and mothers know me by that."

They have different approaches to illustration. Kostja: "I can say for myself that I drew picture books more for my own pleasure, and I was not thinking about children a lot. I only wanted to enjoy my work as much as possible; if others also liked it, even better." Kamila: "I work for children and I try to think like children. I think what would I have liked when I was a little girl, and when I see my picture books now, I am extremely proud of what I did, and I enjoyed it very much. They appear extremely magic, and I hope that others perceive them in the same way."

Kostja tried his luck as a painter in the USA in the middle of the ninety-eighties and he and Kamila came close to staying there. In San Francisco (which remains his favourite city), he could get a studio easier and cheaper than in Ljubljana. He found a gallery, where he had exhibitions and which represented him. The Americans warmly accepted his paintings. Kostja says that they could easily have stayed there and lived comfortably, but Kamila wanted to come home. He was still sending his watercolour paintings to the USA. Even in their last attempt at the end of the eighties, they did not manage to stay in San Francisco - they returned because of the critical situation in Yugoslavia, which was on the brink of war. Kostja's most pessimistic paintings come from that period.

Having finally settled in Slovenia, Kamila began to engage more intensely in painting as well. Her paintings immediately appear to speak of gender relations. She got the inspiration for them when she was meeting "some fine ladies" in Ljubljana, and the paintings developed from a tiny format (from the ninety-nineties) into a monumental format. Both paintings and main actresses in them are "large". Nevertheless, they are so different, light and jovial. Despite their amplexity, they act elegantly, en-face, like Egyptian princesses painted by a pop-art artist. They float softly, like Salome as represented by Aubrey Beardsley for the Oscar Wilde play. The playful ladies seem to be performing in stories, often in a diptych or triptych. The story has to be composed by our imagination, which must also explain the role of the man, whose presence is most often merely indicated. The man

who always appears in an inferior position yearns for these lush women. The ladies appear more or less naked, wearing only "lace-style censorship", which stimulates rather than discourages sinful thoughts. Kamila admits this is a critique of false decency. Kamila: "I do not want to make statements on these paintings, and do not give them titles; I just want the painting to be good. Everyone seeing them sees them differently. People like them. However, I am most pleased that my fellow painters like them very much. I was very afraid when I began to make these large-format paintings in 2003, and I did not know how they would be accepted. Particularly, since I mainly used to work for children. When I was preparing my first exhibition in Equrna gallery, I did not want anyone to see these paintings before the opening, not even the gallerist. A large number of people showed up at the opening, as they were so curious what I was doing!"

Kamila constantly struggles for her paintings not to be compared with her illustrations. As she says, these are two completely separate stories. Otherwise, she and Kostja are disappointed, since the majority of people still consider illustration as an inferior form of painting. Also, the impact of globalisation means that Slovenian publishers are not commissioning original Slovenian illustrations, but are already buying illustrations with the story.

Kostja has probably used most of his knowledge and inspiration on commercial projects, which he has always carried out with pleasure, and his motivation was not affected. The proof is that some of his logos stayed up-to-date for 30 years, and some have remained icons even when the companies represented by them no longer exist. Kostja: "If you work by trying to do your best, and your brain is working even on commercial projects, then everything you do, you do it for your soul as well, and not only for the money... with rare exceptions." Probably the greatest charm of his products lies in the fact that they make their point so easily.

Kostja: "Even for a thing that appears to be done in half a minute, I sometimes needed days. I made a great effort to make it appear as if it were done in half a minute." Kostja was always known for working very quickly. Kostja: "Usually, agencies had a whole month for a job, and they tried to do it themselves, but when

they were pressed for time, they called me and asked: Could you do it by yesterday?" Nevertheless, he carried out such tasks with the same effort. Another characteristic of Kostja's work is that he knew how to be provocative even in commercial projects. According to his words this was easier in the time of socialism, when everyone was able to make jokes on his own account; but now under capitalism, everyone is too serious. He is even more troubled by the fact that customers now show more interest in the price than in the content or form of the advertisement. "Consumerism has spoilt everything; it is hard to fight against it, against this aggressive publicity; values and needs are simply different, greed for money, and shopping... Things have come so far that when I see a commercial on TV, I say to myself...I really should not buy this!" Although Kostja has virtually stopped drawing comics, he agrees that

the time is appropriate for a new Magna Purga or similar social critique.

With respect to all of the above, it is clear that it is difficult to escape from the images created by Kostja: "There are really many things to see around and until the exhibition and the book, the majority of people did not know these things were my creations, but there are so many of them, that I myself forgot I had made some of them." Although he appears to be a workaholic, one of the things which makes Kostja proud, is the fact that he has not been in a regular job even for a day, and that (until the exhibition and publishing the monograph, which were financially very demanding) he never had to ask for financial support. He admits that he is sometimes so tired that he does not want to work anymore, but more than a week of vacation makes him nervous. Kostja: "I take everything in my life for granted; the things that I do and the things that happen to me, all that seems normal to me."

Kostja was always looking for new challenges and new approaches, just like in his favourite hobby, cycling. Repetitive matters did not interest him. Ranko No-

vak, the designer of the exhibition and the monograph, wrote that in forty years, Kostja has created so many diverse and quality pieces that he seems more like an institution than an individual. According to Kamila, Kostja's greatest quality is that his work is timeless, since even young authors frequently invite him to cooperate. If you missed his exhibition, you can see a selection of his works on the web site "http://www.kostjagatnik.com".

Kamila, unjustifiably compared with Kostja virtually throughout her career, is glad that she is now finally respected as an independent artist, although she modestly admits that it was hard to succeed beside a genius like Kostja. Her way of working is exactly the opposite of Kostja's. She prepares for each project for a long time; she studies and reads everything in detail, and she also creates very slowly. She admits that, unlike Kostja, she would prefer to do one and the same thing over and over again. These oppositions or complementarities are probably the reason they get along so well. Since they have never paid attention to trends and fashions, their creations are timeless, and always contemporary.



Juš Turk, photo: Juš Turk and Darinka Mladenovič

Foreigners owning houses in Slovenia



Brendan Ruff: “I was looking for a country to live in – on condition that it wasn’t England”

According to data from Slovenian tax offices, as of 1 March this year, foreigners had bought 3,060 pieces of real estate in Slovenia since the country joined the European Union. It is interesting that most of them come from the UK, where, according to unofficial data, every sixth citizen owns real property overseas. They are trailed by citizens of two of our neighbouring countries, Italy and Austria, who are closely followed by Germans, while there are also many Irish, French, Dutch, Swedes, Belgians, Hungarians, Spaniards and Bulgarians among the new owners of real estate in Slovenia. The majority of owners from non-EU countries are Americans, who are followed by Croatians, Swiss, Australians, Canadians and

owners from about 25 other countries. But there is little danger of foreigners owning too much property, because Slovenia can always launch procedures halting such sales.

Why do foreigners like to buy property in the north-eastern area of Goričko?

The greatest demand for real estate among foreigners was first seen in the coastal region of Primorska particularly in the area of Kras, where old houses in need of refurbishment once sold for between EUR 20,000 and EUR 150,000, while houses or even apartments by the sea would reach much higher prices. Property is still sold

at high prices also in the northern region of Gorenjska. Foreigners are also interested in buying in the valley of the Soča River, while Italians prefer properties in the area of Brda and in the surroundings of the city of Koper. On the other hand, real estate prices in the Goričko are considerable lower, which made many English – and also many Austrians and others – rather buy the cheaper, abandoned, but also idyllic houses there. They would refurbish them nicely for permanent residence, or only for relaxation and for vacations. What is more, many local residents claim that these newcomers to Goričko have pleasantly revived this countryside. They are also trying hard to learn at least some Slovenian language, which is the hardest thing to do, especially for the English. All of them already knew and then noticed immediately upon their arrival that the cost of living in Slovenia is lower than in other EU countries. They still claim this today. Real estate brokers and others report that foreigners find Slovenia

very beautiful and that, although it is a small country, it has wonderful and diverse countryside, and Slovenians are very friendly people. But you will see below that not exactly all of them are friendly.

We have asked the Ruj real estate agency in Sežana whether the impact of the ongoing financial and economic crisis, which has caused prices to fall steeply in the developed countries, is also being felt in Slovenia. They told us that there was no significant drop in sales, while adding that there was less interest than in the last couple of years.

Bureaucracy is what bothers them most

Unfortunately, foreigners who have bought real estate in Slovenia, frequently come across bureaucratic obstacles they find unfathomable, and also meet neighbours who are always friendly at first, but soon become unfriendly, or other people

who are bothered by everything the new owners undertake. But there have been also some new residents who expected that they could do whatever they liked – building without permits, even starting an illegal business, – not knowing that they have to meet all the conditions laid down by law in Slovenia. But such people are exceptions.

It is, of course, impossible to visit all foreign owners. As we were trying to find some of those who have settled permanently in Slovenia, Mr Suša of the Ruj estate agency in Sežana was very helpful, because he still maintains friendly contacts with some of the owners whom his agency helped buy property. He immediately connected us with Leonardo Santoianni from Italy, who now lives in the village of Dutovlje, but is still not able to speak any Slovenian, and with Englishman Brendan Ruff, who is really doing his best, as he says, to speak the “hardest language in the world”.

“To me, Slovenia is the centre of Europe”

Brendan is originally from Newcastle upon Tyne, a city in north-east England. Before he chose Slovenia as his new homeland, he had travelled much of the world. He lived for some time in Ukraine, until, in search of a country to settle in, he drove his SUV to Slovenia. Here, in the town of Postojna he met a young vet, Senja Marušič from the village of Gorenje; and then, last year, in her rather desolate village he bought an old house, making it a new home for himself and Senja. He proudly says that everything in the house, from furniture to fittings, is the work of his own hands. Senja used to live only two houses away. “We also have horses over there, but we never eat horse meat,” she said proudly.

“I was looking for a country to live in – on condition that it was not England. And I’ve found it. It’s Slovenia, which is



the centre of Europe, as far as I'm concerned," said Brendan. "It's only that Slovenian is a very complicated language for me. Take, for example, our word cook, which, as simple as it is, has several meanings, while you have plenty of expressions for everything related to cooking. (Well, this also holds true the other way around, when one Slovenian word can be translated with a whole series of English words). "The price of the house was attractive, it cost only 60,000 pounds; but there were lots of things that needed refurbishment," said this intelligent man, adding half-jokingly that he was an inventor by profession, while in fact he is an excellent computer programmer, with a good income.

The saviour of a wounded dog

They have a little girl, called Inka. They also have a dog, a shorthaired pointer, who has lost a leg. How did this happen? "There was a severe traffic accident in which the animal was injured so badly, that its owner, some innkeeper and hunter from Brezovica, near Ljubljana, wanted to get rid of it right away. And because I work as a vet, I took this poor creature under my wing and saved it."

We were interested in whether they had, or have, any difficulties with paperwork because of the notorious Slovenian bureaucracy. Brendan said that many things in this respect were rather more complicated than in England. "Take driveways for example. In the UK, when a dispute breaks out, the police come right away and settle the matter effectively. And here you have unbelievable complications that seem like they will never end. This is particularly so because some neighbours,

who had accepted us warmly at first, now almost have a hostile attitude towards us and are giving us trouble, which is why we frequently see a lawyer, who is not exactly cheap. I've just returned from the lawyer's office. The kind Mister Suša from the Ruj agency, who made the purchase of this house possible, is also helping us sort these things out." Before the purchase, the pair also consulted Frances Sargent, the director of a British company which markets real estate in Slovenia. "She was in Slovenia before, and it was she who gave me the first information about the Slovenian real estate market," said Brendan, who is still in friendly contact with Ms Sargent.

A man from an idyllic house in Dutovlje

Leonardo Santoianni has been a professional bus driver for twenty-five years, and has also been driving a Pullman for the last



seven years. He had already cruised across Europe many times with buses. "This is how I got to know Slovenia, and when I saw that it is beautiful and peaceful, I decided that I would not live in Trieste any more, but here in your country," he said. He bought an old house on the outskirts of Dutovlje in 2002 through the Ruj real estate agency in Sežana, for 140,000 euros - the plot around the house cost 40,000 euros, while the reconstruction cost him a total of 210,000 euros. "You know, for this money I would be able to buy a modest apartment at the most in Trieste, while here I have a house and a garden. The truth is that it's still not completely reconstructed, and the ground around it is still turned up, but I'm happy. A neighbour, car mechanic Gec, really helped me a lot to start the reconstruction. He helped me get the water connected and gave me cement, so everything ran very smoothly. We managed to reconstruct the first part in just three months, but in the following two months, before the roof was up, a craftsman started giving me trouble. He turned out to be, as we Italians say, a furbo."

In this almost completely renovated house, painted yellow, Leonardo lives with his Russian wife Lilija, and his 7-year-old son Francesco. »When we came here, he did not know a word of Slovenian, and now he is already very good at it. It is largely thanks to the excellent local elementary school."

Which municipalities, according to data from Slovenian tax offices, were the most attractive for foreigners buying property between 2004 and this April?

- **Britons:** 1,153 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Murska Sobota (286) and Kranj (263)
- **Italians:** 815 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Koper (492) and Nova Gorica (142)
- **Austrians:** 332 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Murska Sobota (139) and Maribor (64)
- **Germans:** 266 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Murska Sobota (58) and Koper (36)
- **Irish:** 91 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Murska Sobota (38) and Celje (9)
- **French:** 66 properties, mainly in the municipalities of Nova Gorica (14) and Koper (10)

CULTURAL TRAILS

Jože Prešeren, photo: Darinka Mladenović

Goričko

landscape park as development initiative

Goričko is a special world. It is part of Prekmurje, the northernmost part of Slovenia, near the border with Austria and Hungary, but still some experts say that everything here is different from Prekmurje. Well, when on a visit, we soon find that this represents the true Prekmurje for visitors, despite some peculiarities of the local dialect. Until the end of World War I Goričko, like other parts of Prekmurje, had been under Hungarian rule for many centuries, hence the diversity in customs, dialect and cooking. Many members of the Hungarian minority live here, and many of the residents are Lutherans.

Goričko is a hilly region - hence the name: hills are called gorice by the local residents. Millions of years ago, these hills sprang from the bottom of the Pannonian Sea, which disappeared long ago, and then rose. This is the world between Mura and Raba rivers, which continues to the Austrian region of Grabenland and to Hungarian Őrseg and Göcsej to the east. The largest river in Goričko is Ledava with its numerous tributaries. People have been living here for ages and have preserved many particularities due to the remoteness from larger city centres. But hills are not that remains of the Pannonian Sea - numerous fossilised shells, fish or plants can still be found. Today, Goričko is a region of ridges and shallow valleys (called grabe here) between them, with many streams. The majority of settlements were built on the sunny sides of the hills; there are 11 municipalities with 91 villages and 25,000 inhabitants, but no major regional centre, so mainly as the headquarters of the landscape park, this function was taken over by Grad, and the region is economically connected notably with Murska Sobota. There are many forests, meadows and other agricultural lands here, but generally, the soil is rather infertile. The local people produce excellent fruit and the agricultural speciality of the region is pumpkin, from which the noted pumpkin seed oil is extracted. Needless to say that the local people cannot imagine living without home-made pumpkin oil.

The landing of a stratospheric balloon - the event of the century

A few years ago, the national Slovenian television channel broadcast their film of a stratospheric balloon landing in the lonely village of Ženavlje in Goričko. In the middle of August 1934, an unusual balloon landed in a field. The event provoked great interest among the inhabitants and they spoke of it for decades after - which should mean, according to the local people, nothing good. They helped in the landing of the balloon, since the unusual travellers dropped ropes that had to be pulled down. The craft landed safely and it was soon discovered that the travellers were French-speaking Belgian scientists who had taken off from a Belgian airport that morning in the presence of several thousand curious people. A local who had lived for several years in France led the discussions with them in French. This is how the village of Ženavlje in Goričko entered history in an unusual way, as it was the centre of attention of European scientists, notably stratosphere researchers, for several days. It is interesting that the television film showing the event was entitled *The Day Europe Fell on Our Heads*. The significance of this event for Goričko is proven by the fact that a monument was erected at the landing site, and the community of Gornji Petrovci, to which Ženavlje village now belongs, proclaimed this date a municipal holiday.



Castle with 365 rooms

Until 1952, the place now called Grad was called Gornja Lendava; now it has around 800 inhabitants and is considered one of the larger settlements in Goričko. This place is, of course, closely associated with the nearby castle, simply called Castle (Grad). The castle building was first mentioned in 1208. It survived many owners, but it was robbed at the end of World War II, and left in decay for many years. Grad is considered the largest feudal building in Slovenia. Some still say that there used to be 365 rooms, one for each day of the year. Since renovations supported by the European Union began a few years ago, it was established that there are 311 rooms, of which 47 have now been renovated. In these, six museum workrooms of traditional handicraft were arranged, a Prekmurje črna kuhinja (literally black kitchen, an old rural type of kitchen), a wine cellar with Prekmurje wines, two laboratories for biology classes, a smaller conference hall, an office, two apartments, a knights' hall for presentations and a wedding hall. The headquarters of Goričko Landscape Park are also in the castle.

The medieval structure is covered by numerous Renaissance and Baroque reconstructions: picturesque inner courtyard is encompassed by arcades on brick columns, while the bell tower of the castle chapel is Baroque. Remnants of former castle equipment are still stored in the chapel. The castle park with its rare tree species is also worth seeing.



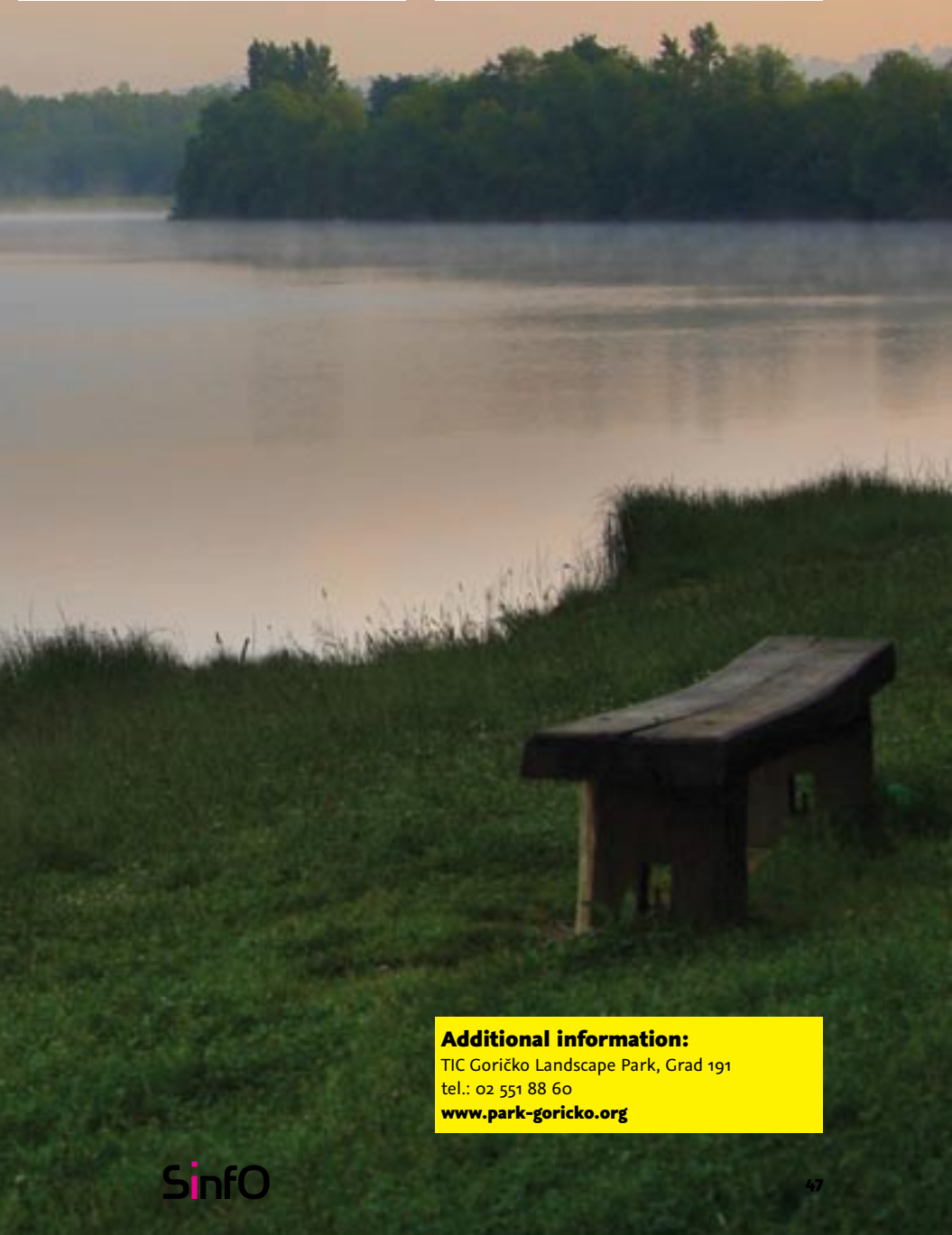
Landscape Park of Three Countries

At the initiative of numerous people from Goričko, and after several years of preparation, in 2003 the Slovenian Government established the protected area of the Landscape Park in Goričko; some months later, Goričko Landscape Park Public Institute was established. Today, the Landscape Park enables the people of this border region of Slovenia to achieve quicker economic development while protecting and preserving their natural environment, as well as the cultural and historical heritage of the region. Goričko Park is geographically part of the Goričko-Raab-Örség Natural Park of the Three Countries, which encompasses parts of Slovenia, Austria and Hungary.

The path to establishing the natural landscape park of the three countries was not easy. The idea was born in 1994, and the Austrians were the first to realise it, establishing their Raab Park in 1999; the Hungarians joined two years later. The common goal of the founders of the cross-border landscape park was primarily to preserve the environment and historical and cultural heritage in the protected areas. The Austrians decided to emphasise the development of tourism and some production services in the Park; the Hungarians declared their protected area a National Park and deal primarily with the preservation and breeding of autochthonous species of horses and cattle. In Goričko, in compliance with local needs, plans were designed to preserve natural and cultural heritage and at the same time develop handicraft and cuisine, small businesses and organic farming

associated with ecotourism. Today, the first results of efforts of the management's efforts are already visible, since farmers receive higher subsidies, and they produce fruit and vegetable for the requirements of tourism. There is a growing number of tourist farms within the Park, with more than a hundred tourist beds in total. One of these is the newly established Croat's Farmhouse, managed by Verica Bokan, a local resident, and the former journalist Andrej Sedej - who later got involved in catering near Kranjska gora, and moved recently to his wife's former home in Rogaševci in Goričko. Excellent Prekmurje culinary specialties can be ordered here- the most famous

is Prekmurska gibanica. The farmhouse offers lodging, but many guests arrive with mobile homes. The owners know a lot about this kind of travel, as it was a subject Sedej wrote a lot about as a journalist. Goričko offers visitors many tourist routes through the beautiful landscape - and the cultural monuments, which most people visits, include the castle in Grad, the St. Nicholas Rotunda in Selo and the Church of the Ascension in Bogojina, which was founded in the 14th century and between 1925-27 it was renovated in an original style by the most famous Slovenian architect, Jože Plečnik. However, there are many interesting points visitors can discover on their Goričko wanderings.



Additional information:

TIC Goričko Landscape Park, Grad 191
tel.: 02 551 88 60
www.park-goricko.org

I FEEL SLOVENIA

photo: Darinka Mladenovič



In Slovenia, white storks are mainly found in the north-east, where approximately 90% of all the pairs nest. And most of these nest in Prekmurje: half of all Slovenian storks.

They like the open cultural landscape, with its patchwork of grassland, fields, pastures and settlements. They avoid woodland. Only some 200 pairs live in the whole of Slovenia, which is not a significant number - less than two tenths of a per cent - on a European scale, where over a hundred thousand storks nest.