



Sinfo

APRIL 2010

BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

**The contribution of
the Western Balkans
to the European future**

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PLEČNIK'S LJUBLJANA



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Cover photo Tomo Jeseničnik



Veronika Stabej
Director

POOLED RESOURCES

TODAY'S WORLD IS TOO COMPLEX FOR THE individual to master each and every aspect of it. So there is nothing wrong in admitting that we need to pool our resources in certain areas.

This also applies to international relations, and the desire for friendship with our neighbours is indeed written into Slovenia's national anthem. Together with the hope that we will be able to overcome any disagreement. If, however, disagreements arise, it is important that we are able to sit down at the same table and seek common solutions. Including through informal dialogue.

How to resolve problems is something that was indeed recently demonstrated by Slovenia and Croatia, neighbouring countries that are spreading the efforts for good neighbourly relations to other countries of the former Yugoslavia. On the initiative of Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and his Croatian counterpart Jadranka Kosor, what has been termed the Brdo process was recently launched at Brdo pri Kranju. The aim of this process is to strengthen cooperation and the resolving of bilateral issues in the European spirit, especially in the light of common efforts to attain EU membership.

Around the same table sat the leaders of countries, some of which do not even recognise each other, while they recognise that "we all need each other", especially neighbours.

Memories of the neighbourhood are not always pleasant, however. Our interviewee in this issue is Boris Pahor, the Slovenian writer from Trieste, whose books and testaments from prison camp life draw attention to the injustices done in Italy to the Slovenian population and humanity as a whole, and he is regarded by many as one of the highest cultural and moral authorities of the Slovenian nation.

Pahor has found that neighbourly relations started improving when Slovenia became a state and a member of the EU.

More evidence that what we need is to come together. No one can do it all alone.

And this is something demonstrated every year by the organisers of ski flying at Planica, who sometimes through almost inhuman effort succeed in hosting an event enjoyed by spectators and competitors alike.

“ AROUND THE SAME TABLE SAT THE LEADERS OF COUNTRIES, SOME OF WHICH DO NOT EVEN RECOGNISE EACH OTHER, WHILE THEY RECOGNISE THAT “WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER”, ESPECIALLY NEIGHBOURS. ”

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FIRST STATE VISIT BY CROATIAN PRESIDENT JOSIPOVIĆ

Mateja Malnar
Štembal
Photo STA

‘It is no coincidence that I chose Slovenia for my very first state visit, since the friendship between the two countries has lasted for centuries,’ said Ivo Josipović.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MONTH, NEW CROATIAN PRESIDENT IVO JOSIPOVIĆ MADE HIS first state visit, to Slovenia. He was received in Brdo pri Kranju by Slovenian President Dr Danilo Türk, who stated after the meeting that Slovenia and Croatia are coming to the beginning of a new chapter in their relations.

The Slovenian president emphasised that this new chapter presents the opportunity to resolve the remaining unsolved issues and to make progress in the direction of strengthening bilateral relations.

He said that a great deal of the credit for the situation is due to the governments of the two countries, which last year “made major advances on this path and developed successful cooperation which reinforces mutual respect and trust”. Türk and Josipović also expressed support for both governments in establishing a bilateral commission that will review all of the unresolved issues between the two countries, and for the renewal of the operation of the bilateral commission for economic cooperation.

The Croatian president said that it is no coincidence that he chose Slovenia for his very first state visit, since the friendship between the two countries has lasted for centuries.

The presidents also dedicated a great amount of attention during their meeting to conditions in the region. According to the Slovenian president, Slovenia and Croatia have very concordant interests, which dictate the strengthening of cooperation in the region, and both countries also support closer cooperation and the resolution of unresolved issues in the Western Balkans.



Agriculture Minister resigns

IN THE MIDDLE OF MARCH, Milan Pogačnik irrevocably resigned his position as Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food.

At an extraordinary session of the National Assembly, the Minister explained to the deputies that he is irrevocably resigning from the position of minister as

a matter of principle. He made the decision after numerous accusations in connection with allegedly questionable procedures of returning bull mastiffs to their owner and allegations that in exchange for support during his interpellation from the opposition SNS party he promised to support their project of building an aviation museum. He denied any allegations of

wrongdoing or corruption and expressed the hope that he would prove this through the facts evident in the documents which refer to the controversial allegations.

He decided to resign because after these events he believed that it was impossible to continue to perform the duties of minister regardless of his guilt or innocence.

Prime Minister and large economic delegation visit Bosnia and Herzegovina for the first time



AT THE BEGINNING OF MARCH, PRIME Minister Borut Pahor and a nearly 140-member economic delegation and four ministers travelled to B&H on Slovenia’s

first official visit to that country. They met with Prime Minister of B&H Nikola Špirić, and discussed conditions in the country and its accession to the EU and NATO with

Erased persons act adopted

WITH A VOTE OF 48 IN FAVOUR AND 30 against, the Slovenian Parliament adopted the Act amending the act arranging the status of citizens of from former Yugoslav republics in Slovenia, through which the state is intending to regulate the status of erased persons.

According to Minister of Internal Affairs Katarina Kresal, the intent of the law, in accordance with a series of decisions by the Constitutional Court and in the spirit of the Slovenian Constitution, is to comprehensively resolve that part of the injustices endured by erased residents that relate to the revoking of their status 18 years ago.

The Act amending the act arranging the status of citizens of other SFRY successor countries in Slovenia regulates the status of the erased persons who were denied the right to supplementary decisions, the majority of whom do not have an official status. The amending act sets out the conditions under which foreigners who were citizens of other republics of the former SFRY on 25 June 1991 and who still do not have permanent residence permits in Slovenia

can obtain permanent residence permits. It also sets out the cases in which citizens of other republics of the former SFRY who were deleted from the register of permanent residents shall be retroactively considered to have had permanent residence permits and declared permanent residences.

The amending act is opposed by the opposition, who maintain that the Act will be used as the basis for the payment of compensation. The SDS therefore proposed various amendments, which would make the conditions for erased persons to obtain status stricter, which were largely rejected by the National Assembly, as the coalition believed that the proposers’ intention was to use them to neutralise the content of the findings of the Constitutional Court.

In the middle of March, the SDS and the SNS responded by submitting a demand for the holding of a legislative referendum. The demand for the holding of a legislative referendum was signed by 31 deputies, who believe that the Government’s claim that the adopted act will not have any financial consequences is false.

The adopted act is the final stage of

the B&H Presidency and the Parliamentary Assembly, and also took part in a business conference attended by businessmen from both countries.

During the visit, Pahor stated that Slovenia believes in B&H and its future, and that he therefore seeks to further political and economic contacts with it.

Pahor and Špirić described relations between the two countries as good, but the countries continue to hold divided viewpoints with regard to the repayment of the debt to depositors of the former Ljubljanska banka. Ljubljana continues to seek a solution within the framework of succession, while Sarajevo seeks a two-party solution. They emphasised the significance of the fact that the two countries are prepared to negotiate and that they are both seeking opportunities to resolve the issue.



‘There are still 13,426 persons who are without official status in Slovenia and for whom there is no data on their permanent residence.’

the regulation of the issue of the erased persons, which has remained unresolved for 18 years. At that time the state is alleged to have deleted 25,671 residents of Slovenia who were citizens of former republics of the SFRY from the register of permanent residents or transferred them to “passive” records. The erased persons were therefore deprived of various social rights, many had to leave Slovenia.



“Today, we saw the political leaders of countries, some of which do not even recognise each other, sitting at the same table,” said Slovenian PM Borut Pahor after the conference ‘Together for the European Union: The Contribution of the Western Balkans to the European Future’, thus stressing one of the major achievements of the event – jointly organised by Slovenia and Croatia – that took place on 20 March at Brdo pri Kranju in Slovenia.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS TO THE EUROPEAN FUTURE

Dialogue as a step towards regional cooperation

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alenka Čebular Photo STA

THE IDEA FOR THE CONFERENCE WAS FIRST PROPOSED AT AN informal meeting of Slovenian and Croatian prime ministers in Kranjska Gora, on 13 January this year. Such high-level meetings have often proved that outstanding bilateral issues are best resolved at an informal level, through open dialogue. This fact highlights the importance of the Western Balkans conference as a method of resolving issues – introduced by Slovenia and Croatia – and it could become a model for other countries in the region.

Brdo pri Kranju hosted prime ministers from Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

The Balkan Incentive Fund for Culture – (BIFC) of the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) is an important instrument that promotes cultural development at local and regional levels, and has in recent years brought together a number of cultural workers from the region.

During Slovenia’s 2009 Presidency of the Council of Europe, ministers of the countries of the Western Balkans followed Slovenia’s initiative and agreed to abolish tuition fees for students from the region on a mutual basis until 2011.

Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania, and the European Enlargement Commissioner, Štefan Füle. Despite the absence of the Serbian President, Boris Tadić, and EU senior representatives, the participants agreed that the conference had been a success, as their attendance alone underlined the event’s main goal, i.e. to reaffirm the commitment to reform processes and demonstrate an awareness that responsibility for stability and development lies within the region itself. In addition, the participants discussed initiatives and concrete projects that may stimulate regional cooperation and integration, since – as suggested by PM Pahor in his statement – this part of Europe has no joint infrastructure projects. Mutual non-recognition is one of the reasons for weak cooperation in the region, and the conference alone served to prove that this is the region’s key problem.

Joint declaration

By adopting a joint declaration, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to their respective EU perspectives as well as the implementation of reforms based on EU standards, principles and values. They agreed that the process of visa liberalisation should continue throughout the Western Balkans region, and called on the EU to keep future enlargement among its top priorities. The issue of the EU perspective is paramount to the region, as it provides the necessary motivation to carry out further reforms and continue to resolve outstanding

bilateral issues in a European spirit.

Of course, the absence of the EU's most senior officials – apart from the Enlargement Commissioner – did not go unnoticed. However, this may well have highlighted the fact that the countries in the region need one another and that the strongest initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation should come from within the region, as only this can lead to future stability, economic development and reconciliation both in politics and everyday life.

In this respect, both hosts, the Slovenian PM Pahor and the Croatian PM Kosor, welcomed the attendance of the President of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nikola Špirić, who came to Brdo despite all pressures he faces. According to the Slovenian PM, Mr Špirić put dialogue first and showed great political courage and responsibility, which – to quote the Croatian PM, Jadranka Kosor – many leaders in the region did not do.

The Brdo Process

The March conference is said to be the first in the process of re-establishing cooperation and trust between the countries of the Western Balkans. The presidents agreed to future presidential meetings by adopting the joint declaration. The first ministerial conference to follow this example should be about transport and infrastructure, as these two areas are vital to the region's future development.

Slovenia and the Western Balkans

Those who have been closely monitoring developments in the Western Balkans were not surprised to see that Slovenia was one of the initiators of the conference; the country has been actively involved in the region in the political and economic spheres, and in civil society. Until recently, its activities were largely uncoordinated, but they have now been brought together in the document 'Guidelines of the Republic of Slovenia's policy towards the Western Balkans', which was approved by the Government in March 2010.

The document lays down priority areas and measures needed for a more synchronised and coordinated engagement of all interested parties – state, commercial and other – in the region. The objective is to create a favourable environment in the region, with security, stability and the development of the Western Balkans being the key priorities for Slovenia and its economy. Slovenia's activities in the region are mainly focused on fostering the development and stability of the whole region.

Slovenia's top priorities include:

- Strengthening political cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans, with Slovenia working at the bilateral level as well as within the EU and NATO to promote the countries' prospects of Euro-Atlantic integration, foster regional cooperation based on good neighbourly relations, and encourage the efficient resolution of bilateral issues.
- Supporting the integration process of the Western Balkans in NATO and other international organisations, with Slovenia encouraging an ongoing debate on the Western Balkans, providing political support to candidate countries, and supporting the activities of international and regional organisations which could strengthen reform processes and boost the region's development. >>

In the field of the environment, Slovenia is planning to strengthen regional cooperation as part of the Dinaric Arc Initiative, which will ensure sustainable environmental development in the Western Balkans.

In the countries of the region, Slovenia is promoting IT support for science, education and culture by financing the COBISS library information system, which may develop into a large regional online library.

Highlights from an interview with Vojko Volk, Coordinator for the Western Balkans at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published in Delo, Sobotna priloga (by Saša Vidmajer // the interview was conducted before the Brdo conference and published on 20 March)

Spain, which is currently presiding over the EU, has announced a conference on the Western Balkans; Italy, too, has great ambitions in the region; we are still waiting for the decision of the International Court of Justice in The Hague about Kosovo... This summarises the international situation in which Slovenia is organising the Brdo conference. What is Slovenia's goal?

Suddenly, it seems as if there were too many initiatives, but at the time when we began our work - last autumn - we were afraid that little, or nothing, would be happening about the Western Balkans. After studying the Spanish Presidency plan, we found that there was no particular emphasis on the Western Balkans. We were aware of the Italian initiative to organise a conference ten years after Zagreb, but we knew that it would have been difficult to organise it there. We had a number of ideas, among others to move the conference under the Spanish Presidency from Zagreb to Sarajevo instead. We can say that the Spanish conference in Sarajevo is our idea, and alongside it we proposed the initiative to have a conference at Brdo as an introduction to the one in Sarajevo. We took the risk of trying to seat at the same table all the leaders, including those of the two newest countries, Montenegro and Kosovo.

How does Brussels see Slovenia with its ambitions in the Balkans? Is the fact that Slovenia is part of the region a 'pro' or a 'con'?

Both. Our advantage lies in the fact that we speak the language, that we know the situation in the greatest of details. The infrastructure in the Western Balkans was largely constructed by Slovenian companies: Iskra knows everything about the power grid; Litostroj knows the

secrets of all the hydro-electric plants in the Balkans. And this advantage was not lost in the years when we literally tried to flee the Balkans. But in the EU this is not always an advantage - especially when EU representatives such as European Union Special Representatives (EUSRs) for individual countries or peace-keeping operations such as Eulex are being appointed. We have been contaminated. We have not had a single senior representative appointed just because we are from the region. This ambivalent attitude on the part of the EU can be upsetting, particularly given our huge input in terms of finance, personnel and commitment - seven hundred troops in Kosovo, for example. This is not fair. We want to convince Brussels that it is time for Slovenians, too, to be appointed to certain posts in the EU and the Commission concerning the Balkans.

How much expertise does Slovenia have on the Balkans?

The only criterion is what others think. And now, after a long while, expertise is again worth something; we are again being asked for opinions and we are receiving answers to our initiatives, like the Brdo conference. Our ambition to re-establish ties that have been broken has been acknowledged. This ambition is supported by the USA and the EU alike; they know that if we succeed in establishing dialogue and cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans, this could help revive the desire to enlarge the EU.

You once stated that it is hard to be an expert on Balkans. Why do you think so?

I said that because that is what I have learnt from my mistakes. Whenever a traditional diplomat tries to analyse and predict a certain country's next step, we say that he/she identifies with that particular country, and calculates the costs and benefits of that particular step. More than once I have found that the countries in the Western Balkans are willing to act in a way that harms them. The cost and benefit analysis does not always rely on rational criteria, but also emotional. This is why it is difficult to >>



A number of NGOs are active in the Western Balkans, including the Centre for European Perspective, Foundation 'TOGETHER', the Centre for eGovernance Development, the Centre of Excellence in Finance, the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF), the Centre for International Cooperation and Development, SLOGA, all of which were founded by the Slovenian Government.

The Foundation 'TOGETHER' and ITF are among the most recognised.

The Foundation 'TOGETHER', a Regional Centre for the Psychosocial Well-being of Children, was established in February 2002 by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the Municipality of Ljubljana and the non-governmental organisation Slovenian Philanthropy. Today, it is a recognised and well-established organisation whose activities and programmes represent an important form of humanitarian aid and development assistance of the Republic of Slovenia. The International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) is a humanitarian, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the eradication of landmines in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and elsewhere in the world. The ITF was established by the Slovenian Government in March 1998 to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina with its landmine problem and with the physical and socio-economic rehabilitation of landmine victims. Since other countries in the region and SEE also suffer from the landmine problem, the ITF has expanded its operations, and is now operating in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and is also launching operations in the Caucasus and Cyprus.



- Strengthening economic ties with the Western Balkans, also by fostering a favourable business environment through creating new, and strengthening existing, mechanisms of EU and regional and international organisations; further assistance is possible by attracting foreign investors and by investing in joint projects that reach beyond national borders.
- International development cooperation, with Slovenia focusing on the creation and strengthening of social services and social infrastructure, particularly training the civil service, administration and institutions in good leadership practices and the rule of law as part of their EU perspective, on business services and infrastructure (energy, environment, etc.), human rights and sustainable development.

Slovenia has also been closely and successfully collaborating with the countries of the Western Balkans in agriculture, environment, health care, general security, science and technology, culture and intercultural dialogue.

“Everyone needs everyone”

“Everyone needs everyone” was the conclusion of the participants at the Brdo conference. By organising the conference, and more generally through its activities in the region, Slovenia is the only EU member state from the region to have provided a model which shows that even fundamental issues can be resolved through dialogue, openness and trust.

The declaration marks the beginning of a process that will focus on infrastructure projects and concrete collaboration from which all people in the region will benefit. With the declaration, the region sent the EU a joint message that it is ready to take further steps towards European integration, and that the countries of the region would support one another. Despite the fact that EU accession depends on the progress of individual countries, joint efforts, mutual support and assistance play a vital role in the process. The conference thus represented a dialogue between the region and the EU, which was established by the presence of the Enlargement Commissioner Füle. The declaration is also a joint statement to the EU-Western Balkans ministerial scheduled to take place in June in Sarajevo.

Slovenia and the Western Balkans in figures

- Slovenia annually allocates 70% of its bilateral development assistance to the region; in 2009, this amounted to over €10m (€10,092,049.00), while in 2010 this share is expected to increase to 80%.
- Slovenia is participating in both EU civilian crisis management missions in the Balkans: EUPM in B&H and EULEX in Kosovo.
- 378 Slovenian army personnel help maintain security in KFOR units in Kosovo and 25 in the Althea operation in B&H. Slovenia is taking over NATO command in Skopje.
- The Western Balkans is Slovenia's second most important market in terms of trade in goods, accounting for 17% of the country's exports and 6.5% of its imports. According to the Bank of Slovenia, the majority (67.4%) of foreign direct investment in the Western Balkans is by Slovenian enterprises.

be an expert on the Balkans, and there is no need to try too hard. Effort should be invested in attempting to neutralise irrational criteria and internal political interests, and make way for the logic that we must keep moving on. We have recently heard Serbian politicians say that if they were pressed to choose between the EU and Kosovo, they would opt for Kosovo. This is difficult to comprehend. Since Serbia has neither Kosovo nor the EU. And one would think that the simple wish to become an EU member would mean getting both. I remember my late grandfather, who never got over the fact that he had lost the Gorizia in which he had lived. Sadly, he did not live to see Slovenia join the EU and the borders opening, so he could go to Gorizia for a coffee and speak to the waiter in Slovenian without a sense of fear or resentment. This is our experience, which we would like to share with the Balkans: that the joint future of Serbia and Kosovo is where we are now - in the EU; that the Kosovo-EU dilemma is not a serious dilemma, or at least, it is not rational.

You do not believe that what transpired between Slovenia and Croatia - Slovenia's blocking of Croatia's EU accession - could happen again elsewhere, say between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Serbia?

Once Croatia joins the EU, other countries in the Balkans will receive a very clear message, i.e. that settling all outstanding issues with their neighbours is the only way. We should not forget that Slovenia's door to the EU was opened by Solana's compromise and the unratified agreement between Drnovšek and Račan. Serbia, too, will have to make its way by settling relations with its neighbours, which include Kosovo. To hide this pressing fact would be irresponsible, and most of all to Serbia, which is expecting the so-called EU questionnaire containing several thousand questions, including those pertaining to the size of the country, the number of citizens, towns, villages, etc. And the answers to them will clearly show that Serbia is eager to join the EU alone, without Kosovo.

OUR GUEST: Dr Mikko Kosonen, head of the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra

The economic crisis is something the EU needs – it shows that a lot of things need to change

Vesna Žarkovič

Photo Mateja Jordovič Potočnik



HOW DO WE ENSURE DEVELOPMENT, MAINTAIN competitiveness, make it possible for citizens to use the existing resources, how do we eliminate bureaucratic obstacles and deeply rooted divisions in society, are only a few of the questions raised at a recent round table by Dr Mikko Kosonen, head of the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra.

At the beginning of March the Finnish Embassy in Slovenia and the Government Office for Development and European Affairs held a round table on the structural and development challenges facing society.

Times are changing and the good old days are not coming back

“The economic crisis is just the tip of the iceberg, there are major forces in the background that are going to change the world completely”, says Kosonen. “Economic power is shifting to Asia, not just in products but also in added value. The question arises of how the European countries will respond to this. Our generation is aging, and how we will deal with that is an important question. I believe that the economic crisis is something that the EU and Finland need, it shows that a lot of things need to change.”

“First of all health care. We have to move from reactive to proactive health care, which means that people have to learn to live healthy lifestyles. We have to change the paradigm of thinking about health. The aim of the healthcare system is to



‘The economic crisis is just the tip of the iceberg, there are major forces in the background that are going to change the world completely’, says Kosonen.’

create as much health as possible. Primary health care must be significantly improved and reformed in a way that effectively transfers the focus from treating illnesses to health promotion, prevention and early intervention. The patients should be stewards of their own health and the better utilisation of information technology in reforming services. Health value can also be improved through specialisation and competition. Changes and reforms are not a threat, but an opportunity, and even a prerequisite for a good health care system. It is possible to produce reasonably-priced, high-quality services; however, it requires a higher cost, greater quality awareness, and effective use of new technologies (electronic services in particular). We should really improve customer-orientation. Cost control, cost awareness, and productivity can be increased through pricing policies for municipal services, transparency of funding and implementation of the service voucher system and the purchaser-provider models.

Sitra – the Finnish Innovation Fund – is an independent public fund which under the supervision of the Finnish Parliament promotes the welfare of Finnish society. Since its establishment, Sitra's duty has been to promote stable and balanced development in Finland, the qualitative and quantitative growth of its economy and its international competitiveness and co-operation. Sitra's aim is to help Finland prosper as global pioneer in systemic changes that generate well-being.



Moreover, increasing initiative and health awareness in the public greatly contributes to preventive health care.”

Health care policy a major problem all over the world

“In Finland we want to be the most modern country with regard to introducing innovations into the health care system, and we want Finland to be the leading country with regard to introducing new services and the new technologies that accompany them. All of this will create new business opportunities. The balance between the public and private sectors is not healthy, since we can’t just add more jobs in the public sector. We have to be prepared for service activities to move into private practice. This would definitely increase the efficiency of health care and create new jobs in the private sector. This would be a big change,” says Kosonen.

Sitra is currently focusing on five programmes: Municipal Programme, Energy Programme, Growth Programme for the Mechanical Industry, Landmarks Programme and Public Leadership and Management

Energy Programme

Because of the challenges involved in the production and more efficient use of energy, Finland needs to create new innovations and agility in responding to these challenges communities use almost as much energy as industry. Energy saving poses a major challenge for companies, the public sector and consumers. The five-year-long Energy

‘I think that Singapore and South Korea are significantly more dynamic societies than the rest of the world, in part because they are managed like global companies which have a vision for the next 20 years – not just until the next elections.’

Programme focuses on improving the energy efficiency of the built environment. Reversing the trend in energy consumption requires motivating consumers to action, as well as the rapid renewal of the service sector and the entire building and real-estate sector. They want to create new rules for energy-efficient construction, pilot projects on new ways of living that are more energy efficient, and a new project for rebuilding old houses.



Landmarks Programme

The objective of the five-year Landmarks Programme is to increase the well-being obtained by

Finns from a renovated countryside and to strengthen the significance of the countryside when developing commercial and social operational models aiming to achieve sustainable development.

The Landmarks Programme provides and disseminates

impartial information to support social decision-making, while developing and testing new operational models and accelerating new business activity. The objectives will be met by boldly looking for different views and promoting innovative operations. The Landmarks Programme develops new methods for identifying, measuring and reinforcing the significance of the countryside in the individual well-being of Finns. The programme promotes the establishment of demand-based services and companies, and the public sector is also challenged to join this mission. The development is based on a human approach, catering to the needs and demand of citizens, as well as on regional differentiation.

The aim, therefore, is to see the countryside flourish, although there is still uncertainty over its future. The countryside needs a new, vital and active role.

In the future most people will live both urban and rural lifestyles. A study was recently carried out in Finland which found that the majority of Finns have a lifestyle which is equally divided between both urban and rural, so they are searching for solutions where people could live in both areas in a way that is not exclusive.

Public Leadership and Management Programme

The purpose of the four-year Public Administration Management Development Programme is to support the public sector in the challenges of leadership and management: to create and pilot new management and operating models suitable for the public sector. New kinds of leadership and practices will help improve job satisfaction, efficiency and learning to a significant degree. Currently employing over 600,000 people in Finland, the public sector must remain attractive.

“Management in the public sector, i.e. the way that the government and the ministries are organised, is outdated and too hierarchic, slow and rigid,” says Kosonen. “I think that Singapore and South Korea are significantly more dynamic societies than the rest of the world, in part because they are managed like global companies which have a vision for the next 20 years – not just until the next elections. They are thinking about what they can offer the world, and internal politics is not the most important for them. They are positioning themselves globally; they have made rapid progress and have developed very successful management programmes. In Singapore, civil servants are educated in government schools, where they meet employees in the private sector and discuss national interests. In Finland the ministries are highly autonomous and do not always function very well with their environment.”

Growth Programme for the Mechanical



France Križanič, Finance Minister



Laura Kakko, Finnish Ambassador to Slovenia

Industry

Finnish companies have successfully manufactured machinery and other metal products for the global market. The mechanical industry has a significant multiple impact on the society. Finnish machinery companies have to react quickly to the change in the market.

“This branch of industry has a lot of unemployment, and a lot of jobs are not going to come back after the crisis, and there is also the problem of the 100,000 small subcontractors that work for the large companies. The large companies usually look for subcontractors in Asia, since it is better to have your subcontractors near the markets. If the subcontractors do not join together and combine their strengths and make international connections, they won’t survive. We are helping them create new strategies. We help 120 employees with a share capital of EUR 750 m invest in companies if we see that it would be promising.”

‘Dr Mikko Kosonen: I would like to warn the inhabitants of the EU that we will not have good prospects if we continue in the same manner as we have in the past. The things that have not proven to be good have to be changed, and in doing so take on risks, responsibilities, in short work hard, change the country ... small countries have an advantage here. I would like to encourage them not just to follow the rules of the EU, but also to lead the way themselves.’

“I was saved by love”

BORIS PAHOR

The key moments in the life of the Slovenian author from Trieste were living in Nazi concentration camps, the pain and paralysis that he experienced upon losing the Slovenian language in the occupied zone in Trieste, the confusion of post-war Trieste and the always-fresh, constant theme of Pahor's writing – love.

Neva Zajc Photo Dare Čekeliš

Mr Pahor, your story begins in Trieste, the city of your birth, where it continues to this day. Do you have any happy memories of the city from your childhood?

I have few happy memories. I remember the sea and swimming, and when we got sunburned and were as red as lobsters.

In conversation you always mention the first sad sight, the burning of the Slovenian Cultural Centre, which deeply affected you even though you were just a seven-year-old boy.

I can still remember the flames that night in 1920. But it wasn't just the Cultural Centre; the fascists also burned the one near sv. Ivan (St. John), then the one in Rojan, Barkovlje, and the printing shop. I don't remember everything, but the atmosphere was miserable. Lorries careened through the villages. I remember screaming. Like a storm had come. The worst thing was that they destroyed our institutions until the Fascists came to power in 1922. Then they began abolishing our schools and associations. It was the beginning of the end of every form of Slovenian life, economic and cultural, and the right to Slovenian schools. They abolished Slovenian first and last names. All of the inhabitants of Friuli-Venezia Giulia became Italians. This is a historical case without equal in Europe. It's difficult to understand today. When I explain what happened to us in other countries, how my wife Radoslava Premrl became Francesca Premoli, they simply don't get it. It is hard to explain how it is possible that this could have happened to us, around six thousand inhabitants, Slovenians and

Croats, in Europe in the 20th century. This area had to become Italian, for good or ill.

It's clear that this period affected you deeply and awakened the stirrings of your national consciousness. When did you first become aware that you were Slovenian?

Quite a bit of time passed before I realised who I was. It happened at the seminary in Koper, where I made friends who were much more sophisticated. The trauma of my youth had affected me deeply. I couldn't find myself. It wasn't just a question of national consciousness or identity. I was a bit lost in secondary

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school. My Koper schoolmates were much more self-confident, they predicted an uprising and I gradually realised that I was one of them. I read Slovenian literature and became a normal person who knows what he wants and struggles against fascism.

What stimulated your desire to write? It happened after the war, when you began writing in earnest.

I had already begun to write before the war. I started trying to write when I discovered Slovenian literature. Since I was educated in Italian, my Slovene was poor. I sent my writing to the publisher in Ljubljana. They corrected me, but they didn't reject

me. My perspective on Trieste was probably worth something. The decisive moment was when I was accepted by Edvard Kocbek, who later became a great friend, a virtuous man and a man of letters who understood me and supported me, one of the few people who was interested in people on this side of the border.

It was an exceptional, cruel, but nevertheless important period in your life, which you have written many books about, including Necropolis, which is now being read by all of Europe. You wrote them because of the experiences that you shared with many other internees in the concentration camps. How deeply did this experience affect you?

I was deeply affected by the proximity of death and the destruction of humanity. I was lucky to avoid being a labourer in the tunnel, where I didn't last long due to illness, but also because they knew I was a Slovenian and spoke several languages. They appointed me as an interpreter and I stayed in the barracks, so I didn't have to go out on roll call in the rain and snow. That was my salvation. I suffered less than the other prisoners. When they emptied the camp and sent us on to Dachau - I was among the three thousand or so Slovenes whom the Home Guard sent to the camps - I got lucky again. I became an orderly and stayed with the sick patients in the barracks. I probably contracted tuberculosis there, which I was treated for after the war, but I was protected from the outside world, which was very tough, especially during the winter, when the temperature would fall as low as twenty below zero Celsius (-4 °F). It was difficult, >>



and the hardest part was the destruction of humanity. Trainloads of people were sent to their deaths. The twentieth century was a century of destruction, Fascism in Italy and Spain, Nazism in Germany, and on the other hand Stalin, who eradicated millions of people in the name of Marxism or communism. The whole of Europe was involved in this enormous slaughter. This I cannot forget.

A lot of people say that you are a rebellious person. Did you write because of this rebellion? Did you write because someone had to describe the slaughter, because you wanted to bear witness, or did you write because you had to process the experience internally?

It was both. The need was born in the seminary, when I found myself and I felt the need to validate myself through writing. It was similar in the camps. While I was recuperating in the sanatorium in Paris I wrote notes so I wouldn't forget. I kept writing them when I returned home to Trieste in 1948.

In Trieste I published my work in the magazine *Razgledi* (Perspectives). I wrote sketches about the camps. A collection of short prose was published in 1948, which included three of mine. Twenty years later I went back to the Struthof concentration camp in Alsace, and that's where *Necropolis* was formed. There was a need to bear witness, but there was also a need to write about what I experienced. It was also a form of redemption. How many of my fellow deportees met with sad ends after the war due to their inability to return to a normal life. We expected a new life, but we were disappointed in many respects.

What was Trieste like when you returned?

Trieste was chaotic. While I was recuperating in Paris I met a French girl who liked me. I experienced my return to life there, with her. I was not happy about going back to Trieste, although they were eagerly awaiting my return. Trieste's fate was uncertain. The political battles and divisions lasted nine years. The Slovenian national question was pushed to the side.

How would you describe the relations between Slovenian and Italian Trieste?

The relations began to change only when Slovenia became a country and joined the European Union. Today we do not have those extreme divisions between people. Some circles in Italy have realised that they have to accept the Slovenians and take them into account. But Rome still makes the decisions about Trieste.

You always fought for the rights of minorities. How do you see the situation of minorities today?

Many years ago I founded the magazine *Zaliv* (The Gulf, as in the Gulf of Trieste, t.n.), since I did not accept any dictatorship, neither Italian nor German nor Yugoslavian. With *Zaliv* I wanted to encourage discussion of the problem of minorities throughout Europe, beginning with our question. This was not a ghetto, as some critics claimed, but a need to resolve the national question, the question of our minority in Italy, which seemed crucial to me. The former regime did not understand this. I was interested in Sloveneness. I published the magazine for 25 years. The issues are unresolved to this day, coming to terms with the Italian population and with Italian culture. The situation in other places is similar.

Mr Pahor, how did you feel when the Yugoslavian authorities put a "persona non grata" stamp in your passport, when you couldn't cross the border into Slovenia, which happened because of your support for your friend and role model Edvard Kocbek?

I was ashamed that the government prevented my entrance into Yugoslavia, and Slovenia. It was Kocbek who was convicted. But they also attacked me, and the writer Alojz Rebula. However, I was glad that Kocbek had made up his mind and condemned the treatment of the Home Guard, whose lives were taken. Things could have been settled differently after the war. Kocbek condemned that action on behalf of everyone who entered the national war of liberation with the understanding that it was a pluralistic movement. It wasn't that terrible for me, it was sad, but I accepted it. The Party at the time accused us of having changed sides and joined the Home Guard, but it

had nothing to do with that. It was simply a question of ethics.

Once again you showed your rebellious side.

That wasn't rebellion. It was allegiance to a certain natural human ethic. I don't think that I'm a rebel. When I was interrogated by the SS I trembled with fear that I would give away my fellow prisoners. I'm not a hero. I tried to be true to that which is truly shared by humanity, which has to be taken account of regardless of one's world view or faith. Normal relations between people. Life has been good to me. I had my own magazine, a few supporters and people with similar views. Today nobody remembers *Zaliv*, not even historians. I didn't cross the border into Slovenia until 1981.

You love France. You said that you were reborn there. You experienced love there, which has always been important in your life.

I always liked the French language. Knowing French also helped me to become an interpreter in the camps. My French improved in the sanatorium. And they took me in as one of their own, as they treated for two years at their own cost, as if I had been French. France saved me and became very dear to me. I was educated in Italian, but culturally I am closely connected to France. Despite my age they gave me a stipend, and I went to work with a translator, edit my manuscripts, and I spent more time in France than in Trieste. When my books were published in French I received a lot of attention, made several presentations and conversations on radio and television. They never treated me like a foreigner, even though they knew that I was from Trieste and a Slovenian. I still receive invitations and they are a great honour to me.

You love to visit Paris and you always visit the Memorial of the Deportation. Is there a special reason?

For me, the Memorial is a shrine in the centre of Paris where I go to pay my respects to my friends who are no more. I see the visits as a duty, since these people also gave their lives for freedom, even

though they didn't fight with weapons. History forgets these poor people, the nearly four million people who died in the camps. I pay my respects to them because they deserve it.

Clearly you were accepted in France long before you were accepted in Italy, where you live. How do you explain that recognition at home came so late, that you gained it in your later years and that several decades passed before you were finally translated into Italian?

It was because of a policy that was not favourable towards Slovenes. When I sent my manuscripts, the publishers didn't know who I was. So the French translation was published first, due in particular to the efforts of my friend Evgen Bavčar, who lives in Paris and who set out to get *Necropolis* published, and the Guillaume de Roux publishing house, who received the manuscript. The Italian publishers probably mistakenly believed that I was writing about fascism, about which Italy is not aware. They are just discovering it now. When the atmosphere in Trieste changed slightly, some individuals began talking and writing about me. The novel *The Villa by the Lake* was published and my name gradually began to appear. I was later nominated for the Nobel Prize, *Necropolis* was named book of the year in Germany, and Slovenian newspaper critics also awarded me prizes. Meanwhile Slovenia had joined the European Union, and I gradually began to receive more attention. *Necropolis* was finally published in Italian as well. The Italian press now cover me every time I publish something. A big shift occurred after my appearance on Italy's number three television network. For the last year or more I have been receiving invitations from all over to speak to young people and others. It took a long time, as we are talking about books that I published in the seventies. Slovenian literature, whose home is in Trieste, is becoming known today.

Is that your greatest satisfaction?

Of course, the fact that I am recognised,

one of those whom during fascist times were called "sciavi", when we were without a culture and without a language, a second-class nation; looking back now, it is a great satisfaction. A nation who they considered peasants, ignoramuses, barbarians, is now



“THE TWENTIETH CENTURY WAS A CENTURY OF DESTRUCTION, FASCISM IN ITALY AND SPAIN, NAZISM IN GERMANY, AND ON THE OTHER HAND STALIN, WHO ERADICATED MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE NAME OF MARXISM OR COMMUNISM. THE WHOLE OF EUROPE WAS INVOLVED IN THIS ENORMOUS SLAUGHTER. THIS I CANNOT FORGET.”

also garnering recognition and being treated as equals. It is both a personal and a national satisfaction. When I spoke about *Necropolis* on that television show last year, and about fascism as a prelude to *Necropolis*, our people in Trieste cried, since it was an opportunity for me to speak about fascism and to greet them in Slovenian. Unfortunately we have not experienced this officially, as the Italian authorities have not yet given us that satisfaction, although they should. The Germans have admitted their guilt, but the Italians have not done so, at least not in relation to us, the Slovenians and the Croats, who suffered the most under fascism. In this regard we are in a position that is not at all promising.

Love is a constant theme in your work; it appears in all of your novels and was also your personal beacon.

What are you telling us about it?

I have already mentioned that I was saved by love, while my fellow internees were committing suicide, many of them. From my experience and my belief I have always repeated that the only thing which is good and which remains good in people is love. It means to save your existence as something beautiful. Love and respect for the other, the body itself, which you must not afflict with misfortune. It is also sad that the fruits of love, our children, again sometimes fall into misadventure when they have to become soldiers and cause more misfortune. It seems to me that humanity has yet to find a way for something to be borne of love that would then live without violence, the deprivation of freedom and similar injustices that happen all the time all over the world.

What about nature? That is another one of your loves...

Nature is also unfortunate. We despoil her instead of loving her. We destroy the human body, which is the fruit of nature. This is a major sin against nature. What we are given is not enough; we are constantly looking for new ways to

preserve our humanity, but what happens to nature is all the same to us. The world goes on according to its own will and the desire for profits, but finding a solution for the consequences, pollution, for instance, is avoided by many leaders. They don't care what it will be like in twenty or thirty years.

Boris Pahor was taken from Trieste to Dachau in February 1944, and remained there for 15 days.

He was then taken to the Natzweiler Struthof concentration camp, where he remained until September 1944.

From Natzweiler Struthof he was taken back to Dachau, and then to Mittelbau-Dora and Bergen Belsen, which was liberated by the Allies in April 1945.

After the liberation he began travelling to Paris, where he arrived on 10 May 1945 at the Red Cross sanatorium in Villiers sur Marne, where he was treated until Christmas 1946. ●

RECORD ONE BILLION EUROS FOR TRAVELLING ABROAD LAST YEAR

Vesna Bertonec Popit, Delo Photo STA

WHILE SLOVENIA'S GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT FELL by seven per cent last year, this year it is expected to rise by one per cent. This means that Slovenia will need a few years to return to its 2008 GDP level. Some people are comparing last year's fall in GDP with the drop after the breakup of the former Yugoslavian market and Slovenia's independence.

The economic outlook for 2010 is also not very optimistic. Analysts have determined that Slovenia can expect economic growth only from exports this year, as neither domestic demand nor investments are expected to generate growth. However, most of Slovenia's largest exporters, who due to the economic crisis posted significantly poorer results last year (like the majority of the world's multinationals), are not expecting to see export growth in 2010. Medium-sized enterprises, which were not as deeply affected by the crisis last year, are more optimistic, in some cases because the crisis appeared as early as the end of 2008 and more or less subsided last year, so that these companies have the means and the strength to invest in development and increase their competitiveness.

The service sector, which in the opinion of some experts drifted into the crisis with some delays, is even less optimistic this year. The most significant in this perspective is difficulties in construction, as the majority of construction companies are facing illiquidity, particularly construction companies whose lines of business include the construction of large amounts of apartments on spec, which are selling poorly during crisis times. The fast-growing economy and bank loans in past years caused these companies to grow too quickly. It seems in fact that Slovenian contractors evaluated the market poorly, as they are also having a lot of problems with luxury apartments, since in Slovenia people who have a lot of money tend to build houses with all of the luxury conveniences, and not buy flats in blocks.

Trade revenues were also down significantly last year, which was particularly noticeable in mail-order and internet sales, and owing to the reduced number of foreign guests the crisis also strongly affected tourism. On the other hand Slovenians continued to travel abroad in great numbers, as foreign travel figures last year for the first time exceeded one billion euros. On the other hand, and lower household and commercial



Postojna Cave

purchasing power last year strongly affected leasing companies, which emphasised the fact that they are making payment agreements with customers having payment difficulties, but did not comment on the fact that new leasing contracts are down significantly, which means lower revenues in future.

Owing to last year's decrease in both exports and imports, Slovenia's current balance of payments was substantially better than in the past few years, when foreign trade deficits led to a current deficit of over EUR 1 billion every year, while last year it was only slightly over EUR 200 million.

Last year the European Investment Bank approved EUR 538 million in loans to Slovenia, and a total of two billion euros since 2005. The largest share of its business in Slovenia last year was conducted with the Slovenian export and development bank (SID), which allocated a little less than half of those funds for projects, intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Owing to the taking effect of a law which levies a special tax on motor vehicles that cause higher amounts of pollution, the prices of the majority of cars increased in Slovenia, while the prices of a smaller number went down.

Environmental warnings in Slovenia are also becoming increasingly serious. On one hand, some companies have not yet met European environmental standards with regard to reducing environmental pollution. According to Dr Lučka

Kajfež Bogataj, an ecologist who was part of the team that received the Nobel Peace Prize with American Al Gore, the Slovenian Government has pushed the problem of greenhouse gases aside too much to date. The Government has established a special office, according to Dr Kajfež, but she had hoped that the office would have farther-reaching competences. She stated that Slovenia's strategic element is water, and in her opinion they should already be thinking about emphasising water as a brand and surviving with it. Dr Kajfež opposes the new block at the thermoelectric plant in Šoštanj for ecological reasons and says that if she had the choice, she would support a new block at the nuclear power plant, since there is evidence that the only countries, that have managed to reduce greenhouse gases, are those with nuclear energy. According to Dr Kajfež, one of the causes of the excessive consumption of energy in Slovenia is spatial planning, which is strongly influenced by Slovenia's local self-government, with its 200 municipalities and mayors, and the same number of spatial plans, industrial zones and other ideas.

New environment minister Dr Roko Žarnić has also placed concern for water among his priorities and believes that the issue of landfills is very important in Slovenia, but is also overblown. Dr Žarnić also expects that negotiations over Italian oil terminals on the Adriatic Sea will continue and that it will be possible to reach an agreement, since if not, Slovenia will report Italy to a European court.

The huge difficulties of the Koper company Istrabenz, which expanded its lines of business into a wide variety of areas, are threatening to force the sale of the Slovenian subterranean gem the Postojna Caves and Predjama Castle, which has incited the Postojna economic sphere to collect funds for the purchase of the concession, as they would like the Postojna Caves to remain in Slovenian hands after the expiry of the concession. Although the Government states that the current concession for managing the cave, which was extended two years ago for a period of twenty years, has not generated bad experiences, a possible sale, which has allegedly generated some interest in Italy, could change the conditions. The Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning is therefore studying the



Dr Lučka Kajfež Bogataj
Ecologist

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Dr Roko Žarnić,
Environment Minister

possibility that the Government would have to issue an approval in the case of a sale. This is supposed to be an additional safety net.

Numerous Slovenian companies and their employees have also received special safety nets in the last few months. According to labour minister Dr Ivan Svetlik, the Government, or his ministry, has assisted nearly 1 500 companies with around 85 thousand employees through partial subsidies of full-time employment and partial compensation of laid-off employees. The ministry estimates that their measures have saved at least 26 thousand jobs.

According to data from the Employment Service of Slovenia the number of registered unemployed persons in Slovenia is currently remaining slightly below one hundred thousand, although they had forecasted that that figure would be reached by the end of last year. The unemployment level according to the International Labour Organization's Social Security Inquiry was six per cent in December of last year, while this year it is expected to be slightly higher.

Employees are extremely dissatisfied with the changes that the Government intends to make to labour legislation, which will shorten the period of notice for redundancies to just one month and reduce severance pay for laid-off workers. The trade unions state that the labour legislation is supposed to protect workers and are not satisfied with the Government's bargain: higher minimum wage but faster firing. Students are also highly dissatisfied, since the Government has limited and levied additional taxes on student employment. Students used the money earned by working during their studies to cover the high residential costs, since there is never enough space in the student dormitories, and also used the money to purchase meal coupons. The students believe that now only wealthier students will be able to afford to study. On the other hand the Student Services have a large amount of funding, which they invest in various things. The Government believes that companies avoid hiring young people by hiring students, and that the new regulations, which would also count student work as employment, will be to the students' advantage and those unemployed persons will also be able to apply for so-called "small jobs".



PLEČNIK'S LJUBLJANA IN BUDAPEST, FRANCO NOVINC IN BRUSSELS

At the beginning of March, an exhibition of photographs of Plečnik's works in Ljubljana opened in the foyer of Budapest Castle, one of the most prestigious and most visited exhibition spaces in Hungary.

Jože Osterman Photo Brigitta Soós, STA

THE EXHIBITION CONSISTS OF 30 beautiful photographs by Stane Jeršič which present, through the interplay of sunlight and shadow, details of Plečnik's most interesting architectural heritage in Ljubljana. The exhibition has previously been shown in Malta and in Cyprus in the context of Plečnik Year (2007) and the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union (2008). The opening was attended by a large number of people, among them attendees of the Slovenia-Hungary Business Forum. The exhibition was opened by Gábor Tamás Nagy, mayor of the First District of Budapest, and Darja Bavdaž Kuret, the Slovenian ambassador to Hungary.

In Brussels, Anita Pipan, the Slovenian ambassador to Belgium and Kris Peeters, Minister-President of Flanders, opened a retrospective exhibition of works by the well-known painter Franc Novinc, who is also a professor at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts. Novinc's landscapes, for which he won a Prešeren Fund Award, have long formed one of the more interesting series of works in Slovenian painting. This well-organised exhibition is a further demonstration of the excellent relations between Slovenia and Flanders, which in recent years have exchanged a number of projects in the economic and cultural spheres.



BORIS PODRECCA AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Jože Osterman Photo STA

BORIS PODRECCA IS WITHOUT A doubt one of the most recognisable names in European architecture today. This is demonstrated not only by the large number of projects that he has completed in recent years for various clients and the fact that his architectural studio is one of the busiest in the world, but also by the numerous awards he has received for his solutions, in which his successful synthesis of the new and the old, by no means an easy task in architecture, is particularly admired within the profession. This celebrated Slovenian architect is now coming to Slovenia's most important exhibition space – the National Gallery – with a major exhibition presenting, among other things some of his most recent projects. The Podrecca exhibition promises

to be one of the highlights of the artistic calendar in Slovenia this year.

Podrecca (born to a Slovenian father from Trieste and a Herzegovinian mother from Mostar) is an incredibly multifaceted architect. The exhibition includes photographic documentation of already realised works, competition entries and winning projects that are yet to be realised, various sketches, drawings, notes, freehand drawings, posters, and travel sketches from journeys through Asia and the Middle East – in other words an enormous mass of everything that his lively mind has encountered on his many journeys. Since the National Gallery does not have unlimited exhibition space, the architect has restricted himself to his work from the 1980s to the present day. Even so,



there is still a huge amount of material, as the extensive exhibition catalogue also shows.

In recent decades Podrecca has left his mark not only on Vienna and Austria but also on Ljubljana and Slovenia, while he has also been a very strong presence in the Eastern Adriatic area, where he has realised or is in the process of realising a large number of projects. These are not merely building projects but, more often, comprehensive town-planning projects, many of them in the historic centres or streets of old towns.

DAYS OF COMEDY IN CELJE

Last month Celje raised the curtain on the 19th edition of Days of Theatrical Comedy, an event that always manages to cheer the city up during the slightly melancholy winter season.

Jože Osterman Photo STA



Vinko Möderndorfer, dramatist, writer and director

THE PROGRAMME INCLUDED 12 comedies chosen by selector Tatjana Doma: eight of them in the competition programme and four in the accompanying programme.

Celje's comedy festival is also known for the biennial Comedy Pen award that goes to a new comedy chosen from anonymously submitted manuscripts. This year an impressive 13 works were submitted and the winner chosen by the jury was Nežka se moži (Agnes Gets Married). This comedy for three actors, which is tied to one of the best-known situations in Slovenian comedic literature, impressed the jury with its keen sense for theatrical situations and, above all, its extraordinarily rich language. The following day it was revealed that the

author of the text was the dramatist, writer and director Vinko Möderndorfer, without a doubt one of the most original and prolific Slovenian literary artists who, incidentally, has now won the Comedy Pen at the Celje festival for the sixth time.

The festival was opened by the comedy Krpan vs. Brdavs, a production of the KULT Cultural Institute. This was followed by productions from Narodni Dom Maribor, SNG Drama Ljubljana, SLG Celje, the Ljubljana City Theatre, Koper Theatre, SNG Nova Gorica, the Prešeren Theatre Kranj and the Kikinda National Theatre from Serbia, a selection that proves that comedy is by no means an underappreciated genre in Slovenia's theatres and that most theatres are careful to find room for it in their repertoires.

HOMAGE TO A LITERARY GREAT

IN FEBRUARY, CANKARJEV DOM IN Ljubljana hosted a fascinating symposium dedicated to one of Slovenia's most prominent poets, Kajetan Kovič. This prolific poet, perhaps most familiar to younger readers as the creator of Maček Muri (Mury the Cat), celebrates his eightieth birthday next year. But the main reason for this symposium on his work was the publication of a new collection of poems entitled Vse poti so (All Roads Are). This collection includes works from Kovič's poetry collections dating all the way back to 1948, as well as 40 poems previously only published in magazines. The symposium thus became a good opportunity for participants to remember one of the most fertile periods for Slovenian poetry, which in 1948 began to free itself from the grip of socialist realism and start out in a new and distinctly individualistic direction.



In this context, it was touching to hear Kovič's contemporary and friend, the great poet Ciril Zlobec, talk about the times in which Kovič, Pavček, Menart and he himself introduced brand-new elements to Slovenian poetry with the collection Pesmi štirih (Poems of the Four). Two other poets, Milan Dekleva and Fabijan Hafner, the latter a Slovenian from Austrian Carinthia, contributed selected readings and cogent analysis, while Boris A. Novak discussed the form of Kovič's poetry, describing his poem Južni otok (A Southern Island) as a true masterpiece of classical poetry.



SLOVENIAN DRAMA WEEK FESTIVAL IN KRANJ

The annual Slovenian Drama Week in Kranj is, along with the Borštnik Festival in Maribor, the most important established Slovenian theatre festival.

Albert Kos Photo STA

THE ORIGINAL FOCUS OF THE festival is that it is exclusively dedicated to staging Slovenian dramatic productions, in an attempt to stimulate the production of Slovenian theatrical works, which, though they account for a minority share in the programmes of Slovenia's theatres, often play a crucial supporting role. This year's 40th Slovenian Drama Week, which took place from 20 March to 2 April, completes

four decades of the existence of this festival, something which the Prešeren Theatre in Kranj, the festival organiser, wished to highlight in the preparation of this year's programme. The festival selector, Marko Sosič, until recently the artistic director of the Teatro Stabile Sloveno in Trieste, included seven of the 37 entries in the festival's competition programme and a further six productions in the accompanying programme. A three-

member jury was appointed to choose the best production at the festival, along with a five-member jury responsible for selecting the best Slovenian dramatic work staged or written in the past year.

The Slovenian Drama Week has always striven to present foreign productions of works by Slovenian dramatists and this year's international festival programme is even more extensive than in past years, featuring five productions from abroad: the Theater im Keller from Graz in Austria took part in the festival with its production of Evald Flisar's Uncle from America (Onkel aus Amerika), the Théâtre de l'Oriental from Vevey in Switzerland performed Dragica Potočnjak's Alisa, Alice, the Tristan Bates Theatre from London and the Hercegnovsko Pozorište from Montenegro both staged versions of Saša Pavček's Aria, and the Al-Ghad Theatre (National Heritage Theatre Company) from Cairo in Egypt performed Evald Flisar's Antigone Now. The festival's international programme is therefore an important indicator of the Slovenian playwrights and plays that have been most successful recently in breaking onto foreign stages.

Accompanying the festival were three drama workshops, the organisers of which aim to encourage young writers of plays in Slovenian and in this way contribute to the further development of Slovenian drama. The key workshop this year was dedicated to psychodrama. The workshop was led by Tomi Janežič a theatre director and lecturer at the Ljubljana Academy of Theatre, in collaboration with Vladimir Milošević, a psychiatrist and the director of the Psychodrama Institute in Belgrade, and the Israeli psychodramatist and actress Hedva Novich.

With both its festival programme and the accompanying programme, this year's Slovenian Drama Week successfully fulfilled its stated purpose of highlighting current developments in Slovenian dramatic arts which, according to the selector Marko Sosič, are reflected above all in a 'critical reflection on some of the fundamental moments of Slovenia's social and political past and a deepening of the critical view of the fabric of a society in which the spiritual and social dignity of the individual is increasingly called into question.'



12TH FESTIVAL OF DOCUMENTARY FILM

The 12th International Festival of Documentary Film took place in Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana from 24 to 31 March.

Albert Kos Photo www.fdf.si

THE EIGHT DAYS OF THE FESTIVAL programme saw the projection of 64 films, divided into five categories, the largest of which was the last: a retrospective of Bosnian documentary films covering 44 titles and functioning as a thematic review of the development of Bosnian short documentary filmmaking from the early 1950s to today.

The other four festival categories, consisting of five films each, encompassed a wider international thematic selection of feature-length documentary films prepared by Simon Popek, the director of the film programme at Cankarjev Dom, with a particular emphasis on the competition category consisting of five films on the theme of human rights, where Cankarjev Dom, as the organiser of the festival, has been collaborating with Amnesty International Slovenia for several years. According to Popek, this selection of films deals with apparently marginal themes from areas where rights are abused or denied on a massive scale, although not always in the most obvious forms of human rights violations such as physical violence, torture or unlawful imprisonment. No less dangerous are certain less obvious forms of human rights violations such as denying people the right to healthy food, wilful pollution of the environment, misleading people and manipulating official food safety and nutrition data, or preventing mixed or interethnic marriages or domestic partnerships. As Popek points out, such forms and examples of human rights violations receive less coverage in the media and therefore there is all the more reason for documentary films to draw attention to them.

The festival's competition category



Nataša Posel



Simon Popek

included five films (two American, two German and one Israeli). A three-member international jury awarded a plaque to the best film in the category.

Accompanying the festival were a seminar on the development and production of documentary films in Europe organised by Media Desk Slovenia with expert guests Stefano Tealdi and Leena Pasanen, and a round-table discussion entitled 'Environment, Human Rights and Corporate Responsibility', organised jointly by Cankarjev Dom and Amnesty International Slovenia.

The festival took place in two venues – Cankarjev Dom and Kinodvor – in order to further increase its potential audience. Thanks in part to this festival, the audience for documentary films in Ljubljana and Slovenia in general continues to grow.

Nataša Posel, the director of Amnesty International Slovenia, sees documentary

films as an important way to raise people's awareness of human rights issues: 'The most convincing and involving story is one that is told in a documentary film, in words and images, by the people to whom it actually happened. And although it's true that films cannot change the world, the people who see them can.'





Jure Eržen

SECOND ANNUAL SLOVENIA PRESS PHOTO AWARDS

Andrej Savelli Photo Jure Eržen, Jošt Franko

SLOVENIA'S SECOND ANNUAL festival of photo-journalism and documentary photography, Slovenia Press Photo 2010, which was organised by the Institute for the Promotion of Photography, was held at Cankarjev dom from 23 February to 18 March. The festival was opened by a retrospective exhibition of the work of photographer Göksin Sipahioğlu, the founder of the reputed French agency Sipa Press of Paris. The festival also featured an exhibition entitled "War", with photos by members of one of the world's most influential photo agencies, VII. The exhibition presented all of the major crisis spots of the past decade.

The high point of the festival, which also featured several accompanying events (photography workshops, presentations) was the announcement of the winners of the SPP contest. Slovenian photographers

employed by the Slovenian media or working as freelance photographers once again competed in several categories. The international expert jury, which was led by Christopher Morris, the founder of the VII Photo Agency and Time Magazine's White House photographer, selected the best Slovenian press photo of 2009.

The jury selected a photo by Jure Eržen, which shows a young Palestinian woman with a one-year-old son in the ruins of their house in Gaza, when she lost her husband, father and several relatives during the three weeks of Israeli shelling last year. The award for best documentary of the year went to a photo documentary entitled *Vdova* (The Widow), in which 16-year-old Jošt Franko portrayed his grandmother going about her daily chores. The jury also awarded prizes in the categories sport (Jure Kravanja and Tomaž Bevk), news (Aleš Gregorič and Jure Eržen), nature and

environment (Anže Petkovšek and Boris Farič), entertainment and culture (Matjaž Krivic and Aleš Bravničar) and people (Domen Grögl and Tomaž Črnej).



Jošt Franko

RETROSPECTIVE OF COMIC STRIP ARTIST TOMAŽ LAVRIČ AT MODERN GALLERY

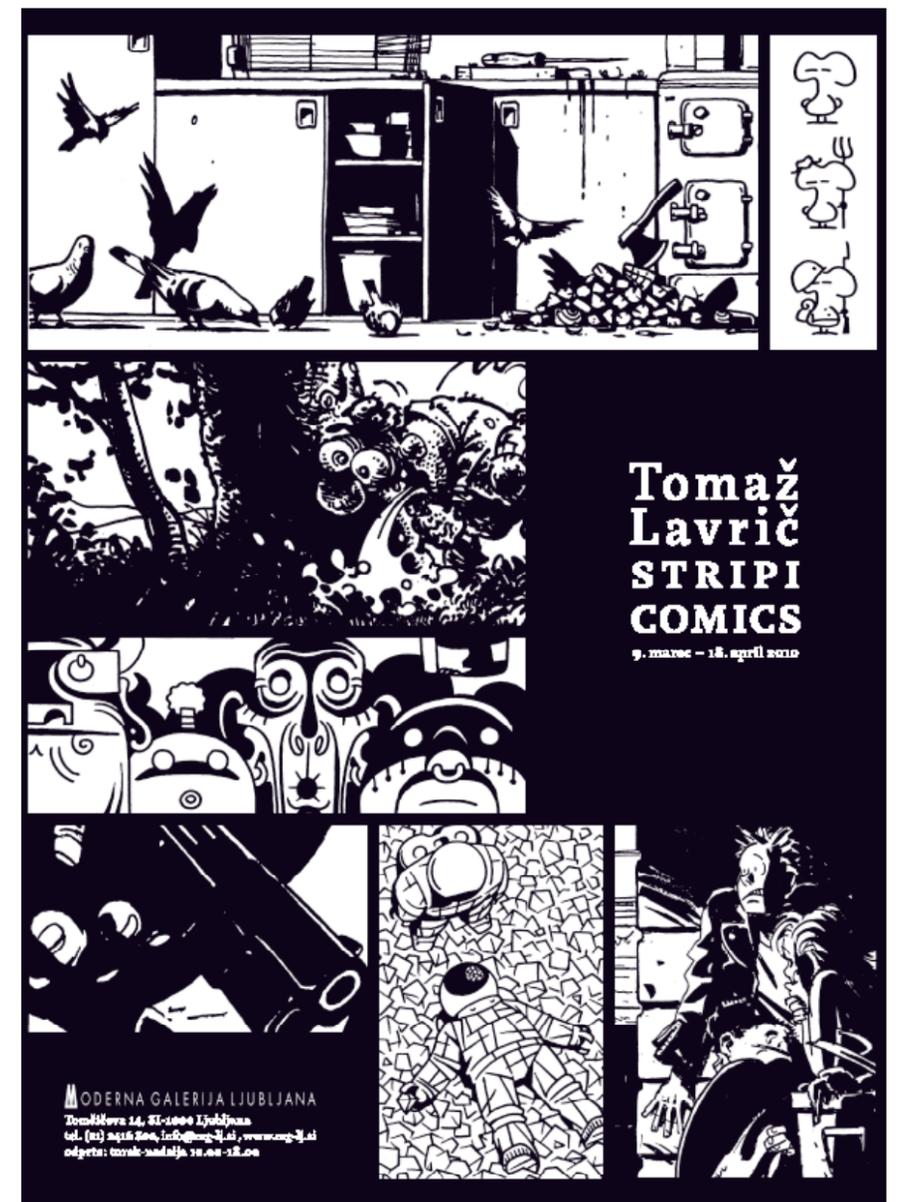
Tomaž Lavrič is one of Slovenia's best-known comic strip artists.

Andrej Savelli

THE EXHIBITION STRIPI (STRIPS), which is on display until 6 June at the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana, presents a cross-section of his work. It features around 85 comic strip boards, the original drawings, with some from each period of his career and each specific style, as Lavrič is a versatile artist who changes styles like a chameleon.

Lavrič began his career in the second half of the 1980s at the weekly magazine *Mladina*, where he has published the majority of his work, and where he still remains today. Although Lavrič is probably best known for his weekly strip *Diareja* (Diarrhoea), in which he has summarised the biggest current stories of the week in two or three pithy drawings every week for the last 23 years, he has also created covers for *Mladina*, illustrations and caricatures to accompany stories, and last but not least has published comic strips, both individual and weekly serials. Lavrič has also collected the majority of those strips in 11 albums, with which he has penetrated and established himself on some of Europe's most demanding comic strip markets, such as France, Belgium and Italy.

As director of the Modern Gallery Zdenka Badinovac said at the exhibition opening, comic strips have long demonstrated that they are a unique art form which deserves a place on gallery walls, and the Tomaž Lavrič exhibition is an excellent opportunity for people who follow art but do not read comic strips to get acquainted with his work. On the other hand, the exhibition will also attract fans



of the strip to visit the Modern Gallery who otherwise might not attend. Lavrič hopes that the exhibition heralds better times for comic strips in Slovenia.



SMALL CAN BE BIG

Sanja Rubinić Photo Matej Povše/Dnevnik

“**THE FEELING OF VICTORY BEGAN THE MOMENT THE LAST OF MANY BOXES CONTAINING THE LAST BATCH OF THE ALMOST 15,000 ATHLETES' NUMBERS SEWN AT HER COMPANY PRINA IN RADOVLJICA, AT THE FOOT OF THE ALPS, REACHED ITS DESTINATION IN CANADA.**”

I FEEL LIKE AN OLYMPIC CHAMPION, I HAVE ACHIEVED a new personal best,' says the otherwise reserved and modest Nataša Pristov, 40, of Radovljica, with a hint of pride. She is thinking of the recent XXI Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver in which she also took part, in her own unique way.

The feeling of victory began the moment the last of many boxes containing the last batch of the almost 15,000 athletes' numbers sewn at her company Prina in Radovljica, at the foot of the Alps, reached its destination in Canada. This was roughly two months before the opening of the Games, when the client gave a uniform verdict – the little company from Gorenjska had done an excellent job!

Between 1 September and 10 December last year, in premises measuring 130 square metres, three seamstresses, Pristov herself and her husband Andrej Okorn (who had left his job at Elan for this important order) sewed numbers for the athletes due to appear at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver, the television broadcasts of which have just been viewed by an audience of millions.

'There was no panic or euphoria, or even any sleepless nights. We organised the work carefully before we started and then completed it calmly and almost without stress,' Pristov explains, adding that for the three months that her company was working on the job there were almost no other orders. 'There were no surprises. Everything fell into place. Even

before the order was confirmed, despite the difficult economic situation, we had bought faster and quieter sewing machines and organised new premises, so I knew that we would avoid production bottlenecks and that we were capable of doing the job well if we got it.'

Continuing a family tradition

The wearing of sports kit at schools and sports clubs in Slovenia in the 1970s was an innovation for which Nataša's father was partly responsible. A former physical education teacher, it was he who proposed what for Slovenian sport was then a new form of dressing. Once the business had got off the ground, Nataša's mother Kristina dedicated practically all of her working life to sewing sports kits and athletes' numbers for almost the whole of Slovenia.

Nataša inherited the family business on her mother's retirement in 1991, and with it a good reputation that allowed her, as she herself puts it, to find a business partner in the larger Austrian market. And so, via an agency in Innsbruck with which she has been working for a number of years, she beat off competition from all over the world to win the above order for the Olympic Games in Canada.

The actual sewing of the numbers was not difficult, explains Nataša Pristov, although the cut for each individual discipline, the breadth of the shoulders, the depth of the neckline and, of course, the gender of the athletes is precisely specified. More important was the preparation of the colour printing process. 'Colours, specifically a dark blue shade that is very difficult to get on a printer, were decisive in the company getting the order,' explains Nataša. 'Naturally the material also has to be of a certain quality, but that is not as important as the colours.'

Winter is the time when the sewing season at the workshop reaches its peak. Their numbers have been worn by competitors in World Cup skiing events for years. Besides athletes' numbers, of which they make up to 10,000 a year, depending on the season and orders, the little company also makes kits for football, volleyball, basketball and handball, and offers screen printing services.

Only in summer, when work slows down considerably because of the seasonal drop in orders, do they take a well-earned rest in the form of a short holiday. Despite everything,

Nataša is not currently planning a visit to Canada. She prefers South America.

A frustrated vet

Before entering the family business, Nataša, who had loved animals since she was a child, was thinking about studying veterinary medicine. She had to give up this idea because of health problems and numerous allergies. In the meantime she developed another great passion – travelling. South America was her favourite destination. Later she enrolled at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Textile Technology, although she did not complete the course. 'It simply wasn't interesting,' she says with a smile. Her great success with athletes' numbers at the Olympics, which has not passed unobserved among designers within the sector, has finally convinced Nataša that she made the right choice when she decided to dedicate herself to the family business. Interestingly, her ambitions remain modest for the time being. She says she is not thinking about a new Mura in Radovljica.

'No, I don't want a big factory, I'm satisfied with our current way of working. Of course money



“**OF COURSE MONEY IS IMPORTANT, BUT IT IS NOT DECISIVE FOR MY QUALITY OF LIFE.**”

is important, but it is not decisive for my quality of life,' says this modest businesswoman from Radovljica for whom, on the other hand, personal spiritual development is very important. For the last five years she has been studying kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhanjan, which helps greatly in her work. 'I notice that, thanks to yoga, it is easier to concentrate and to separate essential things from unnecessary, unimportant things. I cope better with fear and, through yoga, have almost got rid of it entirely. Of course I am not just talking about my own fears, but fears that are probably common to most people, since these days we can see how principles are falling down and a kind of chaos prevails. On the one hand everything is permitted, while on the other hand nothing is, and in these conditions it is difficult to focus on values. For me personally, the best way to do this is through yoga.' Nataša, who describes herself as a 'cautious optimist' does not want to burden herself with negative thoughts, negative energy, and thinks that in a way this is how she managed to 'summon up' the order of the decade.

'Yoga helps you to become calmer,' concludes Nataša. 'You accept things as they are. You only focus on the present. This is the spirit in which our whole group worked, and I'm not



sure that I would have taken things as calmly if it hadn't been for yoga.'

Media attention

Nataša Pristov does not see the order for the Winter Olympics as the greatest success of her life, although it is already clear that it will represent a kind of turning point in her business.

Her most important success, she says, is the healing of her son, a process in which she was involved in a very specific way. When he was a baby, her son Aljaž, now 10, contracted a serious form of atypical dermatitis. The alternative treatment conducted by the homoeopath Kornelija Pope-Toth also included 'healing' the mother. By changing her patterns of thinking and working on herself, she was consequently able to help improve the state of health of her son. The situation in those years at the beginning of the new millennium, as Nataša vividly remembers, was anything but rosy. The business, too, was going through a period of uncertainty.

Journalists were quick to seize on the success story of the

businesswoman from Radovljica and, like the successes of the skiers Tina Maze and Petra Majdič, both of whom shone in Vancouver, the media covered it down to the smallest detail. But despite all the media coverage, no congratulations, thanks or even a bouquet of flowers have been forthcoming from the authorities in Radovljica, even though this little town in Gorenjska has enjoyed its own share of fame and publicity thanks to Nataša's success.

“**THAT SEWING NUMBERS FOR OLYMPIC ATHLETES WAS VERY IMPORTANT FOR HER COMPANY IS ALSO ILLUSTRATED BY THE WAY THAT GLOBAL MARKETING WORKS IN THIS SPECIFIC CASE.**”

When asked where she sees herself in five or ten years' time, Nataša does not have an answer. 'I trust to intuition and will wait and see what the future brings. I don't make long-term plans because something can always come along to shatter them in a moment.'

That sewing numbers for Olympic athletes was very important for her company is also illustrated by the way that global marketing works in this specific case. Despite the fact that new orders are arriving, she will not be allowed to mention the Olympic project on her website for another two years.

But even without the internet, there must be some truth in the saying that 'a good reputation travels far'.



Labour, Family and Social Affairs Minister Ivan Svetlik (third from the left) posing with the winners of the Golden Thread 2009 awards for best employers handed out by publisher Dnevnik

GOLD THREAD 2009

Si.mobil, Nil and Vivo Catering are the best employers

Ana Mrzlikar Photo STA

ZLATA NIT, OR GOLD THREAD, IS A MEDIA RESEARCH project run by the newspaper company Dnevnik, and since 2007 it has been holding the national selection of the best employer. The first year saw the participation of 130, and in three years around 250 companies, with several thousand employees taking part each year. The Zlata nit award is presented in the categories of small, medium and large companies, depending on the number of employees. The most significant portion of the marks is given by employees in the companies participating in the selection, and the winners of individual categories are selected in the end by a committee, following in-depth interviews with company managers and after a vote by the expert council.

The main purpose and design of the project is to seek out the top Slovenian company of the 21st century, one where employees have the chance to fulfil their talents, and through them to contribute to the success of the organisation in the global market, say the organisers of Zlata nit.

The organisation of Zlata nit begins each year in the first few days of autumn, then in the first few days of spring it concludes with a celebration and awards ceremony. "Through the media research project Zlata nit and its selection of the best employer, we want to contribute to the dynamic development of employees and organisations and also to the competitiveness of the Slovenian economy. Each year our team devotes eight months of preparation, research and work to the selection, and even in these rather unfavourable economic conditions we have again managed to find shining examples of best practices in the area of working with people," says Saša Mrak, the head of Zlat

nit. "More than 8,000 Slovenians gave marks for relations within the organisation that employs them, and among the finalists we also looked into the area of leadership, while for all companies we took into account financial performance, so I am certain that our society can learn a great deal from many of these best employers."

The Zlata nit project is supported by the most prominent figures of the business world, civil society and the academic sphere, while the honorary patron is the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. The Minister for Labour, Family and Social Affairs, Dr Ivan Svetlik, said in his introduction speech at this year's award ceremony: "The Zlata nit project fulfils numerous aspects associated with values, theory and practice as well as employment and training policies. The examples of this project's award-winners show that for companies with good key personnel and cohesive and motivated employees, even the economic crisis does not pose a threat, but rather a challenge which they are prepared to overcome. Employers who know how to provide a creative working environment by motivating employees, where their business performance is reflected primarily in the creation of good and safe jobs, are worth all our confidence and support. The Zlata nit awards are a prize for all the efforts of companies that invest in employee satisfaction as well as development. The best employers are a model and inspiration for the Slovenian economy, since work and employment represent for individuals not just social security, but also an important indication of their status in society."

A total of 115 companies opted to take part in this year's

national selection of the best employers, which came really close to last year's number of participants (117). Of the 101 best employers there were 50 small companies (up to 50 employees), 25 medium (between 51 and 250) and 26 large companies (251 and more employees).

And the best employers are ...

The best employers of 2009 were announced at the award ceremony, which took place on 18 March this year at Ljubljana Castle. In the small company category the title went to Vivo Catering, for the medium category to Nil and in the large company category the title went to Si.mobil.

Si.mobil d.d., winner of the large company category

This year Si.mobil was among the Zlata nit finalists in the large company category for the third time, and last year the company had already received a special award for the most innovative and socially responsible approach to employees and the wider environment.

"The distinguishing feature of Si.mobil is our staff, whose drive, dedication and originality is the company's greatest asset.

“ THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF SI.MOBIL IS OUR STAFF, WHOSE DRIVE, DEDICATION AND ORIGINALITY IS THE COMPANY'S GREATEST ASSET. WE ARE BUILDING ON THIS RELATIONSHIP AT EVERY STEP, SINCE WE ARE AWARE THAT OUR STAFF ARE JUST PEOPLE, WITH HEARTS AND FEELINGS, AND WE DEVOTE GREAT ATTENTION TO THIS FACT. ”

We are building on this relationship at every step, since we are aware that our staff are just people, with hearts and feelings, and we devote great attention to this fact. The company's vision is for all users to recognise Si.mobil as the most attractive communications provider in Slovenia, and all members of the orchestra are responsible for this," stresses CEO Dejan Turk, who is also 2009 manager of the year. So what is the secret of this company's success? "A few years ago, like the majority of mobile telephony companies, Si.mobil had a distinctly technological orientation. We then made a conscious decision not to compete in this field, since the competition in this area is extremely fierce and the investments huge. We decided instead of this to try to get the most driven and motivated people," adds Turk.

And this commitment, or rather the drive of the staff at Si.mobil, their enterprise, infused with a creative climate, the orientation to innovation and development of highly demanding jobs, plus the successful commercial development of the company, are the factors recognised by the committee, against stiff competition, as belonging to the best employer of 2009 in the large company category.



Nil, winner of the medium-sized category

Last year the company Nil celebrated two decades of presence in the communication technology field. And that's not all – we can safely say that Nil is one of the leading companies in this field, and is not just able to identify global trends, but through its know-how, which is bought by leading world multinationals, it is even helping to shape them. This is no doubt in part because one of the main focuses of the company has a very simple title: talents. "Whenever we recruit, we are looking for people who will fit well with our personnel," says managing director Klemen Štular. "We have a good team of workers. It's similar to team sports. A good team is the secret for success. Outstanding individuals, whom we like to call virtuosos in sports, are desirable, or the dot on the i, but they are powerless without a strong team. We in fact have both: a strong team and virtuosos."

Among the exceptional companies ranked as finalists in the category of medium-sized companies, Nil stands out in several criteria. Its internal balance is something essential: in all factors of the organisational climate, such as a stimulating work environment and management, job autonomy, the possibility of career development, the absence of overloading, dedication to the company and staff cohesion, the company is in first or second place. The company also scores very highly in terms of added value: in 2008 it exceeded EUR 120,000 per employee.

Vivo Catering, winner in the small company category

The company Vivo Catering, this year's winner in the small company category, was already one of the finalists last year. Right since they started, they have been handing down the skills and culture of event catering to generations of school and university students studying catering and tourism courses. "The thing that distinguishes the Vivo people and the Vivo Catering brand, is professionalism. Our guests recognise us by this the moment they set foot in the door. Years ago the staff at Vivo adopted the motto "It isn't a job, it's lifestyle", and as the founder this is a clear message that we're on the right track. We are very proud that the British protocol services, in other words the Queen, selected us to work for them. The achievement of being selected for this will be very hard for us to outdo. There is a general rule around the world – if you are entrusted official British and Japanese functions, you have long-lasting capital in terms of references, and this applies both to the individual and the company," says managing director Jerneja Kamnikar.

The company excels in challenging operations, where a top-quality service can only result from the full empowerment of human capital. "For us the person washing up is just as



important as the one preparing the main dish. If that person has the wrong approach to doing dishes, it is no use arriving on site with a fabulous main dish but dirty plates," adds Jerneja Kamnikar. The high marks from the committed employees and the indicators of successful company development confirm that, quite simply, she is right.

The other finalists of this year's Zlata nit that also received awards at the ceremony are the small companies B2, Collegium Mondial Travel, Hair Beauty, Intera, List and XLAB; in the

“ OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUALS, WHOM WE LIKE TO CALL VIRTUOSOS IN SPORTS, ARE DESIRABLE, OR THE DOT ON THE I, BUT THEY ARE POWERLESS WITHOUT A STRONG TEAM. WE IN FACT HAVE BOTH: A STRONG TEAM AND VIRTUOSOS. ”

medium-sized group they are Četrta pot, Halcom, Medis, Microsoft, MIK and Sava; and among the large companies they are dm drogerie markt, Krka, Lekarna Ljubljana, S&T Slovenija, Trimo and Zavarovalnica Triglav.

And one more new feature of the project this year: for the first time this year Zlata nit is being extended to government administration and its operating units. The response of these units has been extraordinary, with registration from 55 out of a

total of 58, representing more than 94 percent. This is important, since the results of surveys will be very representative. They will be presented at the Days of Public Law and Public Management, 2 June 2010, when the three best operating units will be announced in the small, medium and large categories.

PLANICA – CRADLE OF SLOVENIAN SPORT

Andrej Stare Photo Darinka Mladenovič



WAY BACK IN 1933, THE ENGINEERS STANKO BLOUDEK and Ivan Rožman set off by train from Ljubljana to Rateče. Their final destination was the Planica valley, which stretches out from Rateče to Tamar. They had hit upon the idea of finding some location to erect and install a ski jump from which it would be possible to jump more than 100 m. The other locations they had checked out were not suitable. According to the pioneers of this sport from the upper Sava valley, Planica was an ideal valley for a ski jump. The two construction engineers inspected the valley, which was accessible at that time by a footpath, they determined the grade of the slope and the location, and the decision was made. The following spring, the first workers arrived with cartes, cleared the spruces and other trees and thereby started building the ski jump, which in the next two decades shaped a new branch of sport – ski flying. It was they who built the ski jump on which in 1936 the Austrian Sepp Bradl flew 101 metres, thereby

becoming the first man to break what was in those times the magical barrier of a hundred metres. Ski flights became the major winter sports attraction, and right up until 1948, when the Swiss Fritz Tschannen flew 120 metres, Planica was the place of the longest ski flights. Later ski flying jumps were also built in Germany, Austria and Norway, and the world record became the property of Oberstdorf, Kulm and Vikersund.

In the middle of the sixties, the brothers Janez and Lado Gorišek revived Planica, and at a new location they constructed the “mammoth jump”, which facilitated flights of over 160 metres. In 1969 there was a spectacular opening, at which the world record was re-set five times. The heroes of flight were the Norwegian Bjoren Wirkola, the Czech Jiri Raška and German Manfred Wolf. On the final day of the flights, Wolf reached what was then an unbelievable 165 metres.

Gradually other ski jumps were expanded, and new facilities

were built in Harrachov in Czechoslovakia and Ironwood in the USA. Planica gradually re-established ties with the biggest jumps, and from 1985 on the world record has had its home at the Planica giant built by the Gorišek brothers. Flyers such as Mike Holland, Matty Nykanen, Piort Fijas, Martin Hoellwarth, Toni Nieminen (the first to break the 200 metre barrier with a 203-metre flight), Espen Bredesen, Lasse Ottesen, Martin Schmitt, Tommy Ingebrigtsen, Thomas Hoerl, Andreas Goldberger, Matti Hautamaki and finally Bjoren Einar Romoeren became heroes of Planica, the most famous Slovenian valley in the world. In the time from 1969, when the jump was enlarged, to this year, events at Planica have been attended by more than 2.5 million spectators. The ski flights at Planica have become the biggest and most important sports event in Slovenia.

Many people have called the week of flights at Planica a national holiday, a festival of sport and the peak of winter sports. In recent years Planica has hosted the conclusion of the World Cup seven times, and in this valley below Mt. Ponce one more sports sub-discipline has been born – team ski flying competitions. At Planica every sports person is welcome, especially those who hurtle down the inrun and launch themselves at speeds of over 100 km/h, rising around 8 metres above the ground and landing on the outrun at speeds of more than 115 km/h. Those who have flown off the Planica jump were always thrilled, many describing their flights as the high point of ski jumping and flying.

Planica has been visited by kings, emperors, prime ministers and presidents, and they were always welcome, no matter where they came from. During his visit to Planica, the former President of Zambia, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, said: “This is the first time I have

ever been dressed up for winter, with a hat and woollen gloves, and if I was younger, I would undoubtedly head off down the jump and fly ... being like a bird in the jungle, here in the snow, which in my homeland we have never even seen.”

Just how big the Planica jump is can best be conveyed by the words of the one-

time ski flying world record holder Matti Nykanen of Finland from 20 years ago: “When you get to the top of the ramp and you look down into the valley and the outrun, you get the feeling that you’re trying to jump onto a postage stamp. You hear the roaring of the 10,000-strong crowd, and the whole thing sends you into a trance.”

And that trance is Planica, with its charisma and its sports and wider significance. Planica is an expression of Slovenia’s love of sport, and this national sports festival is and remains the biggest Slovenian event of each year. ●

“ PLANICA HAS BEEN VISITED BY KINGS, EMPERORS, PRIME MINISTERS AND PRESIDENTS, AND THEY WERE ALWAYS WELCOME, NO MATTER WHERE THEY CAME FROM. ”

THE FLYING CARNIOLAN MARK II

Planica shines at the 21st world ski flying championship

Andrej Stare Photo Darinka Mladenovič

FOUR YEARS AGO WE CELEBRATED THE CENTENARY of the birth of Ludvik Starič, the best Slovenian speedway contestant of all times, whose amazing feats of speed before the Second World War won him the nickname “The Flying Carniolan”. Now Slovenia has a new “Flying Carniolan” – the ski jumper Robert Kranjec.

This season has been by far the most successful one for Robert Kranjec. After taking top spot in the World Cup competition four years ago in Kuusamo, this year his outstanding jumps and

flights have won him the small crystal globe as winner of the special World Cup ski flying ranking. In front of a crowd of 50 000 spectators at the Kulm jump in Austria, Robi, as his friends call him, beat out all the world competition, and his one victory and one second place catapulted him onto the top ranking of ski flying. He won the icing on his cake at the Heini Klopfer jump in Oberstdorf, where his second place merely confirmed his dominance this year of the World Cup. After 13 years, it was a fine sight to see a Slovenian jumper with the crystal globe at the close of the World Cup in the famous location of Hollmenkollen near Oslo.

At the end of last season, when he came third in the flights at Planica, Robert Kranjec was already predicting his rise to the top. At that time he told a TV reporter: “Tomorrow I’ll rest, then the next day I start training for the 2010 Olympic season.” Although medals eluded him in Vancouver, he won the small crystal globe, while at the recently concluded world ski flying championship in his home turf of Planica he came fifth. It is hard to avoid the feeling that this 28-year-old Kranj native has had plenty of bad luck. The ski flights at Planica are always the treat at the end of the season, and this year the four-day competition was attended by around 100 000 spectators. They came from all over, with huge numbers of ski flying enthusiasts from Norway, Finland, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Planica shone at the 21st world ski flying championship. Ultimately the top crown was taken by the extraordinary Swiss jumper Simon Ammann, a young man who has now added the title of best flyer to his haul of two Olympic gold medals and victory in the total World Cup ranking.

Yet Robert Kranjec was not far off flying his way to a medal. Despite what was by far the furthest flight on the first day, owing to the new rules, which were applied for the first time in the world championship, he only secured seventh place. Problems selecting the appropriate flight (the length of the flight path and thereby the appropriate speed on launching) and the wind conditions did not favour Robert Kranjec this time. In the end he took fifth place, which is the third best ranking of a Slovenian flyer to date in the world championships.

But Robert the “Flying Carniolan” Kranjec, who earned his nickname through his extraordinary flights over 200 metres (he has already notched up 88 in his career) is not giving up. Over the loudspeakers at the end of the competition he announced that in



the coming year he would be even stronger, even better. In 2011 the world ski jumping championship will be at Hollmenkollen, above Oslo, the cradle of ski jumping. Robi is promising a supreme state of readiness and the attainment of his first individual medal in the big competitions. At the end of the World Cup season, he is predicting a new record being set at the Planica giant. The world record is 239 metres, set by the Norwegian flyer Bjorn Einar Romoeren, and the Slovenian national record is an equally outstanding 229 metres. Many experts are wondering whether the “Flying Carniolan” can be the first man to fly 250 metres. Robi’s response to such ideas is: “It’s quite possible that I’ll be the first to fly 250 metres, and for that I would need a lot of luck choosing the flight path, favourable uplift and a lot of support from the spectators.” And always there among the supporters is his spouse Špela, who follows Robi everywhere. “Without Špela I would no longer have enough motivation to jump, but since we’ve been together, my life has turned 180 degrees for the better. So I have no lack of motivation, and I hope that the coming big competitions will finally be mine!”

Whoever knows Robert Kranjec – the “Flying Carniolan” Mark II – knows that Robi is serious, for he has reached a maturity in his sport. And his approach, his agreeable nature and above all his outstanding flights have captured the hearts of Slovenian ski-flying enthusiasts. ●

JOŽE ŠPAROVEC

Slovenian and Canadian Skiing Legend

Polona Prešeren Photo Aleš Fevžer



JOŽE ŠPAROVEC IS THE COACH WHO STOOD BEHIND THE great early successes of Slovenian (at the time still Yugoslavian) skiing. He trained skiing stars like Bojan Križaj and Rok Petrovič. Twenty years ago he and his family moved to Whistler, where he first became the head of the local ski team, and a few years later became the athletic director of the Canadian alpine ski team. Now a local in Whistler, Jože Šparovec is still connected with sports, but now in more of a business capacity. He was the Olympics attaché of the Slovenian ski team at this year's Winter Olympics. We spoke with him at the Slovenia House in Whistler.

How do you rate the performances of our skiers at the Olympic Games?

In view of the size of Slovenia these are phenomenal results. We are right up there with the big countries. Some countries just have great conditions for winter sports – like Canada, Norway, Sweden and all of the countries that get a lot of snow. Slovenia competes with these countries as a powerhouse, with a lot of very successful competitors. But Slovenians are not just successful at winter sports; we do well in summer sports too. Of course Petra Majdič and Tina Maze are the standouts, but I have to congratulate the entire team.

How about the Terry Fox Award that Petra Majdič received?

That is really something special. Terry Fox is truly a legend in Canada. He was a young man, an athlete, who endured an immense amount of suffering. He showed something great to himself and the world, and increased awareness of cancer and the fight against cancer. He ran 26 miles on one leg every day until his body gave out and he died. Canadians really respect his effort, and they highly admire and value everything connected with Terry Fox. They are all united in this respect.

You were the Olympics attaché of the Slovenian ski team at this year's Winter Olympics. What was your job like?

I was very honoured when the Slovenian Olympic Committee offered me this job, since most of the people who had held the position at other Olympiads were politicians of some sort. When they came to Vancouver they decided to put my experience to use. My role was to give advice to the head of the delegation and their assistant, since I was the athletic director of the Canadian ski team for eight years.

Can we even speak any longer of the spirit of “the important thing is to participate” in the Olympic Games as we see them today, or have the athletes become modern-day gladiators?

This is a personal dilemma for me. I have participated in plenty of Olympic Games and I have to say that the Olympics are becoming more and more commercial. The athletes and the events are not the priority. I think that the International Olympic Committee has to think about this. The Olympics are becoming an incredibly big event and only a few countries are capable of hosting them. This is not good. And the commercial aspect is so big that all of the sponsors and the entire Olympic family are focused on it. The athletes are therefore becoming like gladiators in the arena. In fact, everything is subordinated to the commercial momentum. The safety of the athletes is no longer as important, and they are increasingly exposed to risk. It's more important that the television broadcast will be at the right time than whether the conditions will be right for the competitors. This is a major dilemma. I also think that perhaps some sports shouldn't be in the Olympics. It would be better to focus on the athletes, and not so much on whether some individual stars will appear at the Games.

What does the future hold for alpine skiing, in your opinion?

Alpine skiing will have to redefine itself. The competition for viewers, for the attention of the sponsors, is huge. Alpine skiing is a little too heavily laden with superpowers which have a conservative approach. They should perhaps follow the example of other professional sports. One interesting example is the biathlon, which changed from a relatively unwatched sport into a highly watched and popular sport. Alpine skiing needs to go through some kind of similar transformation. If you look at the larger countries, we see that the concept of alpine skiing is practically foreign to the average viewer. For instance, ski cross is simpler: four racers compete and whoever crosses the line first is the winner. There is no complicated calculation of two runs, no counting from 30 down, no special provisions regarding start numbers etc.

Furthermore, it is very difficult to get World Cup races outside the Alps. And it will stay that way as long as it doesn't become popular all over the world. The addition of additional races in Zagreb is a very positive development. But until there aren't races in China and elsewhere around the world, including the Southern Hemisphere, it will be difficult to succeed. ●

IDRIJSKI ŽLIKROFI

A true speciality of Idrija

Polona Prešeren Photo Tomo Jeseničnik



ALTHOUGH IT IS ONLY A SMALL place, Idrija is famous for several things. It is the home of the world-famous Idrija lace, while the abandoned mercury mine, with its unique history, has long attracted large numbers of visitors. Attractions in the vicinity of Idrija include a wonderful manor house, Kendov Dvorec, today a hotel, and many beautiful natural sights, among them

Divje Jezero or 'Wild Lake'.

Idrija is also home to a gastronomic speciality. The town and the surrounding area have been famous since the mid-19th century for idrijski žlikrofi. As Dr Janez Bogataj writes in his book *Taste Slovenia*, there are several theories about the origin of this dish but it is most likely that žlikrofi originated in Transylvania, brought by the mine workers who came to work in

the mercury mine. Over time, of course, the dish acquired its own characteristic local recipe, appearance and taste in Idrija and the surrounding area. Owing to a lack of historical sources, however, its exact origin has never been established. Idrijski žlikrofi are a national dish of Slovenia made from dough with a potato filling and a characteristic shape. In view of their traditional process of elaboration and

recipe, in 2002 the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food granted idrijski žlikrofi traditional product status.

How are they made?

Making idrijski žlikrofi can be quite a lengthy process and consists of several phases. The first thing to do is to prepare the dough. Then it is time to make the filling. This consists of potato, minced lard or smoked bacon, onion, seasoning and herbs. The filling is shaped into regular, hazelnut-sized balls. Then the dough is rolled out thinly and the balls of filling are placed onto it. The dough is then folded over and pressed down between the balls of filling, forming 'ears'. A little hollow is then made in the top of each individual žlikrof, giving the žlikrofi their characteristic 'hat' shape. Now the žlikrofi are ready for the final phase – cooking. Idrijski žlikrofi are served with cracklings, various meat sauces and other sauces. The most common sauce for žlikrofi is called bakalca and is made with mutton or rabbit.

Idrijski žlikrofi are served by some restaurants and farm tourism establishments. These can be identified by a distinctive yellow-and-brown signs with the inscription 'Traditional Food Served' and the logo of the Society for the Promotion and Protection of the Traditional Dishes of Idrija. Frozen idrijski žlikrofi can be found in supermarket freezers.

An extremely popular dish

The popularity of idrijski žlikrofi shows no signs of waning and they are among the traditional Slovenian dishes whose production and consumption are growing strongly. According to some figures, around 50 tonnes of them are produced and consumed each year. Idrijski žlikrofi (including the frozen variety) contain no preservatives, colouring or flavour enhancers.

The dish is so popular that a special tasting is held in Idrija every year. This year it took place in early March. Nine competitors took part with samples of their žlikrofi, among them certified producers who make their žlikrofi in accordance with the Report on the Traditional Product Designation for



'Žlikrofi are a popular dish in the Idrija area and homemade žlikrofi are a frequent item on the menu in many households. They are also made by five certified producers and can be bought in the shops.'

Recipe for the preparation of around 150 idrijski žlikrofi (enough to satisfy the whole family):

Dough

- Up to 300g white flour
- 1-2 eggs
- Oil
- Water or milk as necessary

Filling

- 500g potatoes
- Up to 50g minced lard or chopped smoked bacon
- Up to 50g onion
- Seasoning: chives, black pepper, salt, marjoram

Preparation

Mix together the ingredients for the dough, which should not be too hard. Knead the dough until it becomes flexible and elastic and does not stick to the hands or the board. If the dough is cut it must be dense and without air holes.

Form the dough into a loaf and leave to rest for 30 minutes. Then roll it out thinly.

In the meantime, prepare a filling from boiled and peeled potatoes. Mash the potatoes when still warm. Season with salt. Fry and chop the smoked bacon and add to the potatoes (alternatively use cracklings or minced lard). Mix in the fried onion and seasonings. Mix well and knead until the mixture is soft. Form the mixture into hazelnut-sized balls.

Idrijski Žlikrofi, one member who is not part of the certification system, one new member of the Society who is hoping to obtain the certificate shortly, and a local women's club with samples from five of their members. A commission awarded points for five characteristics: appearance, smell, flavour, texture and

overall impression. This year's winner was the Gostilna Kos from Idrija.

Preparing frozen žlikrofi is very simple: shake the frozen žlikrofi into boiling salted water and cook until they float to the surface. They can be served with a variety of sauces, giving free rein to individual creativity. •



IZTOK KOVAČ

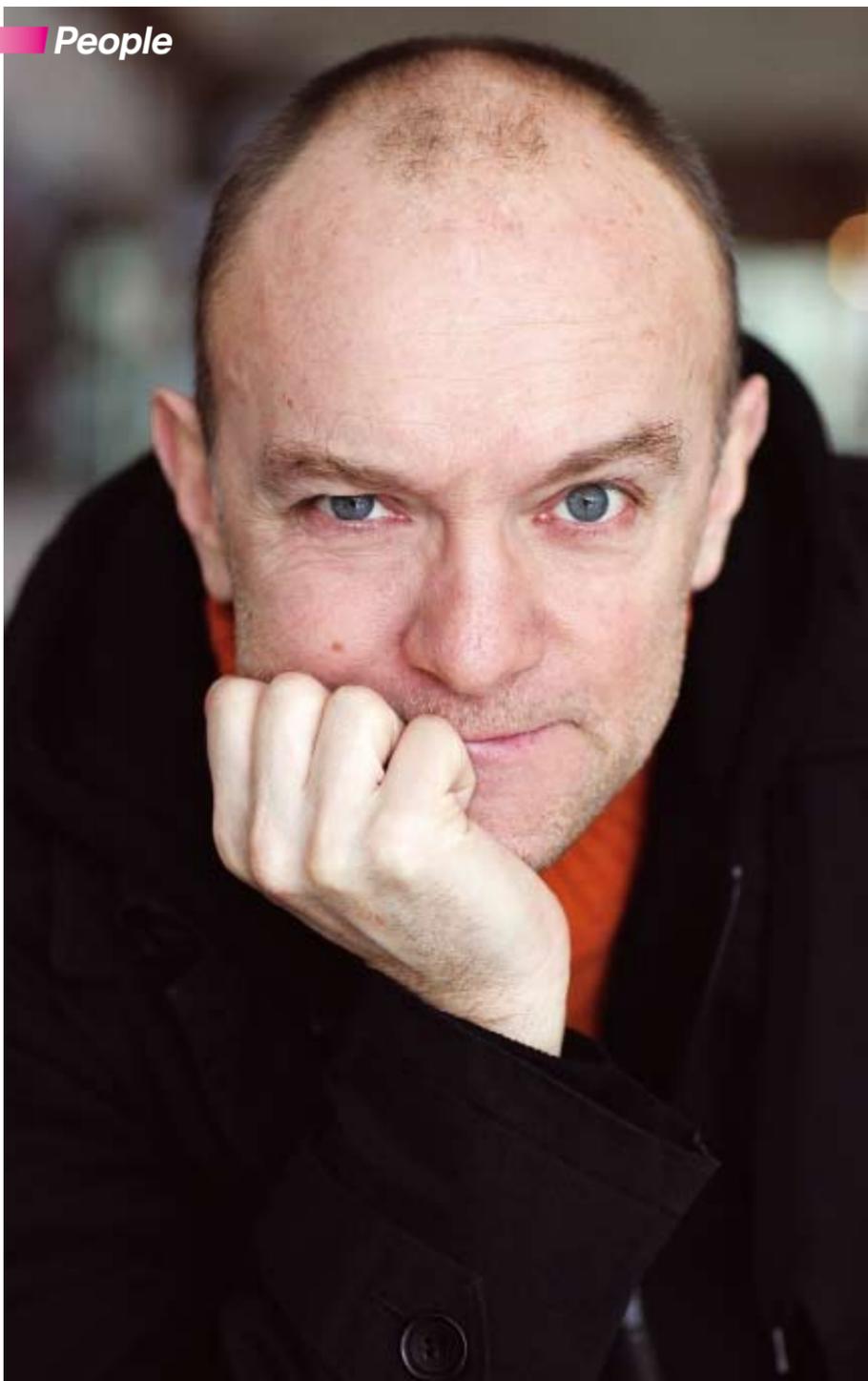
Catching the Falcon

Jože Osterman Photo Barbara Jakše

Trbovlje

Iztok Kovač is from Trbovlje. In a relatively small but geographically extremely diverse country like Slovenia, this means a lot. Trbovlje, around which most of Slovenia's coal mines are located (all of them now closed), is still considered Slovenia's first relatively modern industrial centre, with all the social consequences that this





‘The aesthetic of the heavy bodies and movements of the workers and miners, in some respects awkward and clumsy but with an undoubted beauty and attractiveness of their own, was, in the last decade of the last century, a novelty that shook Europe and prepared it for a reflection on the aesthetics of the once despised socialist way of life.’

implies. These are: in the beginning, the birth and development of the town and its working population with a relatively high standard of living, the struggle for workers’ rights, and finally, following the collapse of most of the industrial plants after the end of the 20th century, a gradual slide into a poorer life and major environmental problems. People from such places are usually used to hard work. They are persevering and self-confident, even stubborn. The fact that the internationally famous avant-garde music group Laibach was formed in this town, that the art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst has its roots here and that Iztok Kovač comes from here is evidence of the incredible creative charge that can be generated in a formerly prosperous industrial environment by critical self-reflection.

Kovač sees his own development as something self-evident. He has always been very interested in the physicality of the human body. He has dedicated a lot of energy to sport, and even today is a fanatical athlete. When a student at the Technical Secondary School of Civil Engineering in Ljubljana he was one of the best sport dancers in the country, while back in Trbovlje he was a member of the generation of Alpine skiers that was then establishing this sport at the national level (these days skiers from that part of the country have once again faded into the background). ‘A few days ago I passed an exam to be a Telemark skiing instructor,’ boasts Kovač, adding that he has grown a little tired of ‘normal’ Alpine skiing. Anyone familiar with skiing will know that the Telemark style is an attractive form of skiing that combines sliding down snow-covered slopes with elements of cross-country skiing and trekking. For Kovač, it represents a new challenge.

From this starting point, Kovač’s interest moved to higher levels of thinking about the miracle known as the human body and the way it moves, while remaining closely connected to the environment that he came from. The critic Eda Čufer sees an extraordinary loyalty to his native Trbovlje in the poetics of Kovač’s dance. ‘A frequent point of reference in his work is his birthplace, Trbovlje – a mining town and at the same time a symbol in

Slovenia of the grey, polluted and forgotten landscape of socialist heavy industry. His return to his native town should not be understood merely as personal sentiment, but as a return to the origins of his own physical constitution, which formed itself surrounded by the bodies of workers and miners.’ The aesthetic of the heavy bodies and movements of the workers and miners, in some respects awkward and clumsy but with an undoubted beauty and attractiveness of their own, was, in the last decade of the last century, a novelty that shook Europe and prepared it for a reflection on the aesthetics of the once despised socialist way of life.

En-Knap

Kovač, who was working successfully as a dancer and choreographer even before Slovenian independence, earned the attention and also the praise of Slovenian and international contemporary dance circles, particularly with his project *How I Caught the Falcon*, which he created in 1991 and in which he dances alone. Modestly, he explains that the piece’s success was also conditioned by the period in which it occurred. ‘The wars in the Balkans, this entirely unknown area slowly opening up to reveal its horrors, over which Europe undoubtedly had a bad conscience, were instrumental in helping me attract the interest of some of the best foreign artists,’ remembers Kovač. ‘We communicated openly and equally with some of the biggest names of that time. The fact that you have information, that you find out at first hand what is happening in your own sphere and can add your own part, is incredibly valuable.’ In 1993 he won a prestigious Time Out London Dance and Performance Award for Best Performance by a Visiting Artist. This year of successes also represented an important turning point on the organisational side: in the Belgian city of Leuven, under the aegis of the Stuc arts centre and the Klapstuk dance festival, Kovač founded the international dance group En-Knap, which even with its name returns him symbolically to his native environment. Knap is, in fact, the local word for a miner.

The group’s home became Ljubljana. Kovač’s growing international

reputation gained him the support of the management of Slovenia’s largest cultural centre, Cankarjev Dom, which became a co-producer of his projects and, in the early days, provided him with rehearsal space. This was without a doubt a breakthrough, since even a decade earlier contemporary dance had been a marginal sphere of the arts in Slovenia. Recognition in the form of the Prešeren Fund Award won by Kovač in 1994 and the solid support of the City of Ljubljana and the Ministry of Culture are merely confirmations of the successful and convincing work of Iztok Kovač and a number of other figures from the Slovenian contemporary dance scene such as Ksenija Hribar and Matjaž Farič. At the same time, Kovač has helped contemporary dance expand into the sphere of dance film, where Kovač’s collaborations with one of Slovenia’s most gifted young directors Sašo Podgoršek

“I think it is vital that contemporary dance should become a field for which we ourselves are capable of training professionals and enabling steady employment for them,” says Kovač.

have created a fascinating artistic niche that has intrigued audiences around Europe. “It’s logical,” is Kovač’s laconic explanation of this development. “The theatre and most other dramatic arts have literature as a basis, but dance can only be adequately recorded by film.” This expansion does not, of course, remain merely at the level of recording; rather, it allows both artists to address brand-new challenges and enhance the physical tie to the body, which is of course the reality of dance. Films such as *Vertigo Bird*, filmed on the 360-metre-high chimney of the power station in Trbovlje, and later films through which the two artists enhance existing dance projects represent a brand-new page for contemporary dance, and also for dance film.

Španski Borci

In recent years Kovač has also been focusing on the question of a suitable working environment to enable the solid and systematic creation of contemporary dance in Slovenia. A decade ago En-Knap was instrumental in the founding of a contemporary dance department at the School of Music and Ballet in Ljubljana, one of the few State-run institutions in Europe to offer education in this field. ‘I think it is vital that contemporary dance should become a field for which we ourselves are capable of training professionals and enabling steady employment for them,’ says Kovač. ‘This would significantly increase young people’s motivation for dance.’ He took the first step in the direction of establishing a more solid institution by creating a professional company of five dancers, selected by means of a very successful international audition. ‘If in the early 1990s Slovenian cultural policy showed a marked openness towards new initiatives in art, later on, when it became necessary to consolidate achievements deriving from this basis and introduce them into the system, things fell off a little,’ says Kovač, who continues to fight for his chosen sphere. In 2009, by entrusting En-Knap with the running of the Španski Borci Cultural Centre (named in honour of the Yugoslav members of the International Brigades who fought in the Spanish Civil War), the City of Ljubljana opened up real possibilities for the founding of Slovenia’s third national dance institution (alongside the Maribor and Ljubljana opera and ballet companies), which is Kovač’s greatest aim, as he freely admits. ‘I believe that cultural policy, by which I mean above all the Ministry of Culture, will be capable of recognising contemporary dance as a field that needs its own national institution, and will take steps to facilitate that.’ Iztok Kovač also believes that this will happen soon.

When you ask him if he is satisfied with his work to date and with his successes, Kovač says that he has actually never thought about it. This is perhaps understandable: he is still a relatively young man with clear goals, for which he is working tirelessly and in which he believes. In short – a knap. ●

SILENT POETRY

Plečnik's Ljubljana - The beautiful creations of Slovenia's greatest architect: in Slovenia and, before that, in Vienna and Prague

Juš Turk Photo Darinka Mladenovič

Tripple Bridge over the Ljubljanica

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES THE biggest impression on the foreign visitor to Ljubljana? Almost certainly the Triple Bridge over the Ljubljanica and the market along the riverbank. Very few visitors know, however, who it was who embellished Slovenia's capital with these and many other creations of startling originality. It was the great Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, who began his career in Vienna and Prague and then established himself above all in Ljubljana with wonderful architectural achievements that gave the city a noble new appearance after the long Baroque period. But almost ever major town in Slovenia – and many more out-of-the-way places too – can boast at least one of his works. It may be a street, a bridge, a library, a church, a baptistry, a bank building, a cemetery, a garden, a memorial or merely a monstrosity or chalice in a church. His achievements in architecture are so remarkable that some people consider him the Slovenian Michelangelo. And since he was simultaneously an

ascetic and infinitely committed to the Catholic faith, a proposal has even been made for his beatification.

Plečnik was born in Ljubljana in 1872. After attending the school of industry and crafts in Graz in Austria, he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where two of his creations immediately attracted attention for their originality. He then took up a post in Prague, where he taught at the School of Arts and Crafts, while at the same time demonstrating several magnificent architectural solutions at Prague Castle. In 1920 he was appointed full professor of architecture at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Engineering. In 1938 he became a full member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. He died in 1957.

Colossal transformation of Ljubljana

Until the start of the 20th century, Ljubljana was a small provincial city with buildings that, for the most part, were merely humble copies of those in

Vienna. Plečnik changed the city greatly, effecting a wonderful transformation. He chose his own original artistic path which, however, nevertheless followed classical architecture. Above all, he showed through his work that in artistic terms Slovenia was the equal of any other country in the world. Not only did the authorities agree with the majority of his plans, they provided broad financial support for his colossal artistic breakthrough. And indeed, how else could so many architectural marvels have been created? Those in the Slovenian capital alone were enough to earn it the lasting epithet 'Plečnik's Ljubljana'.

Revived fame in Paris and Prague

And yet after the Second World War Plečnik was largely forgotten in Slovenia until Europe began to rediscover his art in the early 1980s. The turning point came in 1986 with a major exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. Later, in 2006, a statue of Plečnik was unveiled at Prague Castle. The same year, a commemorative plaque

was unveiled on 'his' Zacherl House in Vienna. The following year a Plečnik symposium was held in Kraków in Poland. The Czechs have even proposed his Church of the Sacred Heart for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Following Slovenian independence, when Plečnik's works were re-evaluated, the new country chose his image for the 500 tolar banknote (until the adoption of the euro, the tolar was Slovenia's national currency).

Plečnik's career can be divided into his Vienna, Prague and Ljubljana periods. His rise, as we have already said, began in Vienna, where he created eight works between 1901 and 1914: the Langer villa and apartment house, the Loos villa (in Melk), the Weidmann and Zacherl houses and the chapel of the latter, the St Charles Borromeo fountain and the Church of the Holy Spirit. Then came Prague, where between 1926 and 1933 he designed numerous architectural masterpieces. Among the most important are the Paradise Garden, the Garden on the Ramparts, the First Courtyard in Prague Castle, the Plečnik Hall, the official apartment of the President of Czechoslovakia, the park of the presidential summer residence, the Third Courtyard in Prague Castle, the Bull Steps and the Garden on the Bastion. Yet his most numerous and greatest architectural and cultural achievements were created when he returned to his homeland, where, in 1920, he became a professor of architecture, although in the meantime he also completed the Church of the Sacred Heart in Prague's Vinohrady district. His Slovenian period, which was above all a Ljubljana period, lasted until his death.

Wonderful results of a large-scale urban design concept

This was also the period when he first tackled the consolidation of a special town planning concept for Slovenia's capital city which included, above all, the interconnection of the city's squares and park areas interspersed by monuments and obelisks and characterised by a beautifully regulated environment. His



Žale Cemetery

'It was the great Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, who began his career in Vienna and Prague and then established himself above all in Ljubljana with wonderful architectural achievements that gave the city a noble new appearance after the long Baroque period.'

main works were created as part of this design. One of Plečnik's most brilliant solutions is the Triple Bridge, mentioned in the introduction, which he created on the basis of an earlier stone bridge built in 1842. To this earlier bridge, Plečnik added two footbridges. These, however, are not parallel but follow the bend in the river and from above, from the Franciscan church and the square containing the Prešeren statue, they lead like a kind of funnel towards the famous Robba's Fountain (Francesco Robba was an 18th-century Baroque sculpture of the Venetian school). The fountain stands outside Ljubljana Town Hall, behind which rises another of the famous sights of the city: the Castle Hill topped by the medieval Ljubljana Castle.

Ljubljana contains several other masterpieces by Plečnik: the Stadium, the building of the Chamber of Commerce

and Industry (now the Constitutional Court), the Mutual Assurance Company, and, connected to the already mentioned Triple Bridge in the very centre of the city, a very long, mainly two-storey building which on its lower level, along the river, also contains a fish market. This imposing creation stands opposite the

outdoor market and is supported, along the whole of its length, by pillars in the form of an antique colonnade. At one end of this complex stands a little flower shop reminiscent of a classical temple, followed, in the direction of the main market, by an open area supported by pillars, today mainly used by spice sellers. Then we come to one of the largest buildings created by Plečnik in Ljubljana, the National and University Library. With the brick elements built into its classically inspired walls, this is Plečnik's bold yet characteristic architectural masterpiece. It stands a stone's throw to the west of Congress Square and the former Palace of the Province of Carniola, today the main university building. Next to the library, on Vegova Ulica, Plečnik erected monuments to Slovenian musicians and linguists. Around the corner, in French Revolution Square, he placed a monument to the poet Simon Gregorčič and an obelisk in honour of Napoleon and his Illyrian Provinces, of which Ljubljana was the capital. A few steps beyond the obelisk is the monastery complex of Križanke, the property of the Teutonic Knights from the 13th century, which was beautifully renovated by Plečnik in 1952. This building and the former park behind it have become the venue for Ljubljana's summer festival. The United States Embassy in Slovenia has chosen it for its annual Fourth of July reception to mark Independence Day. The courtyard of Križanke also contains the architect's only statue. The house where he was born, next to the church in Ljubljana's Trnovo district, today houses the Plečnik Museum.

And almost ubiquitous hint of Antiquity

Another, even greater work by Plečnik is



the breathtakingly beautiful arc of funeral chapels reminiscent of classical buildings at the entrance to Ljubljana's main cemetery. Other projects begun by Plečnik in Ljubljana included the remodelling of the high altar in the church of Saint Joseph, although unfortunately the post-war authorities decided to convert the church into a film studio. Plečnik's work also includes the stadium in Ljubljana, today somewhat neglected. For the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress in Ljubljana in 1935, Plečnik built the stadium's remarkably beautiful grandstand. The architect also left his artistic stamp on the church of St Francis of Assisi and on the parish church of St Francis in Ljubljana, into which he incorporated a classical temple with a Doric entrance and a hall based on Early Christian basilicas. Other works include Šentjakobski Trg (St James's Square), the renovation of the Aemona walls (in Roman times Ljubljana was called Aemona), Tmovo Bridge and the Shoemakers' Bridge. Plečnik also laid out the city's largest park, Tivoli. The columns topped by spherical lamps along the main path through the park are designed to look like people strolling.

'Yet his most numerous and greatest architectural and cultural achievements were created when he returned to his homeland, where, in 1920, he became a professor of architecture, although in the meantime he also completed the Church of the Sacred Heart in Prague's Vinohrady district.'

Plečnik's works also adorn other parts of Slovenia. They include numerous churches around the country, a monastery, a savings bank, and a royal hunting lodge. He also designed memorials to victims of the Second World War in several locations around the country. He was responsible for rebuilding the twin bell towers of the church in Ribnica, which were destroyed during the Second World War. But his genius stretched even further afield, to other parts of the former Yugoslavia. In Croatia he enlarged the pilgrimage church at Trsat in Rijeka and designed the ground plan for the extension to the pilgrimage sanctuary at Marija Bistrica. He also worked on the church and monastery of the Sacred

Heart in Osijek, the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Zagreb and a pavilion for Tito's summer residence in the Brijuni Islands. He drew plans for the cathedral of Saint Joseph in Sarajevo and designed the church of St Anthony of Padua in Belgrade. After the war and the wartime devastation of Slovenia there were no longer any major commissions for Plečnik. Because of the lack of available funds, he did a lot of work free of charge. Even as a professor, he taught for a time without being paid. Despite the fact that, as a religious man, he was out of favour with the post-war authorities, in 1949 he received a Prešeren Award, still today the most important award for artistic achievements in Slovenia. ●



BELA KRAJINA

A land of Easter eggs and many other curiosities

Jože Prešeren Photo Darinka Mladenovič

ONE OF THE MANY INTERESTING things about Slovenia is that some of its most beautiful and attractive regions are actually those that are most out of the way. Some of these have already been presented in the pages of our magazine. In the far south-east of Slovenia, right by the border with Croatia, along the river Kolpa, lies Bela Krajina. Geographically, it really is somewhat distant from major centres, and therefore its inhabitants often have the feeling that they are overlooked and forgotten, and that they are lagging behind in development. This may even be true in part, but this remoteness also brings the region numerous advantages, for which Bela Krajina is famous both in Slovenia and in many other places around the world. The local people often say of their region that it lies on the sunny side of the Gorjanci Hills, and that it is a land of white birches and white national costumes, all of which is true. Today the region is known above

all for its extraordinarily rich cultural heritage, while we should not overlook the numerous other material goods that the people of Bela Krajina can boast: the region's wines are extremely good – the best known are the red Metliška Črna and the white Belokranjsko Belo; Bela Krajina also has a number of successful modern factories, including a bathroom furniture factory, although unfortunately the region's once strong textile industry is currently facing serious difficulties. In recent times the people of Bela Krajina have been calling on the national government to improve the region's transport and communications, since they are aware that their future development will also depend on this. A road tunnel below the Gorjanci Hills is planned to be built in the next few years. This will connect Bela Krajina more closely to central Slovenia. The two traditional centres of Bela Krajina are the old towns of Črnomelj and Metlika. More recently, they have been joined by Semič, a rapidly developing market town.



Tourist gems

The region's many interesting sights and unspoilt and extremely beautiful countryside greatly help the development of tourism in Bela Krajina. The number of private tourism enterprises is growing, farm tourism is on the increase, with many farms offering excellent food and wine, and a number of hotels are being renovated. The town of Črnomelj recently celebrated the 600th anniversary of the granting of town rights. Metlika is half a century older. Both towns have much to offer in terms of cultural history. Sights in the town centres include old castles, numerous museums and galleries and other institutions of national importance. Semič is also slowly developing the features of the town, its development >>>



driven by a number of important industrial plants. The other undoubted distinguishing feature of Bela Krajina is its folk heritage, with numerous folklore events attracting visitors from far and wide. Bela Krajina's winemakers are among the finest in Slovenia and their wines have won numerous international awards.

The most important natural sights of Bela Krajina include the river Kolpa, one of Slovenia's cleanest and warmest rivers, part of which flows through the protected landscape of the Kolpa Nature Park, and the river Lahinja, part of the basin of which forms a protected landscape area containing numerous karst phenomena. Also very beautiful and interesting is the powerful spring of the river Krupa near Semič, where it is even possible to find specimens of the 'human fish' (*Proteus anguinus*). One popular excursion destination is Mirna Gora (1,047 metres), the summit of which offers a view of the entire region. Other notable natural features of Bela Krajina are the many birch forests and stands of birch trees with bracken undergrowth.

These are found in particular above Metlika and Drašiči.

Bela Krajina also offers many interesting cultural and historical sights. Not far from Metlika is Tri Fare, a complex of three Gothic churches built between the 14th and 16th centuries. The churches are surrounded by a cemetery wall. The Kolpa Nature

Park information centre is housed in a beautifully restored typical Bela Krajina farmhouse, Šokčev Dvor, not far from the village of Adlešiči. In the village of Drašiči, every visitor is taken on a hospitable visit to the communal wine cellar and introduced

to an old custom that is still maintained today: all the villagers contribute their own wine to this cellar, after which they can receive it back as a loan as necessary, recording their consumption on a special tally stick. Of course, visitors are also invited to taste the wine. Another sight

worth visiting, in the vicinity of Semič, is the ancient temple of Mithra above Rožanec, where an image of Mithra, the god of light and truth, is carved into the rock. Locals will also draw the attention of visitors to many other natural beauties and features of this marvellous little region.

No visitor to Bela Krajina should miss the chance to visit the Bela Krajina Museum in Metlika. The museum contains a permanent exhibition on the life of the people of Bela Krajina. Metlika is also home to the National Museum of Firefighting, where

you can learn about the development of firefighting in Slovenia. The first volunteer fire brigade in Slovenia was founded in Metlika in 1869. Also worth visiting in Metlika is the Kambič Gallery, with over 200 paintings from the private collection of Dr Vinko Kambič (1920–

'Bela Krajina's winemakers are among the finest in Slovenia and their wines have won numerous international awards.'

2001). The village of Vinica ob Kolpi has a lovingly curated commemorative collection dedicated to Oton Župančič, one of Slovenia's greatest poets and a native of these parts.

Among the popular events attracting large numbers of visitors to Bela Krajina every year is the Vinska Vigred ('Wine Spring') event in Metlika, offering plenty of opportunities to discover characteristic Bela Krajina food and wines and get to know the local crafts tradition. Folklore enthusiasts gather in Črnomelj for Slovenia's oldest folklore festival, Jurjevanje ('Feast of St George'), while a similar folklore-based event in Semič is the Semiška Ohcet ('Semič Wedding'), where couples get married according to the old Bela Krajina tradition, dressed in traditional local costumes. This is also an opportunity to sample some of Bela Krajina's gastronomic delights. Bela Krajina also offers visitors many opportunities for sport and recreation: boating on the Kolpa, cycling, skiing in winter, numerous marked footpaths and trails between villages and hikes into the Gorjanci Hills, to Mirna Gora and through the nature parks.

The Easter tradition as a symbol of Bela Krajina

A distinctive feature of Bela Krajina, and one of the most popular souvenirs of Slovenia throughout the year, is the pisanica, a coloured Easter egg decorated in a characteristic manner. Easter eggs, which are prepared in Slovenian households in the run-up to Easter, along with various traditional Easter dishes, are usually dyed using shop-bought dyes or even with onion skins, and they are often additionally decorated with stickers. But the eggs that are made in Bela Krajina in this period are of a special kind that is found nowhere else in Slovenia. Making an Easter egg takes time. The right tools are required, as are design skills deriving from the tradition. In the middle of the last century, the leading Slovenian ethnologist Dr Niko Kuret wrote that 'richly decorated Easter eggs are a genuine Slovenian custom that is not found among either the Germanic or the Romance peoples.' With regard to the



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coloured Easter eggs of Bela Krajina, Dr Janez Bogataj, a contemporary researcher of Slovenian ethnic heritage says that the people of Bela Krajina have developed a special technique for decorating eggs using wax. A similar technique is used in the Prekmurje region of Slovenia, where decorated eggs are known as remenke. Dr Bogataj classes the making of coloured Easter eggs as a traditional Slovenian folk craft, since today pisanice are made throughout the year in many parts of the country (in Bela Krajina particularly in the village of Adlešiči) and sold as souvenirs.

Interestingly, some Easter egg makers add written inscriptions to the decorations on their eggs in the form of an Easter greeting ('Alleluia!' for example), a saying, or even a message of love from a girl to a boy or vice versa, since coloured Easter eggs can also be given as gifts at the social events and dances that follow Easter. Clearly these decorated Easter eggs are too beautiful to be used as an ordinary Easter dish and eaten as eggs,

so they are usually painted as empty eggshells. In this way the pisanica makes a suitable permanent souvenir.

In the Slovenian countryside, the Easter season is the period of the reawakening of nature, symbolised by food and numerous festive dishes. As Dr Bogataj points out, eggs are an ancient Indo-European symbol of spring, a natural proof of fertility and the source of new life. Christianity adopted the egg as a symbol of Christ's Resurrection – red-dyed eggs represent Christ's blood – and so the egg is a constituent element of traditional Easter dishes in all Christian countries. Bela Krajina at Easter time is no different from the other regions of Slovenia – tables groan beneath the weight of an abundance of good things, including various types of potica, hams, horseradish, cakes and of course the traditional Belokranjska pogača (Bela Krajina flatbread), which has recently been granted the European Union's Traditional Speciality Guaranteed designation. ●

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