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200th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ILLYRIAN PROVINCES

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009

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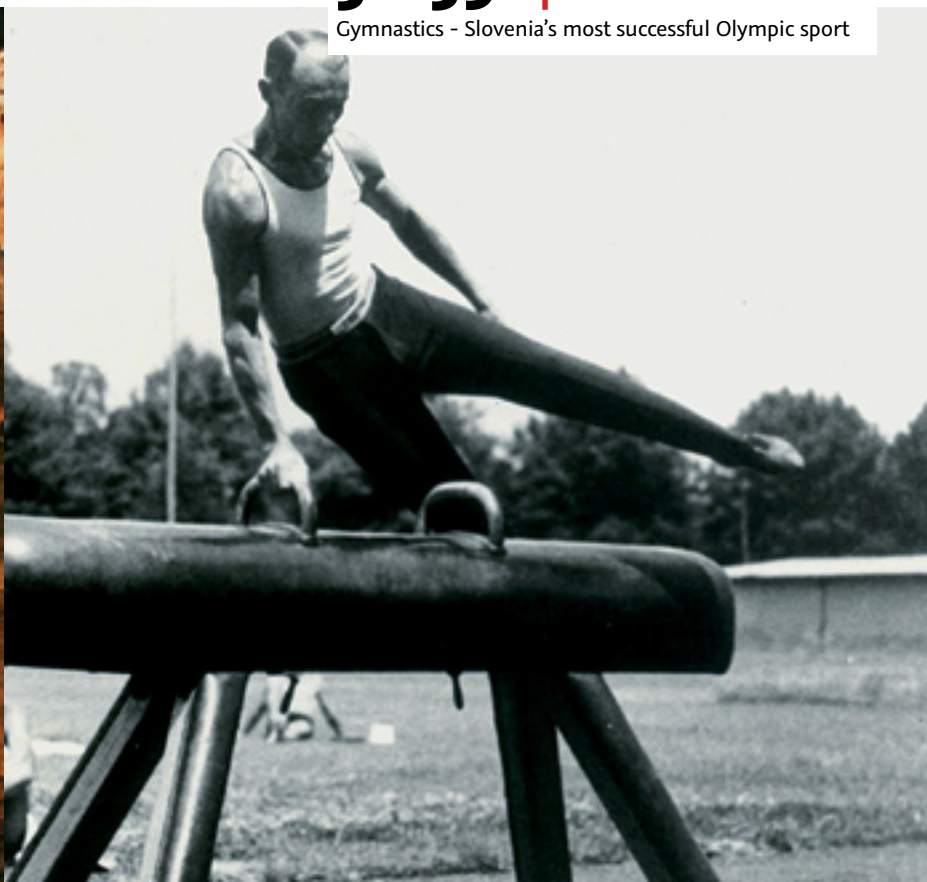


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Veronika Stabej

History and the future

It is not a very common occurrence for nations to celebrate and mark a historical period in which they did not enjoy their own sovereignty and they were a part of some other state formation. Between 1809 and 1813, the present territory of Slovenia found itself under the brief French authority of the Illyrian Provinces, and despite the fact that it was not equally favoured among all strata of the population, it contributed powerfully to raising Slovenian national consciousness and the awareness of freedoms, as well as giving credence to the Slovenian language.

The short-lived period of French rule also importantly established the first seeds of Slovenian-French relations. The linden tree that was planted at that time in the Ljubljana Botanical Garden is still alive and thriving today. As a gesture underpinning the friendship and cooperation between the two nations, Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and French Prime Minister François Fillon, who was on his first official visit to Slovenia in the middle of May, planted a new linden, which we believe will remind the future generations of Slovenian-French friendly ties.

Alongside historical achievements, scientific achievements are of course also very important for our future. We would agree that knowledge must become our fundamental value. Slovenia has quite a few recognised scientists who are contributing importantly to filling the global treasury of knowledge.

Slovenia recorded what was in effect another historic moment in 2004, when we had the opportunity for the first time to elect Slovenian members to the European Parliament. In this issue of SINFO we are therefore devoting attention to the June elections to the European Parliament.

History is also written by legends, and in this issue we are focusing special attention on legends of sports and Slovenian gymnastics, one of the country's most successful fields of sport. No such report would be complete of course without Leon Štukelj, who from 1922 to 1936 dominated the pinnacle of world gymnastics, and of whom the American President Bill Clinton said at the end of the nineties during his visit to Slovenia: “A small man in stature, but great in spirit.”

We like to believe that we, too, are like that.

● Andrej Savelli

Fillon and Pahor remember Illyrian Provinces, look into future

French Prime Minister François Fillon arrived for an official visit to Slovenia on 11 May. After discussions with his Slovenian host, Prime Minister Borut Pahor, both men expressed a desire for a deepening of cooperation, and attended an event to mark the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Illyrian Provinces. In the course of talks with Mr Pahor, Slovenian President Danilo Türk and President of the National Assembly Pavel Gantar, Mr Fillon presented France's proposal for a strategic partnership with Slovenia that would enable regular consultation at all levels regarding the key questions of bilateral relations and cooperation within international institutions. Mr Pahor expressed the hope that Mr Fillon's visit would mean 'the beginning of a new chapter in relations between the two countries', which had no open issues between them to resolve. The current good relations in all areas – the economy, culture, education and politics – present a solid foundation for further enhancement and strengthening. In the discussions, Mr Fillon also addressed a number of other current issues. President Türk explained Slovenia's efforts to achieve the most balanced and mutually beneficial resolution to the ongoing border dispute with Croatia. After discussions with Mr Pahor, Mr Fillon stressed that France's sole objective in the resolution of this dispute was to 'assist in the formulation of a compromise that would respect the interests of both Slovenia and Croatia'. The two prime ministers expressed their support for extension of the EU enlargement process to the Western Balkans, and their hope that the final ratification process for the Lisbon Treaty would be completed by the end of the year. They also discussed the Euro-Mediterranean University, and Mr Pahor outlined to Mr Fillon Slovenia's priorities during its Presidency of the Council of Europe. Mr Fillon said that he was proud to be the first French prime minister to visit Slovenia, and that France 'admired the spectacular progress' made by Slovenia over the last 18 years in the areas of democracy and the economy. He pointed to Slovenia's successful Presidency of the EU in the first half of last year as one symbol of this progress.

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon, Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Jankovic and Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor planting a linden tree.



photo: STA

PM discusses crisis measures with Swedish business execs

On 4 May Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor met Swedish business representatives in Stockholm, who outlined to him the anti-crisis measures which have been put in place in Sweden and which they believe are already showing signs of success. Measures to deal with the crisis were among the main themes of Mr Pahor's meeting with Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. Mr Pahor said that the meeting had been very successful, confirming the good bilateral relations that existed between Sweden and Slovenia. He was also pleased that Sweden was shortly to hold the Presidency of the European Union. After the meeting the Swedish prime minister praised Slovenia's development and emphasised the importance of the experience Slovenia had gained by holding the Presidency in the first half of 2008.

Mr Pahor was accompanied on his official visit to Stockholm by Minister for Development and European Affairs Mitja Gaspari and Minister of the Economy Matej Lahovnik. Before the meeting between Mr Pahor and Mr Reinfeldt, who is soon to take up the post of President of the European Council, the Slovenian delegation, headed by Mr Pahor, also met Swedish business representatives. The primary purpose of the meeting was to exchange views on the economic crisis and make preparations for a visit by a Slovenian business delegation to Sweden, slated for the end of May. Mr Pahor was in Helsinki on a working visit the day after, where he met his Finnish counterpart Matti Vanhanen. At the centre of their discussions were the current economic and financial crisis, and the strengthening of bilateral economic cooperation. They also discussed the forthcoming Swedish Presidency of the EU and a number of other current European topics. After the meeting, Mr Pahor expressed his satisfaction at the success of the visit and the further strengthening of relations between Slovenia and Finland.

Minister of the Economy Matej Lahovnik, who accompanied the prime minister on both legs of the trip, also declared the Scandinavian visit a success. According to Lahovnik, the strengthening of economic cooperation was at the forefront of the visit to Finland, alongside discussions of measures to tackle the crisis. He pointed out that they had discussed, in particular, the ways in which Slovenia might become an entry point for Scandinavian business interests into South-East Europe. Discussions in both Stockholm and Helsinki also addressed the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia, with Mr Pahor's hosts both expressing an understanding of Slovenia's positions. Mr Reinfeldt also gave an explicit expression of support for the resolution process taking place under the leadership of European Commissioner Olli Rehn.

Government finalises response to Rehn border proposal

On 14 May the Slovenian Government adopted supplements to the latest proposal of the European Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, aimed at resolving the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute. Prior to this, the supplements received the majority support of the heads of parliamentary parties.

In response to the question about what the chances are of Commissioner Rehn accepting the Slovenian supplements, Prime Minister Borut Pahor repeated "we are in the middle of a process whose future cannot be predicted". The Prime Minister anticipates that the response will be "of a nature that will enable negotiations to continue"; otherwise Slovenia will not accept it, and Croatia will have to consider how to withdraw the contentious documents from the accession documentation with the EU and in this way resolve the impasse. Here the Prime Minister emphasised that the dispute with Croatia was about "the border, which is one of the key elements of the sovereignty of any state", so there had to be "absolute" certainty regarding the principles of international law and other principles that would be applied in possible arbitration. "Slovenia has made its decisions, it is a sovereign country and is deciding on one of the most important elements of its sovereignty," stressed the Prime Minister.

For the moment the Slovenian response is still under wraps, but according to media reports, Slovenia is thought to be proposing that the arbitration tribunal resolve together the issue of the border on land and at sea and of the contact of Slovenian territorial waters with international waters, specifically applying equal principles, as well as the principle of what is fair and equitable (ex aequo et bono). Rehn's proposal does not contain this latter principle, and the resolution of the aforementioned issues is separate. Slovenia is supposedly prepared to remove the block to Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU only after ratification of the arbitration agreement in the parliaments of the two countries, and not immediately upon concluding the agreement on resolving the border issue through arbitration, as envisaged in Rehn's proposal. Slovenia is also reported to be proposing that two arbitration officials be appointed by the two countries. If they could not agree, the European Commission would appoint the president of the tribunal, who would in turn appoint the two members. Slovenia is also supposedly proposing that the two countries may at any point halt the arbitration process, if in the meantime they agree on some other form of resolving the dispute, the newspaper Delo reported.

On the very next day, Prime Minister Borut Pahor and Foreign Minister Samuel Žbogar presented the supplements behind closed doors to members of the National Assembly foreign policy committee. After the emergency session the chair of the committee, Ivo Vajgl, said that the committee had "expressed substantive support" for the supplements.

That same day, Minister Žbogar called Commissioner Rehn and presented the Slovenian proposals and comments to him in minute detail. In Brussels, Commissioner Rehn then stated that they would study the Slovenian supplements closely. At the same time, he indicated that further consultations with Croatia would be needed. "What is important is the agreement of both sides. We are so close to an agreement that it would make no sense to stop now, when we are almost at the target," stressed Rehn. "Both sides are committed to the process of European Commission mediation, which is also supported by the EU Presidency trio and EU Member States," he added.

The official submission of Slovenia's written response to the proposal came on 19 May. In his first comment on Slovenia's submission, Commissioner Rehn stated that Slovenia's response is in line with its approach with regard to the assistance of the European Commission in resolving this issue, which is positive and constructive. Rehn also announced that he will shortly be calling a new meeting with the Slovenian and Croatian foreign ministers Samuel Žbogar and Gordan Jandroković.

On 14 May the Slovenian Government adopted supplements to the latest proposal of the European Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, aimed at resolving the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute.



photo: STA

Jože Osterman, Government Communications Office,
photo: Barbara Jakše Jeršič

The Illyrian Provinces (1809–1813)

This year's celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces is undoubtedly the most important event that has ever occurred in Slovenia in connection with this period.

The French ambassador to Slovenia as well as many Slovenian historians affirm that Slovenia is one of the rare nations to have positive memories of the period in which Napoleon's armies occupied a large portion of Europe. Napoleon is remembered by most European nations as an occupier and general who brought mourning to thousands of families of fallen soldiers from Paris to Moscow and as far south as Africa, and who toppled many ruling national elites. On the other hand, with his social reforms and the connected "awakening" of dormant communities, especially in the east and south of the continent, he spread the message that every nation is capable of creating considerably better conditions for its life through its own work and the cutting of feudal bonds. Therefore Napoleon, whose actions shook Europe's foundations, is like a symbol of its internal opposing forces, which governed it for centuries and which have only recently begun to give way. European nations have been and are partly still emotionally bound by traditional relations – either good or bad – which they nurtured throughout history. Historical memory therefore contains a conglomerate of wonderful coexistence and mutual love, as well as suffering and terrible wars which claimed millions of victims and inflamed hatred that sometimes seemed as though it would never disappear.

Luckily, life is driven on, above all, by optimism and faith in goodness. The friendly memory of the Slovenians – a small European nation which only began to emerge at the beginning of the 19th century – is nurtured by the fact that this short-lived period of French rule united territories from the Julian Alps to Dubrovnik, therefore the largest territory it ever governed – Ljubljana being the capital city. **But in this context something much more significant for the Slovenians occurred. By introducing the Slovenian language as a school subject in educational institutions, the new French government – whose actions were dictated by the great civil revolution from which it ensued – recognised the equality of this language and culture and in this way placed the Slovenians on the map of European nations. The spontaneous and amiable response by**

the Slovenian intelligentsia therefore created a cultural foundation which could no longer be relegated to anonymity, so many cultural and other reforms remained even after the Illyrian Provinces had ceased to exist. This lucky coincidence, which is of the utmost importance for the beginnings of a firm national identity and the considerably greater self-confidence of Slovenians, is very much responsible for the traditional inclination towards and attachment to French culture which can be observed in Slovenia. This culture brought into force the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality which at the end of the 19th century also made it possible for smaller human communities and less populous nations to survive and develop. Thanks to them, we Slovenians, too, found the way to our neighbours and into the family of European nations.

From the Julian Alps to Dubrovnik

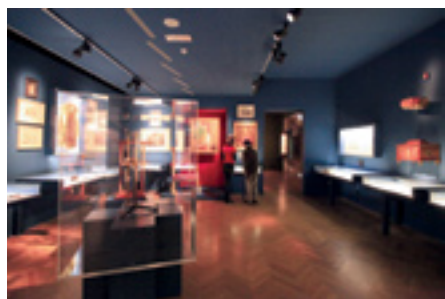
The Illyrian Provinces, founded by Napoleon with a special decree after the signing of a peace treaty in Schönbrunn on 14.10.1809, included lands ceded to the French by the Habsburgs (the province of Gorizia, Trieste, Austrian Istria, Carniola, the western half of Carinthia and the territory south of the Sava River between Carniola and Bosnia) as well as Venetian Istria, Dalmatia and Boka Kotorska (ruled by them since 1805) and the territory of the Dubrovnik Republic, which was occupied by the French and in 1808 annexed to the Italian kingdom. In 1810, they also annexed eastern Tirol. **The provinces covered an area of 55,000 km² and an ethnically very diverse population of about one and a half million (Slovenians, Croats, Serbs, Germans and Italians).** The Illyrian Provinces (with the capital in Ljubljana) were not a constituent part of the French empire but were tightly connected to it. They were ruled by a governor general, and in the four years that they existed there were quite a number of them: marshals Marmont and Bertrand, general Junot, and the last one who was the only one not to be a military figure, namely Fouché.

The Illyrian administration subordinate to that of France

Not all French laws were applied in the Illyrian Provinces, but the Illyrian administration was subordinate to the Parisian ministries and legally subordinate to the higher court in Paris. So on the one hand the Provinces used the emblem of the empire and the French flag, while on the other they had a certain level of sovereignty, as they, for example, issued Illyrian passports. One of the main newspapers of the French empire, the Gazette Nationale or Le Moniteur Universel, regularly reported on events in the Illyrian Provinces in its foreign politics columns. **Equality before the law was introduced, as were the obligation to do military service, a unitary tax system; some tax privileges were abolished, a modern administration was established, the jurisdictions of state and church were separated and the judiciary was nationalised.**

Although during the time of the Illyrian Provinces the reform of the school system did not best come alive, it nevertheless had broader social significance. The planned reorganisation of the school system envisaged that primary school and lower grammar school classes should be taught in the provincial "Illyrian" language. The linguist Jernej Kopitar and poet Valentin Vodnik succeeded in telling the authorities at the time that the language of the people inhabiting the present-day Slovenian portion of the territory of the Illyrian Provinces was in fact Slovenian. The French also founded a university in Ljubljana. Ljubljana was changing into a modern city, and at the city's edge the first botanical garden was created.

On the other hand, the French were unpopular, as they did not succeed in completely doing away with feudalism, they recruited young Slovenian men into the French army, they worsened relations with the Catholic Church and introduced high taxes. **Although of short duration and not popular with everybody, the French period of rule nevertheless strongly contributed to raising national pride and awareness of human liberties.** For the population of the



Illyrian Provinces, their rule meant becoming fully acquainted with the gains of the French Revolution and the principles of contemporary civil society. Opinion about Napoleon's rule and the Illyrian Provinces changed considerably towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries when the freethinking Slovenian intelligentsia began extolling the French as the liberators from the conservative Austrian authorities and a break with the former somewhat conservative values which did not allow for Slovenian development. One of their good arguments was also the period of very restrictive rule under Metternich, which for Slovenians meant wearisome stagnation in all domains. **Napoleon's spirit remained among the Slovenians throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1929, a great national ceremony was held in Ljubljana during which a monument was erected to Napoleon and Illyria on French Revolution Square. To this day, the personality of this great Corsican intrigues people in Slovenia and all over the world.**

Some interesting details

Illyria got its name from the Illyrians who settled the Balkan Peninsula in Antiquity. The name otherwise comes from an interesting myth according to which the alabaster-skinned Galatea, daughter of Doris and Nereus, was loved by the one-eyed cyclops Polyphemus. But he was so terribly ugly that Galatea fled when he approached, choosing Acis, a young Sicilian shepherd, instead. But in an adaptation of this story a Greek writer of satires asserts that Galatea's disdain gave way to careful friendliness when she found out that the cyclops was Poseidon's son. Apparently, Galatea surrendered herself to Polyphemus' desire and gave him three sons, Gal, Celt and Illir. This is how a woman's calculating mind brought about a name which considerably shook up Slovenian history. **The Slovenian territory first came into contact with the advancing**



French armies commanded by Napoleon's general Bernadotte in 1797. Napoleon himself came to Ljubljana and on 28 April spent the night in the bishop's residence. He briefly addressed the people of Ljubljana and rode on. The French army came for the second time in 1805 and for the third time in 1809, when the French stayed longer, from 1809 until 1813. The year 1809 was decisive for the Illyrian Provinces when the "grande armée" crossed into the Slovenian territory. On 23 May, the Austrians gave up Ljubljana without a fight, and the victorious French went on to win the battle at Wagram in the direct vicinity of Vienna so that by the beginning of July 1809 they had gained the territories of Carniola, Carinthia and Croatia south of the Sava River. To these territories Napoleon annexed Dubrovnik, Dalmatia and Boka Kotorska, and founded the territorially somewhat unusual state known as the Illyrian Provinces.

The only still functioning institution from the time of the Illyrian Provinces is the botanical garden in Ljubljana. In 1810, it was established as the Garden of Native Flora as part of the then high school (Écoles Centrales). It was designed by Franc Hladnik (1773–1844), who was its first director and was also a lecturer on natural science and botany at the above school. Just how important the garden was to the French authorities is shown by the fact that one of the first trees, a linden tree, was planted by Marshall Marmont, the former head governor of the Illyrian Provinces. The garden initially covered an area of 33 ares, it received an annual subsidy of 1,000 francs and had a gardener employed who earned an annual salary of 500 francs. For the year 1812, Hladnik lists 768 native plant species, which means that the garden developed rapidly under French rule. It is thanks to Hladnik and his links with Austrian botanists that af-

ter the reinstatement of Austrian rule the garden retained its unchanged form. After 1822, it was twice enlarged. With the founding of the University of Ljubljana, the garden came under its patronage in 1920 and even today continues to be part of the Department of Biology of the Biotechnical Faculty. In 2008, it gained the status of monument of national importance. Thus, Ljubljana gained the oldest botanical garden in south-eastern Europe as its heritage from the Illyrian Provinces. The fact that it has operated for almost 200 years in the same location makes it one of the most important old European gardens.

When discussing the Illyrian Provinces we cannot fail to mention the French writer Charles Nodier (1780–1844), who came to Ljubljana in September 1812. Besides other functions, he was also the last editor of the newspaper *Télégraphe Officiel*, the Provinces' official newsletter. In it he published ordinary news items as well as various scientific articles and articles about bandits who intimidated both the French as well as the general population. On the basis of a real court case against bandits, he wrote the novel *Jean Sbogar*, (*Janez Žbogar*), which he set in the picturesque surroundings of Duino Castle. In the novel, Janez Žbogar is a bandit ringleader who falls in love with Antonija, the beautiful daughter of a rich merchant. But he lives a double life: in the region of Trieste he is a bandit, while in Venice, where Antonija and Žbogar meet and fall in love, he is a charitable nobleman. When Antonija returns to Trieste, her ship is attacked by bandits, her sister is shot and Antonija is captured and brought to Žbogar. When she realises that the bandit Žbogar is a lothario, her heart breaks. Nodier published the novel in 1818.



Programme of events

The historical significance of the Illyrian Provinces for the development of the Slovenian nation is also reflected in the decision by the Slovenian government to honour the 200th anniversary of their founding by forming a special national committee. Also, both heads of government of Slovenia and France have become the patrons of the celebrations, and events are therefore taking place under the exclusive patronage of Prime Ministers Borut Pahor and François Fillon.

The national organising committee for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Napoleon's Illyrian Provinces was set up in 2007 and consists of representatives of all the highest Slovenian scientific and cultural institutions. It was initially presided over by the historian Stane Granda, and the vice-president was the Slovenian ambassador to France, Janez Šumrada. In 2008, the committee gained additional members and its leadership was taken over by Ambassador and the Director of the Government Communication Office Veronika Stabej. The committee, which is based at the Ministry of Culture, has prepared a programme centred on two historical exhibitions at the National Museum and at the City Museum of Ljubljana, and two scientific meetings, one in May 2009 organised by the Institute Charles Nodier and one in October organised by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU). Some events will be transferred to Paris in May 2010. The committee has also succeeded in encouraging other Slove-

nian institutions and associations to prepare projects connected with the anniversary, which it has then placed on the programme of main events with which the anniversary will be honoured. That a broad circle of experts from Slovenia and France has become involved in the events ensures that new historical facts about the Illyrian Provinces will be brought to light after so many years. Therefore it is possible to say that this year's celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces is the most important series of events ever to have taken place in connection with this period in Slovenia.

We would like to draw your attention to and invite you to some events which will occur in the following months and at the beginning of next year in Paris as part of this programme:

► Historical exhibition: "Napoleon says Illyria rise up", 12 May until 31 October 2009, City Museum of Ljubljana, with many accompanying events in the museum (info@mestnimuzej.si)

► Exhibition marking 80 years of Plečnik's monument to Napoleon, 2 October until 15 November 2009, Architecture Museum of Ljubljana (aml@aml.si; www.aml.si)

► Events under the heading "Illyrian Summer of Culture" organised by the French Institute Charles Nodier Exhibition "Under Napoleon's Eagle", 15 October 2009 until 25 April 2010, National Museum of Slovenia (info@nms.si; www.nms.si)

► Exhibition organised by the Municipality of Bovec: "Napoleon's Eagle above the

Alps", 24 May until 10 September 2009, Kluže Castle near Bovec, with a historical celebration of the battle on Predel Pass, on 23 May, to be attended by representatives of four armies that took part in the battle Re-enactment of a battle from Napoleon's wars: the Battle for Razdrto, 19 and 20 September 2009 in the Park of Military History in Pivka

(tank.pivka@siol.net, www.parkvojaskekgodovine.si)

► Symposium organised by SAZU: "The Dimensions of the Illyrian Provinces 1809–2009", from 14 until 16 October 2009, an international symposium on the Illyrian Provinces, the first part in Ljubljana between 14 and 16 October 2009 and the second part in Paris in the National Army Museum at the time of the exhibition "Under Napoleon's Eagle" in 2010, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (sazu@sazu.si, www.sazu.si).





photo: STA

Gregor Golobič, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology

Will science reap the attention of the public?

The achievements of science are, with some rare exceptions, usually overlooked by the general public. In part this is because of the nature of the work of scientists, which does not include PR activities and popularisation outside the scientific community or expert circles, and in part because their activity often presents too great a challenge even for the media, since popularity and attractiveness, which are a precondition of suitable attention, are not easily attainable goals.

The question of the importance and purpose of the promotion of science, however, does not only involve the so-called

general public but also people in public positions – those who make decisions at the representative and executive levels of government. In this sphere in particular, lofty goals of a future as a society of knowledge, innovation and creativity are frequently declared, but on the other hand actual support – here and now – is often missing when it comes to funding, organisation, the removal of obstacles, guaranteeing mobility, etc.

In Slovenia we have tried to address both problems at the same time. We have taken as our model an idea which comes from Canada and which was mentioned by

Professor Alper during one of the international evaluations of the situation in Slovenia. This idea involves scientists giving presentations at special meetings before parliamentary sessions. Since these always take place early in the morning, the event has been given the nickname Bacon and Eggheads...

In order, then, to bring Slovenian science, its leading lights and its current important achievements closer to the two sections of the public mentioned above, I proposed to Dr Pavel Gantar, the President of the National Assembly, the joint organisation of a 45-minute presentation including

an open discussion before every regular monthly session of the National Assembly in the main chamber of the Slovenian Parliament. The President of the National Assembly and his staff liked the proposal and decided to adopt it. In Slovenia we have called the project Harvesting Knowledge and we began it in March this year. It is aimed at members of parliament, the entire government and the whole of the Slovenian public, whom we have invited to follow the event either in parliament or on television, since Harvesting Knowledge is broadcast live by the national television company as part of its parliamentary coverage.

The first scientist to appear in parliament was Dr Roman Jerala of the Institute of Chemistry. He talked about synthetic biology as a promising science in many fields from energy to medicine and about a project in which he and a team of researchers and students from the University of Ljubljana achieved a notable success last November. The team took first place (for the third time in a row) in the Health or Medicine category of the International Genetically Engineered Machine competition (iGEM) at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a project on the preparation of new types of vaccine against the bacterium that causes cancer of the stomach and small intestine.

The first appearance by a scientist in Slovenia's national parliament was also attended by the European Commissioner for Science and Research, Dr Janez Potočnik, who at a press conference before the event described Harvesting Knowledge as an excellent initiative at the right time. He also emphasised the importance of the media in informing the public about scientific achievements and drew attention to the urgent need to support research activity. The second scientist to appear in the Harvesting Knowledge project was Dr Peter Križan, a full professor at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at the University of Ljubljana and a senior research fellow at the Jožef Stefan Institute. Dr Križan attempted to introduce his audience to elementary particle physics in an interesting and accessible way. Together with 13 Slovenian scientists at the "Belle" particle accelerator in Japan, Dr Križan has made a significant contribution to the experimental confirmation of the Kobayashi-Maskawa Matrix, for which Makoto Kobayashi and Toshihide Maskawa won one half of the Nobel Prize in Physics last year. His lecture in parliament had the interesting title "From Here to Eternity: Elementary Particle Physics and its Influence on Society".

The third lecture in parliament was given by the philosopher and sociologist Dr Re-

nata Salecl of the Institute of Criminology. In her lecture, entitled "Discipline and Punishment: Where are We and Where are We Going?" she focused on, among other things the dilemmas that appear today in the understanding and prevention of criminal offences. She also drew attention to the dangers surrounding the introduction of new technologies of social surveillance, such as for example the formation of DNA databases. After these three lectures we can already draw some preliminary conclusions. I can state with satisfaction that scientists are willing to communicate with the non-specialist public and present their scientific work and its social implications in an accessible manner. We already have quality lecturers guaranteed practically to the end of the year, and within the scientific community interest continues to grow. As regards the response in the political sphere, we may with just a hint of optimism see the glass (or the chamber) as being half full. The project is also slowly finding a place for itself in the media, since science occupies an important and credible place in people's thoughts on an uncertain future.

And so we persevere, since – as it is written in the Stories from the Thousand and One Nights: "There are four things that cannot remain hidden for long: science, foolishness, wealth and poverty."

The first scientist to appear in parliament was Dr Roman Jerala of the Institute of Chemistry.



photo: FA Bobo

Vesna Žarkovič,
photo: Mateja Jordovič Potočnik

Chantal de Bourmont: We French are not an arrogant nation!

Before she began work in Ljubljana in November 2006, she was the French ambassador to Estonia. Chantal de Bourmont, the French ambassador to Slovenia, is a chevalier of the Légion d'honneur and the holder of a degree in linguistics. In addition to appointments in her native country, her varied career has included postings in Brussels and Indonesia. A qualified linguist, Chantal de Bourmont did not train to be an ambassador and has learnt her duties on the job. She speaks five languages. In addition to her mother tongue, she is fluent in English, German, Estonian and Indonesian. She believes that the French are not as arrogant as people say.

The visit by the French Prime Minister François Fillon is the first official visit of a French head of government to Slovenia. At the first Franco-Slovenian colloquium of his visit to Ljubljana, under the heading "Europe and National Identity: from Napoleon to the European Union", the French premier stated that France and Slovenia formed a connection in turbulent times: two hundred years ago revolutionary wars were raging in Europe and Napoleon was spreading the principles of liberté, égalité and fraternité across the entire continent. The creation of the Illyrian Provinces in

Slovenia marks the birth of Franco-Slovenian friendship and points to the common heritage of the two countries. Madame Ambassador, how in your opinion is this heritage reflected today?

Those were not easy times. This brief period of the Illyrian Provinces was a time of great unrest, which has a good and a bad side. This was the period of the birth of nations in Europe, the French Revolution and the Romantic age. What interests us today, two hundred years later, are the things that our two countries have in common. If I try to answer your question on the heritage shared by our countries, I would say that the greatest legacy is that

today we are part of a whole series of alliances, relationships and connections. We share the values that were planted two hundred years ago and that have continued to develop up to the present day. They enable us to understand each other, to cooperate in many shared perspectives which may differ in many ways but are nevertheless common. But we do not forget that Slovenians are still Slovenian and the French are still French.

The Prime Ministers of France and Slovenia, François Fillon and Borut Pahor, also discussed the subject of language and identity in Europe. As a linguist you are probably particularly sensitive to this issue. Fillon linked the heritage of Europeans to culture, saying that it is the basis of European civilisation and that it is essential to create a European identity. How do you see it?

The basic question at the colloquium was whether a European identity actually exists. Talking to some people, you sense that they see the construction of Europe as something threatening. Needless so, in my opinion. National identity opens up numerous possibilities and offers breadth in a globalised world. I think that national identity is based on emotions, while European identity is based on the intellect, i.e. will, discipline and so on. I believe that there is no such thing as a European identity and that only national identities exist. People freely decided to join the EU. If you ask me whether I feel European or French, I will not hesitate to say that I am French. But I am both things at the same time: I am also European because I am French, and I am French because I am European. With Slovenians I note a certain paradox in that Slovenia is one of the countries most favourable inclined towards the EU, while at the same time there is considerable fear that Europe could somehow undermine your national identity, the identity that you have forged with such difficulty over the course of history. In my opinion this fear has no real foundation. Every country has the right to its own identity, but despite this Slovenians are still afraid of Europe.

This could also be because of Slovenia's small size.

I don't believe in differences between big and small countries. I am very pleased that our prime minister has visited Slovenia. By doing so he demonstrated the political weight of your country and proved that we do not consider ourselves a superior country or, as many people say, a country of arrogant individuals. I know that many people see the French as haughty and conceited, but believe me, we are not aware of this. We genuinely do not realise that we carry ourselves like this. I can assure you that we want an equal relationship, regardless of the size of a territory, and therefore the size of a country does not come into it.

The fundamental question that Borut Pahor wished to highlight was: "How many differences should Europe tolerate without at the same time threatening its unity and effectiveness?" How would you answer this question?

It is certainly a good question. Our prime minister replied that if we want to feel a national identity, we need to erect borders. The EU urgently needs borders, which means that enlargement will have to stop at some point. Otherwise we will be able to ask ourselves where the European identity actually is. The EU must stop somewhere. It is just that we do not yet know where. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the European Community, but this is nothing strange, given that a community like the EU has never existed before. Of course history teaches us about empires built through wars and conquests, or, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, a community of different nations. But the EU is not an empire, it has not been built by force. It is based on law, on the free choice of nations. Anyone can leave whenever they wish. This is something completely different. It is important to understand this. The common denominator of all this is, of course, a policy which is at the service of stability and peace.

This year we are celebrating 200 years since the founding of the Illyrian Provinces. To mark the bicentenary, a series of events will take place in Ljubljana, the fruit of cooperation between Slovenian and French institutions and individuals.



This interweaving of the cultures, views and knowledge of the two countries is also an opportunity for strengthening intercultural dialogue.

Certainly. I should also point out that Slovenia is the only country in Europe in which Napoleon Bonaparte did not leave a bad memory. The Illyrian Provinces, the administrative-political entity consisting of the part of the Slovenian and Croatian lands under French rule between 1809 and 1813, are the basis for the friendship between our two countries. The two prime ministers marked the occasion by planting a linden tree in Ljubljana's French Revolution Square. During preparations for the jubilee events, we were guided by two ideas: the idea of devising something "Franco-Slovenian", and the idea that the theme should not only be the past but also the present.

This is your third year as French ambassador in Slovenia. Your term of office has chiefly been characterised by the Slovenian and then the French presidencies of the EU, and by the recent visit of the French prime minister. Are you now able to get your breath back or do you have other important commitments on the horizon?

Oh [with relief], the horizon is now calm, since we have just survived yet another stormy period. A lot of important things have happened in the last few years but

today I am enjoying blessed peace. The next thing on the horizon, fortunately, is a holiday, both for me and for all my staff. I think we have earned ourselves a bit of peace. The prime minister's visit was a very demanding test for all of us, but we acquitted ourselves well. We will, of course, continue to work according to the guidelines set out by the two countries, or rather the two prime ministers, in the course of their numerous bilateral contacts.

Slovenia and France have very similar views on new, as yet unexploited opportunities for cooperation. What in your opinion are these opportunities?

There are two main areas here: matters that are agreed in Brussels such as agriculture, energy, foreign policy, European affairs, the Mediterranean, the Lisbon Strategy and so on; and, on the other hand, bilateral cooperation, which is agreed by the two countries themselves. Above all, how to foster economic cooperation. Renault is present in Slovenia, and new French investments are planned in the Šoštanj thermal power plant, the Krško nuclear power plant, the railway network, the Primorska motorway, and strengthened scientific cooperation. Cultural cooperation is already good but could be even better. We could also undertake joint projects in the Balkans. The doyen of French companies is Renault, and its Revoz subsidiary is Slovenia's main exporter and a company that enjoys a very good reputation and is

recognised for its concern for the environment. This also applies to a lesser extent to the Lafarge cement works in Trbovlje. The cement works, which is not directly owned by Lafarge France but by its Austrian subsidiary, operates in accordance with Slovenian and European regulations.

Are you satisfied with the presence of French enterprise in Slovenia?

Yes, I am satisfied. France is the fourth country – after Austria, Germany and Italy – in terms of foreign investment in Slovenia. French businesses are satisfied with their work here, but the question is whether it is possible to have new French investment, although because of the economic crisis this is not a good moment. Even so, one must constantly aim higher.

As ambassador you are always exploring, getting to know new people and cultures and the mentality of the nation. How well do you know Slovenia? Are we Slovenians very different from the French?

Naturally you are different from us, because you are a different nation, you have your own language, your own landscape. It is a completely different country. The climate in Ljubljana is similar to the climate in Grenoble. I believe that it is easier for Slovenians to understand the French than the other way around. It is more difficult for us because unfortunately we know almost nothing about Slovenia. The majority of French people do not even know where Slovenia is, they do not know your history. They know all about the British, the Spanish, the Italians, but they do not know Slovenia.

You are quoted as saying: "I did not train to be an ambassador. I learnt my duties on the job. Believe me, that is the best school." What have you learnt most on the job since you have been in Slovenia?

Good question! I have put together a good team of people. They are professional and we work well together. Some are Slovenians and some are French. They deal with different areas: politics, economy, culture. Their work is not always easy. On demanding projects the whole team works together, in unison, towards the same objective. This kind of cooperation seems to

me to be very valuable, since it establishes special ties between us. Of course I would like to know your country better, but I do not have much time. Every time I visit a Slovenian town, I discover something new about life here, and the most interesting thing about my job is that I meet a lot of new people. It is interesting to observe how things work here, and all the things that can be done.

It is also an ambassador's job to represent his or her country abroad, and so my periods abroad are interrupted by visits to France every three or four months, when I report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Maintaining contact with home is also essential for breathing in French air and the French spirit.

What do you do when you are not at work?

I rest. But when I am not resting, I ride a wonderful Lipizzaner horse, which I will be taking with me when I leave Slovenia. I ride at the weekends. It is a shame that not everyone in Europe knows that Lipizzaners are Slovenian horses. That is really a great pity! I knew Slovenia even before I was appointed ambassador – thanks to Lipizzaners. Many people in Europe mistakenly believe them to be of Austrian origin. I also had a horse in Estonia, where I was posted before this, but I didn't take him with me when I left. But my Lipizzaner is coming with me: this one is for life.

Are you satisfied with the level of knowledge of the French language among Slovenians, and our knowledge of French culture and the French way of life in general?

When I arrived in Slovenia I was amazed to discover how many Slovenians speak French. It is true, though, that there are many possibilities for a greater inclusion of French in your country. The status of French in Slovenian schools is not bad. I meet a lot of francophones in diplomatic, university, economic, journalism and intellectual circles. Many more, in fact, than in the countries where I have lived to date. If you consider that there are currently more than 2,500 secondary school students learning French in Slovenia and that five years ago there were only 350, this is a big step forward. Of course a lot of them

learn German, and also Spanish, and that is as it should be. I have the impression that the situation for French is improving greatly, although French was in fact the language of the 19th century, while English is the language of the present, and one should not delude oneself. But there are more and more people who speak French – and not just linguists. There are also lawyers, economists and so on who wish to retain their knowledge of French from secondary school at the university level. Some of them even choose to go and study at French universities. So the situation of French in Slovenia is by no means poor.

What about Slovenian food? Do you like it?

Oh, awful.

Awful??

Yes, it's so good that I have trouble saying no. Since I've been here, I have to watch my weight.

Learning about and understanding what is happening in Slovenia and passing this on to your countrymen in Paris, while at the same time presenting events in France to Slovenians – this could be a brief definition of your job. What is the current focus of your attention with regard to these obligations?

Presenting France in Slovenia is not very difficult, because Slovenians know France very well. It is a lot more difficult the other way round, because the French do not know Slovenia well enough. I don't spend much time here explaining about France, because people already know a lot. As ambassador here I do not have the same difficulties experienced by my colleagues in the Czech Republic or Slovakia as regards incorporating French companies into their society. Slovenia has accepted them well. And so it is not difficult to bring France to Slovenia.

As an ambassador, you are always exploring, getting to know new people and cultures and the mentality of the nation. And you always face the same questions: Will I understand these people? How do they think and what do they think about? What is their history? Why are they the way they are? Will I be able to work with them? And so on. These are the questions that make this job so fascinating. In order to understand others, you have to be open to different opinions and views, different ways of doing things. Although some parts of the world are totally different, the challenge is the same everywhere. You have to follow the same principle: even though this is not my home, I have to understand this environment, and I must be understandable to others.



Vesna Bertoncelej Popit, DELO, photo: STA



Dr. France Bučar warned that any persecution of the so-called tycoons makes no sense, since all they did was exploit the possibilities offered by the law, and if we wish to prevent such developments in the future, then we need to change the law.

Following the Slovenian Government's first two packages of economic measures, which were aimed at banks and at helping companies, whose export orders had fallen acutely, the third package of measures is aimed more at protecting jobs and social security for employees, which should contribute to halting the growth of unemployment, with unemployment figures going over 82,000 at the end of April. According to the ILO methodology, this is an unemployment rate of 5 percent, and in the words of labour minister Ivo Svetlik this is still one of the lowest jobless rates in the European Union.

Meanwhile in the third package of measures the Government also envisages certain longer-term structural reforms, which are being intensively harmonised with the social partners. These measures include pension reform and reform of healthcare funding, as well as restructuring of national public spending. Owing to the ageing of the population, the urgent need for some of these measures has been pointed out both by the European Commission and the OECD, with which Slovenia is negotiating over membership.

At the end of April the Government adopted a rebalancing of the national budget, under which the target deficit should amount to 1.8 billion euros, or 4.9 percent of GDP. Newly estimated national budget revenue should amount to 7.9 bil-

lion euros, and spending to 9.7 billion euros. At one of the May Day celebrations, Slovenian President Danilo Türk pointed out that rather than protecting jobs, the anti-crisis measures should be aimed more at promoting development, since the crisis is still just arriving in Slovenia.

Opinions as to when the crisis will be bottoming out differ widely, with the finding put out by the most advanced countries of the world at the end of April that the crisis had hit bottom, but progress was too slow. In Slovenia, too, despite the gloomy forecasts, some companies sensed a resurgence and a gradual return of orders, something noted more prominently for instance around Celje. Nevertheless economic circles as well as politicians and the media have in fact recently been focused mainly on the difficulties of companies that have gone through management take-overs, and following the decline in the stock markets many of these companies have not been able to meet their debt obligations, and banks have reprogrammed their loans. However, the Government has prohibited any further reprogramming of these loans, something favoured by the Slovenian public, which understands that an individual who cannot pay a bank loan loses his property. At Nova Ljubljanska banka, for instance, some 250 million euros have been handed out for management buy-outs.

In contrast to this, Dr. France Bučar, president of the parliament during the period when Slovenia gained independence, and a person whose opinion is still held in high regard by the public, warned that any persecution of the so-called tycoons makes no sense, since all they did was exploit the possibilities offered by the law, and if we wish to prevent such developments in the future, then we need to change the law. In presenting his book *Slovenci in prihodnost* [Slovenians and the Future] France Bučar expressed the view that today Slovenians are less free than at any other time. In his opinion they have merely the apparition of real freedom, an apparition dictated by the market environment. While people only ask what personal benefit can be obtained, this will lead to a collapse of society, stated Bučar, who added that if the social fabric is allowed to unravel all the ideals that enable the existence of society will crumble.

Dr. Jože Mencinger, former rector of Ljubljana University, took the view that in economic terms Slovenia is not even a country any more, but just a region, since it has supposedly lost all the attributes that define the state as an economic subject, namely its currency, control over the flow of goods, capital and labour across its borders, and also its own economic system, and it will supposedly be left with greatly reduced scope for decision-making on taxes and their use, although this would supposedly be gradually standardised in the EU.

Mencinger, who since the departure of Dr. Franc Križanič to head the finance ministry, has been head of the Economic Institute of the Ljubljana Law Faculty, proposed nine measures which the Government should consider and address as a complete whole. These measures include a progressive gradation of income tax, increasing tax on profits from the current 25 to 30 percent, introducing a low tax on financial transactions so the public finance deficit should be limited only by the possibility of taking foreign loans, which should be necessary for a few more years, the introduction of a basic citizen's income, and selective state capital injections for companies in trouble, where the



Dr. Jože Mencinger, former rector of Ljubljana University proposed nine measures which the Government should consider and address as a complete whole.

fundamental criterion for liquidation of companies should be a comparison of the company losses and the social costs stemming from the collapse of the company. The Government Office for Macroeconomic Analysis and Development has determined that Slovenia made poor use of the favourable market conditions to raise its competitiveness, and for that reason in the future it will probably lag behind the level of development of the most advanced European Union Member States. Meanwhile given the decline in economic growth, economists fear deflation.

According to data from the Employment Service of Slovenia, a total of 35,000 work permits were issued for the permanent residence of aliens and 70,000 issued for temporary residence in Slovenia. Appli-

cants from the countries of the former Yugoslavia account for 90 percent of all work permit applications. In view of the European directive, which is still in its reading, Slovenia should in future standardise the procedure for obtaining a work permit and a residence permit.

The economic crisis has also had a marked impact on tourism. In Ljubljana and Bled, which depend heavily on foreign visitors, there have been far fewer guests and tourist overnights this year, while the level of visiting has been more satisfactory at Postojna Cave, Zreče and Pohorje. On the other hand Croatia, where the Slovenians have traditionally spent summer holidays, and where in the first few months of this year Slovenian visitors dropped by almost a fifth, and some others, for instance the

Germans, have fallen by as much as a third, should be luring Slovenians to spend summer there again, and they are supposedly very welcome in Croatia.

In Slovenia there has been a kind of argument for some time among those who believe that irrespective of how companies operate and how and even if they pay their employees, they are entitled to so-called European managers' salaries, and certain state companies to so-called European prices, which has thus far applied to electricity prices. But when the company Gen I offered households cheaper electricity, prices were lowered or favourable packages were offered by certain other distribution companies that only recently had raised electricity prices and announced new price increases.

The Chamber of Craft Establishments of Slovenia has been demanding that the institution of an ombudsman for the rights of crafts and small businesses be established along the lines of the EU model.

The Slovenian Government has resolved to propose Dr. Ernest Petrič, former Slovenian ambassador to India and the USA, and now a constitutional judge, for the position of director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), headquartered in Vienna.

And finally Maribor, the second biggest Slovenian city, is preparing for the organisation of the Winter Universiade 2013. The organisers expect to receive 15 million euros from the national budget, and all ministries will support them in securing European funds.

In May the Slovenian Olympic Committee should be weighing up the sense and justification of proposing Slovenia as a candidate for the Olympic Winter Games, at Bled in 2018. Candidacies must be submitted to the International Olympic Committee by 15 October this year.





photo: personal archive

Dr Ciril Štokelj, Deputy Head of Cabinet of the President of the European Parliament

On 7 June, Slovenia will elect its representatives to the European Parliament for the second time. Although at first glance it would seem that seven representatives cannot mean a great deal in a parliament that contains almost 800 members, this is not the case. Members of the European Parliament work via political groups in which the voice of each member counts for a good deal, particularly when it comes to voting on matters of importance to all citizens of the European Union.

Since there are relatively few of them, Slovenian MEPs have a very great responsibility within the European Parliament. They must identify those committees, working groups, delegations and other working bodies within the European Parliament in which they can defend the interests of Slovenia in the clearest and most responsible way, represent Slovenia's positions and expectations, and help to place a Slovenian understanding of matters and policies to the forefront. Member States with 60, 80, 90 or even more MEPs obviously find it much easier to present their positions, their points of view and their expectations, and to exert an impact on decision-making, in almost all parliamentary activities. Slovenian MEPs must be selective in working within those committees and working bodies that are relevant and vitally important to Slovenia, such as the foreign affairs committee, the justice and home affairs committee, and the committees on science, finance, culture, and so on.

Even when it was still negotiating its entry into the European Union, Slovenia showed itself to be a candidate that would, with its knowledge, experience and abilities, make the best possible contribution to enhancing the effectiveness of European Union operations. Slovenian MEPs have gone on to prove this through their work, proposals and ideas, and through their appearances at plenary sessions and within various working bodies. With their knowledge, experience and expertise, they have brought to their political groups a different and much more global and nuanced understanding of the countries of the Western Balkans, the region of Eastern Europe and the enlargement process itself. In 2008 Slovenia held the Presidency of the European Union. This was a demanding year for Slovenian MEPs, since they had to act as a conduit between Slovenia and their respective political groups. Credit is due to them as well for the fact that there were so many working meetings of political groups in Slovenia, and that they helped to bring about the adoption of numerous directives of importance not just for Slovenia but for the European Union as a whole, for which voting in the European Parliament was the final stage of a usually long negotiation process. The next five-year term of the European Parliament

(2009–2014) will be of very great importance for all citizens of the European Union, among them those of Slovenia. We are in the middle of a financial and economic crisis that requires immediate decisions to be taken; Slovenian MEPs will, in line with their powers, knowledge and experience, contribute to the decision-making process. They will also be invited to take part in the formulation of a different, primarily stricter regulation of financial markets and, in this way, help to create the future – one that will be based on a socially-oriented market economy. The Slovenian MEPs who will enter parliament after the elections will not be able to avoid confronting issues such as climate change and permanent energy supply. We need joint European Union responses to all these issues, and Slovenian MEPs can make a great contribution to formulating that response. Slovenian MEPs have, since the beginning, been extremely active in searching for new agreements relating to the work of the European Union after enlargement, from the Convention to the current Lisbon Treaty, which is still awaiting final approval in a number of Member States. The newly elected MEPs, including those from Slovenia, will have a great deal of work to do in the European Parliament in securing its implementation.

Slovenian MEPs have been active in the current Parliament's work on illegal migrations, and will have to continue to be so in the future, to ensure that the European Union pays heed to the desperate plight of those dying on the borders of the European Union. Could they do more in the European Parliament to raise Slovenia's profile in the European Union? By all means, but everything takes time. From current experience it will be necessary to anticipate those areas requiring greater attention, where Slovenia's votes will be indispensable and how to install Slovenian MEPs into key committees and delegations – that is, in those places where key political decisions are taken. Slovenian MEPs will also have to use their experience and influence to help increase the effectiveness with which Slovenia operates within the European Union, from the utilisation of funds and the preparation of programmes under European directives, to the establishment of a Slovenian section at the European School in Brussels. Their vote could ensure that Slovenian becomes a language with a status equal to that of other official languages at the European School. Slovenia might already have had its own Slovenian section at the European School; for various reasons, chiefly a lack of political decisiveness and professional work, this has not yet happened. Slovenian MEPs will have to appear jointly and pool their resources to help bring about the adoption of this important decision.

Nataša Goršek Mencin, Head of the Information Office of the European Parliament for Slovenia

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2009

A little over three years ago I transferred from the Slovenian state administration to the European administration. I took a job at the European Parliament, an institution I still knew very little about, even though I had spent almost six years at one of the Slovenian ministries covering European affairs. I was working on the harmonisation and adoption of legislation on the European level. Even in the process of preparing for the open competition for employment, little time was devoted to the European Parliament.

When I started working at the Directorate General for Communication of the European Parliament, and the main duty I took on was informing citizens and target audiences of the role and activities of the European Parliament, I realised why all the lectures about the European Parliament were so lightning-swift. The pace of this institution is so fast, the machinery so complicated and the logic of operation so elusive that it is not possible to explain it. Something that cannot be learned about comprehensively is better off being presented in brief, so as to avoid the complication of details. To the outside observer, the European Parliament probably looks like an anthill. You can observe it for hours on end, but still not grasp how things work. But you do know that behind it is a well-planned system.

In the first European Parliament elections involving Slovenia, in June 2004, only a little over 28% of Slovenians voted. So more than 70% of citizens eligible to vote left the decision on their future to a mere handful. Did they not realise that the decisions of MEPs affect their lives? Or did they just not understand what their representative would do? Perhaps they could not decide who should be their mouthpiece, since they did not understand the workings of the "anthill".

Trust that the system works is sufficient in observing the anthill. It is not sufficient, however, when decisions need to be made in relation to this. We then want explanations. And these

should be short and logical, if you please. Since such an explanation of the European Parliament is not possible, this has to be dealt with in another way. All of us working in the various European Parliament information offices operating in the Member States decided therefore to prepare a special information campaign for the 2009 European elections. The first decision was that in the campaign we would not attempt in any way to explain the details of how the "anthill" works. We would explain, however, how the results of its operation – the decisions of the MEPs – affect the lives of Europeans.

We started the campaign at the end of 2007, and the first phase ran right up to the end of 2008. The second phase began in January 2009, now for the first time under the same "umbrella". In all Member States citizens can follow the same symbols and the same content. In this way we are creating awareness about the common European area. We are communicating the fact that MEPs represent the voice of all citizens of the European Union. So before deciding whom to give their voice, voters must decide who of the candidates best understands their needs, desires and expectations for the coming five years. They do not, however, need to understand the decision-making process in the European Parliament.

The second phase of the campaign ended on 9 May with the beginning of the political campaign. It is now the turn of the political parties and MEP candidates to present to the electorate their vision for dealing with European and world issues in the coming five years. Between 4 and 7 June 2009 direct elections to the European Parliament will be held across the entire European Union. In Slovenia we will be going to the ballot boxes on 7 June. On the evening of the elections we will know how Europeans decided and what kind of future we want. There seems to be too much disturbance in the world to leave your decision to others. Or not? You decide!



photo: personal archive

AN OUTSTANDING PROGRAMME FOR THIS YEAR'S LJUBLJANA FESTIVAL



Polona Prešeren, photo: festival archives

This year's festival season begins in Ljubljana on 6 July with a performance of the Teatro alla Scala's production of Roland Petit's Pink Floyd Ballet and ends on 27 August 2009 with the final performance of the Bolshoi Theatre's production of Tchaikovsky's opera Eugene Onegin. Once again this year, summer in Ljubljana can also be a wonderful holiday, thanks to the outstanding programme put together by the organisers of the Ljubljana Festival.

The main festival will be accompanied by regular favourites such as Cinema under the Stars at Ljubljana Castle and the 12th International Artists' Colony. On 22 June, before the start of the summer festival, Ljubljana Festival marks the 75th birthday of composer Vinko Globokar with a concert entitled "Destinées Machinales".

The festival will host more than 80 events and over 2,500 performers from 20 different countries. The festival events take place under the patronage of Mr Zoran Janković, the Mayor of Ljubljana. The general sponsors of the festival are Telekom Slovenije and Mobitel.

For Darko Brlek, the director and artistic director of the Ljubljana Festival and president of the European Festivals Association, the following are among the festival highlights: Russia's famous Bolshoi Theatre with a new production of Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin, a concert of opera arias by world-famous tenor Ramón Vargas accompanied by the Orchestra of the Slovenska Filharmonija, the London Symphony Orchestra with

Valery Gergiev, the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the cellist Gautier Capuçon, the combined RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre de Picardie and the clarinetist Mate Bekavac, the Orchestra and Choir of the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival with Handel's ode Alexander's Feast, the Slovenska Filharmonija string chamber orchestra and the cellist Alexander Rudin, the SNG Maribor Opera production of La Traviata, the premiere of Haydn's opera The Apothecary (a co-production by the SNG Ljubljana Opera and Ballet and the Ljubljana Festival), top Latvian choir Kāmer, the musical The Full Monty by Zagreb's Komedijska Theatre, a Russian Cossack choir, a flamenco evening and the traditional concert by Vlado Kreslin.

These are just a few of the events to enjoy at the Ljubljana Festival this summer. The programme will also include concerts of chamber music, music workshops for children, a round-table discussion and much more. A Mahler Evening will underline the rich musical heritage of our capital city, which takes its place on the musical map of "Mahler Cities" in which the great composer began his creative journey.

To see a calendar of all the festival events, visit www.ljubljanafestival.si, where you can also view a selection of festival videos.



THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Albert Kos, photo: M. Drašček

The National and University Library, built between 1936 and 1941 to plans by the architect Jože Plečnik dating from 1930–31, occupies a central place among the national cultural institutions in Slovenia's capital by virtue of its role and its mission and because of its architectural importance.

The history of the library goes back quite a lot further. Its origins lie in the second half of the 18th century, when Empress Maria Theresa signed a special decree designating the 637 books saved from the fire that destroyed the (dissolved) Jesuit college for the general use of the library at the Ljubljana lyceum. These books were soon joined by collections from a number of other monasteries in the province of Carniola that were dissolved as a consequence of reforms during the reign of Joseph II, and later by rich collections of books from private legacies. When its resources permitted, the library also bought material itself or acquired it on the basis of swaps. In its first period the library was known as the Lyceum Library. In 1807 it was granted the right to receive a compulsory copy of every publication printed in the province of Carniola. During the period of the French occupation this right was extended to cover the whole of the Illyrian Provinces. Following the closure of the Ljubljana lyceum in 1850, the library became the Provincial Research Library. After the founding of Ljubljana University it became the State Research Library and the central library for the whole of Slovenia. Since it now took on the functions of a central university library, space in its temporary premises in one of Ljubljana's gymnasia soon began to run out, but calls for a new library met with strong resistance on the part of the central government in Belgrade. It took student demonstrations and protests to persuade the government to give the go-ahead for the building of the current library, which owes its immediately recognisable architectural identity to its designer, Jože Plečnik, particularly as regards its exterior and the monumental marble staircase leading to the large reading room, the central and most representative part of the library.

In the following decades, however, as the end of last century approached, the rapid growth in its book inventory brought

the library to the limits of its capacity, which at the time of building was envisaged as 240,000 units of library material distributed over 8,410 m² of usable space. Calls for a new library in a nearby location to complement the existing one and incorporate the Central Technical Library, currently an autonomous institution, date back to the 1980s. Although the plans and other construction documentation have already been drawn up, numerous complications have meant that construction has yet to begin.

The National and University Library has partially relieved its problems of space through a renovation and the more rational use of its existing premises, which have long since become a bottleneck for its increasingly numerous visitors. These include people of all ages, generations and professions, although by far the largest number of library users are young people and students, particularly students of the humanities and social sciences, since the library collections covering these fields are the most extensive. In addition to its book inventory, the library also maintains collections of newspapers and periodicals, collections of maps, musical scores and special prints and a relatively rich collection of medieval manuscript material.

The digitalisation of library material is an ongoing project and the library offers visitors and users a whole range of modern library services from electronic catalogue searches to a web portal and interlibrary loans. Last but not least, it also organises occasional exhibitions, the most recent being an exhibition on cultural contacts between the Czech lands and Slovenia from the Middle Ages to the present day, prepared in conjunction with the Czech embassy in Ljubljana to mark the Czech presidency of the EU.

With its varied activities the National and University Library is growing into a modern academic information centre which is forming increasingly fruitful connections with kindred institutions in other countries, particularly in Europe, while continuing to focus on its core mission of conserving the nation's cultural memory and its cultural, artistic and academic heritage.



DRUGA GODBA A FESTIVAL WITH CHARACTER

Polona Prešeren, photo: festival archives

With the arrival of spring, various festivals come to the streets and squares of Slovenia's towns and cities and fill them with a special atmosphere. One of these festivals is the legendary Druga Godba, a festival devoted to music from all over the world. This year Druga Godba will be something very special because the festival is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary.

The silver jubilee edition of the festival began on 18 May and continues until 7 June, bringing to the capital 13 concerts and screenings of films from the world of music. Druga Godba opened this year with a concert by Victor Démé, an exponent of mandingo blues from Burkina Faso. Actor and director Branko Završan, from Slovenia, gave a popular performance of songs by Jacques Brel. The biggest and most talked-

about event of the festival so far has been, without a doubt, the performance by the Algerian-French star Khaled. The festival is still going on and the programme can be consulted at <http://festival.drugagodba.si/>.

The closing event of the festival in Cankarjev Dom on 7 June will have a Mediterranean feel, with performers from Istria and Corsica: the Istrian group Vruja showcasing their new album, and A Filetta, a seven-piece male a cappella group from Corsica.

As well as the concerts, the festival includes screenings of recent films on the theme of the music of the world at Kinodvor and a poetry slam for young people under 23. The authors of the winning entries will get to meet Abd Al Malik and receive a free pass to his concert.



JAVNO OBČUJEMO ŽE 40 LET RADIO ŠTUDENT FM 89.2 THE RADIO ŠTUDENT EFFECT 1969-2009

Andrej Savelli, photo: RŠ archives

Radio Študent celebrated its 40th birthday on 9 May. It arose from the student movement at the end of the 1960s, when students began to feel that their voice needed to be heard more strongly and clearly. It was the first student radio station in Europe. From its very beginnings, it provided a space for alternative, frequently overlooked points of view, and always supplied its listeners with music they could not hear elsewhere. It could be said that Radio Študent was engaged in a 're-invention' of the medium of radio from the very moment it began, at the same time breaking through the boundaries of the medium with its non-stop innovations.

Because of its innovative approach to the creation of radio programmes, the station and its staff were often subject to the scrutiny of the powers-that-be. During its lifetime, Radio Študent has left a strong mark on intellectual, cultural, artistic and media life in Slovenia through its method of handling and broadcasting information, as well as through its music policy. Moreover, the station was one of the most important factors in the independence and democratisation of Slovenia, although its role has often been undeservedly overlooked and underestimated. It was, in fact, the only media outlet to provide up-to-date reports, freely and without censorship, on the so-called 'JBTZ trial' at the end of the 1980s,

an event that marked the beginning of the 'Slovenian Spring'. It was also one of the founding members of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights. Radio Študent had an extremely wide circle of listeners during this period.

Many of today's established cultural figures, politicians, television and radio presenters, journalists and academics started off at Radio Študent as presenters and producers. To mention just a few of the more prominent, these include Pavel Gantar (President of the National Assembly), Gregor Golobič (Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology), former Ombudsman Matjaž Hanžek, Samo Hribar Milič (Director of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry), journalists Ervin Hladnik Milharčič, Bernard Nežmah and Ali Žerdin, and the popular TV presenter Jonas Žnidaršič.

Despite the fact that it is now entering middle age, Radio Študent retains its rebellious and ever-youthful spirit. It celebrated its birthday with a whole series of special events, film showings, lectures, concerts, exhibitions and performances. The climax of the celebrations came on Saturday 9 May, with numerous concerts being staged at several locations around Ljubljana. Long live Radio Študent!





A CULTURAL PROMOTION EVENT IN STRASBOURG ON THE OCCASION OF SLOVENIA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Alenka Ivančič, photo: Council of Europe

On Wednesday, 20 May, two exhibitions, "Water – Our Hope" and "Tanja Pak – Works in Glass" were inaugurated at the Council of Europe's Headquarters in Strasbourg. The promotion event organised by the Government Communication Office was the first in a series of 54 events during the Slovenian Presidency of this pan-European organisation.

This first event was a mosaic photographic exhibition of Slovenian national parks and protected areas entitled "Water – Our Hope", complemented by an exhibition of sculptures by Tanja Pak.

The exhibition entitled "Water – Our Hope", a joint Slovenian-French project, shows Slovenian natural treasures, along with Slovenia's extraordinarily variegated landscape and high plant and animal diversity. About 63% of Slovenia's surface area is covered in forests, integrated into the Natura 2000 environmental network, with protected areas, often called parks, covering 12.6% of the surface. Slovenia has established 47 parks, including one national park, three regional parks and as many as 43 landscape parks. The exhibition presents eight protected areas most typical of various parts of Slovenia, and the waterways, a symbol of Slovenia. With its 7500 freshwater springs, 26000-km of rivers and streams, 200 artificial and natural lakes and 7700 oc-

asionally active torrential streams, Slovenia ranks among European countries with the most abundant and dynamic waterways.

Slovenia has a long tradition in the protection of nature and its waterways. Slovenians, aware of the interdependence between man and nature for a long time, have historically managed their natural resources with due care and in line with sustainable development principles, thus preserving typical landscape characteristics.

Within the ambient installation entitled "Tanja Pak – Works in Glass", the exhibition in Strasbourg displays the sculptures called "Trees" and "Frames: 1. Stones, 2. Boats, 3. Branches", in which the energy of nature merges with stone, - iron, - glass, - timber, - crucial elements for artistic expression and used by Tanja Pak to build her artistic creations. As an antipode to stone, timber and iron she uses a man-made product – glass, seeming fragile, mystical, almost unearthly with its transparency and providing added design value to the joint mosaic exhibition.

The mosaic exhibition, running until 18 June 2009, has been organised by the Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia.



ALPINE FLOWERS IN BOHINJ

Polona Prešeren, photo: N. Božnar

Bohinj is one of those places in the heart of the Slovenian Alps that have protected their uniqueness from the influences of the modern world and where nature is still as pristine as it was centuries ago. It is therefore no surprise that the extraordinary wealth of flora in the wider Bohinj area has long been exciting the interest of botanists and the admiration of those who love nature and its beauties. Ever since the earliest days of the scientific study of Slovenia's flora, the mountains above Bohinj have been considered a real treasury of Alpine flowers.

From early spring until autumn, the floral riches of Bohinj and the mountains above it are a feast for the eyes of every visitor to Bohinj and the surrounding area. As soon as the snow melts, hellebores and other heralds of spring burst into luxuriant bloom and the meadows are carpeted with brightly coloured flowers. In autumn it is the forests glowing in autumnal colours that provide the most striking views.

All of this is there for all to see. But the more we know about something, the more we notice! In Bohinj they are well aware of this and have decided that in the season when the largest number of wild flowers are in bloom they will devote themselves to flowers for a few days. This was the origin of the Wild Flower Festival. Its aim, of course, is to pay due tribute to the floral

riches of Bohinj, the Triglav National Park and Slovenia. The organisers also hope to encourage people to learn about Alpine flora and have a richer experience of Bohinj's natural and cultural heritage.

The period of the festival, which ends in the first half of June, will therefore see a whole range of cultural events connected with floral themes – from art exhibitions to musical evenings. After all, flowers have always inspired artists! Experts will hold conferences and there will be workshops on how wild flowers can brighten up and enrich our lives: from photography courses to culinary workshops, from learning about beekeeping to art courses. Guided by local guides and expert botanists, visitors will discover the flora of Bohinj and the surrounding area, and also that of some of the other botanically interesting regions of Slovenia. Other activities during the festival include organised birdwatching trips into the mountains above Bohinj.

The Wild Flower Festival allows us to experience Bohinj in a new way and to find out many interesting things about the area's history, the coexistence of man and nature, and the beauty that is sometimes hidden where we least expect to find it. See you in Bohinj!

For more information visit: <http://www.bohinj.si/alpskocvetje/eng/index.php>



Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Fonda archive

Fonda – Piran sea bass



The editorial office of the magazine Finance ranked the family company Fonda of Portorož among the 10 finalists for the most enterprising idea of 2009. They are convinced that Fonda has a promising entrepreneurial concept. This concept is being realised by three biologists, father Ugo, son Lean and daughter Irena, who are resolved to raise the best farmed fish in the world. In an entirely healthy way they produce food that contains only the most necessary and the healthiest ingredients. They have devoted their lives to investigating the sea. They have mastered marine biology and the laws of healthy nutrition down to the last detail, and have combined all this through a decade of experience plus unwavering conviction and enthusiasm.





For instance during the visit last year to Slovenia of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, at an official dinner they served the royal couple Piran sea bass, which the Slovenian Fonda family raised in the natural, clean environment of Piran. The chefs supplemented the sea bass with fried chanterelle mushrooms in buckwheat fritters and lamb cutlet with rosemary in a cream puree. The royal guests then enjoyed a dessert of chestnut cake, and ended the dinner with coffee and pralines.

Piran sea bass is a superlative quality fish from the Fonda fish farm. Immediately after harvesting, each fish is tagged with a label certifying its origin. The location of the fish farm in Piran Bay means that fish can come straight from the sea to anywhere in Slovenia in just a few hours. Quality control begins right at the careful selection of the very best fry, which are then raised in free-hanging nets that allow the sea bass to have a constant exchange of fresh sea water and unimpeded movement, since the small number of fish per net means they have sufficient space. The fish are fed exclusively by hand with the highest quality food containing nothing originating from land animals.

The Fonda Family:

UGO FONDA, father

Ugo Fonda is a biology graduate and internationally acknowledged expert in underwater biology, with a wealth of experience in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. He is regarded as one of the top experts on the

Slovenian sea. In recent years he has been involved professionally with diving and underwater works in extreme conditions. Since his childhood Ugo Fonda has loved the sea and the marine world, especially fish. He has passed on this unconditional love to his children.

IRENA FONDA, daughter

Irena Fonda is a molecular biologist and the recipient of numerous awards and accolades for her study achievements. She gained a doctorate in the field of the use of molecular biology in oncology.

On the founding of the Fonda family fish farm she joined her father and brother because of her affiliation to the sea. She manages the company and at the same time she works on international research projects in the field of marine biology.

LEAN FONDA, son

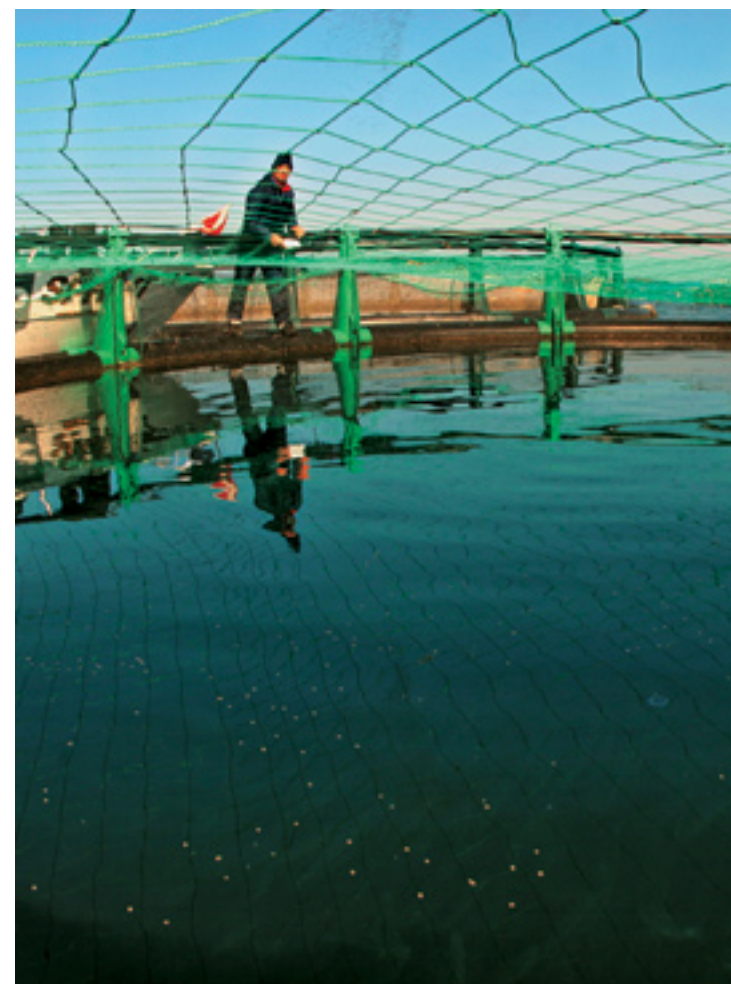
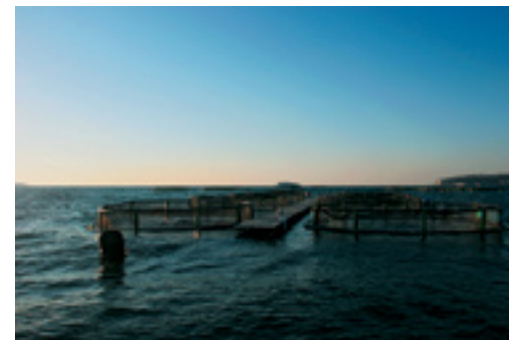
Lean Fonda is a biology graduate, and as a professional diver he is continuing the family tradition in the fields of diving and marine biology. He has headed numerous extremely demanding underwater jobs in Slovenia and abroad. He is president of the Marine Fish Farming Cooperative of Seča. Since he was a small boy he has been infected with the sea and the underwater world, and he is a true expert on Adriatic fish and ranks among the country's best underwater fishermen. He enthusiastically supported his father's idea of setting up a family marine fish farm.

The historical fact of a good catch

After the original prehistoric and ancient settlements, the medieval city of Piran was established in the 7th century, and belonged to the Venetian Republic. Fishing, seafaring, agriculture and salt-making were the pillars beneath the rapid flourishing of this part of the Mediterranean region. Piran Bay is distinguished by clean water and a strong current, which runs along the eastern Adriatic shore towards the north. The clean seawater, gentle Mediterranean climate and fertile Istrian soil are elements of an exceptional and unique ecosystem that provides an excellent base for producing food in and by the sea. All this has been exploited to great advantage by the Fonda family. It has been known for a long time that fish are a healthy and high-quality food. Despite the fact that fish are a simple, easily digestible and tasty food, fish meat probably contains more healthy ingredients than any other food.

Fonda Fish Farm – a centre of new life

The Fonda Fish Farm lies in Piran Bay at the southernmost point of Slovenian maritime waters. This area of sea is characterised by clean, deep water and a strong marine current. It is therefore entirely understandable that this is the one area of sea where wild fish are truly abundant. The fish farm became a refuge for a mass of fish and other marine organisms. More than thirty species of fish can be found in the area of the fish farm, and here they feed on food that falls out of fish farming cages. While the small fish hide from predators among the fields of shellfish and the nets, the bigger fish feed and spawn here. At the mooring for the ropes that secure the cages to the bottom, and at other parts of the fish farm, numerous other animals gather, from tunicata (sea squirts) to various polychaeta or bristle worms. In Slovenia's sea the Fonda Fish Farm therefore performs a function similar to that played elsewhere by artificial underwater ridges or the wrecks of sunken ships, which very rapidly become centres for new life.



Piran sea bass in a healthy diet

A diet that includes fish has a favourable effect on the complete development of the human organism, especially the brain, even before birth and during growth, it increases the psychophysical abilities of adults and slows the ageing process.

Scientific research has confirmed that a large part of these beneficial effects can be ascribed to omega-3 unsaturated fatty acids, which are found primarily in the fatty tissue of fish. At the same time fish meat is distinguished by a high biological value, and it has the advantage over red meat of being easily digestible, for which reason fish can also be eaten by those suffering illness, and they are a constituent part of dietary nutrition. In comparison with wild fish, those fish raised in clean water, such as the Piran sea bass, and which are fed only high-quality food without any harmful additives, do not contain (or only contain traces) pesticides, additives, toxic metals (mercury, selenium, chrome and others), nitrates, dioxins, furans, sulphonamides, PCBs, 3-MCPDs, acrylamides and others. Furthermore, compared to other sea bass, the farmed sea bass contain up to six times more fats, especially those that are good for our health and are also prized gastronomically.

Marine fish are very healthy and easily digestible food, so they should appear frequently on the menu, including in place of other types of meat. The Slovenians eat too little fish, for less than a third of adult Slovenians eat fish and seafood at least once a week. Fish are also an excellent source of high-value proteins, and they contain high amounts of iron, potassium and niacin. Small fish, which we can eat together with their bones, are a rich source of calcium. On average, fish meat has less fat and connective tissue and a softer cell structure compared to other types of meat, so it is more easily and rapidly digested. Replacing red meat with marine fish can have the effect in particular of improving the proportions of fat we ingest. They are best prepared by frying, baking or stewed in their own juice.



Tadej Golob, photo: personal archives

A car to enjoy

We had agreed to meet at a bus stop on the country road that winds between Ljubljana and Polhov Gradec. It was a beautiful May day. The road was full of cyclists charging the nearby slope up to Katarina, and of drivers going home from work. While I was waiting, with the photographer, for the engineer Niko Mihelič to arrive and show us his product, I fell to thinking how today's cars all sound the same. Once upon a time you could distinguish an NSU from a Zastava, this one from an Opel and that one from a Mercedes. Today, it's all zoom, zoom, zoom – the same sound. How boring is that? Just then, from a distance – at first barely audible but louder and louder as it approached – came a rumbling sound. The weather was clear, with barely a cloud in the sky. The 'pok-pok-pok' got closer and closer. There's only one thing in the world that makes a sound like that: a Harley-Davidson, that legend of American motorcycling. 'POK-POK-POK'... Loud, of course, but a nice loud. When the object appeared from around the corner, however, one saw that it wasn't a motorcycle at all. It was a car – a convertible no less. In it sat our man, wearing a pair of large goggles on his head, the kind that motorcyclists used to wear.

'Hi,' he said from the depths of a car that couldn't, it seemed, get any lower to the ground. 'This is it.' Well, it was undoubtedly a car (it had four wheels after all). But in another way it wasn't. From the front cover (that thing you'd call a bonnet in a normal car), between two quite erotically rounded mudguards, jutted a two-cylinder 1,450 cc engine, the kind one normally finds in a Harley motorcycle. Smoke was gently issuing from the cylinders – like smoke from a cowboy's gun, I thought. It had two seats, one for the driver and one for the passenger. I climbed in by stepping over the low side of the vehicle and sinking down into a seat that use to belong to an Alfa Romeo. 'Shall we take it for a spin?' asked Niko. I settled myself down, belted up and the driver started the engine. It went 'pok', like someone had fired a gun, and off we went, with the wind, perched only just above the surface of the road – at least that's what it felt like – and fast. Much faster than the car I'm used to driving. We stuck to the hair-raising bends. 'Blind bends' we sometimes call them, and this time they really were. After a few hundred metres I couldn't see a thing. Niko took off his goggles and handed them to me.

After I was able to see again (though my eyes were watering) and we had reduced our speed a little, I began to enjoy the drive, which was like nothing I'd ever experienced before. It was loud and windy but, in some way, it was what 'motoring' was all about. Born to be wild and all that. I don't care much for cars, I admit, beyond the fact that they take you somewhere, but I'll never forget this drive.

Half an hour later we were sitting in a nearby restaurant. I switched on my tape recorder and listened to his story.

'I like the Harley philosophy,' explains this former representative of the company in Slovenia, 'which goes something like: factory plus customers. There's a phrase most associated with Harley. I've seen it on a T-shirt and it says: If you asked me what a Harley is, I wouldn't know what to say. Harley is something you feel, especially when you leave work after a hard day and drive 60, 80 kilometres an hour to meet a friend for a beer. Like sitting on a horse, letting go of the reins and enjoying the relaxing sound. I wanted to build something that could be driven like a car but still sound like a Harley. And, of course, I wanted to see if I could build a car in the first place. A car that could be driven on the roads and would be safe.'

Niko Mihelič was born and raised in Ljubljana, although he now lives in Šujica, a small village about ten kilometres from the city centre. He has been interested in technical things his whole life. He doesn't know why himself, although he does know that clatter and din have always attracted him, right from the time his mother bought him a wooden scooter from Nama, the oldest department store in Ljubljana. He made a headlight from cardboard and tied a candle to it with some cord. He now had his first 'motorbike'. He continued with a two-gear 60cc



bike, which he soon converted to a three-gear, then a five-gear capable of reaching 115 kilometres an hour. That was about as fast as that much-loved 'people's car' of the time, the Zastava 750. 'In those days a Vespa "gang" used to gather in front of Šiška cinema,' he recalls, 'and if there were two of you on a Vespa, my moped would go faster.' Then came a Honda 125, a 250 and a 750. This last finally satisfied his desire for speed, before he had saved up enough money to buy the dream car of that time, a Porsche 911, which he also used for everyday journeys with his family of five. 'We would put two bicycles on the luggage rack and drive off to the seaside.' Before starting to build his own first car, he checked whether it would be allowed to take to the road. 'I didn't want to make something that would be stuck in the garage,' he explains. 'There have been many projects like that in Slovenia, where people have started to build their own cars and not finished them. Some have been finished, but their makers have emerged from the garage only to come up against the question of 'the right papers.' Niko first acquainted himself with the regulations and standards applying to his creation and, to his great relief, discovered that 'one-offs' do not require the crash test mandatory for mass-produced vehicles. One condition is that you don't make the axle or the load-bearing parts yourself, and that the chassis is strong enough. And because he wanted to have four-wheel drive with a reduction gear, turning this nippy roadster, amazingly, into a capable all-terrain vehicle, he chose a Subaru base, the only one to offer a gearbox, transmission and reduction for such light vehicles.

'I wanted to produce a car that would be enjoyable to drive,' he says. 'Today we know more or less only one type of car – those that take us from A to B. The main thing is that they are reliable, have good air-conditioning, a radio, power steering ... I grew up at a time when the first thing you'd say to a friend with a new car was "Let's go for a drive". And then shortly after that: "Are you going to let me have a go?" We don't do that anymore. Sitting in a car has become such a pain. So I wanted to build a car that I could enjoy at every gear change, every second. A car I would live to drive. One for which I'd choose the old road down to the coast, not

the motorway. There are two roads in the world that could have been made for this car. The first is the main road along the Adriatic; the other is Highway 1 from Los Angeles to San Francisco. This car would be in its element on those two roads.'

Niko did not draw any plans for the car. He already had the final look of the thing in his head, and began to build it as one would build a house. He got together the people he needed for the construction. At a colleague's place they cut and welded the chassis and an upholsterer took care of the interior linings. He engaged an autoelectrician for the electrics, a woodcarver for the wooden parts and a panel beater for the sheet metal that gives the car its final appearance. He was already retired and was genuinely delighted to be offered the job. 'All my life I've fixed broken cars,' he had sighed. 'Now I finally get to make a new one.'

There weren't that many people who believed that the thing that was gradually taking shape in Niko Mihelič's garage over the course of a year would really make it into the road – even the type-approval people who paid him a visit. (At first merely out of politeness, as they later confessed to him).

Niko hasn't counted how many cars went into this one. He took care to ensure that it would be as simple and as cheap as possible. The headlights, for example, he found in a shop selling farming implements. They originally came from a tractor and cost ten euros each. He found it easy because, nowadays, people throw things away that you would not have found, even by mistake, in a scrapyard 30 years ago. He ferreted around and came up with a great deal of useful stuff, from the fuel tank on.

The car certainly doesn't look as if it has been made out of discarded bits and pieces. Everyone we passed that afternoon turned back to look. In the carpark, the very least they did was turn their heads – that is, if they didn't come up and take a closer look to see what strangeness was in their midst.

'People's responses to the car have been positive, without exception – from older people as well as children,' says the proud owner. 'These days people are not best disposed towards expensive sports cars. There's an economic crisis going on and

lots of people have lost their jobs. But when they see a car like this and find out that I built it myself, they're all just really excited.'

Niko's car is a one-off, but for how long? At the Geneva motor show, he spoke to the people at Subaru, who were pretty excited about it. And after talking to a Slovenian missionary working in Africa, he got an idea for something a bit different. 'He mentioned to me that a car like this – with a different engine, of course, because Harley engines are far too expensive – would be just right for Africa. Toyota, Land Rover, Mercedes, Puch ... They all make great all-terrain vehicles, but there just one thing wrong with them: they are too expensive for off-road driving in areas where you can only drive 50 kilometres an hour. Wouldn't it be better to buy three or four light and useful 'Miheličs' for the price of one of these ATVs? This car, with its Subaru four-wheel drive and gearbox, could also be manufactured here in Slovenia, where there is enough knowledge and enough specialists for specific procedures should you need them.'

Niko Mihelič is already talking to a well-known Slovenian company that has expressed a readiness to consider his ideas. One of his other ideas – a folding bike for city traffic that would fit into the boot of even this tiny car – is already in production. Perhaps this crisis could also be an opportunity. That's a pretty phrase, but it might just come true.



Polona Prešeren, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

Primorska



The scent of the Mediterranean

Primorska smells of the Mediterranean. You can smell it in the landscape, on the plate, and in the glass. At this time of year it is remarkable: nature offers a wealth of possibilities for excursions. But after the rigours of these excursions, the taste buds will also need some pampering. In Slovenian Istria, the south of Primorska, the doors are always open to inns offering the local cuisine, whether ultra-traditional, or a more contemporary fusion approach.

Slovenian Istria is a little chunk of land between Croatia, Italy and the edge of the Slovenian Karst. It is famous for its natural heritage, which attracts growing numbers of visitors and nature lovers to its enchanting and peaceful landscape. It is also a favourite of wine drinkers, who love to come to this part of the country. The white varieties that do well in the wine region of Istria include Prosecco, Malvasia, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and Yellow Muscat. The main red varieties are Maločrn, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Refošk, the last of which is a regional speciality, producing wines of dense extract and notable acidity.

And there's more: the sea waters can already be braved at this time of year. The Slovenian coast is also very attractive. And the charms and pleasures of Slovenia's coastal towns were described in a letter written to Boccaccio by the poet Petrarch, when he invited him to leave the stifling Venetian climate for the clean, fresh air of Koper.

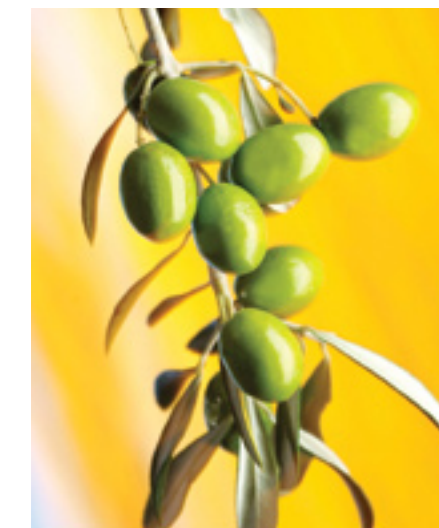
Istrian cuisine

The people of Primorska love to eat well. Here food has always been prepared with imagination, diligence and love. And, of course, with the touch of the Mediterranean. The excellence of the food is another reason that so many gourmands come to this part of the world.

The cuisine combines the flavours of Istria, the Karst and the Vipava Valley. There are a host of dishes cooked in Slovenian Istria that cannot be found anywhere else in the country. It is also remarkable that the cuisine of the coastal belt is slightly different from that of the hinterland. Among the

traditional foods found most often on the plates of Slovenian Istria are dishes made from corn and wheat flour, potato, cabbage, beans, a number of different herbs, and, of course, the essential olive oil. Asparagus is a favourite when in season. The region is famous far around for its truffles, which take dishes to the very highest level. The inns in Pomjan, Korte, Kubed and several other areas are renowned, and not just in Slovenia.

In Istrian cuisine poaching and blanching are favoured over frying and roasting. Fresh vegetables (courgettes, fennel, Savoy cabbage, aubergine, chard, radicchio), herbs and spices are widely used. As might be expected this close to the sea, there are countless dishes featuring seafood. The locals also love to make simple but tasty vegetable soups and stews, the most famous of which is made from young corn cobs, fennel and barley. Homemade pasta is common: tagliatelle, macaroni, bleki and the local speciality, fuži. These are served as a starter or a side dish, with a variety of sauces. And of course the cuisine of Primorska would be unthinkable without prosciutto.



Extra-virgin olive oil

The olive oil of Slovenian Istria is something special, with centuries of tradition, its origin protected. The news from Brussels that it had been granted PDO status brought delight to the local producers of extra-virgin olive oil.

Extra-virgin olive oil is used by the finest chefs in the world, and is recommended by nutritionists and dieticians, some even proclaiming it the king of oils. It is vital in Istrian dishes, in Mediterranean cuisine, with seafood, in salads, and in dishes of all types, even desserts. This is not news to good cooks and skilled housekeepers, and not only in the Mediterranean parts of Europe, but all over, and in all cuisines. And even the ancients used to say that olive oil soothes all pains and eases all worries.





Minestra of broad beans and ham

(serves five)
 100 g dried broad beans
 (or chick peas or other pulses)
 150 g cooked ham
 bay leaf, sprig rosemary
 50 g leek
 ½ clove garlic
 50 g carrot
 1 stalk celery
 20 g olive oil
 20 g flour
 salt, pepper, parsley
 slices bread

Soak the broad beans or other pulses overnight. Cook in fresh water with the bay leaf and rosemary, and a little salt and pepper, until half-soft. Sauté the sliced leek, the diced carrot and celery, and a little chopped parsley in the oil while the beans are cooking. Stir into the beans with the cooked ham. Cook for about 30 minutes more. Let the minestra cool and rest slightly before serving.

Serve with toasted bread.

Herb frittata

Ingredients:
 4 eggs
 flour
 milk
 fresh herbs
 olive oil for frying
 salt

Beat the eggs with the milk, salt, and add flour until a thick batter forms. Heat olive oil in a frying pan, add the batter, and scatter with fresh herbs. The herbs can also be added in advance to the batter. Fry well.

The frittata can be made with a variety of extra ingredients: parsley, nettles, fennel, dandelion, elderflowers, wild asparagus, prosciutto, lardons... just go by your taste and your imagination.



Fuži with truffles

250 g fuži (a type of Istrian pasta similar to macaroni)
 10 g black truffles
 1 tablespoon butter
 100 ml milk
 1 egg yolk
 10 g parmesan
 1 tablespoon olive oil

Cook the pasta until al dente. Strain, rinse in warm water, return to the pan, drizzle with the olive oil, and toss. Grate the truffles. Heat the butter in a pan, and add half of the truffles. Fry for a few minutes, and add the milk. A little cream can also be added. Bring to the boil, and add the yolk. Mix well and pour over the pasta. Before serving, scatter the remaining truffles over the fuži. Serve with the parmesan.

Olive bread

1 kg flour
 250 g black olives
 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 1 teaspoon sugar
 50 g yeast
 about 1 tablespoon salt

Crumble the yeast into a cup. Add the sugar, pour in a few tablespoons of lukewarm water, cover, and leave to prove for 10 to 15 minutes. Pit and coarsely slice/chop the olives. Tip three-quarters of the flour into a large bowl or onto a work surface. Make a well in the centre, add the salt, then pour in the olive oil and 500 ml of lukewarm water. Add the olives, and mix well by hand. Add the yeast to the flour, and knead well, adding the remaining flour until it forms a thick dough that does not stick to the hand. Leave to prove at room temperature for 30 minutes. Knead the dough again, then shape into a long loaf or several long rolls, cover with a teatowel, and leave to prove for 20 to 30 minutes. Preheat an oven to 150°C. Raise to 200°C, and bake the bread for about 60 minutes.

The olive bread goes very well with savoury dishes, particularly charcuterie and stews.





Gymnastics

Slovenia's most successful Olympic sport

Ana Mrzlikar, photo: Archive of the Gymnastic Association of Slovenia except Miroslav Cerar which is from a Personal Archive (never previously published!)

Beginnings of Slovenian gymnastics

Gymnastics has a long and rich history in Slovenia, and among the things that Slovenians can certainly be proud of are the achievements of the country's gymnasts, ranging from Štukelj, Šumi, Primožič, Cerar and Kolman right up to Pegan and Petkovšek. The beginnings of local gymnastics date back to 1863, when the first physical training society, Južni Sokol, was established in Ljubljana. The Sokol ideology fostered national and cultural consciousness, and with the arrival of Dr. Viktor Murnik,

who instilled strict order, discipline and systematic physical training in the society, regular training became the society's main activity. Educational work began in the Sokol gyms, and this fostered discipline, a healthy mind in a healthy body and integrity. Murnik devoted himself to the systematically organised education of physical training personnel, which also contributed to raising the quality of Slovenian training and the later fine performance of the country's gymnasts.

The Slovenian Sokol association became a member of the International Gymnastics Federation in 1905, and two years later Slovenian competitors were participating in international competitions.



Leon Štukelj (on the right)

Miroslav Cerar on his best apparatus – the pommel horse – at the world championship in Dortmund (Germany) in 1966.

Leon Štukelj – world sporting legend

Leon Štukelj is a sports name known around the world. A small man, who throughout his life weighed at most 49 kg, he first showed his abilities to the world in 1922, when Ljubljana hosted the world gymnastics championship. At that time the competition involved not just exercises on the equipment but also swimming and athletics, so he (only) came in seventh. Two years later, however, at the Olympic Games in Paris he won his first gold medals (all-round event and bar), and then at the Amsterdam games four years later he won his third (rings). In his career he tallied a total of 20 medals; six Olympic medals at three games and 14 at four world and other international competitions. The gymnastic success of the Leon Štukelj generation was enhanced by Stane Derganc (Olympic bronze in horse vaulting in Amsterdam 1928) and Jože Primožič – Tošo (Olympic silver on the parallel bars in Amsterdam 1928). Štukelj won his last Olympic medal (silver on the rings) at the Berlin games in 1936. Leon Štukelj is the pride of the Slovenian nation also because of his way of life, which remained a synonym for a sporting and healthy life. He was an amateur sportsman, receiving exclusively medals for all his success. In 1998 the Slovenians held major celebrations marking his 100th birthday. The main event took place under the honorary patronage of the president of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch. To mark his centenary, Telekom Slovenije issued four series of phone cards with references to Štukelj's life and sports career, while Pošta Slovenije honoured his 100th birthday with the issuing of three commemorative stamps.

On his visit to Slovenia in June 1999, former US President Bill Clinton met Leon Štukelj and remarked: "A small man in stature, but great in spirit." The oldest living Olympian died at the end of that year at 101 years of age.

For his exceptional achievements Leon Štukelj received the Bloudek Prize, the highest Slovenian distinction for achievements in sport, and together with Miroslav Cerar he was a cofounder of the Slovenian Olympic Committee.



Miroslav Cerar – Slovenian ambassador of sports, tolerance and fair play

Slovenian gymnastics again attained the world peak after the Second World War. In his 12-year sports career Miroslav Cerar succeeded in winning 30 medals at the Olympic Games and at world and European championships. He won his first gold medal at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo (pommel horse), and his second gold four years later in Mexico City (pommel horse). Now a retired lawyer, Miro Cerar is regarded as one of the most elegant gymnasts on the pommel horse, which was also his best apparatus. An interesting event that will remain in the annals of gymnastics occurred in 1962 at the world championship in Prague. When an unjustified mark was given, costing Cerar the title, the spectators poured forth a cascade of protest which developed into loud whistling that lasted 25 minutes. "There were 18,000 people in the hall at that time, making a protest that deteriorated into deafening yells," recalls Cerar. Yet he did

not respond to calls from the other gymnasts, the trainers and event stewards to appeal the mark given. He stepped up to his competitor, the Soviet gymnast Boris Shakhlin, and congratulated him on his victory. Following a special committee meeting, for the first time in the history of gymnastics the judges changed their decision and Cerar became the new winner.

Miroslav Cerar is an exceptional advocate of fair play, and since 1995 he has been a member of the executive committee of the European Fair Play Movement (EFPM), since 2008 a member of the council of the International Fair Play Committee (IFPC), and he is also in his third term as an ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia for sports, tolerance and fair play. "Fair play activities are based on the promotion of sports ethics in the broadest sense. We are fighting against any kind of deviation in sports: aggressiveness, unsporting behaviour and outbursts, alcohol abuse, drugs ... which relate not just to the competitors, but to all those involved in sports – trainers, officials, fans and also the media. The activities partly overlap with those that I have as ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia for sports; this involves mainly promoting and maintaining the Olympic values, decent behaviour in sports, tolerance and not victory at any price." Miroslav Cerar is the recipient of the highest Olympic distinction, L'Ordre Olympique, which was awarded to him in 1985 by the International Olympic Committee. Up until the victory of Primož Kozmus at last year's Olympic Games in China, he and Leon Štukelj were the only Slovenians to hold gold medals in individual sports. Equally, they are the only two Slovenians to hold the distinction of being inducted into the famous International Gymnastics Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, USA, earning eternal glory in competitive gymnastics (Štukelj 1997, Cerar 1999).



Aljaž Pegan and Mitja Petkovšek

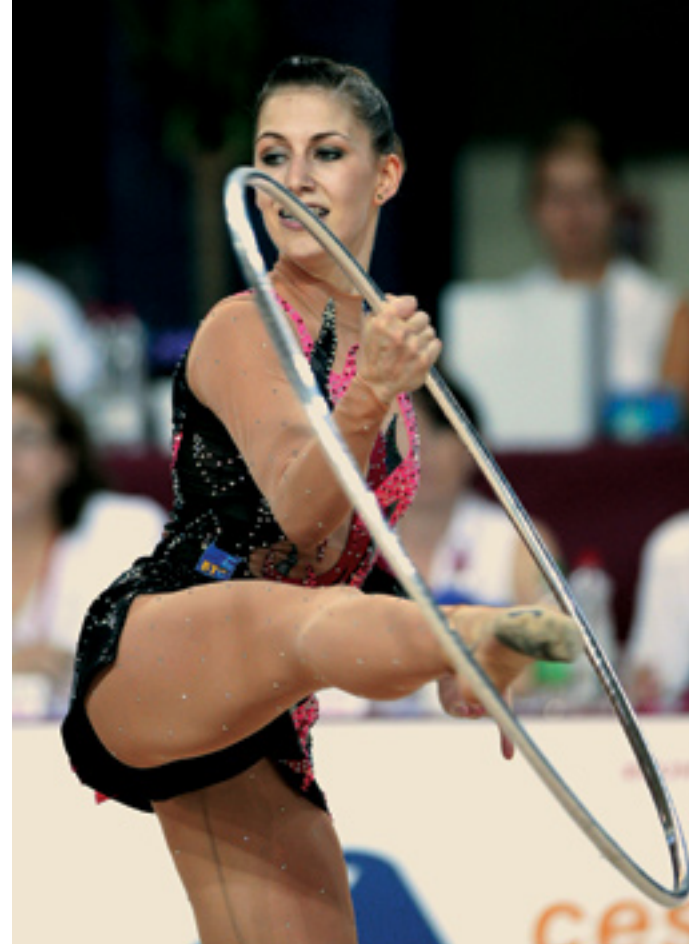
Alojz Kolman – with the kolman element

For some time following the success of Cerar, Slovenian gymnastics had no representative that ranked among the best in the world. That is, until Alojz Kolman came along; in the European Cup competitions of 1986 he won eight medals, of which five were on the bar, and his success at competitions in 1990 was crowned with a bronze medal at the European Championship in Lausanne. He concluded his competitive career with acknowledgement from the International Gymnastics Federation, which listed an element on the bar, which he was the first in the world to perform successfully, in Paris, as the kolman in the Rules on Men's Competitive Gymnastics.

Pegan and Petkovšek – biggest achievers in gymnastics today

Over the past decade and a half, the greatest success in Slovenian gymnastics has been earned by Aljaž Pegan and Mitja Petkovšek. In 2005 at the 38th world championship in Melbourne, they earned for Slovenia its first two gold medals in 35 years – Pegan on the bar and Petkovšek on the parallel bars. This result ranked Slovenia in third place on the ladder of the most successful gymnastics countries – the only countries in a better position were the global superpowers of the USA and China. If you consider the kind of selection of gymnasts available to other bigger countries, then this result truly ranks Slovenia as a phenomenon.

After Kolman, Pegan is the second Slovenian to write himself into the manuals of world gymnastics – his move on the bar is called the pegan. After first executing this element, the world gymnastics federation magazine World Gymnastics wrote: "With almost perfect technical execution of the new super element, the young Slovenian Aljaž Pegan has thrilled the gymnastics world."



Mojca Rode – rhythmic gymnastics

Women in gymnastics

One name that must certainly be mentioned in the history of women's gymnastics is Jelica Vazzaz. In 1938 she was a member of the Yugoslav team at the world championship in Prague, where the team won second place. She was an initiator of rhythmic gymnastics in Slovenia. In her sports career, from 1948 to 1979 she was an international judge in sports gymnastics, and she was also the first Slovenian woman to pass (in 1965) the international judging exam in rhythmic gymnastics. Today many people refer to her as a legend of Slovenian gymnastics.

Although women's gymnastics appeared on the programme of the Olympic Games right back in 1928 in Amsterdam, Slovenian women gymnasts first competed at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, and with fourth place they earned their first prominent ranking.

Currently Slovenia's best female sports gymnast is Adela Šajn, who is known to world audiences for being one of the most elegant competitors. At last year's Olympic Games in China, Adela was the country's sole female team member since 2000, when Mojca Mavrič competed in gymnastics in Slovenian colours at the Sydney games.

Another branch of gymnastics is rhythmic gymnastics, in which for a number of years Mojca Rode has enjoyed the greatest success. At the recent qualifications for the rhythmic gymnastics world cup, hosted at the end of April this year by the city of Maribor, she performed outstandingly and made it to all four finals.

What gymnastic successes can we look forward to?

"There is no doubt that as by far the most successful Slovenian sport, gymnastics has such a rich history that it would be hard to keep pace with the giants of Slovenian sport such as Štukelj and Cerar," says the president of the Gymnastics Association of Slovenia, Klemen Bedenik. "Yet the results of recent years show that the phenomenon of success is not declining. Just in the last four years at world and European championships, Aljaž Pegan and Mitja Petkovšek have won six gold, four silver and two bronze medals. Behind these now legendary sportsmen there are young ones continuously rising, such as Sašo Bertonec, Alen Dimic, Adela Šajn and Mojca Rode, who are already hitting the top ranks in world cup competitions. The future of Slovenian competitive gymnastics will depend to a great extent on better conditions for training, and we ardently hope that we will be able to build a national centre, which we have been waiting for impatiently since the times of Miroslav Cerar.

Changing social conditions and the appearance of modern fashionable sports have somehow driven gymnastics out of schools, and in gymnastics societies the number of children in recent years has been falling. For this reason in the period from 2005 to 2009 the Gymnastics Association of Slovenia has directed its efforts towards popularising gymnastics and promoting its mass appeal. Under the title Slovenia Working Out, in 2007 and 2008 we staged in Slovenian towns 17 gala shows entitled Gymnastics Stars, and provided a free attraction for children in the context of the Slovenian Gymnastics Days. In two years we were seen by more than 12,000 people, and in association with local societies and schools there are now more than 1,300 children participating in the programme Gymnastics in Primary Schools. In 2009 we set out and issued the Strategy of Regionalising Slovenian Gymnastics; one of the projects for 2009 is to go to 120 primary schools and present to children throughout Slovenia this most fundamental sport, without which no top sports person can succeed in any discipline."



JANEZ DOVČ

PLAYING AND BEING...

Katja Verderber, photo: Bojan Stepančič

Janez Dovč was very young when he first felt a burning desire to make music. At the age of five, which is when he began performing, he felt the gentle breath of the muse, which then became a clear voice, a call which even today he is unable and unwilling to resist. And so came music. After studying various instruments and disciplines, including (interestingly) physics, he returned to his first love: the accordion. He himself says that the accordion is not a jealous and possessive mistress, and that it allows him to experiment with the many instruments that come his way: "The accordion is still a very young instrument, it is still developing. But it has incredibly broad expressive possibilities and it is a real pleasure to explore, to deconstruct the instrument, the playing technique, and to play with the sound and get in tune with different instruments and different kinds of music."

His professional career really began when he joined acclaimed Slovenian world music ensemble TerraFolk. He spent two years on the road with them, discovering both the mainstream and the backwaters of the music industry, became a "professional" and earned a reputation as a first-class live performer. His restless nature and sharp intellect drove him onwards, on his own journey. His fixed abode became Jararaja, the group that plays his compositions and arrangements. In his words: "The essence of Jararaja is Slovenian folk music. It is a blend of old models and a new musical sensibility and musical elements in a way that respects and passes on a cultural and spiritual tradition. We supplement interpretations and arrangements with original compositions. Folk music is a living and open structure, as I understand it. It may have started off as original compositions, but over the generations it has solidified and refined itself. Jararaja is especially dear to me because as well as making extraordinary music, we have a relationship as human beings and friends that gives the sound an extra element."

An all-round musician, he has never let himself be limited and has transferred his own form of musical expression into collaborations with many established musicians and ensembles. He has played with

numerous soloists (Boštjan Gombač, Vasko Atanasovski, Anja Bukovec, Marko Hatlak, Irena Preda, Miloš Simič), orchestras (the Slovenska Filharmonija Orchestra, the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra) and artists from a great variety of studio and live projects (Carmina Slovenica, Lojze Krajncan, Saša Lošič, Izidor Leitinger, the Fool Cool Orchestra and so on). The Italian accordionist Simone Zanchini, a regular collaborator with the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, occupies a special place among his creative connections: "Meeting and working with different musicians is an very important part of the life of a musician. It involves sharing and exchanging experiences, getting in tune and inspiration. Simone is one of those musicians who break new ground at the world level, exploring how the accordion can harmonise even better, just as Art van Damme, Frank Marocco and Richard Galliano have done or are still doing now, and, in Slovenia, the almost forgotten Jože Kampič, and of course Marko Hatlak, Bratko Bibič and others, particularly young accordion players, who bring new approaches from their studies abroad. The number of top-level musicians and artists in Slovenia is surprisingly high."

Janez Dovč is a young and capable musician who has also demonstrated a talent for organising events. Last year, at the age of just 28, he put together a top team of musicians and collaborators and organised the cultural programme to mark Statehood Day and the end of Slovenia's EU presidency in Brussels. "Even with events like that, you can feel a fresh innovative creative approach which combines good music, visual image, dance, performance and spoken word... The scenario in which these different layers interweave and complement each other is also open to a certain degree of musical improvisation, which gives a concert an extra spontaneity. A cultural event leads to a fusion and the release of new energies. This approach is not only about pre-determined elementary constituents, quanta or quotas but also draws out the fractional parts, the so-called aliquots."

Two years ago Janez Dovč founded his own music agency and record company, Celin-

ka, which brings together a broad selection of acclaimed Slovenian musicians and their projects: "It is about a creative field of groups and individuals who are very seriously and sincerely involved in music, and this exchange of experiences, transfer, tuning in, just like in music, always bring an added value, not just energy but synergy and not just operation but cooperation. It is important to have a perfect mastery of melody and rhythm, but the key thing is a sincere love of music. The main challenge is how to stimulate this field so that artists can get in tune with each other. When this works, differences no longer lead to compromise but to counterpoint, and new possibilities open up."

In April this year Celinka held its first festival, the interestingly titled Godibodi Festival, with Dovč as artistic director. The event was a huge success: "I believe that creating music and playing, like every

form of sincere creativity, gives life greater depth. And nowhere is it more apparent than with live performance, when all paths are open at every moment, that every new breath can become an inspiration. And so: Play (Godi) and Be (Bodi)."

Celinka also has plenty of plans for the future: "We want to continue opening up and supporting the capacity to create, perform and listen to music. Before the end of the year there will be a new disc by Aleš Hadalin and Jararaja, while for December we are preparing two new productions in the Linhart Hall at Cankarjev Dom. We are slowly exploring possibilities for establishing ourselves outside Slovenia, above all through collaborations with foreign partners, which could also lead to some European projects. One of the indicators of Celinka's international orientation is a new project, one that is fresh and extremely interesting. Kisha brings together acclaimed singer Anda Marič and musicians

from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Italy: "An international line-up of highly talented musicians, a modern blend of electronica and the raw sound of the accordion, original music and Hungarian lyrics... a formula that has already convinced the major international record company EMI, which will be releasing our first disc at the beginning of June."

Janez Dovč is also committed to improving the conditions in which musicians work. With all of his projects, he is already working today for a better musical tomorrow. With his feeling for energy and synergy, analysis and synthesis that he has also developed through his study of physics, and above all with his love of the good, quality music that he creates, nurtures and respects, he works at home and his work echoes round the world. Like all good things, may this music also spread far and wide.



Škocjan Caves Biggest underground canyon in the world

Jože Prešeren, photo: Darinka Mladenovič



NATURAL TRAILS

The Slovenian landscape, on which we focus some attention from issue to issue of our magazine, boasts an extraordinary diversity in a relatively small area. Countless visitors from abroad are enchanted by the well preserved natural environment and the beauty of individual locations. But does Slovenia actually have any natural feature of world renown? Of course it does, it just isn't sufficiently known about around the world, and we probably don't do enough for the world to know about it better. Interestingly enough, this feature, which since 1986 has been on the Unesco list of world natural heritage, is in the Slovenian Karst (the southern part of Slovenia and part of the Primorska region). The Slovenian Karst is known for its many underground caverns, the most famous being Postojna Cave, and also for the fact that the original Slovenian word *kras* is one of the few, if not the only, contributed by the Slovenian language to established international usage (giving the English word *Karst*). The Slovenian Karst is the area between the Adriatic Sea and the part of the continent where the first researchers in the world started uncovering and exploring karstic caves and other karstic phenomena.

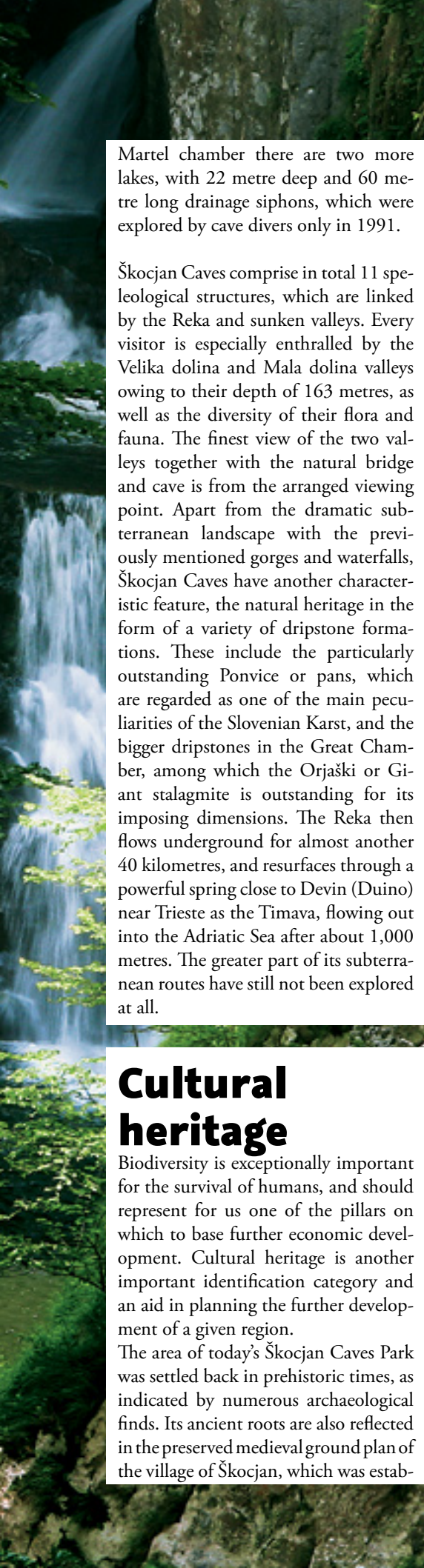
The only Slovenian natural feature entered in the list of world natural heritage is Škocjan Caves. The most noteworthy aspect of these caves is that they form the biggest known underground canyon in the world! As a unique yet typical and archetypal natural karstic area, Škocjan Caves are one of the jewels of planet Earth. In order for this world feature to become better known, the managers of this regional park plan in the coming years to invest three million euros, of which more than two thirds will be contributed by the European Regional Development Fund. This investment should serve to strengthen the identity of this natural monument, to complete certain infrastructural structures and to arrange a promotion and conference centre. The investment is intended to increase the volume of tourist traffic, and especially the identity of the Slovenian Karst and all of Slovenia as attractive tourist destinations.



What is special about Škocjan Caves?

The Škocjan Caves Regional Park includes some highly characteristic and, on the global scale, unique karstic landscape, in which over a very small area there is an exceptional concentration of natural features and natural heritage in the form of karstic and other phenomena and points of interest. With its network of caves, sunken valleys and individual natural monuments, this regional park comprises the truly typical karstic 'architecture'. Moreover the living natural environment should also be mentioned, for this area has a diverse biological make-up comprising some rare plants and animals.

Škocjan Caves incorporate an extensive system of passages stretching 6,200 metres, and at their lowest point the caves dip 223 metres. The caves begin at the edge of the central Karst close to the town of Divača, where the Reka River disappears. The Reka flows from the sinkhole beneath the 65 metre-high rock face close to the settlement of Škocjan, running for 2,500 metres through Mahorčič and Marinič caves, then appears underground at the bottom of the sunken Mala dolina valley, and beneath the Naravni most [Natural Bridge] it cascades into the 163 metre deep Velika dolina sunken valley, disappearing again into the underground beneath its western face. Along this underground gorge the Reka flows through several chambers, named Rudolf, Svetin and Mueller, then through the narrowest section with its vertical and overhanging walls – the Hanke Canal, 1,400 metres long – which ultimately widens into the Rinaldini, Putickova, Shadelooch and Martel chambers. This last is actually the biggest underground chamber in Slovenia, at 308 metres long, 126 metres wide and 146 metres high, and its entire volume measures 2.2 million cubic metres, ranking it among the biggest such caverns in the world. At the end of the



Martel chamber there are two more lakes, with 22 metre deep and 60 metre long drainage siphons, which were explored by cave divers only in 1991.

Škocjan Caves comprise in total 11 speleological structures, which are linked by the Reka and sunken valleys. Every visitor is especially enthralled by the Velika dolina and Mala dolina valleys owing to their depth of 163 metres, as well as the diversity of their flora and fauna. The finest view of the two valleys together with the natural bridge and cave is from the arranged viewing point. Apart from the dramatic subterranean landscape with the previously mentioned gorges and waterfalls, Škocjan Caves have another characteristic feature, the natural heritage in the form of a variety of dripstone formations. These include the particularly outstanding Ponvice or pans, which are regarded as one of the main peculiarities of the Slovenian Karst, and the bigger dripstones in the Great Chamber, among which the Orjaški or Giant stalagmite is outstanding for its imposing dimensions. The Reka then flows underground for almost another 40 kilometres, and resurfaces through a powerful spring close to Devin (Duino) near Trieste as the Timava, flowing out into the Adriatic Sea after about 1,000 metres. The greater part of its subterranean routes have still not been explored at all.

Cultural heritage


Biodiversity is exceptionally important for the survival of humans, and should represent for us one of the pillars on which to base further economic development. Cultural heritage is another important identification category and an aid in planning the further development of a given region.

The area of today's Škocjan Caves Park was settled back in prehistoric times, as indicated by numerous archaeological finds. Its ancient roots are also reflected in the preserved medieval ground plan of the village of Škocjan, which was estab-

lished on a great natural bridge beneath which are the Mahorčič and Marinič caves. Škocjan acquired its place name from St. Kancijan: it is interesting that a full 22 churches are dedicated to this saint, located for the most part by watercourses, springs and sinkholes. The original Gothic church in Škocjan was expanded in the 17th century with two side naves and a new presbytery. The village developed around the church and lay atop the old encampment walls, which are still partly preserved today. Today the typical Karst village of Škocjan comprises houses built in the 19th and 20th centuries, and one feature worth a visit is the village well, which was hewn into the rock, and in which rainwater collected for watering livestock. In the 20th century Škocjan was still known for its artisans, for the village had three blacksmiths, a carpenter, cartwright, two tailors, two seamstresses, a mason, innkeeper and more. Nowadays the village is left very much alone, coming alive only during the tourist season, when visitors come to the two museums. The Jakopin Shed houses the ethnological section, with a presentation of grain production and use, while the Jurjev Stable presents the story of discovery of the Škocjan Caves system since the beginning of the 19th century. The village cemetery is of course also worth a visit, since this is the last resting place of numerous local explorers of Slovenian caves, including people after whom some caves have been named today.


The neighbouring Betanja is another fascinating Karst hamlet, where there are several typical Karst houses with walled courtyards called borjači. From Betanja the route goes down towards the Reka River, which once lived a special life of its own. The people of the Karst set up at the water's edge mills and sawmills, so the valley leading up to the sinkhole used to be called the valley of mills, but now there are no more in operation. Nowadays the biggest settlement in the area of the Škocjan Caves is Matavun. In the 19th century there were still only four homesteads in the village, where the residents were oc-

NATURAL TRAILS



cupied solely with farming. The locals sold their products – sheep's cheese, hay and firewood – in Trieste, where they purchased their other necessities such as salt and oil. Later on, in the second half of the 20th century, the village grew to 11 homesteads, and there were also two inns, one of which even had a natural refrigerator with ice, which was quarried from the nearby pond, the village well, and properly protected it last-ed to the end of summer. Today visitors to the park are also offered several overnight accommodation possibilities.

Owing to the grandness of the subterranean sections, the surroundings of the famous Škocjan Caves are somewhat neglected. Nevertheless these fine little places are worth a visit, and if nothing else, you need to see the extraordinary sunken valleys from the outside. Foot-paths have been arranged around both major valleys, and these afford a fine



view and an experience all of their own. A famous Slovenian biologist, researcher and writer Peter Skoberne noted of this region: "The imposing appearance of the surroundings, formed over millions of years, and the thunderous water disappearing into the darkness, will perhaps help us to place ourselves and our ideas in a more realistic framework. We incessantly require inducements to humility, to a feeling of dependence and insufficiency, in order to be sincerely grateful for the gift of life and faith. So once for a change let us forego the glitter of the world-famous underground and take some time for a wonderful karstic adventure in the valleys."

You can get to the extraordinary Škocjan Caves Park from the Ljubljana–Koper motorway, and there are signs for the park at the Divača exit. For more information:

<http://www.park-skocjanske-jame.si>

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Piran Bay
Photo: Darinka Mladenovič