

politics environment
culture business sports

6

March 2008

Sinfo

Janša in the EP:
Climate change and energy
ambitions confirmed

**Halfway through the
presidency:**
Slovenia exceeded expectations
in many ways

Dr Matej Makarovič:
The imperceptible Presidency of
the EU in the Slovenian media?

Slovenia convinced the
professional public by winning the
first prize at the biggest world-
renowned tourist exhibition in
Russia, MTT 2008

QUOTES OF THE FORTNIGHT



Dimitrij Rupel /Foreign Minister and chair of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council/: **EU Presidency pinnacle of Slovenian politics**, Ljubljana, 2 April : Slovenia's ongoing six-month stint at the helm of the EU is the pinnacle of Slovenian politics. Slovenia is steering the EU and coordinating European politics. There have been no mistakes in foreign policy during the three months of presidency...We assume responsibility for our actions, we brave all the obstacles. Slovenia's achievements include the conclusions from the meetings of the General Affairs and External Relations Council, which in January agreed on a temporary political agreement with Serbia, unified its position on Kosovo in February and held a preparatory meeting for the European Council in March.



Janez Janša /Prime Minister and current President of the European Council/: **Compromise could quickly further Macedonia's NATO bid**, Bucharest, 3 April : If Macedonia is constructive in its talks with Greece regarding the name issue, it could very quickly get an invitation to join NATO, Slovenia stands 100% behind Macedonia's efforts to join the alliance. Macedonia did not get an invitation to join the organisation at the ongoing NATO summit. But the worst scenario did not happen as Macedonia does not need to wait for the next summit, it could get invited as soon as it resolves its name dispute with Greece.



Janez Lenarčič /State Secretary for European Affairs/: **Slovenia exceeded expectations in many ways**, Ljubljana 31 March: Considering the issues and doubts which arose before the beginning of the Presidency, we can now with certainty conclude that Slovenia is up to this task. We can also say that it has exceeded expectations in many ways. Maybe it is because expectations regarding the Slovenian Presidency were relatively low. In these three months it has been demonstrated that Slovenia is definitely capable of taking on the task and carrying it out as expected. Among the individual issues Kosovo was the most significant. It was expected that this issue would divide or split the European Union or stir up a dispute, but it has not. And the Slovenian Presidency and its leading of the discussion is at least partially responsible for that.



John Monks /Secretary - general of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)/: **I am very grateful to the Prime Minister for the warm reception that we had**, Ljubljana 5 April: I am very grateful to the ZSSS, too. For the very efficient way they organised today. And there's many things done recently. This feels even more respect for Slovenia, for the way it conducts itself, for the way its handling the presidency and for the way that it set in very, very good example among those nations that joined the EU in 2004. So, I just finished on that congratulatory note Prime Minister to your county and to your government and to you for the way matters are being conducted. We appreciate them very much.



Jožek Horvat Muc /The chair of the Council of the Roma Community/: **Situation in Slovenia favourable for the Roma**, Ljubljana, 8 April: The situation in Slovenia is favourable for the Roma, which has also been confirmed at a recent plenary of the parliament of the International Romani Union. We are very pleased with the situation in the Prekmurje region. The situation in other parts of Slovenia is not that good, but it is improving, local communities are helping the Roma to improve housing conditions. The majority of the problems are attributed to employment and shortage of municipal funds intended for the Roma.



Anže Logar

8 POLITICAL COMMENTARY

DR MATEJ MAKAROVIČ: THE IMPERCEPTIBLE PRESIDENCY OF THE EU IN THE SLOVENIAN MEDIA?

21 – 22 OUR EXCELLENCE

SLOVENIA CONVINCED THE PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC BY WINNING THE FIRST PRIZE AT THE BIGGEST WORLD-RENOWNED TOURIST EXHIBITION IN RUSSIA, MITT 2008



27-28 PEOPLE

AUTHOR, JOURNALIST AND SONGWRITER IVAN SIVEC: I'M STILL AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PATH!

29-30 CULTURAL HERITAGE

300 YEARS OF THE CATHEDRAL ST. NICHOLAS OF LJUBLJANA



contents

THE FRONTIERS HAVE FALLEN

The last day of March featured the official ceremony at the point of entry into Schengen airspace. The day before, the nine countries that became Member States in 2004 entered the European airspace without internal frontiers. The event has great symbolic significance. It is concrete evidence of the advantages brought by EU membership to the citizens of the mentioned countries, and it brings the Member States a step closer together regarding their rights and obligations. It is not a coincidence that four years after the 'Big Bang', 'old' and 'new' Member States are still spoken of many times. This division becomes obvious when the discussion comes to the free movement of the four liberties. The employment markets in one fifth of the Member States are still subject to transitional restrictions on employment. On the eve of the 'third industrial revolution', which the Slovenian Minister for Growth, Žiga Turk, discusses within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy in this issue of Sinfo, it is difficult to understand that the free movement of the four liberties has still not been established throughout the territory of the European Union. Soon, the set of liberties will be joined by a fifth – free movement of knowledge. Could anyone justify eventual restrictions on the free movement of this liberty?

The last day in March will most probably be remembered also by Slovenian secondary school students. Within the 'First-hand EU' project, more than one hundred representatives of the government and European institutions visited secondary schools that they had gone to in the past. The Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and President of the European Council, Janez Janša, accompanied by the European Commissioner for Science and Research, Janez Potočnik, joined the secondary school students of his former school. He talked about the experiences he has lived through since his secondary school days in former Yugoslavia. 'At that time in Slovenia there was only a desire of individuals to have a life like in the EU.' Today, the European Union is our everyday, and the prospects for the future are positive.

The PM did not waste any words on the restrictions in the employment market. Finally, also these obstacles will be abolished in 2011 at the latest. Just in time to not effect today's generation of European secondary school students.

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

PRIME MINISTER JANŠA: NATO AND THE EU MUST JOIN FORCES IN ENSURING SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE WORLD



Prime Minister Janez Janša arrives at the NATO summit with his partner Urška Bačovnik.

The Slovenian delegation led by Prime Minister Janez Janša attended the NATO summit, held in Bucharest between 2 and 4 April. Enlargement of the Alliance and security in the Euro-Atlantic area topped the talks of the Heads of State and Government gathered in the Romanian capital. In his address at the summit, the Slovenian Prime Minister highlighted the importance of cooperation between the NATO and the European Union, this being the only way to achieve maximum effectiveness. He advocated the European Union's involvement in NATO's strategic deliberations, given the EU's increasing importance and contribution to ensuring global security. Prime Minister Janša also said that he was pleased to see the two aspiring countries of the Western Balkan region, Croatia and Albania, being invited to join the Alliance. He also welcomed the progress made by Ukraine, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro on their path towards joining NATO. With regard to Macedonia, the Prime Minister said that although the country had not received the invitation to join NATO, the worst-case scenario had not materialised because Macedonia could be issued with the invitation – without having to wait for a new NATO summit – as soon as a solution to the name issue with Greece has been reached. On the last day of summit the Heads of State and Government met the Russian Delegation. Prime Minister Janša assessed with positive words the meeting with the Russian President Putin, saying that "the Summit in Bucharest has strengthened security in the Euro-Atlantic area." "It has also responded in great measure to the most pressing challenges such as Afghanistan, Kosovo and other operations in which NATO is currently involved with its forces," added the Prime Minister.

MINISTER RUPEL LAUDS UKRAINE'S DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, chair of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council, praised Ukraine's progress in the transition towards a pluralist democracy at a meeting of the EU and the Ukraine Cooperation Council on 11 March. He outlined the importance of the transition process, which should be based on the principles of the rule of law and respect for human rights, and mentioned other important factors such as transparent political and economic processes and freedom of the media. Rupel stressed in particular the importance of combating corruption and ensuring the independence, impartiality and effectiveness of the judiciary; in this context he expressed concerns about occurrences incited by racism and anti-Semitism.



EU Justice, Freedom and Security Commissioner Franco Frattini (left) and Slovenian Interior Minister Dragutin Mate.

MINISTERS BACK COMMISSION'S APPROACH TO EU BORDER MANAGEMENT

EU interior ministers have expressed support for an integrated strategic approach to the management of the EU's external borders, Commissioner Franco Frattini said after the meeting held on 12 March in the congress centre at Brdo pri Kranju. According to the chair of the meeting, Slovenian Interior Minister Dragutin Mate, the ministers first focused on the role of Frontex, expressing agreement that the role of the agency should become bigger. The agency should strengthen cooperation with other EU institutions, above all Europol. Mate explained that a joint fund had been created, through which Member States can finance urgent Frontex operations such as the control of the border in the Mediterranean. In this context, the ministers backed an idea on establishing special regional Frontex offices. In the long term, Frontex should also strengthen cooperation with third countries. "Only such cooperation enables an even more effective protection of the EU's external borders," Mate stressed. The officials also discussed the introduction of new technologies. They shared the view that these must not significantly worsen "the standard of crossing the external borders" in the sense of causing unnecessary queues at airports and border crossings. The ministers also backed the idea of setting up a system of electronic authorisation and the introduction of a shared electronic database for citizens of third countries entering and exiting the EU, which would upgrade the existing Schengen database and the visa information system. They were also in favour of a common automated fingerprint identification system (Eurodac).

SLOVENIAN, NORWEGIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKERS DISCUSS EU, BALKANS



Slovenian Parliament Speaker France Cukjati (right) and his visiting Norwegian counterpart Thorbjørn Jagland.

Slovenian Parliament Speaker France Cukjati and his visiting Norwegian counterpart, Thorbjørn Jagland, agreed on 13 March that the two countries held similar views on the Western Balkans, Middle East and energy policy. Speaking to the press after the meeting, Jagland said Norway was almost an EU member, as it is part of the European Economic Area (EEA), a member of the Schengen no-border zone, and participates in the EU's security and defence policy. Expressing his hope that Norway would in the future become a member of the EU, Jagland said that a third referendum on the issue was unlikely. Norwegians voted on joining the bloc in 1972 and 1994 referenda, which failed because of disagreements over the common fisheries policy. Moreover, Norwegians are satisfied with the existing level of cooperation between Norway and the EU, he added. Jagland said that the countries were interested in maintaining good relations with the United States and in solving the issue of Kosovo. Cukjati was the first Slovenian parliament speaker to visit Norway. He visited the Scandinavian country last June.

EU AND U.S. AGREE ON COMMON APPROACH TO VISA WAIVER SYSTEM

The EU and United States on 13 March agreed on a common approach to talks on the U.S. visa waiver system, determining that matters falling within national responsibilities would be discussed by national authorities, while those that fall in the scope of EU powers will be negotiated at the EU level. "We made a proper distinction between what is possible to do at the national level and what not," European Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini said after talks with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff at Brdo pri Kranju. Frattini's comment refers to several Central and Eastern European Member States which are not in the U.S. visa-free travel programme and have signed bilateral memoranda of understanding, irking the European Commission and raising concerns that Member States might be treated differently. The two sides clarified that the memoranda of understanding "constitute an expression of political will and they are a prerequisite for entry into visa waiver programme", Frattini said. Chertoff said the memoranda were not meant to intrude on EU competencies. "This is not new, this is the understanding we have had all along ... but it's good to be able to reaffirm this," he said. Old Member States bar Greece are in the visa waiver programme, as well as Slovenia as the only newcomer. While Frattini had earlier mentioned October as a possible date for the introduction of visa waivers for all Member States, Chertoff pointed out that this depended on how well prepared



US Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff says the EU and US agree a common approach to talks on the US visa waiver system.

the individual Member States are. He said U.S. law required visa negotiations with each country individually, so the United States will insist on this approach, proceeding on a step-by-step basis. Discussions on the implementation of an electronic travel authorisation (ETA) system are meanwhile to be concluded by the end of the Slovenian Presidency in June, when an EU-U.S. summit is to take place. The system, introduced last year with new visa waiver legislation, requires passengers from visa waiver countries travelling into the United States to register online with the Department of Homeland Security at least two days prior to their travel.

MACEDONIAN PRESIDENT FOR »REASONABLE COMPROMISE« IN NAME DISPUTE

Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski stressed on his 18 March visit to Slovenia that Macedonia wished to maintain the dignity of its citizens, and could thus accept only a »reasonable compromise« in the dispute with Greece over the name »Macedonia«. After holding talks with his Slovenian counterpart Danilo Türk, Crvenkovski explained Macedonia was ready to discuss its name as part of its efforts to join Euro-Atlantic organisations, but it would not accept being pressured by Greece. He suggested the only acceptable change would be adding a description of the system of government to the name of the country. President Türk meanwhile pointed out that Slovenia conducts relations with Macedonia in full respect of its name, adding he supported Crvenkovski's call for a compromise. »Slovenia understands the issues as a bilateral dispute, which will be solved by both Macedonia and Greece in the established way,« Türk told the press.

During their meeting, President Türk and Crvenkovski also examined the situation in the Western Balkans, particularly the developments in Kosovo, and agreed that the problems there should be resolved peacefully and sensibly. Türk condemned the recent escalation of violence in the north of Kosovo and reiterated his call to establish the conditions necessary for UNMIK operations and for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The Macedonian President also met Prime Minister Janez Janša, who reaffirmed Slovenia's support for Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions, and Parliament Speaker France Cukjati.

EU POLICE COLLEGE EXPANDS ACTIVITIES TO WESTERN BALKANS

The European Police College (CEPOL) concluded on 19 March a three-day conference where representatives of the EU and candidate countries agreed that CEPOL expand its activities to Western Balkan countries. »The Western Balkans are one of the priorities of Slovenia's EU Presidency, and this is why we invited representatives of police training systems of these countries to the conference, to see where we are and how we can cooperate in the future,« CEPOL Governing Board Chair Nevenka Tomovič told the press. Tomovič added that the meeting was also called in order to exchange best practices and seek ways to improve the training of police officers in fighting organised crime. Another reason for the conference was the proposal that an Organised Crime Threat Assessment (OCTA) be drafted by southeast European countries as well. CEPOL brings together senior police officers across Europe with the aim to encourage cross-border cooperation in the fight against crime, maintenance of public security and law and order.

PRIME MINISTER JANŠA: NO UNRESOLVED ISSUES BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND POLAND

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk met his Slovenian counterpart Janez Janša in Ljubljana on 20 March, with topical EU issues and relations between the EU and Russia high on the agenda. Discussing the veto Poland used to halt negotiations on a new strategic partnership between the EU and Russia, Tusk said that Poland has received sufficient answers as regards the recent trade dispute with Russia. The country will also refrain from setting new conditions and will not hinder talks between the EU and Russia, Tusk elaborated. Tusk said that talks with Janša also included the energy and climate change package, and highlighted the wish of his country that the principle of solidarity be included both in the package and in the European legislation.

Janša meanwhile underlined the importance of Poland's contribution to shaping relations between the EU and its eastern neighbours, saying that the European neighbourhood and enlargement policy was one of Slovenia's priorities, especially after the last EU summit, which reaffirmed Poland's initiative for strengthening relations with countries to its east. Janša also praised Poland's contribution in the Western Balkans, expressing his regret that more than 20 Polish members of UNMIK had been injured in the recent unrest in Kosovska Mitrovica. Tusk stressed that both Slovenia and Poland recognise the independence of Kosovo and are also in favour of a European future for all Western Balkan countries. The pair moreover stressed the importance of expanding NATO with three new members – Croatia, Macedonia and Albania – while also expressing support for including Ukraine and Georgia in the Membership Action Plan at the upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest.

Janša and Tusk praised bilateral relations, Tusk even saying they were so good that they only played a side role during the talks. Janša pointed out that trade exceeded EUR 2bn last year, an increase of 20% over the year before.

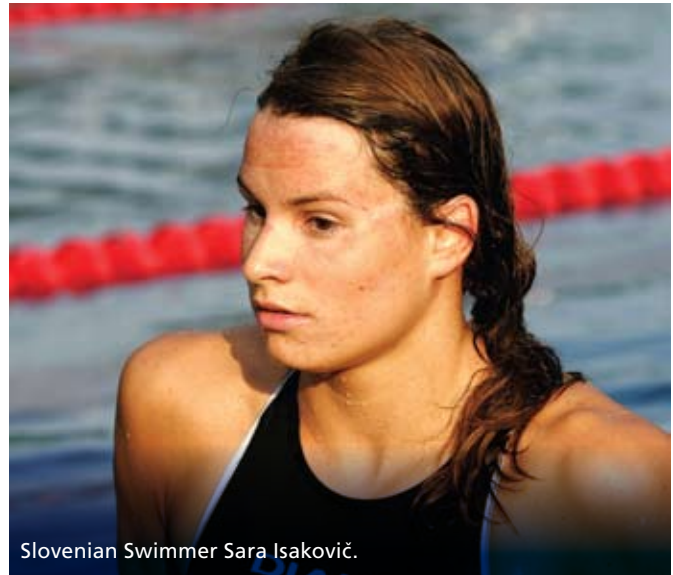
JUSTICE MINISTER PRESENTS DRAFT BILL ON WWII RESTITUTION

Justice Minister Lovro Šturm presented on 21 March a draft bill on WWII restitution, which would allow some 150,000 people to claim compensation for damage to property caused by the occupying forces and collaborators, as well as the partisan resistance and the Allied forces. The Ministry estimates that the compensation claims could amount to EUR 600m, which would be provided by the state-run Restitution Fund (SOD).

The draft bill limits individual claims to EUR 200,000, with damage to both moveable and immovable property, as well as loss of profits eligible for compensation. All Slovenian citizens or their heirs that had Yugoslavian citizenship in 1945, as well as legal entities that operated in Yugoslavia at that time, are entitled to file claims. The draft bill will now be forwarded to political parties and relevant NGOs for consultation, the Justice Minister said.

SLOVENIA BAGS GOLD AND SILVER AT EURO CHAMPIONSHIP

Slovenia's Sara Isakovič won the 200-metre freestyle event at the 29th LEN European Championships in Swimming, Diving and Synchronised Swimming in Eindhoven, Netherlands, on 23 March, while Peter Mankoč bagged silver in the 100-metre



Slovenian Swimmer Sara Isakovič.

butterfly. Isakovič swam 1:57.45, while Mankoč clocked 52.07, 0.18 seconds behind the winner, Russia's Yevgeniy Korotishkin. This is the first medal from a championship for Isakovič, 19, and the second gold for Slovenia in a European championship. Mankoč, 29, has meanwhile bagged a number of medals in short course swimming championships, winning the 100-metre medley in the European short course championships for eight consecutive times, among other things. Teja Zupan finished eighth in the 1,500-metre freestyle with a time of 16:58.53, while Matjaž Markič came in fifth in the 50-metre breaststroke, completing the distance in 27.92 seconds.

FM PLEDGES FURTHER SUPPORT FOR MONTENEGRIN EU ASPIRATIONS

Slovenia will continue to support Montenegro's efforts to join the EU, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said after holding talks on 26 March with Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister for European



Foreign Minister Rupel with Montenegrin Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Gordana Djurović (right).

Integration Gordana Djurović. Montenegro's efforts are properly conceived, concentrated and focused, Rupel said, noting that Slovenia had made it a priority of its EU Presidency to support the EU ambitions of all countries in the Western Balkans. »We hope that our Montenegrin friends will use the time of our Presidency to speed up their accession to the EU,« he added. Djurović, who

believes that Montenegro is well on its way to joining the EU, said the country would continue to pursue a proactive policy and try to fulfil all commitments in the accession process. »We are setting our goals within the limits of realistic ambitions,« she said, noting that Montenegro had so far honoured all of its commitments.

UN REFUGEE OFFICIAL DISCUSSES COOPERATION WITH THE EU

Cooperation between the EU and the United Nations refugee agency in view of Slovenia's EU Presidency dominated talks as UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres paid a visit to Slovenia on 26 March. »We know the problem of refugees; we also saw part of this issue during the recent visit to the Middle East,« Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel told the press after talks with Guterres. Rupel said he asked Guterres' opinion on the proposal for a Mediterranean Union (which would feature the EU and non-EU countries along the Mediterranean) and how it could be applied to improve the status of refugees in the region. Minister Rupel also stressed that the EU was a specific case in that it is a union of 27 countries with different systems of treating refugees. As Guterres noted, it is very difficult to coordinate with an entity that has a single border and many different national systems. »The key aspect currently is the development of the European asylum system. The Slovenian Presidency has put forward numerous initiatives that are very useful ... we have developed very important forms of cooperation,« Guterres added. Guterres also praised Slovenia for having included intercultural dialogue among the priorities of its presidency programme, saying this was vital for refugee protection as well as peace in the world. Rupel added that talks also touched on Kosovo, »where the help of the high commissioner for refugees might be necessary«.

SLOVENIA SHARES EU PRESIDENCY EXPERIENCE WITH CZECH REPUBLIC

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel met Czech Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Alexandr Vondra in Ljubljana on 27 March, sharing with him Slovenia's experience regarding the EU presidency. The Czech Republic is to take over the EU presidency after France in the first half of 2009. Rupel told the press after the talks that Slovenia was more than happy to share its experience with its Czech friends. Apart from Rupel, Vondra met with the European Affairs State Secretary Janez Lenarčič, with whom he discussed the recent European Council session. He visited the Brdo Congress Centre, Slovenia's main venue for EU presidency-related events. Vondra met with Interior Minister Dragutin Mate, with whom he discussed the visa waiver programme (which allows visa-free stay in the United States for up to 90 days), which is also part of the ministerial agenda. Vondra also discussed with Slovenian officials the Czech ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the U.S. missile defence system, which is to be located in the Czech Republic as well as Poland. Vondra said the agreement with the United States is expected to be signed by the end of 2008. He added that the issue was important not only for the Czech Republic and Poland, but for cross-Atlantic ties in general.

SLOVENAIN AIRPORTS ENTER SCHENGEN TROUBLE FREE

Slovenia's airports entered Europe's border-free area, the Schengen zone, without difficulties on 30 March. The airports had been ready for passport-free travel within the Schengen zone since last year, its officials told the press. The elimination

of passport controls in air traffic with Schengen area countries comes three months after control was eliminated at land and sea borders in Slovenia and eight other Schengen newcomers. The



Schengen crossing at the Jože Pučnik Airport of Ljubljana.

completion of the process at airports, which have been ready for the new regime since last year, when the Schengen Information System (SIS) was introduced, was put off until now to coincide with new airline timetables. Passengers passing through Slovenian airports will now be able to fly to and from destinations in the Schengen zone (the EU – except Ireland, UK, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria – plus Norway and Iceland) without having to undergo passport checks. Despite the absence of border checks, passengers on Schengen flights still need to carry a document – either an ID or a passport – to prove their identity, just like for any travel within the Schengen area.

JANŠA SAYS WELFARE STATE IS BASED ON SELF-INITIATIVE

Speaking at charity concert organised by the Slomšek Foundation on 30 March, Prime Minister Janez Janša said that the Slovenian society still finds it difficult to accept that a welfare state is not based only on social transfers, but also and primarily on the social initiatives of people, their self-initiative and inventiveness. Janša, a honorary sponsor of the event, said that the creation of the foundation was an expression of the initiative of citizens who are aware that true autonomy is »expressed through the creation of different civil organisations set up on their own material foundations«. On the other hand, according to Janša, a responsible state is tasked with »opening up space for such initiatives and supporting them directly or indirectly«. A society of well-being can only be built on the foundations of mutual solidarity, the Prime Minister believes. Janša remembered Blessed Anton Martin Slomšek, praising him as a great patriot, promoter of culture and exceptional educator. He added that people in Slovenia now live in conditions Slovenes living in Slomšek's time »did not dare to dream of«. Bishop Slomšek (1800–1862), who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 19 September 1999, strove for religious education and education in the Slovene language. He was considered an excellent preacher and a great advocate of Slovene culture.



The imperceptible Presidency of the EU in the Slovenian media?

Photo: STA

The great majority of events, including those that are directly important for the lives of ordinary people, happen far beyond their direct daily experience. Therefore it is of vital importance for the perception of such events whether and how they are perceived by the mass media. Questions such as the influence of the European Union on Slovenia and the influence of the Slovenian Presidency on the European Union, and ultimately the influence of both on the daily lives of Slovenian citizens, are much too complex to be viewed without the serious help of media interpretations. That is, without the latter, the Slovenian Presidency of the EU would narrow down to some smaller additional traffic jam, in which an "ordinary" Slovenian citizen finds himself due to the increased traffic of diplomatic vehicles.

With regard to that, the image of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU would definitely deserve serious and systematic analysis in the Slovenian media. Instead, we are for now limited to examples and impressions, but these are communicative enough for a serious consideration. It seems that the news linked to the Slovenian Presidency has a relatively modest role in the Slovenian media compared, for example, to other political events. Perhaps Presidency is too small a source of juicy and spicy news, but it has not marked considerably even the serious media and the media that should directly serve the public interest, such as the Slovenian public radio-television station. The latter introduced a regular programme for this purpose, but scheduled it in a late evening slot, when high ratings can no longer be expected. But if we monitored the biggest Slovenian commercial television by contrast, it would be difficult to gather even from long-term viewing of its information programmes that Slovenia is currently presiding over the EU. Every word that the Slovenian Prime Minister says in the Slovenian Parliament can be viewed by direct TV transmission, while his appearance in front of the European Parliament only makes it into the Slovenian media in selected fragments. If we look at comments in the printed media,

an almost uniform image prevails that the Slovenian Presidency is something that is performed very correctly and without major mistakes, but is at the same time something completely unimportant.

Where do such media images come from? The Slovenian Presidency, of course, is not turning the European Union upside down and or creating some revolutionary situations, but it is at least for Slovenia itself undisputedly a historical moment that changed a small country into an important global player. But perhaps this triggers some sort of media reflex of smallness: some rotten inertia by which Slovenia should in all respects simply be small: not only in population and area, but also in the scope of thinking, ambitions, European and global concerns and solidarity...

We cannot claim that here the media is just adjusting to some "narrowness" of its public. As public opinion surveys show, the identification of Slovenes with Europe is relatively high compared to other European nations, and national pride correlates positively with our European orientation. On the other hand, it is true that interest in European matters is still modest among Slovenes; for now, there is practically no notion of European interest in a sense comparable to notions of Slovenian national interest, whereby European interests would logically complement the national.

This only means that the Slovenian Presidency could be an excellent opportunity for strengthening European identity and, through that, an interest in European matters among Slovenian citizens. But with the prevailing mentality of smallness in the media, this opportunity remains obviously much too little used, as in these months the media could be playing a huge role. Luckily, opportunities still remain, and the Slovenian media can still contribute a lot to Slovenia being (even) more European after this Presidency, just as Slovenia will, on the other hand, with its Presidency – for now we hope and believe this in a very positive sense – leave a mark on Europe.

Janša in the EP: Climate change and energy ambitions confirmed

On 26 March, the President of the European Council, Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, presented to the European Parliament the decisions of the EU Summit, emphasising the confirmed climate change and energy goals as »the most important achievement. Members of the European Parliament praised the achievements of the summit, and at the same time called on the European leaders to be even more ambitious in the future.

According to Janša, the most important achievement of the spring EU Summit, the first of the two summits chaired by Slovenia, was the confirmation of climate change and energy goals. Since the EU wants to reach an agreement on the issue as early as during this term of the European Parliament, "success is also in your hands", Janša emphasised at the extraordinary plenary session in Brussels. "It is important that we reached a consensus on the two key elements for further discussion less than two months after the issuing of the climate action and renewable energy package: fundamental principles and timeline. The EU heads of state and government have committed to reaching an agreement by the end of 2008, which will enable the timely adoption of the package, and at the latest during the current term of the European Parliament," said the Prime Minister. Janša told the members of the European Parliament that success also depended on them, because the mentioned legislation would be adopted in cooperation with the parliament. »Only with the timely adoption of the package we will justify the expectations of EU citizens and give a positive signal to our partners in the world, especially in the light of negotiations on a comprehensive post-Kyoto agreement next year in Copenhagen. I especially underline the latter,« Janša pointed out.

Janša summarised the summit by saying that: »The achievements can be summarised by three decisions: we have launched an ambitious, concrete and modern three-year cycle of the Lisbon Strategy, which offers more balance between care for people and the environment on the one hand, and competitive market economies open to knowledge on the other; we have confirmed the fundamental principles and timeline for the adoption of the climate action and renewable energy package, and defined further steps for the stabilisation of financial markets.«

The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso: »The tasks which are ahead of us are clearly visible after the spring EU Summit. We have to prove that Europe has the power and capacity to respond to global challenges. The spring EU Summit was a moment of truth, »partnership« was the essential tool for achieving the results, and again I praise the Slovenian Presidency for its »competently« performed work.«

Janša also stressed that »it would be very wrong to rest on our laurels and not continue with reforms in a time of increasing unpredictability in the world economy«. In his speech, which summarised the decisions from the summit held on 13 and 14 March, the first summit under the Slovenian EU Presidency, Janša also mentioned the famous phrase »knowledge is power«, because the EU leaders have introduced a fifth freedom – the free flow of knowledge. The importance of investing in people, the implementation of the free flow of knowledge and the role of the European Parliament in pursuing these goals were also emphasised by Mr Barroso. »I count on the further support of the European Parliament, so that we can achieve the goals we have set,« he told MEPs.



THE MEPS IN GENERAL PRAISED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SPRING SUMMIT UNDER THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY

The Slovenian Presidency has been praised the most for the spring summit by the most influential political group in the European Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP). »I support the decision from the summit, especially regarding the climate action and renewable energy package, while the timeline is very ambitious,« said an EPP member, Avril Doyle, the parliament's rapporteur on the package. Swedish MEP Lena Ek, of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), also congratulated the Slovenian Presidency on the results of the summit, also expressing hope that more concrete results would be achieved at the next summit. The summit was also praised by Genowefa Grabowska, of the Party of European Socialists (PES). »I congratulate the Slovenian Presidency on knowing how to focus on the topics important for EU citizens and EU Member States,« said Ms Grabowska, pointing to the issue of poverty which was, according to her, answered by the March Summit only »on the way«.

TIBET ON THE AGENDA

At the very last moment, Tibet was placed on the agenda of the extraordinary session, which was envisaged only for discussion at the spring Summit. The EU is increasingly concerned over the situation in Tibet, and calls the parties to open dialogue and refrain from violence. A proof of the EU's concern is its placing of Tibet on the agenda of an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Slovenia. "We must not allow China to demonise the Dalai Lama," said the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering. "I am expressing recognition and respect for the Dalai Lama and calling on Beijing to negotiate with him and find a solution which would take into account the identity of the Tibetan people," he said. Some members of the European Parliament – a number of them wearing T-shirts with the five Olympic rings – despite a call for a boycott from the European Green Party, expressed their opposition to boycotting the games, which has been mentioned as a lever for persuading China to respect the human rights of the Tibetan people. A boycott of the Olympic Games has also been rejected by the EU Presidency and the European Commission. »Boycotting the Olympic Games will be a shot in our own foot and would not help improve the situation in Tibet,« said the chairman of the Party of European Socialists Martin Schulz. A similar position, also expressed in the recent declaration adopted at an informal meeting of the EU ministers responsible for sports held in Slovenia, was also echoed by the European Affairs State Secretary, Janez Lenarčič. The possibility of boycotting either the opening ceremony or the entire games has so far been clearly mentioned only by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, and the Czech President, Vaclav Klaus.

Halfway through the Presidency



JANEZ LENARČIČ: SLOVENIA EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS IN MANY WAYS

Slovenia as the presiding country of the EU is delivering everything that the European Union expects and needs. It can also be concluded that Slovenia has exceeded expectations in many ways, the State Secretary for European Affairs, Janez Lenarčič, said at a press conference on 31 March in Ljubljana at the end of the first half of the Slovenian Presidency. "Considering the issues and doubts which arose before the beginning of the Presidency, we can now with certainty conclude that Slovenia is up to this task. We can also say that it has exceeded expectations in many ways. Maybe it is because expectations regarding the Slovenian Presidency were relatively low," said Lenarčič. He explained that in these three months it has been demonstrated that "Slovenia is definitely capable of taking on the task and carrying it out as expected". Among the individual issues he addressed, Kosovo was the most significant. "It was expected that this issue would divide or split the European Union or stir up a dispute, but it has not. And the Slovenian Presidency and its leading of the discussion is at least partially responsible for that," stated Mr Lenarčič. He recalled that that day, precisely one half of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU was over. "Today is the 91st day since Slovenia took over the Presidency of the European Union, and we still have 91 days ahead of us. Today we are precisely half-way through the Presidency, which is a good opportunity to review the work carried out so far and take a look ahead," he said. He announced that the second half of the Presidency would be marked by preparations for the European Council meeting in June, which will be the second most important event during the Slovenian Presidency since the EU summit in March. He said that the main topics on the agenda would be related to justice and home affairs, common foreign and security policies and very likely climate change and energy policy. He pointed out that there are several summits taking place in the coming months, such as EU-Latin America, EU-USA, EU-Russia and EU-Japan. Regarding relationships with Russia, Mr Lenarčič said that Slovenia would strive to take one step forward in respect of opening negotiations on concluding an agreement on partnership and cooperation. He explained that discussions on the mandate for negotiations had been going on for quite some time, but the problems had not been completely resolved. There are still certain bilateral questions between some new Member States and Russia which are holding up consent to opening negotiations, he added. There is also no agreement among EU Member States regarding certain aspects of satisfying conditions for signing the Stabilisation

and Association Agreement with Serbia, mainly the question of Serbia's full cooperation with the International Criminal Court in The Hague, but Mr Lenarčič did not completely rule out the possibility of signing an agreement under the Slovenian Presidency of the EU. Among the successes of the Slovenian Presidency in the first three months, Mr Lenarčič especially highlighted the agreements of the EU summit in the spring and also presented achievements within various Council formations and in cooperation with the European Parliament.



Post-Summit Analysis: A HARSH REALITY CHECK FOR THE (17.3.08)

For its part, the Slovenian Presidency appears to have fared reasonably well in the first half of its first mandate at the EU helm. Well supported by the Commission on the work related to Lisbon II and energy policy, it has kept a relatively low profile on the most controversial topics. Even on the almost intractable issue of Kosovo, it has managed to steer a potentially divided Union clear of an open crisis and keep it focused on the practical imperatives of the moment. This is no minor achievement, although much remains to be done.

In the first half of the six-month spell, 64 events at ministerial and sub-ministerial levels took place in Slovenia with over 6,000 participants. Some 1,100 events meanwhile took place in Brussels, including the spring summit and 33 ministerial meetings. Expenses did not exceed the allocated funds. The government earmarked EUR 62m for the entire spell. Currently, over 2,100 civil servants are engaged in presiding over the bloc, with 292 people having been hired especially for the occasion. The presidency website www.eu2008.si recorded over 400,000 visits, approximately 3,300 daily.

FM RUPEL: EU PRESIDENCY PINNACLE OF SLOVENIAN POLITICS

Slovenia's ongoing six-month stint at the helm of the EU is the pinnacle of Slovenian politics, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel told the press in Ljubljana. »Slovenia is steering the EU and coordinating European politics. »There have been no mistakes in foreign policy during the three months of Presidency...We assume responsibility for our actions, we brave all the obstacles,« he said. The minister said Slovenia's achievements include the conclusions from the meetings of the General Affairs and External Relations Council, which in January agreed on a temporary political agreement with Serbia, unified its position on Kosovo in February and held a preparatory meeting for the European Council in March. Rupel labelled as successful the recent informal meeting of EU foreign ministers at Brdo pri Kranju, which strengthened the European future of the Western Balkans. According to Rupel, life in the Balkans must normalise and become European-like, a process that is likely to take some time, although progress is already visible. He expressed hope that Bosnia-Herzegovina's parliament would pass the police reform and that a temporary solution would be found in the Greek-Macedonian dispute over the official name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Touching on Serbia, Rupel said he hoped for the best at the 11 May parliamentary election. He said a step forward would be attempted in a bid to convince the »doubting Thomases« to offer a Stabilisation and Association Agreement to Serbia before the election.



Middle East, Russia and Western Balkans top Slovenian Gymnich

EU FOREIGN MINISTERS MET IN SLOVENIA AT THE INFORMAL MEETING OF EU MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (GYMNICH), HELD BY THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY ON 28 AND 29 MARCH AT THE CONGRESS CENTRE OF BRDO PRI KRANJU, NEARBY THE CAPITAL LJUBLJANA.

Apart from the foreign ministers of the 27 EU members, the meeting was attended by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe/ High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, the EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Dr Benita Ferrero-Waldner and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn. Representatives of the governments of the candidate countries and the potential candidate countries of the Western Balkans attended the meeting as well. The first day of meeting mainly focused on Middle East and Russia. The President of the General Affairs and External Relations Council, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, who chaired the meeting, said the ministers held a detailed discussion on Middle East, especially focusing on how better coordinating the EU initiative in the Middle East and Syria. With regard to the negotiation process between Palestinians and Israelis, the ministers assessed it as positive, even if things are moving forward too slowly, this causing unease among Palestinians. The Slovenian Foreign Minister also expressed concern because of the problems of safety and terrorism in Israel. The EU Ministers agreed that the European Union should better coordinate the relation with Syria, including by means of visits to the region. The Ministers also had an in-depth discussion on the relations between the EU and Russia. Minister Rupel stressed that the EU should consider Russia as a whole, and further explained that both sides were interested in strengthening cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere. Energy issues have been also included in the discussion, stressing that the existing and new energy routes should increase security and provide smooth energy supply to the EU. It is thus possible that during Slovenia's EU Council Presidency, the Council of Ministers will endorse a mandate to launch negotiations on a new draft agreement on partnership and cooperation, that's particularly important considering the upcoming June EU-Russia Summit, an opportunity for the first meeting with the new Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev.

AT THE FINAL DAY OF GYMNICH, THE DEBATE FOCUSED ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, said the Ministers had sought to give a fresh impetus to the Thessaloniki agenda, a strategy giving a European perspective to the Western Balkans region. The EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana, assessed the meeting as very positive, since » the EU have showed once again the engagement with the Western Balkans«. This was echoed by the EU Commissioner Olli Rehn, who said that the talks, following Thessaloniki and Salzburg meetings, gave new impetus to the EU integration process of the region. The Ministers focused on a series of proposals from the European Commission aimed to help the Western Balkans' citizens by means of concrete measures, including visa liberalisation. According to the EU Commissioner Rehn, one of the first steps was to conclude a roadmap for visa-free travel for the countries of the region. The Slovenian Presidency also gave importance to the promotion of people-to-people contacts, between the Western Balkans and the EU, above all of the younger generation, promoting exchange in science, education and culture. Among the priorities for allowing the countries of the Western Balkans to take key steps to EU membership, key-points are cooperation in energy, transport and civil protection. The Slovenian Presidency said in a statement that this year substantial progress in accession negotiations would be possible with Croatia and with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The statement also quoted Montenegro and Albania, that made some significant step toward the EU integration. With regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU is now within reach, provided that the police reform is implemented as the first step in the broad range of measures to be adopted along its way to the EU. The statement also touched on Serbia, calling on its leaders »to confirm their commitment to the European perspective and fulfil the remaining conditions for signing the SAA«. This comes after the ministers met Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić earlier in the morning to reconfirm the EU's readiness to help the country, but also to call it to do more if it wanted to join the bloc. In response, Jeremić said Serbia was committed to EU integration but needed more assistance from the EU, including the immediate signing of the SAA. Asked about the EU's readiness to sign the agreement, Rupel said »the Member States are virtually unanimous, or with certain exceptions, that now is the time to make another step forward.« Rupel also commented on the presence of Kosovo's PM Thaci, saying that Kosovo officially spoke about a multi-cultural society in Kosovo, which is a very important orientation. »I think he was reassuring, he was moderate and he sounded very pro-European«, said Minister Rupel. At the meeting in Brdo the Ministers also expressed »strong concern« on the situation in Tibet, calling for an end to violence and the treatment of arrested persons in conformity with international standards. Minister Rupel stressed there was no call or agreement between EU members on a boycott of the Beijing Olympics or the opening ceremony.



EU Ministers agree framework to Tackle Financial Crises at the ECOFIN informal meeting

The EU agreed a memorandum of understanding which sets the groundwork for the formation of cross-border stability groups bringing together supervisory authorities, central banks and finance ministries in tackling cross-border financial crises. The groups are designed to enhance preparedness for dealing with cross-border systemic financial crisis in normal times, and facilitate the management and resolution of such crises when they occur, according to the memorandum, which was confirmed at an Informal Meeting of EU Ministers of Finance (ECOFIN) held in Slovenia between 4 and 5 April.

Such crisis resolution would come into play in case of crisis affecting the stability of the financial system that has a trans-boundary impact, and which involves a financial group, financial infrastructure or the functioning of financial markets. Cooperation would involve setting up an appropriate framework for cooperation, exchange of relevant information allowing the prompt assessment of the systemic nature and cross-border implications of the crisis, and the establishment of contingency plans. The document says that the objective is not to prevent bank failures; shareholders will not be bailed out and creditors as well as uninsured depositors would face losses. The EU Finance Ministers also discussed on the new investment framework for the Western Balkans, saying that it should provide for a better efficiency of the existing financing instruments for the region. Slovenian Finance Minister and the chair of the ECOFIN council Andrej Bajuk told the press that the ministers believe the efficiency could be boosted through the gradual harmonisation of the available financing instruments. »This is not about increasing the amount of money, it is about increasing efficiency,« Bajuk explained, adding that he was not only thinking of money for infrastructure investments but also of money for institutional reforms that could help countries of the region meet EU membership criteria. Decisions on the issue will be adopted at the May formal meeting of finance ministers in Brussels, he said and added that the ministers agreed there was no other future

for the Western Balkans but the path to the EU. European Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Joaquín Almunia added that the Commission and other European financial institutions, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, »had agreed in launching an instrument to better prepare projects to be financed with the sources available«. The last day of meeting focussed on the EU's commitment to make social expenditure more efficient and effective. »There are differences in welfare systems but Europe has a distinct welfare model - which we would like to make even more efficient,« said Finance Minister Bajuk. According to EU figures, expenditures on social transfers average 54% of public spending across the EU. This corresponds to 27.3% of GDP, ranging from 13% to 33% across Member States. There is no single system which would work in all Member States, but there are common principles that have been shown to be working, Bajuk said about an issue that is among the priorities of the succeeding presidencies of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. These include a comprehensive approach to ongoing reform of social schemes, focus of social transfers to the poorest and most vulnerable groups, and bearing in mind that raising spending does not in itself improve social services. Bajuk noted that the biggest problem the EU faces in the long term is the ageing population, which will exert pressure on public finances. Slovenia is among the countries that face the most serious challenge in this respect, he said. According to Economic and Financial Affairs Commissioner Joaquín Almunia, the EU needs to »make sure that taxpayer money is put to the best use, that it makes a difference, and that we don't spend more than is needed.« This is crucial in view of the ageing population, a challenge is further augmented with increasing globalisation and increasingly mobile tax bases, all of which makes it more difficult to ensure the funding of welfare policies. Almunia however insists that the EU can preserve welfare and ensure the sustainability of welfare models. »This is not a question of a trade off between economic growth and fairness. We can, with appropriate policies, avoid these negative trade-offs,« said the EU Commissioner.

Minister of Transport Radovan Žerjav



On 20 March, the government approved a plan for the introduction of vignettes for collecting road tolls on Slovenian motorways. According to the plans, vignettes will come to life on 1 July and will be valid for personal vehicles, while the system for commercial vehicles will remain unchanged until the introduction of a satellite toll system. The annual vignette will cost 55 euros and the six-month vignette 35 euros.

The government will introduce an additional vignette for motorcycles, which will cost 22.50 euros. With these extremely attractive and reasonable prices the government aims to encourage as many people as possible to use motorways instead of side roads. "These prices ensure a slightly higher level of collected tolls compared to the existing system. We are talking about 20 million euros on an annual level, which is crucial," said the Minister of Transport Radovan Žerjav. Vignettes are only a temporary solution, which will be in force until the introduction of the satellite toll system, he added. With vignettes introduced on all motorways and expressways the burden on domestic motorway and expressway users will be reduced, while the vast transit of foreign vehicles will be subject to a higher charge. The annual vignettes will be limited by a calendar year, which will not be the case with the six-month vignettes, which will be valid six months from the purchase date. In accordance with the plan, vignettes will be in use in the second half of this year. This is why this year only the six-month vignettes will be available. According to the Minister, the cost of introduction will be half that estimated in the study carried out by the Institute of Microeconomic Analysis and Development, which was initially prepared in 2005 under different suppositions. The total costs are estimated at eight million euros. "Vignette printing alone, according to the data we have, that is according to a free offer, is forty times cheaper than mentioned in the study," said Žerjav. It is not yet known who will print the vignettes. Due to vignette introduction in the transitional period, the government has decided that for the time being only one simple toll station will be built in Dragutinci. Žerjav predicts that, in this way, the government will save additional 13 million euros. At the existing toll stations, barriers will be raised and driving speed limited. "Afterwards, we

plan to remove the islands in the middle. This is supposed to be done by 15 September this year," said the Minister of Transport, adding that traffic flow would thus significantly increase. Electronic toll collection lanes which will fall vacant with vignette introduction could effectively be used for haulage vehicles. "This option is now under consideration," he added. The use of vignettes will be supervised by the police at first, and at the same time the training of the staff of Motorway Company of the Republic of Slovenia and collect tolls will be carried out. Žerjav is convinced that control is one of the key elements for the success of this system. This is why vignettes will be introduced in the transitional period lasting until the introduction of toll collection in a free traffic flow with the help of satellite technology. According to the plans, toll collection via satellite for commercial vehicles weighing over 3.5 tonnes will be introduced by August 2008 and for the rest of the vehicles by the end of 2010. The annual price is comparable to ten one-way toll fees for the 130 km drive from the capital, Ljubljana, to Slovenia's second largest city, Maribor.

Janez Janša: *Vignettes will increase labour mobility and reduce pollution*

The Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša is certain that vignette introduction for toll collection on Slovenian motorways will more adequately charge the constantly increasing traffic. With this new system even up to 10 per cent more tolls will be collected. The PM believes that the existing toll collection system is unfair to many citizens and pointed out that a half of motorway users do not pay tolls. He is also convinced that the new toll collection system will increase labour mobility, reduce pollution and more justly apportion the costs of motorway use among domestic drivers and transit traffic. Vignettes are only a temporary solution, since the introduction of satellite toll collection for all vehicles is the final goal. By July 2009 at the latest, satellite toll collection will be introduced for commercial vehicles and later on, when this is possible, for all vehicles as well, he added.

INTERVIEW

The new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy



Text: ELDINA KNEZ and VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: Archive

Development Minister Žiga Turk: We have a vision and direction to follow, which can bring us together to become most creative area in the world, none of the EU countries could separately achieve that, neither France or Germany, Finland or Denmark, Slovenia or Slovakia.

THE RECENT EU SUMMIT HAS LAUNCHED A NEW, SECOND THREE-YEAR CYCLE OF THE LISBON STRATEGY FOR THE 2008-2010 PERIOD. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE CYCLE AND WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR THE STRATEGY AFTER 2010?

The new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy was launched at the spring European Council under the Slovenian Presidency. We can say that 2008 for Europe represents the end of period to look inwards.

Following the agreement on the Lisbon Treaty, expansion from EU15 to EU27 and the success of Euro it is time for Europe to move from form to content, to start looking outwards and address the challenges of globalization. Europe has the capacity to shape, not respond to globalization so it is time to get in shape.

With the ambitious launch of the Lisbon Strategy we offered a strong boost for reforms to make Europe more dynamic, creative and entrepreneurial, while remaining caring for people and environment. It was not our aim to fix what was not broken in the first place, but to orient ourselves towards added value. We wanted to send a very strong message that Europe must continue with modernisation and reforms. In some of the new Member States, the changes undertaken over the past 20 years were so huge that they should be an example to some of the older Member States. Changes are in fact possible and are not necessarily painful. On the contrary, they can sustain the quality of life of which Europe is so proud.

The European Council also invited the European Commission and National Lisbon Strategy coordinators to launch a debate at the

earliest possible opportunity on the post-2010 growth scenario, since reforms will also be needed after this period.

YOU BELIEVE THAT THE LISBON STRATEGY IS WORKING AND THAT ITS ACHIEVEMENTS ARE OBVIOUS. CAN YOU NAME THOSE ACHIEVEMENTS?

Lisbon is delivering and the economic upswing in 2006 and 2007 in the European economy is not only cyclical, it is also a result of structural reforms. Economic indicators in the EU showed economic growth of 2.7%, unemployment below 7% and public debt below 60%. In Slovenia economic performance was even better, with economic growth of between 6 and 7%, unemployment below 5%, public debt below 30% and a well balanced budget.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LISBON STRATEGY FOR PEOPLE?

Economic growth means jobs, salaries, prosperity, social protection. Lisbon Strategy is mostly about growth, but is also sensitive to very day-to-day human problems, such as spending time with family, making sure children finish school, equal opportunities for men and women. Dealing with issues like knowledge, competitiveness, employment, energy and climate change for all of us means, that as Europeans we feel stronger and less insecure facing global challenges, we have a vision and direction to follow, which can bring us together to become most creative area in the world, none of the EU countries could separately achieve that, neither France or Germany, Finland or Denmark, Slovenia or Slovakia. But it also means that we have better life today than 20 years ago. We buy brands, we spend more money on holidays, drive better cars... Maybe we don't remember that any more.

AND WHERE IS THE FOCUS OF THE LISBON STRATEGY?

Within the four pillars of the Lisbon Strategy the focus in the pillar of knowledge is on creativity, open access, open innovation, broadband access and knowledge as the fifth freedom. In the pillar of competitiveness the most important thing is small or medium enterprise and growth. In the pillar of employment it is flexibility of jobs, education and management of talents and in the energy and climate change pillar, in addition to many other things part of the energy and climate change package the somehow new angle is that it is important for states themselves to demonstrate appropriate behavior by example.

ARE ALL EU MEMBERS EQUALLY DETERMINED TO INTRODUCE STRUCTURAL REFORMS? WHAT IS ACTUALLY PREVENTING EU MEMBERS FROM IMPLEMENTING REFORMS?

No, all are not equally eager to reform. The need for reform is also different from country to country. Some did already achieve a lot. What is the obstacle to reform? I like to quote Machiavelli. He said that reforms have only a luke warm support in those who

may perhaps benefit from changes, but fanatic oppononets in those that will loose.

YOU SAID THAT YOU WOULD INTRODUCE CREATIVITY INTO THE LISBON STRATEGY, THAT HUMAN CREATIVITY WAS BECOMING A DECISIVE ECONOMIC SOURCE, AND THAT THERE WAS A 'WAR FOR TALENT' GOING ON. HOW DO YOU THINK CREATIVITY CAN BE ACHIEVED?

The message we imposed through renewed Lisbon Strategy is this whole concept of creativity and open innovation. We must ask ourselves what truly brings economic growth? The Lisbon Strategy in its previous cycle was focusing mostly on knowledge, R&D, scientific innovation which is definitely important, but China and India are also bringing great engineers and scientists to the global talents arena.

In order to compete globally Europe should rely on its cultural heritage and diversity. The creative industries in Europe are stronger than the car industry. And it is the creative industry that makes the difference between a coffee cup worth 0.05 and a coffee cup worth 5, even when manufacturing costs, somewhere in China, are almost the same for both of them. Stronger intellectual property protection, like protection of brands, designs, or the digital content will be needed.

Europe should also continue developing world-class IT infrastructure. The economy is increasingly digital and we must think in terms of broadband access. Member states will have to come up with plans to make sure that their citizens can benefit from this information revolution and that all schools in Europe will have broadband connection by 2010. With connectivity all Europeans can become part of the innovative and creative processes taking place in Europe.

AND WHAT IS YOUR ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVITY AT HOME, IN THE SLOVENIAN REGIONS?

Slovenia has great creative potential and we are promoting the topic also in our National Council for Competitiveness. If Lisbon Strategy is Europe's lowest common denominator, it is regions, that can offer more. Regions should invest more in infrastructure and capacity to retain talents and even to win the war for talents in the world. This war is not happening only between Europe and the rest of the world, but also within Europe, among regions. We could strive to connect creative regions and cities for example in line of the 5th corridor that goes through Slovenia as well. It is not just a traffic and logistic corridor, but can offer much more. We have seen Bilbao in Spain, city that invested in building unbelievable objects and attracted artists, students and other creative people, who now want to stay, live and work there. We already know it as a "Bilbao effect".

In Slovenia we have a couple of centers that are aware of this issue. They are aware that establishing a core around which they will be able to keep local talents and attract others, is essential. I could mention Koper, Celje, Maribor, Novo mesto and Krško, where we can see things are moving into right direction. Also the

INTERVIEW

government plan for establishing regions was the right direction, it would bring many benefits to Slovenia, but there was not enough political consensus at the end, for now.

YOU HAVE SAID MANY TIMES THAT THE EU NEEDED NOT ONLY A SHIFT IN SCIENCE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS IN SCIENCE, BUT ALSO CHANGES IN PEOPLE'S HABITS. WHAT CHANGES ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE REGARDING THIS ISSUE?

Changing people's habits was always the toughest challenge through history, especially if change means less comfort. But it should not! In regard to climate change issues and creating low carbon societies, the change in people mindset is globally driven, Slovenes included. But the roughest change I claim Slovenia needs is in the entrepreneurship spirit, the courage to make things differently, to be first, to be better, to be more successful and more competitive. Once we see those values as great human values, we will have more self confidence and we will be more successful.

YOU ALSO EMPHASISE THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF A DEVELOPED RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE, WHICH IS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON STRATEGY. CAN THE EU'S ECONOMY COMPETE WITH ECONOMIES IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD?

Europe's current prosperity has its foundation on the monopoly the West established in science and technology sometime between the 13th and 15th century. For the last 600 years it was the western science and western technology that overshadowed all others and provided the basis for the dominance of the West, not only in research and development, but in economy, military might and politics. Instrumental to this build-up of dominance was communication technology. This monopoly is now coming to an end. Japan, Korea since 1970 but recently the BRIC countries are not only the manufacturers of the world, they are also rapidly increasing their investment in science and technology and higher education. Europe must compete in this area and pool resources together in a way that also allows for small Member States to be a part of the European scientific infrastructure.

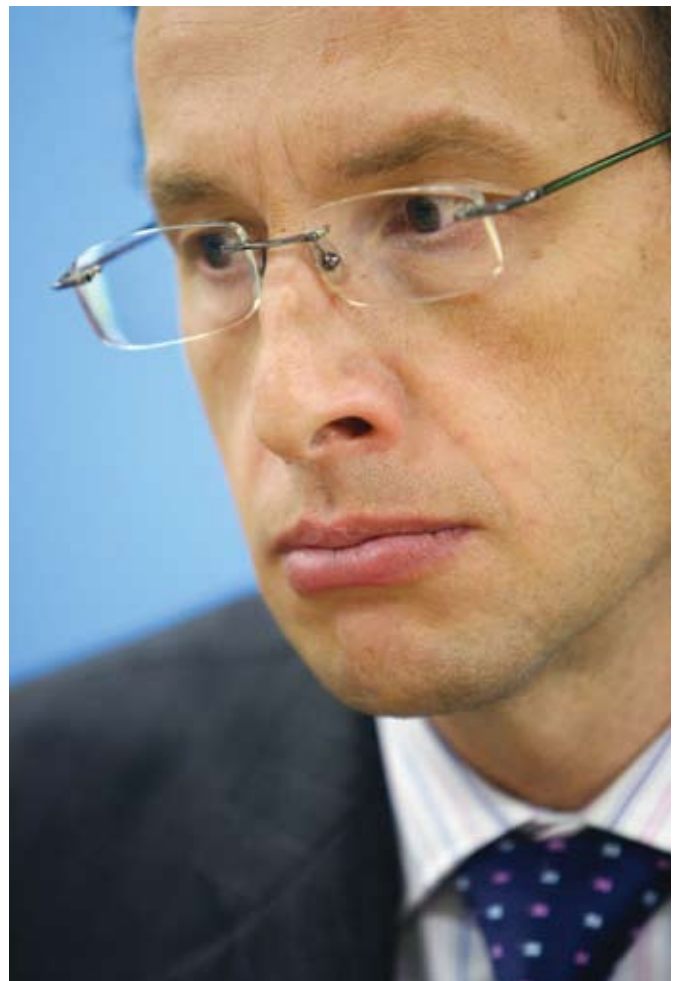
The research infrastructure is meaningless unless utilized by people, by talents. Talent is attracted to technology, Richard Florida claimed. Research infrastructure cannot move easily. But people can. They are fleeing to the US or wherever good infrastructure is. It is therefore important to think of the mobility of people and knowledge in general. So that we can match the best researchers with the best infrastructure. This is the 5th freedom - the freedom of the movement of knowledge.

At the spring European council we have reaffirmed the importance of knowledge, innovation and creativity, but also called for the creation of the 5th freedom, the launching of e-infrastructures,

high-speed networks across Europe and a new generation of world-class research facilities.

AT THE RECENT DEBATE IN THE UN ON MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS, YOU SAID THAT SLOVENIA EARMARKS MOST OF ITS DEVELOPMENT AID FOR THE BALKANS, AS SLOVENIA POSSESSES A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF THE REGION AND CAN HELP IT NOT ONLY WITH MONEY, BUT ALSO WITH KNOW-HOW. DOES THE SLOVENIAN ECONOMY ALSO BENEFIT FROM THIS DEVELOPMENT AID?

Of course. The state aid should not only be in cash. Even more valuable is the aid of knowledge, services, solutions, that would allow that eventually the recipient would not need such help. And it is typically not the government that has this knowledge or could provide a services. It is a company, in many cases a Slovenian company. Be it a contractor, that builds a schools or an IT developer that offers a library information system for that school.





The Vrhovo hydro power plant.

SOLAR AND MINI HYDRO PLANTS LAUNCHED IN RADEČE

Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak and Drago Polak, CEO of power producer Savske Elektrarne, on 19 March symbolically launched the Vrhovo solar power plant along with a mini hydro plant near Radeče in central Slovenia. Vizjak said that the Slovenian energy sector was capable of being among the pioneers in renewables, which have recently become not only environmentally but also commercially interesting. But investing only in renewable sources of energy is not enough. »A lot of work in efficient energy use is ahead of us, and I believe this is more important than investment in new production sources,« the minister said. Polak meanwhile expressed the wish that the adopted energy policy would also reflect on the promotion, support and purchase price of electricity, and at the same time promote innovation and production of the necessary equipment in Slovenia, which will make renewable sources more competitive. The solar plant has produced 11,300 kWh of electricity in the test phase since January, while the planned annual production is 74,600 kWh, enough for 22 households. The mini hydro plant will meanwhile produce 184,000 kWh of electricity a year, equivalent to the consumption of 54 households. Photovoltaics is a fast-growing industry, as the production of electricity with solar power has recorded annual growth of 40% in the last five years. The number of solar plants in Slovenia has been doubling every year since 2005, but most are small installations. According to Polak, the trend means that the total installed power of Slovenian solar plants will stand at 6.5 MW by 2010, with an annual production of over 6 GWh.

EXPORTS UP 9.5% IN JANUARY

Slovenia's exports totalled EUR 1.59bn in January, up 9.5% from the same period last year. Imports soared by 15.4% to EUR 1.8bn, the Statistical Office said on 11 March. With exports

totalling 88.0% of imports, the monthly trade gap narrowed to EUR 217m, down from EUR 314m in December. Exports to EU Member States increased nearly 10% over the year before to EUR 1.18bn, and accounted for 74.6% of total exports. Imports from the 26 other Member States, which were up 11.7% from the previous year to EUR 1.39bn, represented 77% of total imports.

ERIC BERNARD NEW CEO OF RENAULT SUBSIDIARY

Eric Bernard has been appointed Director-General of the Renault Slovenia group. He will oversee the production in Revoz, Renault's Slovenian subsidiary, and the commercial activities of Renault Nissan Slovenia, the company wrote in a press release issued on 11 March. Bernard, the Director-General of Renault Nissan Slovenia, the French carmaker's sales subsidiary, was appointed by the Renault regional management committee to replace Marcel Brouiller, who was transferred in mid-January to a similar position in Renault's plant in Le Mans. Brouiller successfully launched the production of the next-generation Twingo model in Revoz last spring. The plant in Novo Mesto is the only Renault factory making the new model.

VIZJAK: GOVT WANTS TO ATTRACT CITIZENS TO INVEST

The government believes Slovenian citizens must be attracted to invest in solid state property. Economy Minister Andrej Vizjak therefore said he believes the national telco's future ownership structure could combine a strategic owner and co-ownership by citizens. An initial public offering is not ruled out, while it is also not being announced »because the proposal still needs to be examined«, Vizjak said on 15 March. He would also not rule out the possibility that Telekom Slovenije will not be offered for sale at all. He believes the tender for the sale of nearly half the telco was published at the right time, when financial markets were upbeat. The initial bids too indicated a good result, but the global financial turmoil later prompted caution on the part of the bidders. Since the situation on the markets is still deteriorating, Vizjak does not think it would be sensible to repeat the tender in the next few months, but the government will consider modifying its withdrawal. »We are not ruling out the option of an initial public offering, which does not depend on financial markets,« the minister said, suggesting the shares could be offered to citizens who are long-term investors. Such investors could then be rewarded for their long-term ownership of Telekom. »We do not want speculation in these shares,« Vizjak said. Asked how serious the plans to build a second reactor at the Krško Nuclear Power Plant were, Vizjak said the project would become topical »if we fail to secure Slovenia's energy supply with other measures«. Another important factor is a successful solution to the issue of a radioactive waste depository. The search for an adequate location is progressing well, so that Vizjak expects a decision by the summer.

GOVERNMENT ALLOWS 24,600 WORK PERMITS FOR FOREIGNERS FOR 2008

The government adopted a decree setting the quota of work permits for non-EU citizens at 24,600 for 2008, a figure proposed by the Labour Ministry and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council. The figure is based on projected economic growth,

labour market shortages and the use of the quota last year, the government said after an 11 March correspondence session. A total of 13,500 permits have been allocated for the regular employment of foreigners, and the government also established quotas for other categories of employment: 8,000 for seasonal workers, 2,000 for posted workers, and 1,000 for workers who are not subject to special requirements. There are also 50 permits each for training and individual services performed by foreigners. Last year the quota was initially set at 18,500, but as demand increased it was raised to 24,500 in June and to 29,500 in November.

MERCATOR, GORENJE AND KRKA BIGGEST SLOVENIAN MULTINATIONALS

Grocer Mercator, home appliance maker Gorenje and pharma company Krka were the top three Slovenian multinational corporations in 2007, according to the rankings presented on 18 March by the Centre for International Relations at the Ljubljana Faculty of Social Sciences. The data, which excludes financial companies, shows that Slovenian corporations are small on a global scale, as only five of them held assets in excess of EUR 800,000 abroad. Mercator, Gorenje and Krka account for more than half of the assets held abroad by Slovenian corporations, while the top five manage 68% of all such assets. The analysis also shows that Slovenian corporations predominantly invest in Europe, mainly in the markets of the former Yugoslavia. They have lately also begun showing interest in Russia, China and other Asian countries. The top 25 Slovenian multinational corporations have 286 foreign offices in 53 countries. The top three are followed by food producer Droga Kolinska, energy company Petrol, hardware retailer Merkur, logistics company Intereuropa, and paints and coatings maker Helios.

TELEKOM ROLLS OUT COMMERCIAL WIMAX SERVICE

Telekom Slovenije made the first commercial connection to the wireless broadband WiMAX network in Ljubljana at the end of last week, marking the launch of commercial service on a network that will cost around EUR 10m. The network, which is projected to have 80 base stations and cover 40% of Slovenia's population by October, will provide fixed wireless Internet access and IP telephony, the company said on 18 March. The company plans to get 5,100 subscribers and is constructing the network mainly in areas where broadband Internet access is not possible for various reasons. The company's goal in the first three-year period (2007–2009) is to get 98.4% coverage, 38.4% over the requirements stipulated in the licence agreement. WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access) allows wireless sending and receiving of data over long distances from point-to-point links. Telekom paid EUR 417,000 for one of two WiMAX licences awarded in October 2006.

MINISTRY AIMS TO ADAPT AGRICULTURE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The Agriculture Ministry has drawn up a strategy to minimise the harmful effects of climate change on Slovenian agriculture. »We believe this is one of the first strategic documents of its kind,« Agriculture Minister Iztok Jarc told the press on 25 March. The strategy is divided into five segments: climate change education and awareness; research into climate change and adaptations



by the agricultural sector; building capacity for managing the changes; subsidies and changes to farm legislation; and strengthening international cooperation. »Climate change would continue even if all greenhouse gas emissions were reduced to zero immediately. Adaptation is necessary, and it is a precaution in case international agreements on emissions reduction fail,« said climate expert Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, who chaired the commission drafting the strategy. The ministry has also launched other measures to cope with climate change, such as subsidised insurance for crops and livestock, and the construction of new irrigation systems.

REVOZ BIGGEST SLOVENIAN EXPORTER IN 2007

Renault-owned car maker Revoz was the biggest Slovenian exporter in 2007, its exports worth EUR 1.2bn. It is closely followed by household appliance maker Gorenje, whose exports were worth almost EUR 1.1bn. The perennial top two, which account for over 6% and some 5.5% of Slovenia's total exports respectively, are far ahead of third-placed Krka, which reported exports worth EUR 617m. The top three are followed by steel group SIJ (EUR 500m), aluminium producers Impol (EUR 410m) and Talum (EUR 302m), and Adria Mobil, a maker of caravans (EUR 264m). Power company HSE (EUR 243m), chemical group Helios (EUR 230m) and industrial conglomerate Kolektor (EUR 223m) round off the top 10. All companies in the top 10 increased exports (data for HSE was not provided), Revoz upping the figure by as much as 24% and SIJ by 31%. Delo FT points out, however, that the standings are patchy, as several companies that made it to the top 10 last year, foremost among them drug maker Lek and auto parts maker Cimos, did not disclose their export figures for various reasons.

NEK FUND INCREASES INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

Representatives of the Financial Fund for the Decommissioning of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant (NEK) on Tuesday described the fund's operations in 2007 as successful. The fund's investment portfolio increased by EUR 14.2m to EUR 145.7m, its director Janko Strašek told the press. Strašek explained that the fund,



Photo: STA

Representatives of Financial Fund for the Decommissioning of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant speaking to the press about the fund's operations in 2007. From left to right: The fund's director Janko Strašek, president of the management board Romana Jordan Cizelj, and president of the supervisory board Branko Kelemina.

which is tasked with financing the decommissioning of Slovenia's sole N-plant and the storage of nuclear waste, said that return on investment reached 6.39% this year. Financial revenues stood at EUR 8.1m and profit at EUR 5.9m. The fund helps finance the Agency for Radioactive Waste and contributed EUR 2.21m for its operations in 2007, whereas its total contributions between 1998 and 2007 stood at EUR 8.13m. What is more, the fund completed its land usage compensation payments to the municipalities of Krško and Brežice this year. The payments totalled EUR 9.33m. Strašek also touched on plans to build a new nuclear waste deposit site, saying that Brežice and Krško were the most serious candidates for the location. The costs of the site, which is expected to be built by 2013, are being estimated at between EUR 140m and EUR 150m.

SLOVENIAN, SERBIAN INDUSTRY CHAMBERS TO BOOST COOPERATION



Photo: STA

The signing of the memorandum on cooperation between the Slovenian Chamber of Craft Industries and Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Belgrade. Andrej Poglajen of the Slovenian Chamber of Craft Industries (right).

The Slovenian Chamber of Craft and Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Belgrade signed on 27 March a memorandum and a letter of intent on cooperation in developing

craft industries and small and medium-sized companies. With the memorandum the chambers agreed to seek a better business environment for companies, as well as greater exchange of information, experience and good practice. »We want the cooperation between Slovenia and Serbia not only raised to the level at which it was before, but to strengthen it even further,« said Andrej Poglajen of the Chamber of Craft. »Previous cooperation focused primarily on large companies, while now, in the times of small and medium-sized companies, we need to do as much as possible to speed up and strengthen cooperation in this field.« His counterpart, Vladimir Vuksanović, meanwhile expressed satisfaction over plans for strengthening cooperation and explained that »the aim of the documents signed is to organise several bilateral meetings of entrepreneurs and craftsmen«. The Slovenian Chamber of Craft has so far signed twelve similar memoranda with organisations from Croatia, Italy, Austria and Macedonia.

STRONG EURO NOT A PROBLEM FOR SLOVENIAN EXPORTERS

The euro's increasing strength against the U.S. dollar has given rise to concerns that Europe's exports will be badly hurt. Slovenia's biggest exporters say they are still coping well, but a strong dollar is bad for business in the long term. The pace of export growth has slowed since November, but the actual euro-dollar exchange rate is not so important, as the Slovenian economy is more dependent on the euro zone, Marjana Šiško Debeljak of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GZS) said. However, household appliance maker Gorenje, Slovenia's No. 2 exporter last year with exports in excess of one billion euros, says that the strong euro is not good for the industry. The weak U.S. dollar dampens Gorenje's interests in the U.S. market. What is more, it is favourable for competitors from the east, a Gorenje spokesman told STA. Drug maker Krka, which reported exports worth EUR 617m last year, says it has recently started invoicing most of its customers in Eastern Europe in euros, reducing its exposure to the U.S. dollar to a minimum. Purchases in dollars are almost identical to dollar-denominated revenues, so the exchange rate will not have a short-term impact on results, Krka said. However, in the long term a weak dollar is not good for Krka, as it is advantageous to companies whose costs are mainly in dollars. Slovenia's exports grew almost 15% year on year to EUR 19.4bn in 2007. Over 70% of the exported goods were sold to the EU.

BARCAFFE REMAINS MOST RECOGNISED BRAND IN SLOVENIA

Coffee brand Barcaffe remained the most recognised brand name in Slovenia in 2008, according to a survey by the Valicon agency. Slovenia's favourite coffee blend was followed by Milka chocolate and Barilla pasta, show the results unveiled on 27 March. The fourth place is held by Laško beer, which has been climbing up the list in the last two surveys and is followed by Orbit chewing gum, which held the third spot in 2007, and UHT milk Alpsko mleko. The list of the strongest 10 brands in Slovenia wraps up with Aquafresh toothpaste, food additive Vegeta, Paloma toilet paper and Gillette safety razors. According to the survey, three brands of food group Droga Kolinska, three brands of beverage group Pivovarna Laško, and two brands of tissue manufacturer Paloma have meanwhile made it to the top 10 Slovenian products. The list is led by Barcaffe, Laško beer and Alpsko mleko, which are followed by Paloma toilet paper, tea brand 1001 Cvet, Paloma napkins, Radenska mineral water, Argeta pâté, Fruc fruit juice

and Gorenjka chocolate. The strongest brands in the territory of the former Yugoslavia meanwhile are Milka, Coca Cola and Orbit, with Paloma's tissues in 10th place.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 0.7% IN JANUARY

The industrial output in January was up 1.1% year on year and 0.7% higher than the previous month, the national Statistical Office said on 28 March. Seasonally adjusted data shows a decrease of industrial output in manufacturing by 0.2%, while production went up in electricity and gas supply (+16.4%) and in mining and quarrying (+8.4%). According to working-day adjusted data, industrial production in January increased in manufacturing (+1.2%) and in mining and quarrying (+16.7%), but dropped in electricity and gas supply (-5.5%), compared to January 2007. Compared to the month before, the industrial output increased in intermediate goods industries (+1.4%) and in capital goods industries (+3.9%), but decreased in consumer goods industries (-2.6%). The seasonally adjusted index of stocks of industrial products was down 0.7% on a monthly basis, while the working-day adjusted index was up 10.8% year on year. Labour productivity in 2007 increased by 6.1% over the year before, according to the office.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT DEFICIT AT 0.1% OF GDP IN 2007

The general government deficit in 2007 stood at EUR 24m or 0.1% of GDP, while the general government debt at the end of December dropped to EUR 8.071bn, or 24.1% of GDP, Andrej Flajs of the national Statistical Office told the press in Ljubljana on 31 March. According to Flajs, the general government deficit in 2006 stood at EUR 377m (1.2% of GDP), while the Finance Ministry expects the deficit to increase in 2008 to EUR 343m or 0.9% of GDP. The deficit has been dropping gradually over the last few years, from 2.1% of GDP in 2004 to 0.1% of GDP in 2007. The bulk of the deficit is created at the central level, where it stood at 0.3% of GDP for 2007, Flajs said. He added that the ministry projected that the deficit would stand at 0.9% of GDP in 2008 at both the state and central levels. »Last year the growth of revenue (8.1%) was considerably higher than the growth of expenditures (5.3%) because of high economic growth and accelerated inflation,« Flajs said. He said a considerable reduction of the debt in 2007 to slightly more than EUR 8bn is a consequence of acquisition and restructuring of debt, for which the government also used a part of assets from privatisation. Slovenia cut the debt last year to 24.1% from 27.1% in 2006. The Finance Ministry projects a 5% increase of the general government debt in 2008 to EUR 8.505bn, or 23.4% of GDP. According to Flajs, the relative borrowing in terms of the share of GDP decreased in the 2004–2008 period. The biggest deficit in 2007 was recorded in transactions with foreign countries, which stood at EUR 1.4bn or 4.3% of GDP, while the year before it stood at EUR 803m or 2.6% of GDP.

GERMAN-SLOVENIAN COMPANY LAUNCHES INTERMODAL TRANSPORT SERVICE

Europe Intermodal, a joint enterprise of Slovenia's Adria Kombi and Germany's Kombiverkehr, launched on 31 March the

Bosporus-Europe Express, a train link between Turkey and Germany via Slovenia offering weekly intermodal transport services. The new service links the biggest container terminal in Istanbul, Halkali, with the European train network of Adria Kombi and Kombiverkehr, and thus enables access to key economic regions in Europe. The service is designed to allow goods to be transported from Turkey to Central Europe or the other way round within six or seven days, Adria Kombi has said in a press release. »Germany is at the moment Turkey's most important trade partner, both in imports and exports,« Adria Kombi's boss Rok Svetek said, adding that the Bosporus-Europe Express service would guarantee fast and reliable freight between the countries. Europe Intermodal, established in 2007 with headquarters in Istanbul, Turkey, also plans to launch daily transport services in the near future, according to the press release.

NKBM GROUP POSTS EUR 56M PROFIT IN 2007

The NKBM financial group, centred around Slovenia's second-largest bank, Nova Kreditna Banka Maribor (NKBM), posted a net profit of EUR 56.5m for 2007, almost 20% more than in 2006. Total assets stood at EUR 5.1bn, up 25% year on year, according to unaudited results released on 31 March. The group posted a pre-tax profit of EUR 71.4m, which is almost a third over the 2007 plan. Net interest revenues meanwhile stood at EUR 116.5m, up 16% year on year and also above plans. The NKBM group consists of 12 companies, and its consolidated balance sheet includes insurance company Zavarovalnica Maribor and investment firm Moja Naložba. NKBM lost 3.58% on the Ljubljana Stock Exchange on Monday to end the day at EUR 33.65.

PARLIAMENT ADOPTS TOUGHER ANTI-TRUST LAW

The National Assembly passed a new act on the prevention of restriction of competition, which strengthens the powers of the Competition Protection Office and tightens anti-trust provisions. The law gives the Competition Protection Office greater investigative powers and obliges the companies being investigated to fully cooperate. In investigations, the competition watchdog will be able to seize property and seal off offices. At the same time, it gives companies under investigation the right to »privileged communication«, excluding from the probe communication between the company under investigation and its legal representatives. Presently all decisions are taken by the director of the office; according to the new act, a three-member panel will decide on a case-by-case basis. The decisions of the office will be final and recourse provided with appeal at the Supreme Court. For market concentration, the act determines two thresholds of annual turnover requiring companies to ask for a takeover permission. Moreover, companies may be required to ask for permission if their market share exceeds 60%. The act raises fines for violators. The current maximum fine stands at EUR 375,000, but the ceiling has been raised to 10% of annual turnover. Prosecution may be dropped if a violator cooperates with the watchdog (whistle-blowing) in cases of restrictions of competition or cartels.



Text: ANJA LORENZETTI, Photo: Archive of the Slovenian Tourist Board

Slovenia convinced

the professional public by winning the first prize at the biggest world-renowned tourist exhibition in Russia, MITT 2008

Besides the other activities the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) follows the goal of content-oriented visual implementation of the new Slovenian brand and in its framework other brands used by Slovenian tourism, that is, the I FEEL SLOVENIA slogan, since they are convinced that this is decisive in improving recognition and successful placement of any country at a global level.

SLOVENIA WAS AMONG MORE THAN HUNDRED DESTINATIONS AWARDED FOR HAVING THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND BEST SELF-PROMOTION AT THE BIGGEST TOURIST EXHIBITION IN RUSSIA

A renovated Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) stall bearing a visual image of the Slovenian brand in all its elements with the sign or brand I FEEL SLOVENIA and other elements of the new brand was in November last year presented at the tourism bourse WTM London 2007 in London. The presentation at the tourism bourse of global importance was an excellent opportunity to begin with promotion action for the new Slovenian brand. We witnessed great interest and approval for the new image by the foreign public. It again received great award last month at the biggest tourism bourse in Russia, that is, at MITT 2008 that this very year celebrates fifteen years since its first establishment. This put even more stress on the Slovenian prize. The Slovenian stall received in the Russian capital the main award of the international professional jury in the »Best Country Stand« category among more than hundred countries and various destinations presented at the fair for the best exhibition space and best slogan. The above mentioned award confirms that the new corporate identity used by the Slovenian tourism encourages interest and positive associations not only by the general and media public but also with the professional public in all the presentations of the Slovenian tourism.

Our country is exhibiting at the 200m² big stall, which is travelling across the great world-renowned tourist exhibitions in Europe. Taking in consideration the new Slovenian brand a great stress was put on the presentation of Ljubljana as the capital of Europe in the year 2008 as well as an excellent tourist destination. There are other Slovenian cities and attractive tourist points of our country to anyone's allure that get presented also. At the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) they endeavour to meet the characteristics of the demand of the market in which they are being presented by presenting Slovenia together with their tourist offer. They try to meet the requests of the local public as much as possible. Practically all products of the Slovenian tourism and a great part of the Slovenian economy are presented at every exhibition.

Although some feared when the new brand was introduced that our country would be thought of being pathetic or even hippy, that is, a country that has no content and which offers nothing apart from leisure and lacks seriousness, these criticism have proven unfounded. According to the impressions of foreign visitors that have come across the slogan, our new image elicits a smile in them, since people feel a nice sensation and at ease when confronted by the slogan of love, unburdened with the weight of its content.

»I FEEL SLOVENIA IS A DERIVATIVE THAT FIND ALL EXTREMELY PLEASANT, THOUGHTFUL, SIMPLE AND PURPOSEFUL,« IS CONVINCED MR MARJAN HRIBAR, THE DIRECTOR OF THE TOURISM DIRECTORATE

Mr Hribar stressed last year at the presentation of the slogan that Slovenia really needed a new presentation or brand that

OUR EXCELLENCE

shall increase its recognition. The country which is so varied and boasts with so versatile a content according to his opinion shall need a clear and concise message that with the corresponding advertisement and consistent use at all levels of public life wakes with the individuals across the world the first and right association of our country. According to Hribar the essence of the brand is in its content and Slovenia has strong content that lies hidden in its variety, in the good-heartedness of its people and activities that are carried out by the Slovenes. The choice of the green colour makes sense since the »Slovenian green« represents balance between the calm of nature and the diligence exhibited by the Slovenes. »Memory of Slovenia combines the fragrance of the forests, murmur of the stream and the fascinating taste of water as well as the softness of wood. I feel Slovenia,« added Mr Hribar.

MINISTER ANDREJ VIZJAK SAID: »WITH THE NEW BRAND I FEEL SLOVENIA WE DRAW GREAT ATTENTION ABROAD.«

The award Slovenia got at the Russian tourism exhibition proves that Slovenia needed a slogan giving her greater recognition, said the Slovenian Minister for Economy Andrej Vizjak. According to the Minister, who wants that guests from abroad visiting Slovenia would experience that which is the centre of the story of the Slovenian brand, a short and clear message elicits strong associations that which makes up the entire experience of our country.

SLOVENIAN TOURISM AND THE SLOVENIAN EU PRESIDENCY

The Director of the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) Dimitrij Piciga is fascinated over the achieved Russian award as well as convinced that the very time of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU presents an excellent opportunity for Slovenian tourism. Slovenia and its tourism have in the field of implementing at the European and global market as well as in the field of defining of the identity of our country and the new Slovenia brand taken great steps forward and that is why these very performances such as was the last in Russia are of a great importance. The people working at the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO) are aware of our biggest treasure – the intactness of nature that in its density invigorates anyone visiting our country and that is why they want to encourage »selfness«, which is in his view the directing of the attention to oneself and that is with a more intensive approach at experiencing it at every step you make.

The statistics show that the short-term tourist and promotional effects of the Slovenian EU Presidency (PEU) can be observed since the visits to Ljubljana, at Bled and also in Slovenian health resorts have grown. Piciga is satisfied also with the fact that the Slovenian tourism with the health resorts leading, that is, mostly that tourism to which great investments have been made for a long time is not dependent only on extended weekends, but it operates equally throughout the whole of the season. One of the reasons why this performance at the Russian exhibition is particularly important lies in the fact that the Russian tourists are among the more desired guests throughout all the tourist countries. Only in the last year the number of Russian tourists has grown by 28 percents in Slovenia that is why the recent achievement at the Russian exhibition is undoubtedly of a great importance for future visits of Russian tourists to our country.

SLOVENIA PARTICIPATES IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT IN SELECTING THE EUROPEAN DESTINATION OF EXCELLENCE 2008

Slovenia and the Slovenian tourism is more and more intensively included in the common European space with which grow both the recognition and importance of the country, its economy and last but not least its tourism not only on the European tourist map but on the global also. This year Slovenia for the first time participates in this year's European project »European Destinations of Excellence« (EDEN) 2008. Among the twenty European destinations that shall be selected at the national level in the following months by European countries the aforementioned title shall for the first time be awarded to the chosen Slovene destination. The goal of the project is to stress the versatility of the rich European intangible heritage and to expose the developing, less visited destinations which through tourism strengthen the importance of the specific local intangible heritage. The destination to receive the title of European Destination of Excellence shall be presented on web pages of the European Commission and the Slovenian Tourist Board (STO). They shall create the presentation brochure as well as the short promotion video in Slovene and English language for the chosen destination. Such projects surely present an excellent opportunity for our country and individual destinations which should not be dismissed as such.

With help of joint efforts and work of all people active behind the Slovenian image our country shall with all its beauties remain imprinted in the memory of anyone who shall cross the borders of our country and will be happy to return here again and again.



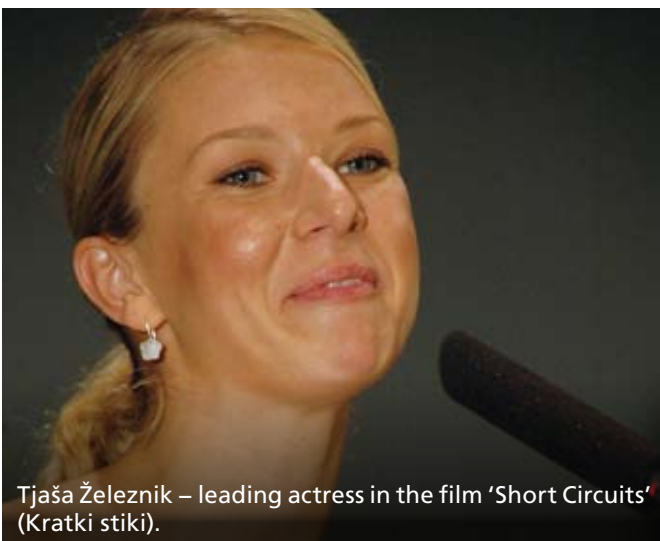
Text: JOŽE OSTERMAN, Photo: STA



THE CARMINA SLOVENICA CHOIR WILL THIS YEAR PRESENT MUSIC FROM BOTH AMERICAN CONTINENTS

The female Carmina Slovenica choir, conducted by Karmina Šilec, which is well-known around the world, have a new project entitled 'Americas', which presents music of both Americas, and presented it in the Maribor Union Hall in mid-March. The programme is comprised of several thematic sets: spiritual, gospel, traditional aboriginal music, Latin-American music, jazz, as part of modern American music, and the legendary songs of singers such as Nat King Cole, Connie Francis, Bette Midler and the Andrews Sisters. This means that the concerts are very communicative and they will satisfy almost all generations of audience, who were only recently growing up under the dominant influence of American musicians. Carmina Slovenica are not breaking new ground with their Americas project since, already at the beginning of 2007 they had prepared a scenic project of minimalist music, CS Light, and works by some of the most prominent modern American composers, such as Philip Glass, Morton Feldman and Steve Reich, which means that this year's project is a deepening of the research already underway.

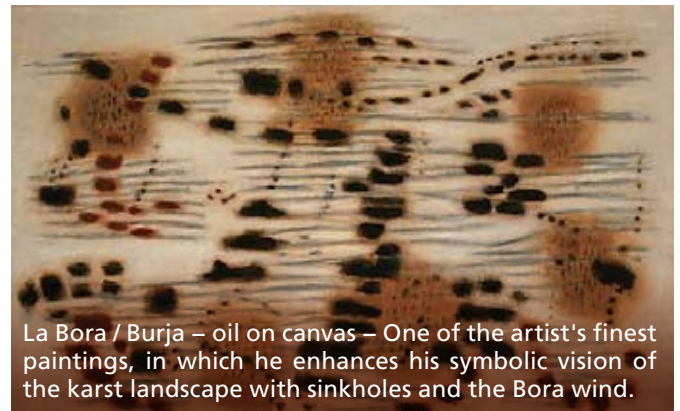
SLOVENES OPENED THE 11TH EU FILM FESTIVAL IN CHICAGO



Tjaša Železnik – leading actress in the film 'Short Circuits' (Kratki stiki).

The traditional film festival, presenting films made in the European Union, was this year opened in the name of Slovenia, which is holding the Presidency of the European Union, by the Consul-General in Cleveland Zvone Žigon. The film festival in Chicago, which takes place in the Gene Siskel Center, is the biggest film festival of the European Union in the USA. 61 films were shown at the festival this year, of which two were Slovenian. The opening speech emphasised the fact that this year the European Union is dedicating special attention to intercultural dialogue, and a well-chosen Slovenian film 'Estrellita', directed by Metod Pevec, was also dedicated to the confrontation of cultures, in a tale about a boy from a mixed marriage and his integration in the cultural patterns surrounding him. The second Slovenian film was 'Short Circuit', directed by Janez Lapajne, which was awarded as the best Slovenian film two years ago.

EXHIBITION OF ZORAN MUŠIČ'S GRAPHICS IN LJUBLJANA



La Bora / Burja – oil on canvas – One of the artist's finest paintings, in which he enhances his symbolic vision of the karst landscape with sinkholes and the Bora wind.

The famous Slovenian painter Zoran Mušič, who spent the majority of his most creative years in the area between Venice and Paris, is for Slovenia still today a personality that is to an extent being discovered anew. The overview exhibition of his graphics, which was set up in the Gallery Zala in Ljubljana on the 99th anniversary of his birth (he died three years ago) is therefore an extremely interesting event. Visitors can view 72 graphics, from various private collections, that Mušič created between 1931 and 1984. The art critic Gojko Zupan emphasised in the opening speech that Zoran Mušič would deserve a comprehensive monograph in the Slovenian language upon his 100-year anniversary, while the President of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Prof Boštjan Žekš pointed out in the preface to the exhibition catalogue the symbolic connection of Mušič's cosmopolitan life with Europe, as the painter was active in practically all the Member States of the current European Union and the ones that will soon become members.

APZ TONE TOMŠIČ WINS THE EUROPEAN GRAND PRIX!

The Tone Tomšič Academy Choir, which is the choir having the longest tradition in top level choral singing in recent decades, won the most elite recognition in choral music on 15 March in Debrecen in Hungary – the European Grand Prix. Only choirs that have won some of the biggest European choral festivals could participate in the final competition, which was in Hungary. The APZ won admission by winning the festival in Varna, while it was also excellent with one first and two second places in Gorizia



in Italy. The choirs competed against the national youth choir from Lyon, who won the festival in Arezzo (Italy), the Norwegian National Choir from Oslo, who won in Gorizia, and the Jazeps Vitolis Choir of the Latvian Musical Academy, which won the festival in Tolosa. Unfortunately, the winner of Tours, the Simon Phillips Vokal Ensemble from Göteborg, cancelled their participation. The Tone Tomšič ensemble won the choral throne for the second time. In 2002 it won for the first time, conducted by Stojan Kuret, while this year they were conducted by Urška Lah, in the recent years definitely the most talented Slovenian young conductor.

THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ENRICHED WITH ORIGINAL TRUBAR'S TESTAMENT

The management of the NUL – the director Lenart Šetinc and the head of the manuscript department Miha Glavan – had a good reason for enthusiasm, as the library funds obtained a copy of a book, an original of the last part of the New Testament, published in Tuebingen in 1577, which represents a key element of the most important book publications of early Slovenian literature. So far, only four copies of the book were known, in Kempton, London, Prague and Stuttgart. By pure coincidence the Slovenian ambassador in Zagreb learned of another copy, which was owned by a collector in Jerusalem who decided to sell it. An action was initiated that brought the book to Slovenia, whereby the copy became probably the most valuable book sample in our national library. The book is not preserved in its entirety – as well as the other four remaining copies – around 416 of approximately 600 pages are preserved. The book will be presented to the public at a special exhibition in mid-May. Trubar Year – celebrating the 500-year anniversary of Trubar's birth – is going even better than planned. The purchase of the Testament is a bonus that was not planned. In Trubar's birth place, Rašica, an honorary committee presided over by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Danilo Türk, met and established that some new activities which were initially not included in the programme are spontaneously being prepared. All this is a sign that Trubar's anniversary is a strong motivation and a lever for national awareness.

WRITERS (AGAIN) IN BLEED

March or April are always months when writers, members of PEN clubs, meet in Bled. At this year's already 40th meeting, representatives of 30 PEN centres were attending. As usual, the programme anticipated a range of activities and meetings, while in

the forefront were – also due to the current political situation – topics included in the programme by the PEN peace committee, as well as topics on some national and identity questions of Europe, which intensely and almost daily define anew the current writers' moment. The President of the peace committee, Edvard Kovač, reminded of the extraordinary peaceful tradition of the Bled meeting, as it was there that for the first time, for example, representatives of Turks and Kurds, Israelis and Palestinians, Basques and Spaniards have met. In his opinion, the "times in Kosovo and Serbia are still too hot and too hard" for writers from those countries to visit Bled, "but we hope they will come next year". But the question of Kosovo-Serbia relations had a place within the discussion on the possibilities for history to become a source for peace, instead of war. The writers analysed different views on certain historical events which occur in human environments, and regretted that much more often they became a source of new disagreements and conflicts rather than pacification, which leads to the conclusion that we rarely learn from history. Very controversial was the discussion at the round table entitled 'What is European Awareness?', to which, of course they did not find a uniform answer. Some were of the opinion that even asking such questions is worrying, while others searched for the answer in a synthesis of diversity of literature and languages. France Bučar pointed out the gap between the European idea and European awareness, where large nations often equal the European awareness with their own interests, and forget about the smaller nations. Aleš Debeljak warned about the dispersion of European awareness – the basis of the EU is a nation state, but even relatively large national communities, such as for example the Catalonians, cannot sit at the same table with the nation states. Not much needs to be done for nationalism. But much effort is needed for cosmopolitanism, he said. Also, ideas for a more compact Europe with a more unified leadership were presented, which would be a more binding incarnation of the European awareness, but the writers were mainly unanimous in the idea that the foundations should be tolerance, mutual respect and, above all, support and understanding of diversity. In the sense of the necessity for deepening the social dialogue and a democratic discussion about all problems, the President of the Republic Danilo Türk, participated in the round table.

LJUBLJANA FESTIVAL PROMISES »FRUITFUL SUMMER«

The 56th Ljubljana Summer Festival, one of the biggest Slovenian festivals, will offer more than 70 events this year, featuring 3,000 artists from 20 countries. »We are looking to a fruitful summer,« festival director Darko Brlek told the press. The festival will begin on 19 June with London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Andrew Davis, and close with a concert of Italy's Maggio Musicale Fiorentino on 28 August. Among the numerous world-class highlights are also a concert of La Scala Philharmonic, the resident orchestra of Milan's famed opera house Teatro alla Scala, and the Moscow Soloists, one of the world's most highly acclaimed chamber ensembles. The programme has been designed keeping in mind the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, explained Brlek, pointing to several round-table discussions which have been introduced to the festival especially for the occasion. Brlek also promised that favourites such as Kino pod zvezdami, the open-air cinema at Ljubljana Castle, would stay on the festival's programme. This year's festival will cost around EUR 2m, while Brlek said he would like to double the budget in the future, so the summer festival could become one of the biggest in Europe. Tickets are on sale until 1 July at a 10% discount, and also available at www.ljubljanafestival.si.

GOODSLOVENIANINNS

Veronika Aljančič, master of the kitchen.

Text: BOGI PRETNAR, Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik



Homely inns: the Pr' Bizjak inn in Zgornja Bela:

GOING FOR KNUCKLES AND BREAD

Marjeta Bizjak already had all the official authorisations to sell wine, brandy, and sausages 200 years ago, 204 to be precise. If you would like to eat under her roof in Zgornja Bela near Preddvor, today, you are welcome. Nowadays the housework, cooking, baking, kneading, and rolling at Pr' Bizjak is done by Marjeta's successor by work and entrepreneurship, not by blood, Veronika Markun, or Verona to friends. An economist by occupation, she took over the kitchen, willy-nilly, from their parents. She is married to Rudi Aljančič, known as one of the most hospitable caterers in the entire region of Gorenjsko. In fact, if it was true that the people of Gorenjsko are just a meaner branch of the Scots, they would both have to be exiled from Gorenjsko, as they are both the antithesis of meanness. Besides, Verona has another characteristic, unrivalled among female cooks: she plays football outstandingly, regularly and sharply! Her sons, Janez, who already 'officially' helps in the kitchen, and Matjaž, are both at catering school. And since it is possible to be officially married in the Bizjak garden – for which they have arranged a wonderful and sweet garden atmosphere with a pergola and romantic paths – there is no doubt you would like to know precisely how to get to Zgornja Bela...

Let's draw a short line: Ljubljana-Kranj-Preddvor (in the direction of Jezersko); turn left at the Preddvor sign, go across the bridge, avoid turning right to Lake Preddvor or its castle, where naive young people can also get married; go straight on to the crossroads, marked by a large house and a tree, then turn left as shown by the Zg. Bela sign, turn right before the wall (the only solution), and then go straight on for about 3 kilometres (even if the road does not seem so straight). Driving through the woods, do not be lured to the left by the Vila Bella sign, rather

stick decisively to the main road and you will quickly get to a wooden arrow-sign directing you towards Pr' Bizjak ...You will probably think you have driven into a neighbour's yard, but have no fear, you will surely arrive at the heart of the Bizjak set of buildings. The old inn is no longer open, but the new one will warmly welcome you with widely open doors, inviting you into a commodious dining room, allowing the separate seating of several parties of guests.

"Oh, you've found the way! It wasn't difficult, was it?" will be the warm welcome from Rudi, offering you a sip of home-made brandy aperitif to sharpen your appetite. If you are a closed party, you can choose the hunting room (but do not take animal-lovers in it. Let them just see the steaks later - nobody thinks the



Honey-brown roast knuckle, a large morsel for two.

GOODSLOVENIANINNS



Super-sweet aniseed curved cookie.

steaks were once alive anyway!), or let Rudi seat you. Beware of overloading your stomach with Veronika's home-made breads and spreads. She bakes at least 5 or 6 different kinds of bread every day – buckwheat bread with walnuts and hazelnuts; mixed bread from wheat, maize, and buckwheat flour; rye bread with aniseed, caraway, and mint; Teran bread with figs; white bread with olives; carob or corn bread with seeds; and breads with poppy seeds, onions, and even dandelion, or zucchini, according to the season. Seeing Veronika kneading bread dough, letting it rise, and then baking it, you might be misled into erroneously thinking that making bread is very easy.

And on top of the bread, treat yourself to the dentex beefsteak. Veronika grinds cooked fillets in a food mixer, and adds double cream, Muscat, pepper, salt, parsley, oregano, and rosemary. Of course, she first crushes the spices in a mortar. Or try meat pâté with chopped browned porcini. What an overture! Besides, Veronika's kitchen is renowned for good old dishes, such as stuffed breast of veal, roasted shoulder of veal, or veal caul Parisian style. Sometimes you can also get sweetbreads (minced tripes rolled in filo pastry), which, thanks to the crispiness of its crust and accompanied by potato salad, is the best hot appetiser you can think of, in spite of your love of escargots or frogs legs, or thinking that something less classy is not good enough. Sweetbread is the right dish for a hungry mouth indeed. However, vegetarians shall not be deprived of culinary pleasures. They should have pastry turnovers, filled with freshly picked bear garlic (also called ramson; whose season is spring), and home-made buckwheat mash. Meat-eaters should control themselves, so as not to steal from their plates.

As for the wine, produced locally in recognised cellars, there will be no shortcomings. Leave it to Rudi's reliable guidance again. From the wide variety on offer, there are nearly ten kinds of unbottled wines alone. The best wine to go with veal sweetbread or veal caul is unbottled *cviček*, whose lightness and acid can neutralise the taste of meat. At the same time, Pr' Bizjak is a typical homely inn, where fried chicken, rolled in bread crumbs, still remains a very good choice. However, this does not mean

you should refrain from having a horse steak, marinated at home, a pepper beefsteak, or a honey-brown roasted juicy knuckle. Perhaps a potato goulash, abundant in chanterelle mushrooms will be to your taste? It is rich in home-grown herbs: thyme, marjoram, peppercorns, a pinch of ground caraway seed, home-made paprika, and two or three bay leaves. If you have trout with zucchini and porcini, you will still have room for a home-made dessert. If you are a big eater, have a go at Veronika's variations of venison. You must have carrot or mangold *štruklji* (cooked batter with stuffing) on the side.

Yes, the desserts. If one regularly bakes so many kinds of bread, making desserts is not a problem. The good old Slovenian strudel, a filo pastry roll with apple and raisin stuffing, is a wonderful and juicy classic. Nevertheless, you can always treat yourself with various custards, cakes (if there are still some frozen chestnuts, Veronika might even make a chestnut cake), the usual pancakes, or the recommended giant aniseed curved cookie in a wonderful combination with a scoop of ice-cream. The area under Mt Storžič is very nice for a walk after a meal, whereas Veronika will gladly lend you a football for a rousing game right in their meadow.



Potato goulash, abundant in chanterelle mushrooms.

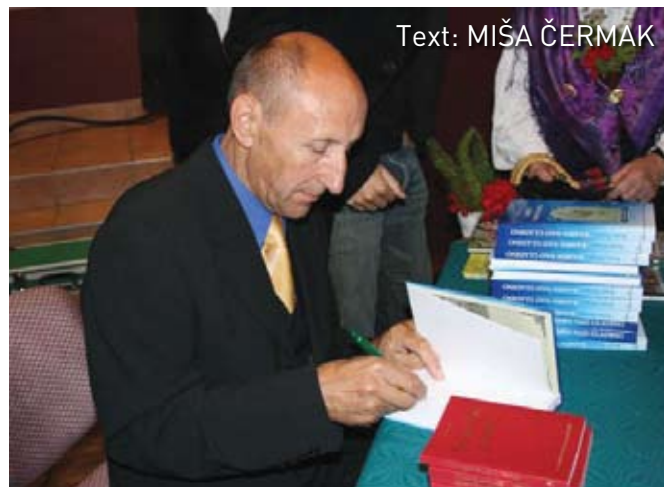
Author, journalist and songwriter Ivan Sivec

I'm still at the
beginning of the path!

Sivec has published thirty-eight books for young people and adults, over two thousand lyrics for songs, and more than a hundred fairy tales and sketch comedies. A number of his works have been adapted as radio plays, while a plethora of radio reports and other broadcasts is the fruit of his journalistic and editing work for the national radio station, for which he served all his life. It seems that a human life is too short to embody all the eruptions of creativity, but Ivan Sivec is convinced that good organisation gives him enough time for everything he loves. And he loves a lot of things! The author, who started working at the national radio when he was 15 after he simply knocked on the door, mastered his radio technician skills during his years in the secondary school of electronics in Ljubljana. But he wanted to upgrade his work, which brought him good earnings, considering how modest a boy he was, with knowledge he came upon every day during his technical work at the radio station. He worked and studied comparative literature, graduated, married, and in his late years, despite his intensive and creative life, had two children, and now even two grandchildren, he managed to earn a master's degree in ethnology in his late fifties! And in the meantime, he lived a full life, for his family and for himself, for his beloved mountains, for walks, for tennis. 'I'm in love with my homeland. I feel great be it in a forest, in the mountains, or at sea.' This optimist with incredible amounts of life energy writes books in the autumn, winter and in early spring. He is a student of a creative writing school established by Brane Gradišnik. A man who grew up with radio, radio drama, music, and life in the countryside, he knew how to translate his experience into his books. 'Today, the closest topics to me are the relationship between the countryside and city, Slovenia's independence, important people from the past (I always help myself with extensive archive material), deviations in modern society and the life of young people.' His adult children and, of course, his wife Sonja, the pillar of the family and his refuge, help him in his work. 'It is important to live and let others live!'

IT SEEMS THAT A LIFETIME IS TOO SHORT FOR YOUR SPRING OF CREATIVITY, WHICH IS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD FROM THE OUTSIDE. ONE WOULD SAY THAT YOU ARE A WORKAHOLIC?

Of course, I'm a workaholic (laughs), in any case! Well, a lifetime is neither too short nor too long for what I do: I still have the feeling that I'm at the beginning of my life's path. I used to be forced to agree to compromises because of my job, the family which I love



Text: MIŠA ČERMAK

and which consumes my time, but it is easier now when my children have grown up and I'm in retirement. In the morning and until noon, I do what I like: I write, because I'm fresh and rested. I edit, proofread, research, which makes the morning hours my golden hours; other things have their turn after eleven o'clock or noon, my wife and children, who have already moved out, in the afternoon, when I spend time with my grandson and granddaughter. Things are going on pretty normally.

IS IT PRETTY NORMAL THAT YOU WERE ON YOUR OWN IN TRYING TO ACHIEVE ALL THOSE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE, INCLUDING YOUR WORK AT THE RADIO? THAT YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR WORK AND OPPORTUNITIES? THE BEGINNINGS WERE RATHER MODEST...

I was born in the countryside, in a large family, a modest family, of course. The radio was then a sacred thing to me: I grew up listening to radio plays, music played on the radio, watching little and big things happening around the radio – for five of us, the radio was the sixth family member – it was a centrepiece, we grew up with the radio.

Radio was my first teacher and the first thing that launched me into the world. Well, when I was looking for work, I was expressing my personality: I always dared somewhat more, I was always the most popular boy at school, and all the girls were in love with me (laughs) – and I was in love with them. Of course, I knocked on the door of the radio station, asked for a scholarship, got one as an electrical technician, and at the same time started writing loads of fairy tales and sketch comedies! It is true that my works 'were out' even before, and that I wrote for Pionirski list, but my writing for the radio, including fairy tales, was paid. I was able to live in style from those fees, and I even bought a scooter with the scholarship I got and with help from my brother, who took a loan.

YOU WERE ABLE TO MAKE YOUR WAY.

Well, I was practical. I was raised to be a modest person, and I inherited diligence and a love of reading from my father, and joyfulness from my mother, who loved to dance and sing. Is that love of music, which brought you to more than 2,500 lyrics, inherited from your mother and seasoned with your childhood?

Certainly. I am convinced that the first six years of a child's life marks the rest of their life. I lived in a world of music and lively cultural activities, many times I created on my own: me and my classmate once made some dolls and staged a theatre in a barn...

YOU ALSO HAD A LOVE OF SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE. IS THIS THE REASON YOU STUDIED COMPARATIVE LITERATURE WHILE WORKING AT THE RADIO STATION?

Because I had no opportunity to study earlier. And because, working as a technician, I had the opportunity to watch the radio elite, in which there were not many 'bluffers' and which really amazed me. I entered the faculty, attended lectures, worked at the radio station when others didn't want to, and graduated in Slavic studies. I went to the faculty like others went to church: I respected the institution and people. I haven't failed a single exam – which means that I wasn't a true student (laughs). Well, I already had a family then... I used to take walks with my children, while my wife would sort things out in the apartment. My daughter, who used to go for walks with me, would ask me if I was again listening to the news on the radio when she heard a cuckoo – I always carried a portable radio and listened to it (laughs). Well, life went on normally, we also built houses together, parties and surprises for our wives: I enjoyed the joyful and relaxed atmosphere at the radio station.

BUT THEN AGAIN: DURING YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY LIFE YOU WROTE NUMEROUS BOOKS, WHICH REQUIRED A LOT OF TIME.

Well, I write very, very quickly, because I always studiously prepare for writing. I do not start until ideas start swarming in my head, then I make a sketch for a book, I look for information, if necessary, and then – I write it. I am touched by people I come upon and meet. I am touched by their stories. I collect material for a long time. I visit a teacher, lawyer, doctor, if they are to be included in my story, to get professional background; then I make a plan, start writing and finish the story.

WHEN YOU WRITE LYRICS, THE PROCESS IS DIFFERENT, ISN'T IT?

It is, and people know me better for my lyrics for folk and pop music. Writing lyrics requires instant inspiration, an inspiration that lasts for a few hours and also depends on the type of music. Slovenia has many, many talented people, who unfortunately do not let themselves be taught and couldn't care less about school. I wrote a poem based on Sonetni venec by France Prešeren with the right structure and everything, and I studied the book Besedna umetnost by Silva Trdina – from the first to the last letter. I know what I'm doing. And everybody who writes poems should. Being a poet is not only a matter of inspiration, but also of craftsmanship. There is no romantic aspect in writing any more: today you have to know something if you want to work!

THE SAME HOLDS TRUE IN JOURNALISM, IN WHICH YOU HAVE LOTS OF EXPERIENCE.

It's true, but I have to say journalists have left me rather disappointed:

almost half of them do not know to speak, write, connect their thoughts logically, and do not have their own view of a subject. And every now and then you can find the 'elite' which is paid the same as those who do not have a clue – and this is not right. It seems to me that journalism in Slovenia is at a very low level.

WELL, NOW THAT YOU HAVE RETIRED, IS YOUR VIEWPOINT MAYBE LESS BURDENED, AND YOUR TIME IS EVEN MORE YOURS, ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS TO ME THAT YOU ALWAYS KNEW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR SOUL: YOU WENT TO THE MOUNTAINS AND CLIMBED MANY SUMMITS, YOU WENT TO WORK, WROTE AT HOME AND AT WORK, AND CREATED AN ENVIABLE AMOUNT OF WORDS. HOW HAVE YOUR NEAREST AND DEAREST ACCEPTED YOUR MENTAL AND/OR PHYSICAL ABSENCE?

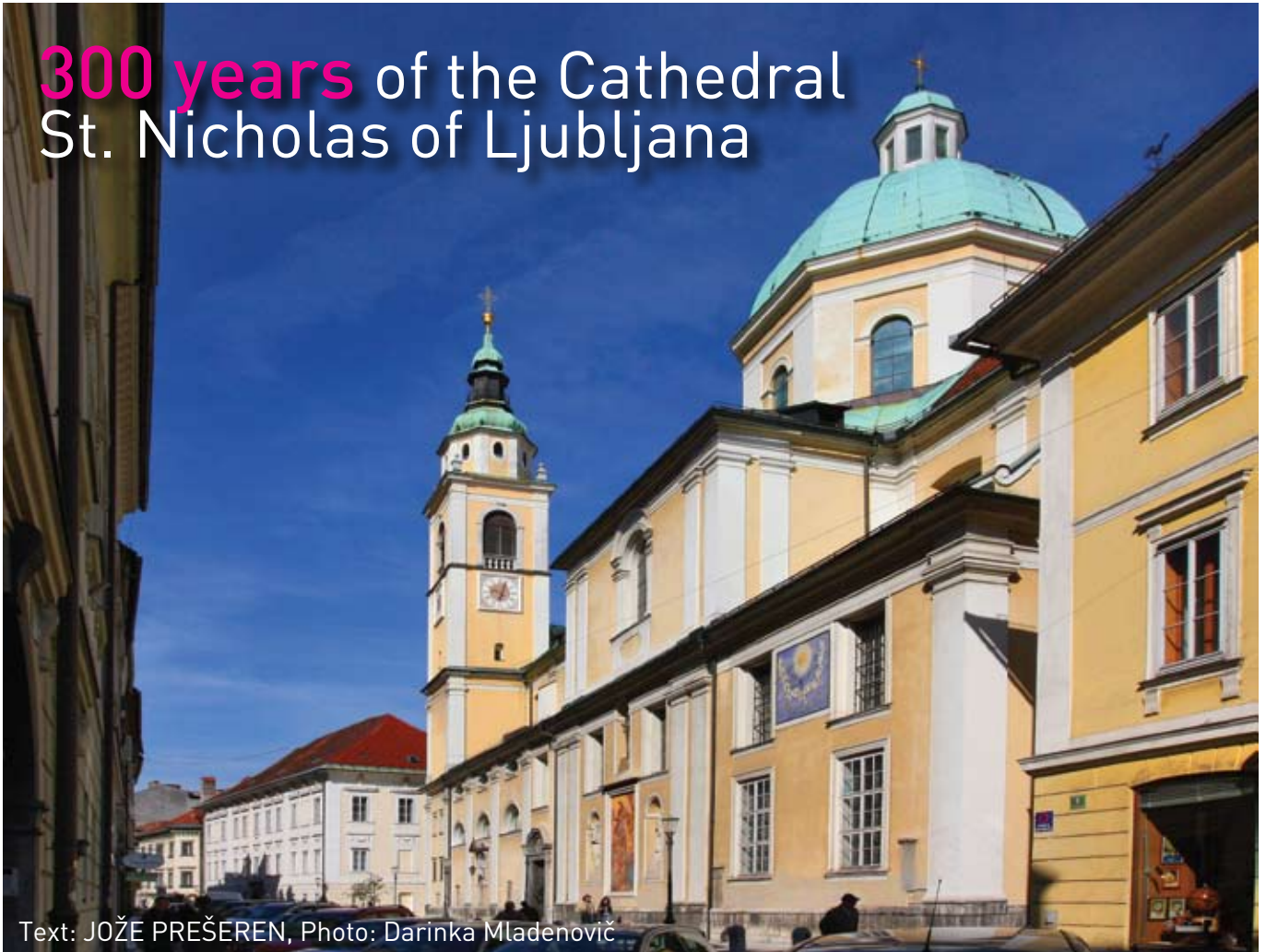
Well, this left me with less time to spend with my family, but we knew how to combine things: we took our children with us everywhere – to Prešeren, Cankar... When they went to primary school, their classmates kept saying that they were annoying because they knew everything: they had to read and study, we had conversations, they were mad about books, their time and our time was not wasted. My wife, Sonja, who does completely different things in life, has a great feeling for language and she is the one who does the first proofreading, because I hate to do it. No, we didn't have any difficulties: I go to the mountains with my wife. We are members of the Kumarice mountaineering association. Once a month we and about thirty other people take trips on which we always take an accordion player, and I make a programme – this is when we 'switch off' from the world!

WHERE DOES ONE FIND FOR EVERYTHING THAT FULFILLS A PERSON AND MAKES THEM HAPPY IN 24 HOURS OF THE DAY?

Most people do not know how to organise their lives: why should I watch TV all the time, if I can watch it only for half an hour and read books the rest of my free time? Why shouldn't I go to bed with a book, instead of wasting my time. Why shouldn't I make love to my wife and enjoy myself, instead of watching a show on television? Television was given to us only for entertainment, and it is not a part of elementary life. And I love to live a basic, full life...

In 2001 the director Tugo Štiglic, in cooperation with the public broadcaster TV Slovenija and Timaro Productions, made the feature film for young people Pozabljeni zaklad (Forgotten Treasure), based on Sivec's youth novel of the same title, and a TV series with three episodes. The film was seen by more than 25,000 moviegoers in Slovenia and was awarded the Golden Roll, given to Slovenian films that sell more than 25,000 tickets. In 2003 'Forgotten Treasure' was also issued on videotape by the public broadcaster RTV Slovenija, while a new Slovenian film based on a Sivec novel is currently in production.

300 years of the Cathedral St. Nicholas of Ljubljana



Text: JOŽE PREŠEREN, Photo: Darinka Mladenović

LJUBLJANA IN EUROPEAN SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

In 2007 the main church of the Ljubljana Archdiocese, the Cathedral St. Nicholas, celebrated its 300th anniversary. There were no special jubilee celebrations on this occasion except for the restoration of the famous frescos by Giulio Quaglio, a symposium of historians and the subsequent publication of a jubilee journal collecting scientific articles by renowned Slovenian art and church historians and theologians; the journal, entitled *The Cathedral St. Nicholas of Ljubljana – 1707*, was published at the beginning of 2008.

Ljubljana became the seat of the diocese in 1461, but the church was too small, or not distinguished enough to be the seat of the diocese, and this is why the old church, which had been restored several times, was demolished in 1701. The new cathedral was designed by the famous Jesuit architect Andrea Pozzo, and the opening ceremony was held in 1707.

THE BAROQUE CAME WITH THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

Slovenes like to make parallels between historical comparisons and the famous book by Janez Vajkard Valvasor *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*, which was published in 1689. The book contains a copper engraving of Ljubljana – then labeled as:

Laybach, and with its Slovenian name Lublana in smaller black letters– the cathedral cannot be seen in the engraving; the monastic churches outside the city walls are clearly visible, while the old cathedral, with a Gothic bell tower, can be seen in a supplement. The cathedral built 300 years ago has therefore thoroughly changed the characteristic view of Ljubljana, which had been maintained for centuries.

In the 17th and 18th century, many European cities were seized by a new spirit that also brought a new culture based on the European Baroque, which was embodied in numerous artistic fields, from architecture, painting, sculpture to music, theatre





and science. This movement was chiefly international, as it was brought to Slovenia primarily from Italian and German lands, and also included Slovenes, who were the main pillars of the movement in Slovenia. After the Thirty Years' War, there was a long period of peace in Europe, and the advance of the Turks also subsided, especially after they lost the Battle of Vienna in 1683. Trade, crafts and transport were flourished. Numerous city buildings were then built in Ljubljana, and are still today a sample of the true Baroque. Numerous educated and talented individuals who would otherwise go to foreign countries, now stayed at home. The first printing house opened then in Ljubljana, and new books, primarily with spiritual topics, were soon published. The only person distinguished from this environment was the famous polymath, Valvasor, who was also respected as a scientist and author in other parts of Europe.

In 1693, a group of the aristocratic and religious elite, including priests and other educated persons, in a desire to make Ljubljana a part of spiritual movements and cultural events and incorporate it into European centres of scientific and cultural life, established a society named Academia Operosorum – the Academy of the Industrious. The founder and lifelong president of the society was provost Janez Krstnik Prešeren. The society initiated in 1701 the establishment of Academia philharmonicorum (about which our magazine wrote in the 4th issue). The operozi are given the most credit for Ljubljana and almost all other Slovenian regions at the time for being heavily influenced by the Italian Baroque, the predominant artistic style of the period. The society also floated the idea of the construction of a new cathedral in Ljubljana, the initiators being the Dolničar brothers, one coming from the high ranks of the clergy, and the other being the then mayor of Ljubljana.

THE LJUBLJANA CATHEDRAL LIKE THE ST PETER'S BASILICA IN THE VATICAN CITY?

The Baroque period in Ljubljana is in any case related to the Counter-Reformation movements which were led primarily by Jesuits. A number of churches and other monuments which are still prominent today, including the famous Robba's Fountain in front of the Town Hall, were built in this period. The most important religious building of the Baroque Ljubljana is the Cathedral St. Nicholas. Its architect was already mentioned at the beginning, and we have to emphasize that the cathedral was designed in the shape of a Latin cross, as a hall with chapels, transverse nave, and a dome over the cross; the dome was completed later, in 1841. The original frescos were painted by Quaglio, while the dome was painted in 1843 and 1844 by the Slovenian painter Matevž Langus. There are also numerous famous paintings and sculptures characteristic of the Baroque period, an exceptional Baroque monument and an organ in the church. Historic records show that the church was gradually upgraded and furnished with paintings, sculptures and side altars. The church acquired numerous works of art throughout the 18th and 19th century, while the famous Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, who also renovated one of the chapels, built a bishop's throne in the church in 1952. Three statues, two on the exterior side and one in the interior, Križ chapel, were preserved from the old, Gothic church.

The Baroque movement in Ljubljana continued after the cathedral was constructed. Besides the cathedral, the construction of a seminary was started in 1708 on an initiative of Janez Anton Dolničar, in which the first public library in Ljubljana, with notable paintings and furniture, also found its place. In the following decades, Ljubljana acquired a number of its famous Baroque buildings which are still among the characteristic city landmarks – the Križanke Church and the Ursuline Church, a new town hall, the renovated Bishop's Palace, the Gruber Palace, and a number of other buildings. Secular architecture in Ljubljana was in full bloom at the end of 18th century, when a number of city palaces and houses were built, while Ljubljana took over the leading role in the political, economic and cultural aspects in the 19th century, which can be seen in its architecture. Numerous architectural changes also took place after the 1895 earthquake.

Ljubljana Cathedral remains one of the most famous structures in Ljubljana, and some even compare it to the St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City, as the main role models of its architect were Bramante and Michelangelo.

Milling as remembrance of times past in Prekmurje



Text: ANJA HREŠČAK, Photo: Darinka Mladenovič

Mills have been standing on the Mura River since the 4th century. At the beginning of the 19th century, the biggest number of mills operated in the Prekmurje villages of Mele, Petanjci, Dokležovje, Veržej, Ižakovci, Krapje, Melnci and Hotiza. Mills used to serve for milling wheat, maize, rye and buckwheat, and today serve primarily as cultural monuments of the past times.

The municipality of Beltinci, in cooperation with the local institute for tourism and culture, the Prleška development agency and the municipalities of Veržej and Razkrižje, recently finalised the Milling on the River Mura project, in which it included the mills on the Mura in its offer of natural beauties, and ensured the preservation of that cultural and ethnological heritage and milling tradition.

Besides bujaštvo (river damming), weaving and tilemaking, milling falls within the traditional crafts in Prekmurje, which supported the majority of the people from Prekmurje. Today, almost nobody makes a living from this old craft in the region, but the local mills have been maintained in very good condition. The best preserved and also the most famous today are the mills in the village of Veržej, especially Babič's mill, which has a rich history, and also the mills in Ižakovci on the so-called Island of Love.

In 1912, in Veržej, the Babič family bought an old mill which was actually floating on the river, but was completely destroyed in a fire fifteen years after. They constructed a new mill at the same place a year after, and in a bid to protect it from another disaster, they set up the mill house by the river bank and put the mill wheel on special boats, called "kumpi" in the local dialect. This mill was washed away by the river, and the family was forced in 1947 to build a new mill. In the third mill, which was set up at the same place as the previous two, two years after the Second World War the family installed an electric motor which powered the mill wheel. In 1990, the swollen river again destroyed the mill by washing away its wheel. The mill which can be seen today in Veržej is therefore the fourth mill constructed since the original, but all of them are known as Babič's Mill. Today you can witness the traditional milling of grain in the mill, and visitors can also buy wheat milled in the traditional way. Over 90 floating mills used

to work on the Mura, and today only Babič's in Veržej remains active.

The floating mill on the island of love in Ižakovci is no less famous. The Mura river has been playing through the centuries with nature along its course and created a natural island that the locals named the Island of Love. Tourist societies soon started taking advantage of the island, which is known for its features, beauty and unspoiled nature in its close and far surroundings, so that today visitors can take a trip to the island and attend various events. The most famous are the "Bujraški dnevi" (bujraštvo is a traditional craft of fortifying and damming the riverbed of the Mura River), which have been traditionally organized in the second week of August by the local tourist association since 1991. The "Bujraški dnevi" are primarily dedicated to commemorating the life and work of the people who lived along this turbulent river through decades. Visitors of the "Bujraški dnevi" can also see presentations of everyday works related to the life along the Mura River.

The newest acquisition on the island is the floating mill- the locals set it up later on – which is the only structure of its kind in Slovenia and one of the few in this part of Europe. The floating mill is a particularity of the Panonian landscape. It partially or even completely floats on the water. The most frequent floating mills in the past were of the kind present in the past on the Mura River. There is also a permanent exhibition on bujaštvo - river damming - in Ižakovci.

Milling on the Mura River represents three values to the people of Prekmurje - it represents technical heritage, because the floating mill, with its simplicity and adaptability, is one of the rare very old technical achievements still in use; it represents cultural heritage, because eventful social and cultural life takes place around the mills; and it indirectly represents natural heritage, because floating mills even today are an example of a successful symbiosis of humans, with their energy needs, and the nature.

The purpose of the recently established project named "the Millers' path" is to preserve this heritage and present it to a wider public and tourists. Prekmurje is becoming an excursion destination for many Slovenian and foreign tourists.



**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**