

Sinfo 06

ISSN 1854-0805

June 2011



Bold and united

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Sinfo – Slovenian information

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Production: Nuit d.o.o., Translation: Amidas, DZTPS,
Government Translation and Interpretation Division
Printed by: DZS, d.d., Slovenia, Number of copies: 4600
Available also at: www.ukom.gov.si/eng/slovenia/publication/sinfo
Cover photo: Linden leaf, Mateja Jordović Potočnik

Government Communication Office: www.slovenia.si
Government Communication Office: www.ukom.gov.si
Government of the Republic of Slovenia: www.vlada.si
Slovenian Tourist Board: www.slovenia.info
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editorial



Vesna Žarkovič, Editor

Bold and united – unparalleled by any other event in the nation’s history

The linden tree – a tree of friendship, love and loyalty, a kind of symbol of Slovenians, with its widely spreading branches that dominate the scene, symbolises an urgent need to bring democracy back to its roots, enabling statesmen to reflect on their commitment to fundamental democratic values while interacting with ordinary people. In July this year, the owner of the Osojnik farm, better known as the Najevnik farm, will have the opportunity to invite Slovenian politicians and statesmen to a meeting under the Najevnik linden tree for the twenty-first time, to celebrate the proclamation of Slovenia’s independence in 1991, when the first meeting of Slovenian statesmen was held under the linden tree. Twenty years ago, practically every Slovenian, young and old, contributed to the best of his or her abilities to historical and unique endeavour for the independence. The citizens of Slovenia recall the events of that time to be unique, unparalleled by any other event in the nation’s history, and unlikely to happen again. Without any doubt, the media played a crucial role. The war for independence was fought largely in the public eye, and the media was used as the main tool for communicating our truth. And succeeded. Who does not remember Jelko Kacin, the then Minister of Information, and his confident TV appearances as he steered and won the media war? Visual culture related to the identity of the nation is the most recognizable visual image of Slovenia’s identity created over the twenty-year history of Slovenia as a sovereign state. The exhibition “Identity of Slovenia – Designing for the State,” is held to mark the twenty years of independence in the Republic of Slovenia. The exhibits cover the range of designs elaborated for the young state and its institutions by one of Slovenia’s top designers, Prešeren Award winner Miljenko Licul, who has created a number of great works of visual culture. In a way, Bled is a holy place in Slovenia. The greatest Slovenian poet, France Prešeren, who was born in a village eight kilometres away from Bled, included Bled in his treasure chest of myths and positive stereotypes about Slovenia in a very clear and precise manner. This can be most clearly seen in his epic poem Krst pri Savici (The Baptism at the Savica Waterfall), in which he described battles between pagans, Slavic people at the time of their settlement in AD 800, and Christians, German people who at the time increased their influence in territories inhabited by Slavs, and then remained masters of these lands for a thousand years. ‘Dežela kranjska nima lepš’ga kraja, ko je z okolšno ta, podoba raja (There is no other place in Carniola more beautiful than this one with its surroundings, a piece of paradise)’ is a verse written by France Prešeren. At Brdo Castle, the Slovenian protocol venue located near Bled, dishes for kings and presidents are prepared. For a dish to be tasty, one must put his heart and soul into it, take the changing seasons into consideration and, from time to time, supplement old recipes with modern ideas, says the chef, Robert Merzel. Once again, Slovenian politics would need the unity and eagerness shown during Slovenia’s struggle for independence, because the European Union is presently breaking in two, and Slovenia is making every effort to be listed among the states included in the most successful parcel of the EU members; to achieve this, some deeper economic reforms are required. Today, there is no outer enemy to fight against; there is only the international situation forcing us again to decide what we would like to, or must, accomplish and how we should act to become a successful, modern and developed society.



Darijan Košir

Historic opportunity we could not afford to miss

The phone rang unexpectedly that night in 1991 although the war for Slovenia was far from being over. My editor ordered me nothing else but to be prepared at 4.30 a.m. for the driver-photographer to pick me up and take me to the Brioni islands in Croatia; he wasn't precisely aware of where he was sending me as a young reporter of a principal Slovenian daily newspaper – he only said it was about some “crucial negotiations” that were supposed to conclude the 10-days' war for Slovenia. In the end it came out that on these magnificent islands, to which the photographer and I had to forge our way through numerous road blocks, reporters witnessed the adoption of the historical Brioni Declaration by which Slovenia negotiated three-months' truce in the combat with Yugoslav armed forces, interim peace negotiations and a final possibility of gaining independence we later exploited.

This tiny anecdote shows how 20 years ago virtually all Slovenians, younger and older, participated to the best of our abilities in the historic and unique venture of struggle for our state's independence. It can hardly be said that in recent history this was the only opportunity, the only moment when our country could and was allowed to – considering international circumstances – fight for its independence; after all, Kosovo is today approaching the conclusion of this probably successful test. At that time, circumstances in the global politics were certainly very much in favor of Slovenia's independence due to disintegration of the Soviet Union; luckily, the Slovenian politics was prepared for

this unique historical opportunity, although there was a lot of experimenting, risk and uninformed decision-making in the whole process of gaining independence which, fortunately, ended with success. Some other countries (Croatia) paid considerably higher price for their independence while still others (Bosnia and Herzegovina) disintegrated in the process and later remained undivided only due to special intervention and interest of the international society. It is true, however, that Slovenia had a huge comparative advantage over these countries: it was virtually a single-nationality state.

As already mentioned, international circumstances were very favorable for Slovenia's independence two decades ago, although it might not have been perceived so during the inception of independence ideas. In June 1991, when Slovenia planned and accomplished the declaration of independence, the world's largest multinational superpower, the Soviet Union, was just about to collapse; the arrival of Soviet tanks into Lithuania's capital Vilnius in January was the first sign of the empire's disintegration while the election of Russian president Boris Yeltsin in June of the same year was far more important; when in August the Soviet army responded to these processes with the military coup which new Russian president was able to suppress, the venue was open first for the independence of the three Baltic states followed by the disintegration of the entire Soviet Union and the formation of 15 new states on the territory of the former empire in December 1991. And if the international community allowed disintegration of the Soviet Union and recognized 15 new states, it had no right to prevent Slovenia from realizing the same desire or aspiration. This is one of the reasons why Slovenia's independence was recognized soon after, on 15 January 1992.

The second circumstance that ultimately was in favor of Slovenia's independence was the developments in the entire former Yugoslavia which obviously had to go through the same process as the Soviet Union before it. At the same time as in Slovenia, independence from Yugoslavia was also declared by Croatia which, during the war in Slovenia, did not actively pursue its independence; moreover, airplanes that threatened Slovenia were taking off from Croatian airports and Yugoslav ground forces were invading our country from the Croatian territory. This non-acting later came at high cost for Croatia since in July 1991 when the Yugoslav army started – to a great surprise – to retreat from the Slovenian territory it suddenly concentrated on the Croatian territory where it started “liberating” the Croatian Knin Krajina the following month which was reclaimed by our neighboring country only four years afterwards. Namely, after the intervention in Slovenia failed, the Yugoslav, or more precisely, Serbian politics had already decided to carry out Plan B, i.e. armed conflict for the preservation of “little” Yugoslavia, i.e. the areas mainly occupied by Serbian population, after the failure of main scenario of the preservation of entire Yugoslavia under Serbian hegemony. For more than four years afterwards, the Serbian-Yugoslav army fought to accomplish the Plan B, until the Dayton Agreement was reached; thus, international efforts of the Slovenian politics to distance itself from these affairs and to gain independence were gaining legitimacy and justifiability every day – which is why less than half a year passed from the Brioni Agreement to the recognition of independent Slovenia.

The third factor that contributed to smooth independence process in Slovenia at that time is perhaps less obvious when considered from a wider perspective and more modern standpoints, however, it played an equally important role – while at the same time it provides most useful lessons for the contemporary Slovenian politics.

Namely, it was political and popular unity of Slovenians while pursuing independence. We must not deny the objective fact that Slovenia was ethnically “the purest” among the states of former Yugoslavia, with no more than ten percent of non-Slovenians, while there were for example one third of non-Croatians living in the neighboring country. Nevertheless, Slovenia was full of notorious internal conflicts throughout history that prevented it from carrying out historic breakthroughs several times. This time everything was different. Already at the plebiscite in December 1990, almost 90 percent of all participating voters decided to support Slovenia's independence which gave the Slovenian politics a clear signal that this time it had no right to miss a historical opportunity due to internal conflicts. The so-called left and right did play each its own politics at that time, but in crucial decisions they were capable of unity, although with clenched teeth from time to time. Namely, all the key decisions from December 1990 to declaration of independence in June 1991 were adopted with consensus which remained solid in face of even harder ordeals such as the 10-day war, the Brioni Agreement or the consequential negotiations with the international community for Slovenia's recognition. For example, the greatest contributors to the latter were Milan Kučan and Dimitrij Rupel, at that time Slovenia's President and Foreign Minister, respectively, who are fierce political opponents today and whose views of the politics were never neither similar nor related.

Later, the Slovenian politics was capable of such comparable unity only once during the larger project of international positioning of Slovenia – entering the European Union by 2004. Similar unity would be required once again today, in a moment when this European Union is being divided into two parts and Slovenia is striving to become a part of the most successful package of EU countries for which, however, some deeper economic reform processes are required as has already been written here several times in the recent months. The only difference in relation to June exactly 20 years ago is that there is no external enemy against which we would have to fight; there are only international circumstances that are again forcing us to decide what and how we want and should accomplish in order to become a successful, modern and developed state.

Leading capacity development institution in South East Europe

The Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF) will in June 2011 celebrate its 10th anniversary of successful operations. Over the last 10 years the CEF has become a leading capacity development institution in South East Europe (SEE). Since its foundation in 2001, the CEF's mission remains to promote awareness of international standards and best practice in public financial management and central banking.



CEF IN BRIEF

The initiative to establish a regional training institution in Slovenia has been framed in the context of the Stability Pact for South East Europe, which has specifically recognized the urgent needs for capacity development in countries in the South East European region to cope with the challenges of implementing public finance reforms.

The CEF was established by the Slovenian Government on January 11, 2001, on the initia-

tive of Slovenian Ministry of Finance and in close cooperation with ministries of finance of other countries in SEE. The goal was to provide its member countries with on-the-job training, exchange of experience, technical assistance and support in the implementation of their public finance reforms. In 2003 CEF's mandate broadened to include central banking topics. Current CEF member countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova,

Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. In designing programs and activities, the CEF closely follows reform developments and the related needs of its member countries as well as the latest trends and standards in public financial management and central banking. Additionally, in order to ensure sustainable capacity development processes and effectiveness of the program, the CEF's training programs are designed to combine short term as well as

mid- and long-term initiatives and seeks input mostly from EU and CEF member country' practitioners as well as experts from international organizations. Over the years the CEF has managed to gain broad recognition and support from the international financial institutions, as well as a number of donor countries active in the region. The CEF cooperates on a partnership basis with institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary



The CEF Director Mira Dobovišek.

Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), finance ministries of the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, the central banks of Belgium and the Netherlands, the European Commission, and—of course—Slovenian Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Slovenia to name just a few.

DELIVERING RESULTS

The CEF Director Mira Dobovišek who has headed the organisation since its inception has identified three core pillars of the CEF's capacity development approach: the provision of specialized training, the encouragement of knowledge sharing and research, and the provision of technical assistance (in conjunction with the IMF).

The CEF program covers a wide range of public financial management and central banking topics. In addition, the CEF provides a limited number of institutional and people and process management workshops to support the creation of an enabling environment for effective public financial management and central banking. In the last decade more than 5.800 participants have passed through approximately 300 workshops, as part of the so called "short program". Its organizational structure allows the institution to develop programs that bring together the capacity development needs of member countries and available training resources. "Our programme is demand driven. This means that we are constantly identifying train-

ing requirements together with member countries, which are then reflected in our program," emphasizes Jana Repanšek, deputy director. The program provides opportunities for the region's officials to study other countries implementation process to meet international standards, best practice and trends, all under the guidance of highly qualified international experts.

Miroslava Sidi, a former Head of Public Finance School, from Bulgarian Ministry of Finance sees the key advantage for her and her colleagues who have participated in the CEF training events their exposure to excellent trainers and presenters from renowned institutions globally. Secondly, she believes interacting and engaging with their peers from the countries

in the region is another valuable method of learning, giving them additional insight for their specific work. Last but not least, the possibility to present and share experience with others who are involved in finding solutions to similar work-related challenges has, according to Ms. Sidi, given her institution's officials confidence and motivation to pursue even better results.

At the same time the CEF plays an active role as a secretariat and as a member in three networks: Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEM PAL), Global Development Learning Network (GDLN), and Train4Dev Network. The CEF has thus developed into a platform for inter-institutional and regional dialogue.



Deputy Director, Jana Repanšek.

FEELING THE REGIONAL PULSE

The CEF has an excellent understanding of the region’s needs and priorities due to its consistent cooperation with the ministries of finance and central banks of member countries. This leads to the development of highly practical tailor-made programs which aim to satisfy immediate training need and priorities in the region. Stanka Vizi, Head of Human Resource Department at the Central Bank of Montenegro, believes that the CEF has made a significant contribution to the human capacity development of their institutions. In her opinion, the CEF feels the pulse of the region and does its best to make sharing ideas and knowledge run smoothly. “Regional challenges need regional

solutions. Moreover, they need regional understanding and regional experience. I am proud to say that the CEF has built a network and infrastructure that is now in place to best support region-wide capacity development initiatives,” adds Ms. Dobovišek.

10 YEARS OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE – BUILDING SKILLS

During the week of June 20–24, 2011 the CEF will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its successful operation. To mark this milestone in the CEF’s history, several events will take place in Ljubljana. The annual Advisory Board meeting, representing its donor partner institutions, and the annual Supervisory Board Meeting, representing its member countries, will be

preceded by the Building Fiscal Institutions to Meet Post Crisis Challenges seminar the CEF is co-organizing with the IMF’s Fiscal Affairs Department. According to the IMF’s regional advisor for public financial management in SEE, Brian Olden, there is considerable interest in the region for seminars relating to strengthening fiscal institutions, particularly following weaknesses identified during the recent global crisis. The importance of building strong fiscal institutions to ensure the successful development and implementation of medium-term sustainable fiscal policy cannot be underestimated in a region where countries are at various stages of the EU accession process. Countries applying for member-

ship need to ensure that fiscal institutions are robust enough to meet the challenges that EU accession inevitably brings. “We hope that this seminar can contribute to the achievement of this objective”, concludes Mr Olden. The roundtable discussion on public finances in the SEE region aims to kick start an informal network of leading economists in SEE countries, to brainstorm some of the most pressing public finance challenges the SEE countries are facing, and to stimulate knowledge exchanges in the region. The celebrations culminate with the CEF’s 10th Anniversary Reception, followed by the Regional Policy Forum on ‘Growth Strategies after the Crisis’ the next day.



IMF Regional PFM Advisor Southeast Europe, Brian Olden.

“The CEF has consistently been a loyal and devoted partner in our efforts to improve the NBRM institutional capacities. Over the years the CEF has significantly helped us on the road to becoming a modern and effective central bank, strategically focused on becoming a part of the European System of Central Banks. The CEF has been and still is the leading regional institution that connects policy makers of SEE countries, bringing up regional issues and offering regional solutions. It is my greatest pleasure to have

this chance to congratulate the CEF on its 10-year anniversary and to express the wish that we all grow together and become better and stronger institutions in these challenging times.”

Petar Goshev, M.Sc
Governor of the National Bank of the Republic of Macedonia



“Over the last 10 years, Albania has largely benefited from the presence of the Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF) technical assistance program and, more specifically from capacity building programs and specific trainings. Albania was happy to be one of the countries participating in the pilot implementation of the Capacity Building in Public Accounting (CBIPA) program in 2003, which is now waiting for localiza-

tion. Through the years, the CEF has become an incredibly strong development platform, contributing a cutting edge to future generations.”

Ridvan Bode
Minster of the Ministry of Finance of Albania



In the last issue of SINFO, an error occurred in the data concerning the average monthly salary and household spending. Here is the correct data:

AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY	
1989 (in ECU ¹)	2009 (in EUR)
366	1,438.96
HOUSEHOLD SPENDING	
1989 (in ECU ¹)	2009 (in EUR)
7,491	20,753

¹ A precursor to the euro. On 1 January 1999, the euro (EUR) replaced the ECU on a one for one basis.

Bold and united Jelko Kacin



There is little doubt that the media played a key role in the process of Slovenia's gaining independence 20 years ago. The war for independence was fought largely in the public eye, and the media was used as the main tool for communicating our truth. There is hardly any Slovenian who does not remember Jelko Kacin, the then Minister of Information, and his confident TV appearances as he steered and won the media war.

At the end of June 1991, in the critical 10 days of war, you addressed the public regularly, even several times a day, to keep people up-to-date with recent developments in the war between Slovenia and the Yugoslav Army. For most Slovenians, you were the only link to the events of the time. How do you see those events now?

Unique, definitely, unparalleled by any other event in the nation's history, and unlikely to happen again. True, the media played a crucial role in unveiling the circumstances in Yugoslavia at the time. The Ministry of Information, which I led from April 1991, was fully aware that the independence process would only succeed if we were able to "sell" Slovenia's side of the story to the public, both at home and abroad. As no national press agency existed at the time, the task fell on the Ministry. We could certainly not expect Yugoslavia's only press agency Tanjug to provide fair and unbiased coverage of the events. When it became clear that Tanjug would not support us in the sovereignty process, we decided to set up the Slovenian Press Agency. We managed to secure financial and human resources from the state and, with very little time on our hands, set the agency in operation a week before the declaration of independence. I am pleased to say that in a very short time we established excellent working relations with a wide circle of journalists from major media agencies.

Your appearances were definitely unique; you were described as convincing, spontaneous, and direct, and these

qualities won over the international public.

Through the media, you conveyed the message that Slovenia more than deserved its independence. It is generally believed that the media battle was managed brilliantly and that the victory was complete because of the responsiveness, quality, and functionality of the media. Would you agree with that?

Certainly. Before I was appointed Minister of Information, I had already been actively involved with the media and communications in general; I worked part-time for the national public broadcasting organization and held lectures at various schools and training organizations, including the Defense Training Centre in Poljče. A defense studies graduate, I knew a lot about the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA, also JLA), maybe even more than others. This knowledge is what made my reports more convincing, spontaneous, and straightforward. Given my media experience, I was also well aware of the power of visual effects, and that is why in my public appearances I favored television at the expense of other media. Television actually showed people in Slovenia and abroad what was going on. Even in hard and difficult moments, I strove to appear calm and composed in our press conferences. Television viewers never saw me wear a uniform; I would always act as the public face of the government. I avoided making any sentimental statements and paid special attention to ensure no

one felt left out or unsupported. I worked for the good of all citizens; in other words, I was totally apolitical. I never commented on national, religious, cultural, sexual, or other beliefs and orientations. My main task was to present the conflict as a case of a "David versus Goliath" struggle as convincingly as possible. When a reporter asked me how many casualties there were in the war, I replied that this information would be provided by the Red Cross. As a state, did not report on the number of victims. Of course, when compared to uniform-clad General Blagoje Adić, who monotonously mumbled into his beard, my media addresses were different: they were youthful, fresh, persuasive....

...and original. The media said: Slovenians have shown how to wage an effective information war in a partisan manner, with well-planned coordination of the media. Slovenia came out of the war as a winner because it won the media war, using carefully selected words and the tone of message to present each situation to its advantage....

..Yes, that's what the papers said. The reason why I always spoke to the media in a composed voice was to calm down the members of the Territorial Defense Force and Police in the trenches, as well as the members of the Civil Protection Service and their families. Our key message was that Slovenia did not enter the war because it wanted one or to win it, but simply to end the hostilities as soon as possible. When the hostilities cease, negotia-

tions can start. And when you start negotiating, you become a partner – until that time you are just a victim of an act of aggression. A negotiating state is the subject of an agreement, and by putting an end to the hostilities, Slovenia became a respected political player.

This period is closely related to the first democratic elections and profound political changes, as well as to the all-round maturing of Slovenian society – which demanded a different approach to the future and called for more future, less past, and some distance from history.

It was completely clear that the time of Tito was becoming a thing of the past, and the cries for reason and democracy were getting louder and louder. Slovenia refused to put up with the federal government any longer; it was particularly opposed to Serbian politics which tried to manipulate Montenegro, Kosovo, and Vojvodina to block any changes leading to the democratization and introduction of the market economy. The period also marked the beginning of retrograde processes, manifested in efforts to remove armchair politicians from their offices and appoint more progressive political leaders into republic governments. It became clear that the country we lived in faced an uncertain future. Gradually, we also realized that the changes in Yugoslavia could not be secured by peaceful means. It was at that time that I took over as Deputy Minister of Defense. But the moment that was crucial for my further work with the media was when the YPA special forces invaded the headquarters of the Territorial Defense of the Republic of Slovenia and put General Hočevar in charge of the Territorial Defense. The incident showed that the army saw the whole issue as an internal affair, and made it clear it would not refrain from such interventions in the future. The second turning point was the time of the referendum and the preparations for it, when



the nucleus of the Slovenian Army and new weapons were presented at Kočevska Reka. I made sure that the government in Belgrade was informed that Slovenia had acquired its own weapons and was prepared to use them for the country's defense. We started letting people know that the situation had evolved and that the defense of Slovenia was no longer impossible nor risky.

The decision by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to hold a plebiscite on independence on 23 December 1990 was therefore a result of a series of events. It was a historical opportunity for Slovenians to decide the course of their future. However, the nearly unanimous support of the citizens for the independence process made the situation in Yugoslavia more uncertain than ever.

The plebiscite was a point of no return. Its outcome showed that the electorate voted for a new, better, and independent path. I do not believe that any Slovenian expected the referendum to pass with such overwhelming majority. Surprisingly, even many non-Slovenians voted for independence. The overwhelmingly approved referen-

dum on independence and the unanimous support of the citizens it received pushed Yugoslavia into further uncertainty. It also marked the beginning of the hardest period in the independence process – the preparations for the declaration of the sovereign state of Slovenia. According to the Plebiscite Act, the country had six months to implement the will of the people. Intensive preparations for Slovenia's independence were also launched towards the media.

Is it true that you didn't expect such an overwhelming outcome?

Yes, that's true. When the discussions on the referendum motion started, many accused us of being irresponsible, and of not knowing what we were getting ourselves into. And when the referendum was confirmed, another question arose: What majority will it be carried by? We set an ambitious goal: two thirds or nothing! But to get an almost 90-percent support – no one dared dream of such an outcome.

What was your work like in those history-making days?

Ever since the YPA had invaded the headquarters of the Slove-

nian Territorial Defense Force, I feared, as Deputy Minister of Defense, that eventually the YPA would also take control of the Slovenian Radio and Television (RTV Slovenija). Therefore, I worked hard on how to protect RTV Slovenija and ensure its continuous operation as a system that informed the public of current events. To achieve this, all broadcasting vehicles and other equipment were moved to locations where they would be kept safe in case of military intervention. The possibility of the Serbs outvoting the dissident republics gave rise to a threat that the Yugoslav Presidency might declare an emergency situation and attempt to overthrow the democratically elected governments in Slovenia and Croatia. We entered the crucial phase of preparing for Slovenia's independence. Time was tight and the work had to be carefully coordinated.

...which was probably the main reason why you were appointed Minister of Information by the government at that time?

That's right. I took over the office only two months before independence. The declaration of independence day was near-

ing, and there were still many activities to be done in the media. Our main tasks were to establish the Slovenian Press Agency and undertake an extensive promotional campaign to accompany the declaration of independence. Also, considerable effort was put into cooperation with domestic media, in particular the electronic media, which were of utmost importance due to their short response times.

When you took over the Ministry of Information, the pace of events picked up considerably... Of course, in that critical period every day mattered. It was crucial that all citizens understood that Slovenia was indeed ready to gain its independence. The journalists were particularly interested in Slovenia's process of economic independence, its economic relations with the international community, the issue of supplying the population, as well as defense and safety issues. Although press conferences often started several hours late, attendance was always high at the conferences covering the SFRY Presidency Sessions in Belgrade, which were attended by Slovenian President Kučan. During all this time, we also considered worst-case scenarios. We needed to define and create new national symbols, design a new flag, and coat of arms. To illustrate, we only had three days to sew the flag. A large part of our efforts focused on the main national ceremony, which was held on 26 June at the square Trg Republike in Ljubljana. The ceremony was magnificent and unforgettable; history was made that day.

But the dreams that were allowed that evening were shattered the very next morning when the YPA launched an attack on Slovenia. We were in the middle of a war: there were soldiers in the streets, tanks, and barricades; border-crossings and airports were closed. Tanks had hit the streets of Primorsko a day before, on 26 June, and two military aircraft did several flights over Ljubljana in an attempt to frighten the people.

How did you perceive the aggression of the YPA?

As their utter defeat. People will not be intimidated by tanks. They were appalled at the actions of the YPA, which had grossly misjudged the situation. I, on the other hand, was more concerned with how to steer the course of events to prevent any premature incident that would further enrage the Belgrade government. If we had acted too soon, everything would have fallen apart and we definitely would not have been able to continue the sovereignty efforts as we had. You know, I was always sent to places where the temperature had hit boiling point and things were incredibly tense. I remember being asked about how I saw the flyovers. I replied that they were done in celebration of the birth of the new state of Slovenia.

And then came the Brioni talks, where the issue of war and peace was decided.

Practically all the leading politicians from the Balkans and Europe were present on Brioni. We worked on the home front while Milan Kučan, Janez Drnovšek, France Bučar, Lojze Peterle, and Dimitrij Rupel went to the Brioni islands. They had to accept a decision, which was by no means an easy one. The Ministry of Information staff reported from the Brioni on the positions of the Slovenian delegation. Their reports include the speech of General Adić, in which the general threatened Slovenia and asserted that the YPA was able to defeat Slovenia within 10 to 15 days as its units were prepared. The talks were extremely hard but eventually led to the signing of the Brioni Agreement. Some of those not involved were skeptical and critical about the outcome of the talks, and we needed to formulate the key messages with extreme caution and persuade editors that the Brioni Agreement was not an act of betrayal, but a guarantee of a peaceful and effective outcome of a military conflict and sovereignty process.

All the information was broadcast from Cankarjev dom, the location of our press centre. On my frequent visits to the press centre I always tried to be calm and composed. To make the reports more appealing to viewers, my colleagues would bring me the information to the studio as soon as it was delivered, which made us look on top of things. No journalist's question went unanswered. The role of RTV Slovenija in the entire process is historical. We also won the war thanks to the responsiveness, functionality, and professional attitude of our media.

Those were exceptional days – eagerness and cooperation were a constant. And today? Do these qualities still pervade public activities? How do you see Slovenia 20 years later? Can we be proud of its time of independence?

As a member of the European Parliament, I look at Slovenia from the inside and from the outside. From the outside, it appears a relatively successful and wealthy state which has asserted itself in many fields. It successfully completed its Presidency of the EU Council and is doing relatively well economically. Moreover, I believe that the official unemployment figures are incorrect. The unemployment numbers are pushed up by people who have registered with the Employment Service and will continue to be classified as unemployed until they become eligible for retirement, just because they are afraid of what pension reform might bring. Slovenia has a healthy economic growth. From the inside, however, I see it as a state which is too self-absorbed, too contained by its narrow valleys to embrace the horizon, a state which, needlessly, gives in to despair, self-pity, and helplessness instead of searching for constructive solutions. I believe Slovenians live a high quality life, enjoy safety, and stability. There is a certain number of poor people, but few live at risk of poverty as the society's social network

remains strong. There are a lot of young, competent, and qualified people living in Slovenia who could easily find a job outside their home country. In other words, Slovenia is like a small mammal amidst large dinosaurs, agile and flexible.

It is a pity it does not benefit more from these features. My advice to the young would be to transfer the experience gained in Slovenia to other countries and try to make a career abroad. In this way, the young could help Slovenia push its GDP growth to up to 10 percent. However, the Slovenian environment does not encourage such actions; instead, it creates a schizophrenic atmosphere that only worsens the welfare of the society.

As a member of the European Parliament and the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), how do you see the EU and Slovenia's role in it?

As a European Parliament Member, I feel I can be creative, useful, not limited or constrained in any way. I work a lot and efficiently. I am a



member of many committees and I treat my colleagues with responsibility and loyalty, and with very little or no political agenda. I am not determined by the political situation in Slovenia, although I uphold Slovenian and European interests. This allows me to be critical of the situation at home. It is very hard for me to accept that the credit for all that is good goes to those working in Slovenia, whereas the EU takes the blame for all that goes wrong. This is simply not true! Slovenia is also doing well because it uses the euro as its currency. Without the euro, the country would be much weaker, poor even, with a struggling economy. Another thing that is unacceptable is that Slovenia is the only country that will put the pension reform up for a referendum vote. It is political, and more importantly, quasi-political and short-sightedly manipulating to oppose pension reform, and in times like today it can even be termed irresponsible, counter-European, and utterly mischievous!



Middle class and young people's finances hardest hit by recession



Dr Marjan Senjur, a member of the Fiscal Council

The current economic and political situation in Slovenia is rather uncertain. The Desus party is leaving the Government coalition as it does not agree with the pension reform proposed by the Government; the party advocates the benefits of pensioners in particular, whose number has increased substantially over the years. There are around 400,000 old-age pensioners in Slovenia. There have been preparations for referendums on the pension reform, as well as on prevention of undeclared work, and on declassifying state archives.

The economic growth rate in the first quarter of 2011 will not be known until the end of May, but it is already clear that it has been based primarily on exports, with domestic demand remaining at a standstill or even dropping, as domestic investment has not yet recov-

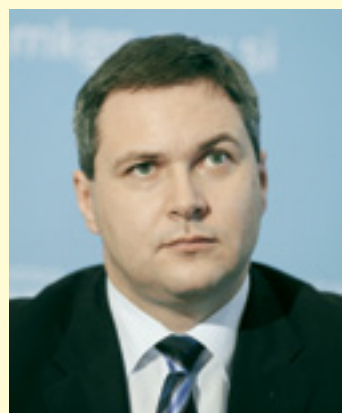
114,000 people registered as unemployed in Slovenia, and this figure seems likely to increase to 116,000 by the end of 2011, mainly due to problems faced by the construction industry and certain market services. A number of large construction companies have gone bankrupt or entered compulsory settlement procedures; the majority of companies with serious liquidity problems are construction and commercial companies.

The number of people employed in the public sector is also decreasing. The Government has announced that it plans to introduce strict measures should the pension reform, which has little public support, be rejected in the referendum. In this case, these measures would affect, in particular, the public sector, social transfers and pensions, which will continue to remain frozen for the next two years. Well before the crisis began, when there was very little publicity about it if any, the public sector and the previous Government signed an agreement on pay growth in the public sector, since public sector pay had lagged behind that of the private sector for years. Now, during the crisis, the public sector requests that this agreement be implemented, which is a difficult, or even impossible, task to accomplish.

The Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES) has begun to implement the law regulating mandatory registration of outstanding liabilities in the multilateral compensation system to tackle the late payment culture. While members of the Chamber of

Craft and Small Business of Slovenia put pressure on the Government – including acts of civil disobedience – to adopt the economic measures that they have been demanding for many years, members of the Chamber of Commerce of Industry of Slovenia, in contrast, objected to mandatory compensation. The attempt to tackle the serious issue of late payments thus turned into a battle of wills between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, whose mandatory membership was abolished during the previous Government's term of office, and the Chamber of Craft and Small Business, whose membership continues to be mandatory.

According to data from AJPES, almost 22,000 debtors took part in the first mandatory compensation, with the total amount of liabilities reported being over 1.5 billion euros. Experts, however, have established that companies are burdened with far higher debts than reported and that some companies deliberately ignored the mandatory registration of their outstanding liabilities. In general, debtors had some difficulty in registering their liabilities in the multilateral compensation system; this was especially the case with companies that had previously not taken part in the voluntary compensation that took place on a monthly basis. This voluntary compensation had a 14–16% success rate. AJPES, however, expects that mandatory compensation will have a 20% success rate. A threshold has also been set for compensation so as to prevent the system from developing into a kind of a barter system.



Minister of Agriculture Dejan Židan

The Government is endeavouring to balance public finance to the greatest possible extent. However, Dr Marjan Senjur, who is also a member of the Fiscal Council, said that in the previous year fiscal policy had been still affected by the recession and could not cover expenditure with fiscal revenue. The public finance deficit was therefore still high and is this year also expected to amount to two billion euros. Dr Senjur says that a public finance deficit that high for three years in a row would be considered a failure and a major problem of public finance policies since it would amount to 40% of GDP. He supports the idea of adopting a special law that would set a ceiling on the state's borrowing at 45% of GDP; this would also include state guarantees. However, he says that 45% of GDP would be the maximum limit and that the real figure would be lower.

In talks with the Government, representatives of economic associations and companies have drawn attention to the fact that salaries are heavily burdened with taxes and social contributions; consequently, important experts in companies cannot be well compensated for their services, and the economy is losing its competitive edge against foreign economies. Due to heavily burdened salaries, Slovenia is also less attractive to foreign investment.

According to a survey conducted among German companies by the Slovenian-German Chamber of Commerce, Slovenia lost 1,200 to 1,500 new well-paid jobs in the last year alone due to an unfavourable invest-

ment environment. Possible investors are also put off by high real estate prices and lengthy procedures for obtaining subsidies. Despite all of this, Slovenia remains a favoured destination for investment by German companies, being ranked third, immediately after Germany itself and Serbia. As many as 64% of the companies surveyed praised Slovenian productivity, and 60% of them praised Slovenian motivation. The German companies that took part in the survey praised the quality of the Slovenian education system, but then criticised the rigid labour legislation and late payment culture, which they assessed as being the worst since similar surveys began to be carried out in 2003.

Austrian companies, in contrast, seem to be more open to investment in Slovenia, since Austria is by far the biggest foreign investor in Slovenia. Almost half of all foreign investment is made by Austrian companies, and they are present in the banking sector, trade, mobile telephone service and some other activities.

While some people in Slovenia advocate the Government filling the state's coffers with new taxes, others draw attention to the fact that Slovenia is losing competitiveness and that the tax administration does not

know how to collect all the taxes. Then again, data show that the tax and contribution burden in Slovenia is somewhat below the EU average. The structure of this burden, however, deviates from the EU average since it is above the average when it comes to labour and consumption and below the average when it comes to capital. The Slovenian Tax Administration is similarly successful in collecting taxes as other EU countries are.

In the 2007–2013 programming period, Slovenia can use 4.2 billion euros of European funds. In the past two years, it has received more funding from European funds than it has contributed. After the first quarter, it is hard to foresee what the situation will be this year, but according to the Ministry of Finance, Slovenia is not drawing on the part of European funds that it has already provided from the state budget. That is why the Government ordered all the ministries to speed up all activities in connection with drawing on cohesion funds. The results of the latest Marketing Monitor survey (Marketing Monitor surveys are conducted in spring and autumn by the Slovenian Marketing Association) show that the recession has seriously affected the middle class and younger people.

This is in contrast to the results of the previous surveys, which suggested that the older and the less well-off were hit hardest by the recession. According to the survey, over two fifths of those surveyed are saving money, although they now save less than they did before the recession hit. More than half of those who are saving money have decided to deposit the money in banks, 18% keep it at home, and 16% have invested it in different funds.

Recently, massive bee deaths, especially in the Prekmurje region, have caused considerable concern. The Ministry of Agriculture has also sent samples for an analysis abroad, and the results confirm that corn seeds treated with illicit pesticides were the main culprit to blame for the bee deaths. In turn, Minister of Agriculture Dejan Židan has imposed a ban on corn seeds treated with the pesticide in question, which has caused a widespread furore among farmers who advocate the building of biogas plants. Minister Židan emphasises that renewable energy sources must be kept within manageable limits and that the land, which Slovenia does not have in abundance, is intended primarily for the production of food for people and animals.



Mateja Malnar Štembal, based on texts by the Brumen Foundation and the National Gallery in Ljubljana, photo: National Gallery archive

“Identity of Slovenia – Designing for the State”

The exhibition “Identity of Slovenia – Designing for the State”, held to mark the 20 years of independence of the Republic of Slovenia, was organized by the country’s central design organization, the Brumen Foundation, with the support and collaboration of the Ministry of Culture and National Gallery. The exhibition, on view at the National Gallery until mid-May 2011, is now moving to Slovenia’s representations abroad to display the country’s design highlights to the foreign public.

The exhibits cover the range of designs elaborated for the young state and its institutions by one of Slovenia’s top designers, Prešeren Award winner Miljenko Licul. Over the course of his artistic career, Licul has created a number of great works of visual culture that are closely related to the identity of the nation and state and are, by all means, the most recognizable visual images of Slovenia’s identity to be created over the 20-year history of Slovenia as a sovereign state. The works Miljenko Licul designed for the state and its institutions have received much international acclaim and attention from professional and lay audiences, and are suitable to commemorate the anniversary as a dignified and innovative presentation of the country, its creative power, and its modern approach.

Working to accommodate the needs of the state administration and the daily life of its citizens, Licul developed a series of sophisticated design solutions, most of which are still used today and could easily stand comparison with the solutions of the most developed countries. Many Licul’s creations feature an interdisciplinary application of Slovenia’s values and the achievements of Slovenes in a variety of fields: culture and arts, sci-

ence, nature and the environment, and society. We should not fail to mention Slovenia’s former currency – the tolar – which has been out of circulation since the 2007 adoption of the euro but the visual design of the tolar banknotes and coins is still fresh in the memory of the nation.

Licul designed the banknotes in collaboration with his colleague Zvone Kosovelj and other authors. The engravings which were the basis for the images (Primož Trubar, Janez Vajkard Valvasor, Jurij Vega, Rihard Jakopič, Jože Plečnik, France Prešeren, and later Ivana Kobilica and Ivan Cankar) were made by painter Rudi Španzel, and the coins were modelled by sculptor Janez Boljka.

According to Licul, the eminent persons depicted on the banknotes were known across Europe, which is of utmost importance. The tools, also featured on the banknotes, portray the relationship between the person and his or her work. As nature is an essential element of life, the tolar coins featured animals. At the time, Licul also mentioned that the designers had to avoid using national symbols, as these were not finalized at the time of the project. It is, however, relevant that the banknotes bear the date 15



January 1992, which was chosen by the Council of the Bank of Slovenia as the date when independent Slovenia received its first international recognition.

Miljenko Licul, working together with Maja Licul and Janez Boljka, also designed Slovenia’s euro coins, recognizable all over Europe for their distinctive design. The visual image of Slovenia’s euro coins was selected in 2005. The outer edge of the coins bears the inscription “Slovenija,” making them easily distinguishable in the home country and elsewhere in Europe.

The national side of the coin depicts a stork, Europe’s largest bird, which also resides in Slovenia. The motif symbolically links Slovenia’s euro coins with the former tolar coins, as it was featured on the Slovenian 20 tolar coin. The 2 cent euro coin design features the Prince’s Stone, a reversed ancient Ionic column which was used in the inauguration ceremonies of Carantanian princes and, later, Carinthian dukes. It is a symbol of Slovenia’s sovereignty.

The Sower, depicted on the 5 cent coin, is embellished with round seeds and stars (these join up with the stars around



the design and the number together reaches 25, the number of EU states at the time of Slovenia’s adoption of the euro). The sower is a frequent motif in paintings; the most famous Slovenian painting featuring this motif was painted by impressionist Ivan Grohar. The 10 cent euro coin design shows a line of text reading “Katedrala svobode” (“Cathedral of Freedom”), and an unrealized plan for the Slovenian Parliament building by architect Jože Plečnik.

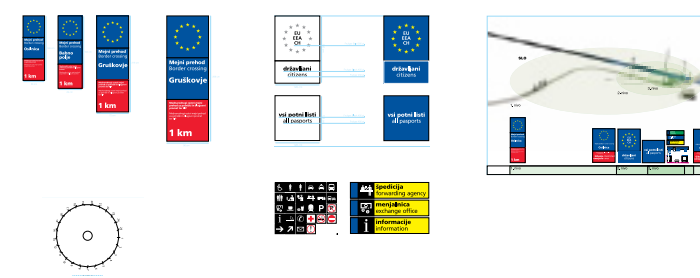
The design for the 20 cent coin depicts a pair of Lipizan horses (representatives of a world-famous horse breed from the Lipica stud farm in Slovenia), and the 50 cent coin features Triglav (Slovenia’s highest mountain) below the constellation of Cancer (Slovenia achieved independence under the zodiac sign of Cancer), and the title of a patriotic song “Oj Triglav moj dom” (“Oh Triglav My Home”). The Slovenian design for the 1 euro coin contains a bust portrait of Primož Trubar and the words “Stati inu obstati” (“To Stand and Withstand”) taken from Trubar’s Sermon on Faith published in the 1550 Catechism, the first book written in the Slovene language. The 2 euro coin features a silhouette of France Prešeren, Slovenia’s greatest poet, and the words

“Žive naj vsi narodi” (“God’s blessing on all nations”) in stylized Prešeren’s handwriting, from the 7th stanza of Zdravljica, Slovenia’s national anthem.

Miljenko Licul also designed a wide range of occasional, commemorative, and collector’s coins and is responsible for the visual image of Slovenia’s biometric passport, ID and health insurance card, and driver’s license. Moreover, Licul drew plans for Slovenia-Croatia Schengen border crossings (unrealized), designed a series of postage stamps, and elaborated numerous solutions for specific, local, and institutional needs.

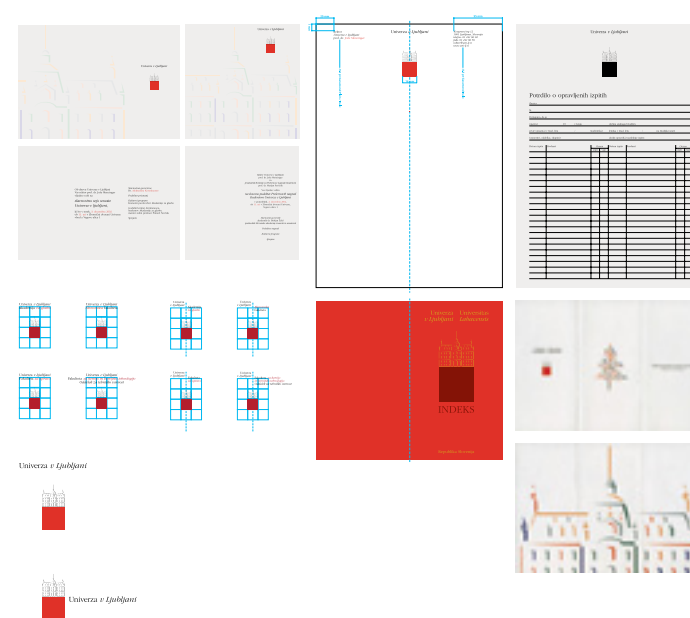
As previously mentioned, the visual design of Slovenian passport bears the signature of Miljenko Licul. In its existing form, the passport was first published in 2001.

The motifs are selected to present, in both content and form, the country’s main cultural and historical information and features in a way that is appealing even to less attentive observers. Slovenia’s new visual identity was also determined by a series of motifs whose visual representation and historical importance confirm that all the relevant elements of the treasure-house of European culture were also present in the Slovenian terri-



tory. These fundamental theme elements include: the flat-earth representation of parts of Slovenia's relief and the Vače situla, whereas the visa pages feature an excerpt from Slovenia's national anthem.

Finally, there is a series of postage stamps entitled "Slovenija – Evropa v malem" ("Slovenia – Europe in Miniature"), which pays tribute to various artifacts from the nation's rich cultural heritage. The motifs, most of them ethnographical, include: the mill on the Mura river; horn sleds; reed-pipes; double hayracks; earthen double bass; a Prekmurje house; the wind pump from Sečovlje Saltpans; a Karst house; the wine press; the Karst basket; the Ribnica horse; skis from Bloke; Easter eggs from Bela Krajina; a shoe-maker's light; a wind-rattle of Prlekija; a beehive; an Easter bundle from Ljubljana; a boot-jack; and a wind mill.

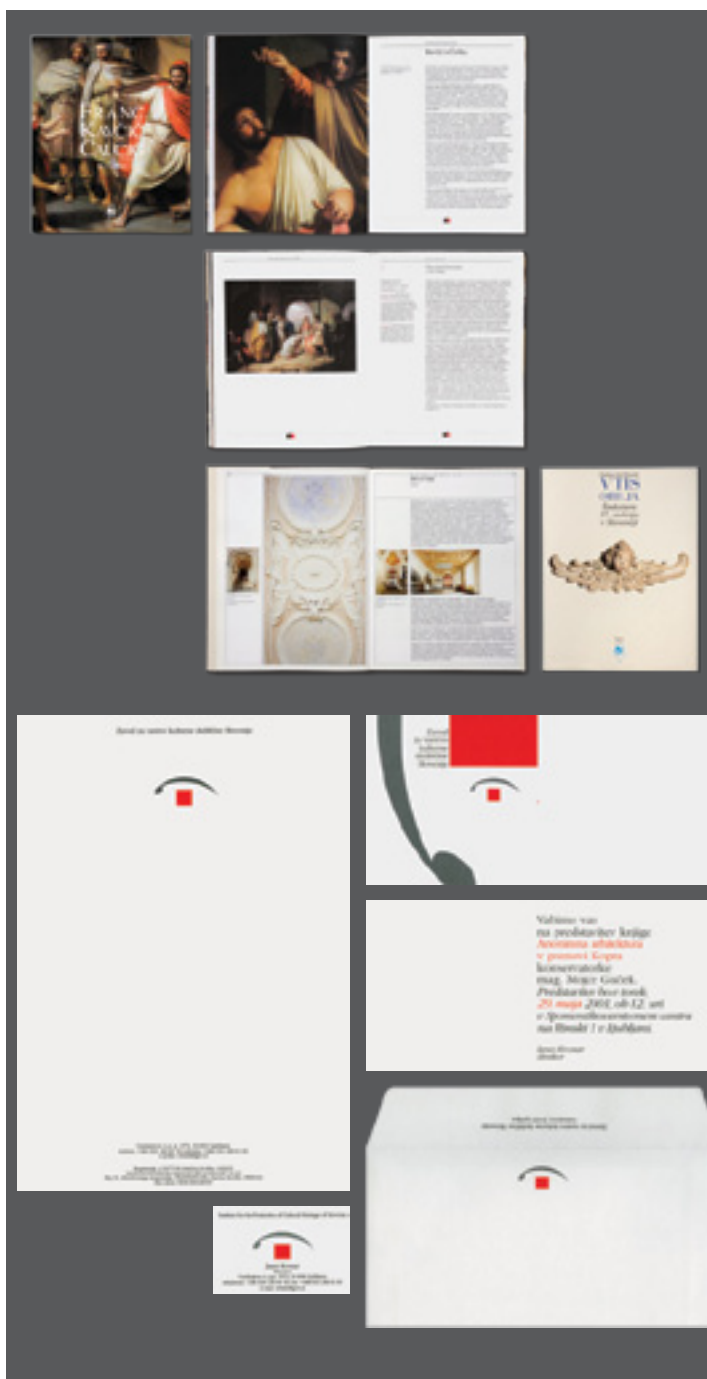


MILJENKO LICUL (1946 – 2009)

The designer Miljenko Licul was born in 1946 in the Istrian town of Vodnjan near Pula, where he attended elementary and secondary school. He moved to Ljubljana in 1964 to study architecture, and never left. In 1972 he started to work as graphic designer for Iskra, Yugoslavia's largest company in the electrical industry of the time. In 1980 Licul founded his first design studio together with several friends, and worked as a freelance designer from then on. In the period 1988–2000 he taught typography at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. For his work, Licul was awarded the highest professional awards, including the 2008 Prešeren Award for his life's work. Miljenko Licul died in 2009.

The work of Miljenko Licul in graphic design is synonymous with superior quality. He was among the authors who renewed the strictly modernist graphic design style of the 1970s with a different, poetic expression without neglecting the content and historical elements of their tasks. He was a member of the generation of designers who successfully converted analogue images into digital form. With Miljenko Licul, the Slovenian graphic design strengthened its international presence and reputation.

Miljenko Licul sees and shows the present-day world, despite its technological advances or because of them, as a space where maximum effort should be used even with regard to the most mundane topics. The fundamental underlying message of Licul's work is that the graphic design of items and texts paves the way, not only for the advance or demise of visual culture but also for the understanding, or misunderstanding, of the world.





Anžej Dežan, Former representative at Eurovision Song Contest

Faust’s Eurovision Song Contest

When the long hand on the clock makes its last circle and the hour on the chosen day in the middle of May approaches nine p.m., I’m always overwhelmed with a feeling of fear, mixed with a little bit of stage fright and expectation. Thus, year after excited year, I anticipate the EBU’s well-known tune, the anchor’s opening words and the first glimpse of the stage that has given me the best moments of my life. A performance at the Eurovision Song Contest is never forgotten. You can never consider it just a job well-done, because it becomes much more than that over the passage of time. If the former Slovenian Eurovision representatives run into each other, it is never long before we start talking about the nostalgia of an irretrievable feeling of fulfilment. To perform at a festival that is being watched by more than one hundred million people has an inherently Faustian quality. I admit I would willingly sell my soul in order to be able to stand on that stage once again. The soothing quality of the human memory, which tends to erase all unpleasant events and keep only the good ones, has helped me when I reach back five years and recall my memories of the events in Athens. When I say “my” I really mean “ours”, because the best memories that I have are inextricably linked with the many members of the Slovenian Eurovision team. Three back-up vocalists, two talented dancers, the head of our team, the producer and editor in chief from RTV Ljubljana, including all three authors of the song, are in all my memories of the three minutes spent on the Eurovision stage. I will always remember the pleasant excitement that I felt when we were leaving together to be received by ambassadors, when we sunbathed at the top of the hotel and practiced dance steps in the hotel lobby. Although I remember almost nothing from the moment when the countdown to the performance on the stage started, the scenes of enthusiasm slowly start to unfold in my mind. I see the flags and hear the cheering that gave me the energy. In London, where I have been studying for the past two years, the attitude to the Eurovision Song Contest is entirely different than in Slovenia. For the most part, it is considered to be a mixture of kitsch, worn-out melodies and cheap dancing steps. Since they have not had any significant success at the contest, they have simply given up. It is easier to make fun of something that you are not good at than do something to change things to the better. Ironically, many London people throw Eurovision parties on that fateful Saturday in May despite it all; in costumes and slightly tipsy, they dance happily from left to right, and back and forth.



Photo: personal archive

Because the Eurovision Song Contest is considered cheap amusement, this year they have totally isolated their representatives, Blue, even before their departure to Germany. Radio stations refused to broadcast their song, which ultimately led to the indignant protests of Blue’s members when they heard that they did not even have the support of their own people. How can they expect then to be well received by Europe? The Slovenian media banish only those who are not successful in the contest, whereas the English evidently consider any appearance at the contest to be the end to a musical career. I watched this year contest with a mixture of enthusiasm over the vocal integrity of our representative and despair over the otherwise poor music offered by the majority of countries. I remember my performance in Athens, where we listened to the CD featuring the contest compositions all the time that year. In Euroclub, which is a club for Eurovision fans and representatives, we cried passionately: “Lejlaaaaa!” and danced to Severina’s song “Štikla”. I still have at least ten of the songs on my iPod and I listen to them regularly. What has changed? Where have we failed? It seems that our desire for modernisation led us to eliminate any quality of the easy listening and tunefulness that used to be the trademarks of this contest. The manner in which the performing musicians communicate with the world has changed as well. Maja Keuc already has thirty thousand fans on her Facebook page. Enthusiastic fans respond to every notice she posts. Her fans even founded a special club favouring her reappearance at the national EMA selection 2012. Despite all this technological euphoria, which does help us to open up to the world, it seems that we still do not fully use the potential of our songs. Our background scenery is always among the worst ones, we have no pyrotechnic effects and we can hardly even afford “the wind in the hair” effect. For a better performance, more money has to be invested in the project. This should be above all in the interest of those who would profit most by hosting the Eurovision Song Contest at the Ljubljana Stadium. Where are all the numerous tourist organisations and state support? Until our representative is also supported by sponsors, it will be hard to surpass the magical seventh place of Nuša Derenda and Darja Švajger. Until that time, the contest will indeed be just a mixture of kitsch and entertainment.



Ida Pedersen, Freelance journalist and translator

A medal but no King?

King Harald V and Queen Sonia of Norway were on a visit to Slovenia on 9 May – Ljubljana Liberation Day – when a small scandal broke out in their country. One day earlier, on 8 May, Norway celebrated its liberation day, which was proclaimed Veterans’ Day last year. It was marked by the presentation of decorations; War Cross with Sword (Krigskorset med Sverd) medals were conferred on Norwegian soldiers serving in Afghanistan for their services. There was nothing unusual about the decorations themselves; what surprised the Norwegians was the unusual fact that the awards were not presented by the King but by the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and that the soldiers were congratulated by Prime Minister Stoltenberg. This gesture by the Prime Minister caused a great stir and his faux pas was widely criticised by the opposition parties and the media, demanding that he apologise to the King.

POSTHUMOUS DECORATION

The Prime Minister defended himself by pointing out that the Government and Parliament made the decision to send troops abroad and so assumed responsibility for it; therefore, they should also honour the soldiers by presenting awards. (One decoration was awarded posthumously and was presented to the deceased’s 10-year-old son.) According to public opinion polls, the Norwegians believe that as Norway is a constitutional monarchy and not a republic, the King and not the Prime Minister or the President of the Parliament is the nation’s representative.

BYE-BYE HABA HABA!

The scandal had only just died down when the Norwegian public suffered yet another shock – their black singer, Stella Mwangi, failed to progress to the Eurosong finals despite the Düsseldorf audience being thrilled by her performance and cheering ‘Norway, Norway’ in unison before the announcement of the last finalist was made. To no avail, she left ‘this crazy circus’ in tears. The Norwegians experienced what we in Slovenia have become accustomed to – wondering and guessing about the jury’s criteria in selecting the winner. I have to admit that this contest never fails to astonish me; for example, I still cannot understand why there were so many excellent songs last year, but Lena still won despite her average performance. My favourites were the Greeks and I was completely engrossed by the Icelandic singer, Hera Björk, who was the most popular performer on the iTunes chart, but ended up in nineteenth place. I experienced last year’s Melodi Grand Prix in Oslo first hand as I hosted the Slovenian group performing at the Eurosong. On the one hand, hosting the event was very tiring, on the other hand, ‘turbo’ parties were organised alongside the contest but I was only able to attend some of them. I accepted an invitation extended by the Serbian Embassy to attend the concert by Goran Bregović, the composer of the competition entry Ovo je Balkan. The hot Balkan rhythms even warmed up my Norwegian husband who comes from the polar Lofoten Islands and we sashayed to the music – unfamiliar to his ear – deep into the night.



Photo: M.J.Pročnik

VAESTVAGØY

Speaking of the Lofoten Islands, I can hardly wait to take a 1 500 km road to the island where he was born and where a weekend-house on a sandy beach awaits us. There, we can admire the ever-changing sea views and colours of the sky from our living-room, paying no attention to the changeable weather on this Atlantic island. In the evening, the sky turns red, orange, violet and pink; you can stay up all night looking towards the western horizon, as there is no sunset. Strictly speaking, not only can you sit through the night and not see a sunset, but also throughout the whole summer. You can only get a good night’s rest when all the bilberries that cover this northern land like a carpet ripen. By then, we are already heading back, leaving behind all these perfect fruits that nobody will pick because these areas are so sparsely populated. Not only is there a lack of people, but there are also very few animals – land animals, at least. There are no bears to feast on the juicy berries, and no moose, reindeer or roe deer, because there are no trees to provide cover. To my pleasant surprise, a reddish fox comes to ‘have lunch’ every day, picking at the leftovers I put behind the house for her. There is not much life on the land, but there is no shortage of animals moving in ‘three dimensions’ – in the air and in the ocean. The Lofoten Islands are a cradle of codfish and a variety of other fishes and marine mammals (including dolphins and whales) and supply the entire world with caviar and cod.

FISH OR PETROLEUM OIL? FISH ON OIL!

Despite already being very rich in petroleum, Norway is still discovering new wells of black gold; in the Lofoten Islands, opinions about new oil platforms vary significantly – the ecosystem is very fragile and this is the spawning ground for cod and other fishes; once the natural balance is destroyed, or an oil spill occurs, we can bid farewell to cod forever. A similar dilemma arose when electricity pylons were planned for construction in the most beautiful Norwegian region of Hardanger, a treasure-trove of fruit trees and natural beauty. It would be similar to Triglav National Park being criss-crossed with electricity pylons. The plan has been opposed not only by nature protectionists but also by famous artists and public figures. The most recent debate focuses on the coastal earwig, a tiny beetle which is causing a change to be made to the planned construction of a road in Alta in the far north of the country. This ‘river sand’ creepy-crawly has been identified as an endangered species and only lives in two or three places in this long and narrow country.

CARNIOLAN BEE

It is hard for me to imagine that a tiny beetle would cause the building of motorways to come to a halt in Slovenia; however, we can start by protecting our valuable bees which may become an endangered species if their ever more frequent killing continues.

Hana Souček Morača, photo: Tihomir Pinter

AN UNFORGETTABLE PAINTBRUSH DANCE



This year, one hundred years have elapsed since the death of one of the greatest Slovenian painters, the impressionist Ivan Grohar, who was born on 16 June 1867 in Sorica and died on 19 April 1911 in Ljubljana.

Impressionism in painting appeared in the 1860s in France, reaching its peak in the 1870s and 1880s and spread across Europe and America later. Slovenian impressionism, as in other countries that imitated the French model, established itself after a certain time lapse.

Its representatives are the first true modern generation of painters in our country. In this context, Ivan Grohar belongs at the very top of Slovenian 20th-century painting. Most of his best-known masterpieces are in the Ljubljana National gallery, while a considerable number of his early works comes from private art collections. Grohar painted devotional motives, landscapes, portraits and scenes of village life. His works combine symbolic subjects depicted through a special technique and his outstanding feeling for colour. During his life he exhibited in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Vienna, Belgrade (he was awarded the order of Saint Sava), Berlin, London, Sofia, Trieste, Warsaw and Krakow. Posthumously, his works were shown in many exhibitions at home and abroad.

On the occasion of the centenary of his death, numerous events will be held in Slovenia. An important event will be the opening of the exhibition of a series of portraits by Grohar at Škofja Loka Castle. The exhibition is a joint project organised by the Ljubljana National gallery and supported by the Ministry of Culture. It brings new findings on the life and work of the artist, in particular concentrating on his portrait painting; Ivan Grohar has otherwise been known to the

public mostly as an impressionist landscape painter. Some portraits are part of the Škofja Loka Museum collection, while the exhibition also includes works from other Slovenian public and private collections. Through this exhibition, the Museum also wishes to mark the 80th birth anniversary of the sculptor Tone Logonder – who sculpted the Ivan Grohar memorial statue – and to take part in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Slovenian independence highlighting the role of culture in strengthening Slovenian national identity.

With a view to marking this mentioned anniversary, the painter's native village of Sorica joined its efforts with the municipalities of Železniki and Škofja Loka, where Grohar did much of his creative work. The objective of the event is to bring the artist and the Slovenian impressionists back to the people. The Municipality of Železniki proclaimed this year as Grohar Year 2011 and has provided for a number of events to celebrate the memory of their famous countryman. At Sorica, the main celebration ceremony dedicated to Grohar will be held on 11 June. On this occasion, numerous artists from Slovenia and abroad will gather to pay homage to the painter of the famous "Sower". The day will also be marked by a social gathering of Slovenian students of painting.

Ivan Grohar never ceased addressing and inviting us to grasp the meaning of his works. He would conjure up the image of the past and give us his insight into the exploration of Creation. The art of painting knows no forgetting. Because this is a medium that resists to the signs of time and generously represents the generations which made it their own.

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS

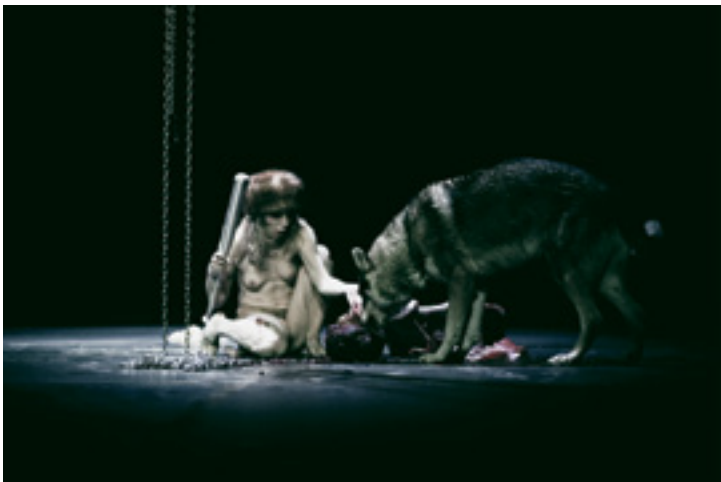


Despite occasional troubles and some minor scandal (such as the dispute between the Festival Programme Director and a well-known art director, when the consequences were allegedly seen on the director's office furniture), the Maribor 2012 Institute leadership has firmly taken the helm and calmed the ship down. Even the stepping down of the renowned Matjaž Pandur as head of the Project Programming Council had no significant negative effect, as he finished most of his work in accordance with the agreement he had concluded with the organisers. We are pleased to inform you that talks on merging the Art Gallery and the Auditorium Centre Maks investment projects are progressing well and that this formula for a solution seems to promise results. Moreover, other special programme teams are busy with their work so that the core of the programme will soon be known. What is more important is that the mayors of all five towns participating in the project have signed the contract on programming and funding. The financial set up is thus more or less complete, providing for realistic planning and firm commitments. Things were put in order just in time for the Maribor 2012 Institute leaders to present their project in Brussels, where it was entered in the competition for the Melina Mercouri International Prize, amounting to EUR 1.5 million. The progress mentioned above allowed the project team to have a clearly defined programme with a sound financial basis free of major problems. The team made a report on meeting the recommendations from the February moni-

toring carried out in Maribor by the experts from Brussels, who expressed some doubts over the dispersion of the programme in five towns. After his return from Brussels, the Programme Director Mitja Čander was in an excellent mood – almost euphoric – since he wrote in the press release for the public that they had actually already won the Prize, since the answers they had provided were consistent and competent, as was pointed out by the members of the commission. The Director-General, Suzana Žilić Fišer, was more prudent, but said that in her view the commission showed a positive attitude and strong support for the project. After a two-month period when it had seemed that developments in the situation and consolidation of programme elements and related personal controversies in the organisational team had pushed the project into deep trouble, the calming of the situation brought about by the confirmation from Brussels is indeed welcome. This proved that the project was on the right path and that its breakdown into individual programme components, which include much broader aspects than merely those linked to investments and performance, was sound, and perhaps even challenging to a degree that Maribor could pave the way for future European capitals of culture in this regard. The Maribor 2012 Project is now facing another important test. The presentation of the programme and of its details, which is due shortly, will be the subject of our next report.

Jože Osterman, photo: archive Exodos Festival

EXODOS AND THE LABYRINTH OF ART



The Exodos Festival, which reached its peak with the performance of Prometheus, landscape 2 by the distinguished Belgian artist Jan Fabre, rounded up a barely believable chain of festival events hosted over two months by the city of Ljubljana. The emphasis was on dance, but Exodos also included other types of art. The festival started with the domestic Gibanica, Plesna Vesna (Spring Forward) supported by the international dance network Aerowaves followed, and the event came to a close with Exodos and Fabre who added their world dimension to the Ljubljana dance scene. This year's Exodos entered a new conceptual approach meaning that in future it will be held biennially. However, the idea is always to concentrate on a world-renowned artist who will invite to Ljubljana guests of his choice and reputation. The chain was started by Fabre (born in 1958 in Antwerp), an innovative and universal art performer whose creations span different areas of art. Fabre is a great provocateur in performance (known for burning bank notes and using the remaining ashes for drawing), a playwright, scriptwriter, philosopher and explorer of the human body through his performance of Prometheus, and the selection of other performing artists produced a "dream edition" of Exodos, as described by the Festival director Nataša Zavolovšek. The audience was offered 30 performances given by more than 200 artists at three leading Ljubljana

venues (Cankarjev Dom, Španski Borci and the Old Power Station). In addition, a special art section known as the Balkan Dance Platform presented its sixth regional review of dance creation in South-eastern Europe. Along with Fabre, other world-renowned names who took part in the festival included the Italian dance group Santasangre with art performances Seigradi and Fanny and Alexander, theatre group Abattoir Fermé, performer and composer Lisbeth Gruwez, writer and director Rodrigo Garcia, visual performer Linda Molenaar, Italian dance expert Virgilio Sieni, director and choreographer Coraline Lemaïson and the avant-garde performer Tim Etchells. The Exodos Festival conceived and opened (on the close of the Ljubljana – World Book Capital project) a park known as the Labyrinth of Art connecting green city areas between the Fužine neighbourhood, the Museum of Architecture and Design and the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic. The park consists of a plantation in the form of a labyrinth with live walls "built" of 287 Canadian hemlock trees planted in the form of primeval labyrinths with a path leading to the centre paved with thoughts of art, walking, books and life. The labyrinth is designed to incite us to quiet thought – so rare in our everyday life – on art and on ourselves.

Hana Souček Morača, photo: Sašo Kovačič

ADRIA 50, YOU ARE CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF

In partnership with Adria Airways, the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia has launched an exhibition entitled "Adria 50, you are cleared for take-off". The Minister of Transport, Dr Patrick Vlačič, opened the exhibition, saying that "the state will always stand by Adria Airways", because this is a resilient company looking for a new business model. The Slovenian air carrier Adria Airways has a rich 50 years of experience in charter and scheduled flights. The history of Adria goes back to 1961, when it was established as a charter company. As a mainly charter carrier, Adria introduced its first regular flight between Ljubljana and Belgrade in 1968, and some of its first flights catered for the conference of non-aligned countries held in Belgrade. In the following years, Adria gradually conquered the markets of tourist flights from Germany, England, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries to airports on the Adriatic coast. In the 1980s, Adria began scheduled flights and became a member of The International Air Transport Association (IATA). Today most of its traffic consists of scheduled flights and a network of routes connecting Ljubljana with more than 25 European cities and providing connections to South-Eastern Europe. The head office is located at Ljubljana Jože Pučnik Airport, and Adria has branch offices in Paris, Moscow, Frankfurt, Zagreb, Zurich and Brussels. With its constantly increasing number

of scheduled flights, Adria became a full member of Star Alliance, a major global air transport association, last year. Cooperation between Adria Airways and the National Museum of Contemporary History started in 2010 with a donation from the former, consisting of more than 400 pieces of aircrew uniforms to the museum. The exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of Adria Airways follows the development of the Slovenian airline, including a presentation of chronology, the aircraft fleet and other information. The photos from the museum archive show all stages of the rich history of Slovenian flying. The common thread of the exhibition is the different Adria uniforms, ranging from the first olive-green women's suits with attractive caps from 1961 to the distinctive turquoise-blue winter coats from 1991. Until 30 September, visitors can walk past an Adria office, peek in the aircraft shed and sit in a genuine cockpit. To bring some realism to the atmosphere of the exhibition, Adria workers contributed many original items used in the past (and some still used today) in the airline's everyday work. The photos inspire us with nostalgia and a yearning to travel. The exhibition is supported by an educational programme showing flight preparations and all the tasks that need to be carried out to ensure safe and comfortable travelling.





Jože Osterman, photo: Bojan Stepančič

SLOVENIAN TOURISM PRESENTS ITSELF IN ZAGREB

The summer tourist season is about to get into full swing, and the Slovenian Tourist Board is already rubbing its hands with glee as the first months of the season pass, yielding good results. The data show that, this year, Slovenian tourism saw between 7 and 9% more guests and overnight stays, with figures indicating an encouraging upward trend for May as well. And all this despite the fact that ski resorts have been complaining about the rather mild winter, which ended abruptly, depriving them of at least fourteen days of good business, and that this year's winter school holidays fell far short of expectations in terms of visitor numbers.

With summer approaching, the Slovenian Tourist Board, which in recent years has proved itself to be a good promoter of Slovenian tourism, organised the 'Days of Slovenian Tourism' in Zagreb. This was an ambitious project as the event was located in Ban Jelačić Square, and all those who matter in the Slovenian tourism industry had stands there offering services and information throughout the day. The event also included performances by various Slovenian musicians. The main concert took place in the evening, featuring 'Sounds of Slovenia', a group of acclaimed musicians from various Slovenian bands, who performed on a large stage set up especially for the occasion. The band is made up of some of the best Slovenian musicians who play in famous Slovenian bands such as Katalena, Jararaja, Magnifico, Kisha, Elevators, and Fake Orchestra, but occasionally join forces to play together under the name of Sounds of Slovenia. Their work comprises high-quality adaptations of Slovenian folk songs and various sounds typical of different Slovenian regions; their most notable performance was that given at the end of Slovenia's EU Presidency in June 2008 in Brussels.

The presentation of the Slovenian tourist offer continued throughout the following day, accompanied by the sounds of Slovenian music and also providing plenty of opportunities for visitors to discover Slovenian cuisine. Slovenia may not have as much of the Adriatic Sea as Croatia, but with its mountains, lakes, and health and ski resorts, it has become an increasingly attractive destination for its neighbours in recent years.



Jože Osterman, Photo: STO

A FILM AND A BOOK ON THE MOST PROMINENT MT. TRIGLAV CLIMB

A month ago, the 5th International Mountain Film Festival closed its door in Ljubljana. The festival is a fine successor to Slovenia's sport film festivals with tradition spreading over several decades. This is particularly true of alpinism, since Slovenians are a nation considerably more "addicted" to this type of sport than most other alpine nations. The first prize was awarded to the French film Voyage au bout de l'hiver, while the audience prize went to the Slovenian film Sfinga.

Sfinga, a Slovenian documentary feature depicts a nearly mythical and surely most demanding part of the Northern Triglav Wall, which was climbed for the first time by home alpinists Ante Mahkota and Peter Ščetinin in 1966. The film focuses on the technically most difficult climb in the Slovenian mountains which is a heavy task even for today's climbers fitted with the latest equipment. Until 1966, the Northern Triglav wall was practically unsolvable riddle for several climbing legends of the previous generations of alpinists who preferred to avoid it, including Joža Čop.

The script was written by Gregor Kresal, undoubtedly the most suitable person, since he climbed the wall in a free solo climb 30 years after the achievement of Mahkota and Ščetinin. Vojko Anzelj was film director, Matej Križnik was director of photography; brothers Anže and Miha Marenče excellently did the parts of two young alpinists. The film shooting began in August last year. Preparations for the film stirred the idea of a reprint of the book Sfinga by Ante Mahkota, which was first published in 1979. The publishing house Didakta issued the reprint on the first showing of the film.

Jože Osterman, Photo: archive BIG

HOW TO GET A GOOD HOUSE?

BIG, Creative Industries Institute, Ljubljana, the activities of which are focused on searching for various new ideas and challenges, particularly with regard to the architecture and design of South-East Europe, organised an architecture conference in mid-March which has now become something of a tradition. The theme of this year is 'New Rules, New Responses'. Discussions at the conference touched upon the current responses to the challenges that architecture faces on a daily basis due to the ever-changing environment. The introductory presentations were given by architects from Denmark (Mikel Frost, CEBRA Studio), the Netherlands (Nanne de Ru, Powerhouse Company, Rotterdam), Spain (Francisco Mangado) and Belgium (Robbrecht en Daem Architecten). An exhibition entitled 'How to Get a Good House' was opened on the platform outside Figovec restaurant in the centre of Ljubljana, while showing short video spots on outstanding architectural solutions in a special presentation. The Institute, which also publishes "Hiša" journal, awarded prizes for the most imaginative ideas in the construction of private houses.



Jože Osterman, Photo: archive ZKD Ljubljana

THE LARGEST EVER GATHERING OF SLOVENIAN EMIGRANTS IN LJUBLJANA

The annual gathering of Slovenian emigrants, usually held at the beginning of July, will take on a whole new significance this year. This year, as we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Slovenia's independence, special attention will be devoted to the gathering of Slovenian emigrants – it will form part of the official programme and will be held in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana.

That is why, on this occasion, the Office for Slovenians Abroad seized the initiative and took on responsibility for a considerable part of the event's organisation. Understandably, however, all three of the associations responsible for separately organising individual gatherings of Slovenian emigrants in the past – who rarely met together despite being in Slovenia almost at the same time – are not excluded from the organisation. This year, the whole event will be taken to an entirely different level, since this year's gathering of Slovenian emigrants, which is to be held on 1 July 2011 under the title of 'Welcome home', will enable all the emigrants to meet together, irrespective of which association hosts and supports them. The event will be held in the city centre, with presentations given by Slovenian associations, the Slovenian media and other Slovenian organisations; there will also be performances by musical, dancing and theatre groups, and a variety of cultural workshops, educational presentations and sports activities. All this will serve to make the emigrants' day in Ljubljana a truly memorable occasion.

The gathering is scheduled to conclude in Prešeren Square with the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, addressing the participants; this will be followed by a cultural programme featuring the best emigrant cultural groups and several Slovenian singing and folk music groups. In the days that follow, emigrants will, as is the custom, disperse around their homeland to visit their relatives and friends.

If anyone from the emigrants' associations or groups, or anyone else, would like to take part in the event but has overlooked the call by the Office for Slovenians Abroad, they can obtain information on how to take part at www.uszs.gov.si or they can contact the Office directly. They will be pleased to respond to any enquiries you may have.





Albert Kos, photo: Mateja J. Potočnik

Peter Florjančič — doyen of Slovenian innovators

Peter Florjančič, the 92-year-old doyen of modern innovations in Slovenia, is convinced that the old Latin saying “No man is a prophet in his homeland” (Nemo propheta in patria) applies to many aspects of life. Florjančič lived abroad for the 55 most creative years of his life; his homeland barely knew of him and his inventions, and even when he was offering his ‘services’ to us, he did not receive particular attention until recently.

Florjančič left his birth place, Bled, during the Second World War, when this part of Slovenia was occupied by Germany and he was afraid of being called up to serve in the German army. He returned to Slovenia at the dawn of the new millennium – not as a rich pensioner but as an indestructibly creative spirit, determined that he would, after many years of absence, continue to work in his homeland with undiminished will and energy, despite his advanced age.

STARTING INNOVATION AND BUSINESS CAREER IN BLEĐ

His life story is amazing and very unusual in all respects. He was born in 1919 in Bled, a picturesque holiday resort town at the Julian Alps foothills in north-western Slovenia, his parents and relatives being the owners of several hotels. Although born into a hotel-owning family, Florjančič did not pursue the family tradition of life in the hotel industry but chose the education and training in the weaving and textile branch instead. Already in the years before World War II, he invented a weaving machine, enabling a weaver to work alone and independently; he opened and managed a weaving mill at Bled, which soon became the selected supplier of the Royal Palace

in Belgrade. His sports achievements contributed significantly to his reputation since Florjančič was a member of a pre-war Yugoslav Olympic team of ski jumpers. Even at a young age, Florjančič had a lively and restless spirit, with a keen technical and business acumen, which explains why his domestic provincial environment, particular during the German occupation, became too suffocating for him and not sufficiently inspiring for his capabilities to develop; his decision to venture abroad was also due to the increasingly dangerous circumstances in which he found himself. He took a skiing holiday in Kitzbühel, Austria, and from there defected to neutral Switzerland. To cover his escape, he made it look like he had died in an avalanche.

A RISE TO MONTE CARLO'S HIGH SOCIETY AND HIS SUCCESSFUL CAREER PURSUED ABROAD

In Switzerland, Peter Florjančič soon established a reputation by inventing a weaving machine, suitable for use by disabled people. The machine was designed and developed in cooperation with a Croatian Jew and Florjančič received a third of the total profits earned by this invention. In the post-war period,

he lived in Switzerland as a successful entrepreneur. Destiny brought him to Monte Carlo and his short vacations there turned into a longer stay of thirteen years. In Monte Carlo, the innovative spirit of Florjančič was given a new impetus; Florjančič found himself in the middle of the cosmopolitan society that accepted him in its circles, thereby enabling him to make a number of acquaintances with wealthy and reputable people, to convince them about his work and to make them willing to support his projects. A member of the Egyptian Royal Family, Hussein Ibrahim Pasha, and the former Egyptian king Farouk are said to have been his most generous patrons; he met and spent time with all kinds of celebrities from the world of contemporary politics, fashion, film, painting, among whom were Winston Churchill, Coco Chanel, Orson Wells, Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayward, Salvador Dali and Frank Sinatra. Such an environment, which is, besides famous people, swarmed with scoundrels, fraudsters and gangsters of all types, made him feel like a fish in water; in all respects, he was able to seize the opportunities that were made available to him by entering the world of high society.





During his years in Monte Carlo, he came up with two innovations which brought him the most glory and money: a perfume atomiser and plastic slide frames. He cashed in on both of his innovations very well. However, he had less luck with some other innovations that he conceived successfully but did not manage to develop the products into a final stage. These are mainly safety airbag for cars and a plastic zipper; the innovations were his original ideas but he failed to pursue and develop them all the way through to the manufacturing stage.

A RETURN TO BLEĐ AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 'PETER FLORJANČIČ' INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

After bidding farewell to Monte Carlo, Florjančič made some stop-overs in Europe and America, his longest stay being in the neighbouring Villach in Austria and several places in Germany; however, most of the time he spent travelling. He describes his life as having had five citizenships, owned forty-three cars and spent twenty-five years in hotels, four years in cars, three years in trains, a year and a half on ships and one year on planes.

He would not settle in Bled until 1998 and his return was not to enjoy the retirement he deserved, but to continue his work with undiminished energy. Bled was the place where he established Inovacijsko razvojni zavod 'Peter Florjančič' ('Peter Florjančič' Innovation Development Institute) and under his auspices he created a team of temporary and permanent associates who help him to develop his ideas. Despite his age, he never runs out of ideas that attract the interest of Slovenian companies, in particular smaller ones; his experience with larger enterprises are not encouraging since they have not shown any interest in his innovations and have even turned them down. This happened when he offered his innovation of plastic snow chains to a chain factory in Lesce near Bled and, subsequently, successfully sold the innovation to Germany. Nowadays, numerous companies, especially family-run companies, open their doors widely to him, since for many of these enterprises innovations are the only possible way of surviving fierce global competition. Florjančič thus managed to obtain a producer for his fitness bed 'sleepfit', while he cooperated with other companies in developing and creating 'aqua-sleepfit therapy'; his prototype of a water fitness device, appropriate for use on lakes and the sea, has also been prepared. Recently, his licence agreement with the paper tissue producer Paloma



has attracted the most publicity; based on his innovation, Paloma will produce a patented paper product used as an accessory for serving food to customers. The product is a napkin with added value, which is to help customers feel better while reducing the costs of caterers; this innovation is expected to increase Paloma's total revenues by one tenth.

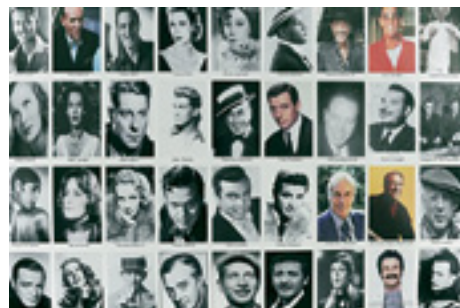
PETER FLORJANČIČ'S INNOVATION ACHIEVEMENTS HAVE BECOME FAMOUS IN SLOVENIA AND ABROAD

His aforementioned innovations and inventions round up, but certainly do not conclude, Peter Florjančič's seven-decade long career in the field of innovations. The total number of Peter Florjančič's innovations and inventions hovers around 400, only a tenth of which have become commercially viable. Florjančič himself admits that the idea of each innovation, no matter how promising, is best abandoned if in one year the right market cannot be identified.

As already mentioned, nowadays Florjančič is no longer an unknown figure; in recent years, several articles about him have been published along with a number of interviews and, last but not least, his life and work were also reported by BBC News. The rich and exciting life and career of Peter Florjančič have been documented in a film made by the director, Karpo Godina, entitled 'The Story of Mr. P.F.'; the film was shot in 2002 and is available on DVD. Furthermore, his life and work were also disclosed by writer Edo Marinček in his books Skok v smetano (Jump in the Cream) and Ideja za milijon (Idea for a Million), which were written on the basis of a collection of material from Florjančič's talks and memories.

THE LIFETIME AND CREATIVE CREDO OF PETER FLORJANČIČ

Peter Florjančič remains in good and creative shape despite his 90 years; his spirit is vivid and penetrating, his health is good, with the exception of his eye sight that has almost failed him. Nevertheless, he compensates for his loss of sight with a reliable memory, and, if necessary, by using modern information technologies by means of which his assistant and co-worker Tanja provides him with any necessary data, designs his ideas, and acts generally as his 'right hand man'. Florjančič believes that the secret behind his long, lively and often adventurous life is his untamed and curious nature, his tendency to enjoy and focus on egocentrism which he is not at all ashamed of; his 'petercentrism', as he calls it, has been a guide to his long life which, as he himself says, has never lacked ticklish and erotic adventures – with no destructive effect on his long-term marriage and family happiness. His life stance, bringing him happiness, recognition and success all of his life, would be most appropriately described by the French equivalent: joie de vivre.



Polonca Štritof, photo: Nenad Vujaklija, Žiga Šmidovnik

Strengthening environmental awareness in Slovenia and uniting people’s hearts through waste paper

Following the very successful ‘Let’s Clean Slovenia in One Day!’ campaign, the Ecologists without Borders Association started a new nationwide campaign this spring. The project entitled ‘Old paper for new hope’ enabled every Slovenian citizen to contribute to a better and more just world. Slovenia was engaged in collecting waste paper for charity purposes. The aims of the project were to encourage young people to actively participate in society, to raise the level of awareness of proper waste handling, and to encourage a sense of compassion for other people, near and far.



In February, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, enterprises and public organisations were invited to participate in the campaign. The campaign itself was carried out throughout the month of April; the Dinos company provided all 372 participating organisations with a free waste paper container and the transportation of collected waste paper. All funds raised through collecting paper were donated to charity – half of the total amount for people in need in Slovenia and half for a youth centre for children with special needs in Africa. The ELA (the Association for Education, Literacy and Art) will use the funds donated to establish a centre in Malawi and commence an education programme for teachers and communities focusing on the special needs of children. The employees’ core activities will entail work carried out with children with special needs, learning assistance and extra-curricular activities for these children, enabling them to complete primary education. Volunteers from Slovenia and other countries will offer their knowledge and energy in return for a rich cultural experience.

A special contest was organised within auspices of the project and forty-five schools and kindergartens participated. Young people submitted their proposals as to who should receive half of the amount raised through the waste paper collected; on 12 May, a commission will select the best proposal and its author will be rewarded with the chance to attend a concert of his/her choice. The same reward will be given to the institution which will collect the largest quantity of waste paper. Thus far, as much as 380 tons of waste paper has been collected. The Ecologists without Borders Association wants to collect another hundred tons of waste paper by the time the campaign comes to an end on 16 May. The project website displays the amount of waste paper collected, a location map of waste paper containers, all promotion materials and other information.

In designing the project, the organisers faced up to some facts. Paper should be recycled in order to preserve forests, save energy and cut greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. Recycled paper is proven to be more environmentally friendly than new paper. Recycling reduces the need for the use of raw materials (wood and water) and energy, and requires less or practically no chemicals and substantially lowers CO2 emissions. There has been a steady upward trend in paper consumption in Slovenia and throughout the world; since 1950, global production has increased eight-fold, i.e. from 50 million tons to approximately 400 million tons. In Europe, the average annual consumption of paper per capita is 220 kg; in Slovenia, this amounted to 185 kg per individual in 2010. So far, Slovenia has not been particularly successful in municipal waste separation since as much as 70 per cent of it is disposed into landfills. On the other hand, waste paper has been collected separately for at least 15 years and positive results can be seen; data on the collected waste

paper averages for Europe and Slovenia are 66 and 46 per cent respectively. This shows that paper is obviously not thrown away with other waste. We know how to collect paper separately; therefore, there should be no reason why this practice cannot be extended to other waste.

Despite Slovenia’s long tradition of collecting waste paper, current trends indicate a decline caused by low waste paper prices, but the ‘Old paper for new hope’ action has succeeded in engaging the largest number of organisations throughout Slovenia to date. This will mean that more paper is collected, provide for the preservation of forest and deliver more water and energy savings than ever before, thus allowing for more generous donations. If each of 30 000 invited institutions would collect 300 kg, as much as 9 000 tons of waste paper would be collected. This would preserve 8 000 tons of wood, 58.8 GWh of electric energy, enough to cover the annual consumption of 15 000 households, save almost 300 million litres of water and mean a donation in the amount of EUR 500 000 could be made. The project has a social component which is aimed at encouraging a sense of solidarity and commitment. Adults frequently lack these qualities. Nowadays, this kind of solidarity is precious because poverty and distress are on the rise. The gap between the poor and the rich has widened in Slovenia and around the world; the world’s 225 richest individuals have a combined wealth of over US\$ 1 trillion, which is equal to the annual income of the entire poorer half of the world’s population. Until 2008, Slovenia was not among the countries with a wide gap between rich and poor; however, this has changed since 2010 and the biggest difference now stands at 37 : 1. In Slovenia, poverty is taking on an ever more brutal face; it has started to raise its head among the employed who cannot afford to take care of themselves and their families. Ensuring the welfare of the world’s human population while preserving sustainable living conditions for future generations must be identified as the greatest challenge of our civilisation. It would be reasonable to reallocate wealth. ‘Old paper for new hope’ gives the Slovenian youth a chance to act responsibly, to set an example and serve as a clear reminder to those who could and should contribute a bit more in their duty to solve this global issue.

The project’s ambassador, Dr Manca Košir, summarised the importance of the joint efforts made by all the partners: “I love life. It is at its most gloriously luxuriant where there are trees. Using paper carelessly and excessively, throwing it away and not recycling it will bring death to trees. By collecting waste paper, thinking about nature protection and opening our hearts to good deeds, one draws a map of compassion and servitude to humanity. It is with great joy that I am the ambassador of light, for I know that in these difficult times it is more important than ever to EMANATE HOPE. And, hurray, that is what this campaign does! Let us light the lights of hope and overcome the darkness, join and entwine as ONE to preserve life and a better world. Not I – WE is our path. Together we can make a difference!”



Miša Čermak, photo: Borut Peterlin

Jurij Gustinčič

a legend of Slovenian journalism

This year in August, Jurij Gustinčič will reach ninety years of age; he has been in journalism for seventy years. He became a professional journalist in 1951 when he took a job with the Belgrade newspaper, Politika, and worked twenty-four years as its permanent foreign correspondent: working nine years in London, fourteen in New York, and sending reports from a burning Jerusalem and an occupied Prague.

In 1974, the Washington Post described him as a star of Yugoslav journalism when he dared to foretell the downfall of President Nixon. Through his writing, he marked some of the most significant events of 20th century. In the 1980s, he continued his career at what was then TV Ljubljana and also remained a journalist after his retirement in 1985. He wrote articles for Vreme of Belgrade and Slobodna Dalmacija of Split and currently appears as a commentator for the RTV Slovenija

and the news magazine Mladina. “Once a journalist, always a journalist,” has been his credo to the present day. It is hard to say that writing was something he dreamt of from the cradle. He acquired the broadness of his mind and the keenness of intellect that have significantly marked his journalism through his family and life itself. His ability to tolerate other opinions, so typical of him, was the influence of his father. “I was born in a communist first gen-

eration family, that is to say the one who went to prison and not the generation who took power later on. My father, Dragotin Gustinčič, an engineer, was the founder of the Slovenian Communist Party. He taught me to be tolerant towards the opinion of other people which, inter alia, was not a distinctive trait of communist regimes. “When I was fifteen, he brought me the Bible and told me to read it through. At that time, we were already in Russia. In addition, he also gave me a book by the

Austrian socialist Karl Kautsky, which dealt with the Bible. Thus, I was given an example of a Marxist explanation, but that was not so important. My father wanted me to know everything. As a result, I started to slowly move from the extreme outer line, which was my starting point, toward the centre. “All my life, I have gone through the process of moving from the extremes toward the centre. However, I am no extremist in any meaning of the word, but I haven’t reached the centre yet. For example: I have nothing against capitalism but, most surely, I am opposed to turbocapitalism. I am afraid that in the end I will get stuck somewhere in between and that I will never reach the centre”.

TURBULENT YOUTH

He was born in Trieste, but his family fled to Idrija. He spent his childhood in Vienna and Ljubljana, where he finished elementary school and was enrolled in the Ledina secondary. At eleven years of age he, his younger brother and his mother Ana (sister of the Slovenian writer Danilo Lokar) moved to be with his father Dragotin, who was living in exile in Moscow. He was one of the co-founders of the Slovenian communist movement but became its victim in the post-war period (he was Dean of

the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana, but was imprisoned for having criticised the party leadership in a letter written to Edvard Kardelj. A couple of months before the break with Stalin, he was arrested and sent to the prison camp of Goli Otok). “My father was a strange man. He was a dedicated communist of the first generation of communists who never thought of having a position with a high status. He had always repeated to me: ‘Jurij, you have to say only what you really think’”. When in Moscow, his father sent him to a German school (before Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union), since he was convinced that German was the language of the revolution in Europe. “Later, he realized that his forecasts would not come true, but I learned the German language well. My father then enrolled me in a Russian secondary school. Thus, I was able to master both languages.” Along with these two languages, Jurij Gustinčič mastered English and Serbian, which he used in writing for many years. In Moscow, he enrolled in university to study history, but had to retreat with his colleagues to Turkmenistan when the German army approached Moscow in 1941. Later, he was sent by the Russian authorities to Tbilisi, Georgia, where he ran the Slovenian radio station for a year

and a half. Three years later, he joined the Yugoslav brigade organised within the Red Army and took part in combat for the liberation of Serbia. “I am a lucky man”, are his words when he recalls that time, “I survived Čačak, where more than half of my unit died during a single German counter-attack; while fleeing across a field along the Morava River, we were swept away by their machine-gun fire”. After the war, Jurij Gustinčič started to work in the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs but returned to Moscow in 1946 to finish his studies of history; however, this was interrupted due to the dispute with Stalin. Following his return to Belgrade (“I was advised to stay there briefly; however, I stayed there for quite a long time.”), he was head of Agitprop (department of foreign political propaganda) in the Federal Secretariat of Information. “In 1948, even ideological differences seemed to have disappeared for a short time. I had a very rich aunt who disapproved of the process of nationalisation and disliked the new regime, but in 1948 she said, ‘Tito, yes, he is a great guy!’”

JOURNALISM FOR EVER

Since 1951, he has completely devoted himself to journalism. In his words, he



“It is not true that a small country cannot live well. However, in order to do so, it needs to have very ingenious politics, capable of self-containment”.

never felt that there was a possibility for him to have a political career.

“In the period following my return from the Soviet Union and bearing the family name Gustinčič, I was thought of by the authorities as someone with not quite a right mind. I myself, as well, never felt inclined to do purely political things. I spent some time among political bureaucrats and I must admit that I was glad when I became a journalist. I have never regretted this. I am a pure journalist”.

He began to write newspaper columns in the form of stories in Politika in Belgrade. “My career was very difficult. After the end of WW2, I joined the newspaper, but I had not mastered the Serbian language. I think that I managed to write my first successful text soon after I entered the editorial offices of Politika, which at the time was considered to be a half-opposition newspaper. I immediately started writing editorials and publishing front page articles, although my Serbo-Croatian was not good. In the first months, I wrote with difficulty; my language was frequently and heavily corrected, but then I wrote something that had a witty ending. Next morning, my editor-in-chief gave me a friendly hug”.

Jurij Gustinčič is very proud of the progress he had made over the years, which had earned him the reputation as of a good Serbian language stylist: “I am very proud of this”.

In his view, the secret of a good text lies not so much in its subject but rather in how it is written; moreover, he was lucky to have shared his office with the renowned journalist Predrag Milojević, whose style was outstandingly original.

“I learned a lot from him. His models in writing were the German poet Heine (‘He had that inner distance toward his own nation.’) and English journalism.

“When writing, I always try to imagine the person or a politician I write about in as human terms as possible. Man as such has always been the centre of my interest, a starting point of my writing. This is the way I used to write about American and English politicians.”

MASTER OF HIS OWN WORK

He has always written about foreign policy. In critical years, he wrote commentaries on the non-alignment movement, expressing a view that it would perhaps be better consider Western Europe; he wrote about Russian communism and was of the opinion that it prejudiced healthy international relations (he was sanctioned as a result of such view). He always knew

how to tell the essential – most often between the lines – without insults; on many occasions, he was ready to be personally accountable for his words, regardless of consequences it might bring.

For many years he worked as a foreign correspondent. In this, he argues that the journalist’s work abroad can contribute to understanding a given milieu but can not considerably influence the opinion his/her country has on it. As to the years he spent in London (nine) and New York (fourteen) while perfecting his English language and in journalism as a profession, he considers them to be too long for a journalist.

“It can happen very easily that a journalist adapts himself to the country he writes about and, in this case, either writes about it with too much emotion and excessive sympathy or in quite opposite terms. Both situations can be overcome by setting oneself a limit. I failed to do so in London and New York; I stayed for too long. I felt fine, but from the journalist’s point of view, this was not the best solution”.

He was known abroad and all around the world; his name appeared on the front page of Washington Post, where it was written that Politika’s ‘star journalist’ Jurij Gustinčič had been criticised for his excessive flattering of the West, which referred to his writing about the Watergate affair.

“We received warnings to be cautious in writing about Nixon, as he allegedly was to win (another election), and that as a resentful person he would surely bear a grudge against us. Six months before his downfall, I held the view that he would lose – which actually happened – and I insisted on my writing as such.”

And he managed to remain upright and faithful to himself; he only wanted to be the master of his own work and of his texts (“I never wished to give orders to people, that is why I never had the position of editor”). And he is proud of this uprightness, that of a Slovenian who through his knowledge has helped broaden international and national horizons for us.

“I felt the most Slovenian only when I was very far away from Slovenia. But I always felt Slovenia in me. We are such a family – we come from Primorska, I read Cankar in Russia...Now in Slovenia, I feel less enthusiastic as a Slovenian”.

ALWAYS A JOURNALIST

He retired before the course of events in Yugoslavia turned serious, but never retired in terms of journalism – despite the fact that he had to recreate in his memory

the secrets of his mother’s tongue. In his words, he had not heard Slovenian for many years, except when he was home.

“In 1941, when my parents divorced, I had no possibility of getting in touch with my native language. I spoke Slovenian in my inner self. I ordered myself to speak Slovenian. Such was my situation during childhood, but also after I came to Belgrade when I had to be careful about the language, since I married a Serbian woman. Again, Slovenian became my inner language.

“And it remained so for all my life; the only trouble was that I had difficulties in

expressing myself as a journalist. When I started to intensively cooperate with my homeland and to publish my columns in Razgledi, I had troubles with my language. Now, after so many years I admit that I wrote those columns in Serbian, since at that time I felt more familiar with it. Ms Majda Meglič of our daily Delo made excellent translations of my columns, so much so that sometimes they were even better than the originals. Such was the situation when I also started to write for Mladina. I could rely on an excellent translator. But all of a sudden, a miracle happened. I once sat at my computer to

write an article. In the middle of the text I was astonished by the fact that the text was actually written in Slovenian. At that moment, I said to myself that I have to take a decision. Actually, I started to write articles in my mother tongue only in the last few years. However, whatever the language he uses, it is clear and understandable.”

Jurij Gustinčič is a man who would not dwell on his personal details; what we do know is that his family was with him on his travels around the world as a journalist; that his wife, with whom he had been married for fifty years, died of cancer

some years ago; that his son speaks excellent Slovenian, despite having spent most of his life abroad. And that he has loved cooking ever since and, of course, that he loves classical music, particularly Mozart. And this is more than enough, since he writes and tells most of what he thinks and knows – so that he is well heard and that his words remain in time, space and with people.



ADRIATIC BASKETBALL LEAGUE POISED TO BECOME SOUTH-EUROPEAN LEAGUE ??

The newly built Stožice Stadium, the pride of Slovenian sports, hosted the final game of the NLB Adriatic League. This is the fourth final to be held in Ljubljana following the 2002, 2003 and 2008 finals, when the best basketball players of this league competed for the Adriatic League title in the legendary Tivoli Hall.



This year's competition was of a very high standard and the following four basketball teams successfully competed amongst the best: Olimpija (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Krka (Novo mesto, Slovenia), Partizan (Serbia) and Budućnost (Montenegro). This highly regarded NLB basketball competition took place at the Stožice Stadium, with 25 000 spectators visiting over a two-day period. The semi-final games concluded in line with expectations, with Partizan defeating the champions of Montenegro, Budućnost from Podgorica, by a score of 62:58, with Olimpija defeating Krka from Novo mesto by a score of 67:57.

During an enthralling final, top-level European basketball was demonstrated with the game of two teams that also played in the play-off of the European Champion League this year. Partizan was luckier and in an extremely exciting finish won by a score of 77:74. The host team was disappointed, but victory in a great final can only go to one team – the best one. The Serbian champions played with passion; the team's centres played particularly well and the ball kept finding its way into Olimpija's basket. The best player in the final was the American, Curtic Jerrelis, who scored 20

points. He was followed by the Serbian, Dušan Kecman, the Australian, Nathan Jawai, and another American, James Gist. During the game, Olimpija lagged behind Partizan by only a few points but, in the closing minutes, bad luck reared its head with Olimpija's long-distance shooting lacked precision.

The players in Olimpija's team were as follows: Ilijevski, Boisa, Gregory, Jagodnik, Šermadini, Markota, Ožbolt, Udrih, Bertans and Anagnonye.

Partizan have won the NLB League title five times in a row since 2007. The 2007 final was in Belgrade and since then the Serbian champions have been unbeaten.

NLB LEAGUE CHAMPIONS TO DATE:

- 5 – Partizan (Belgrade, Serbia) – 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011
- 2 – Železnik (Belgrade, Serbia) – 2004 and 2006
- 1 – Olimpija (Ljubljana, Slovenia) – 2002
- Zadar (Croatia) 2003
- Hemofarm (Vršac, Serbia) 2005

The NLB League has a regional character. In this league, the best basketball teams from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Czech Republic and Israel (Maccabi played in 2003) compete. In the future, it would be a great challenge to also include Italian clubs, since with the inclusion of teams from Italy, the Adriatic League would be one of the strongest regional basketball leagues in Europe and a real South-European basketball league.

TOP HOCKEY PERFORMANCE

The seventy-fifth competition of the world's best ice-hockey teams, fighting for the title of world champions, took place in Slovakia. For two weeks, Bratislava and Košice hosted the 16 best teams in the world. Despite the absence of many top players who competed in the finals for the NHL Stanley Cup, we had the chance to see the most balanced world championship so far, which was full of surprises.



The Slovenian team played in the strongest pre-contest group, together with Slovakia, Russia and Germany. 'The Lynxes' played well, but nevertheless lost all three matches. After leading against the Slovaks by a score of 1:0 they were close to success, but ultimately lost against the Russian national team which has racked up 25 world championships thus far; having maintained a tied score (4:4) until the last five minutes, they eventually succumbed to the stars of the NHL league. In playing against Germany – the first surprise of the

championship – the Lynxes made it to the penalty shootout which they lost to the Germans. The play-off group, which besides Austria also included Slovenia, included two surprising participants: Latvia and Belarus – two teams that belong in the upper echelons of world hockey. After the spectacular victory against Latvia, Slovenia lost against Austria and Belarus, and finally ended up in sixteenth place in the championship, thereby dropping out from the world elite hockey league.

The Congress of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) has decided that the League I championship (formerly known as Group B) with six national teams (Slovenia, Great Britain, Japan, Ukraine, Hungary and Austria) will take place from 15–21 April 2012 in Ljubljana. As a result, the newly built Stožice Arena will host those teams striving to retain their place among the world's elite. Will Slovenia succeed one again – in the presence of their home support – to rank among the world elite? Thus far, Slovenia has played among the best on six occasions, but only twice managed to stay in the elite league. Slovenia's matches this year were quite encouraging as the Lynxes proved a match for Slovakia, Russia and Germany, despite the fact that, being rather understaffed, they played without their first-choice attacking players: Urbas, Kopitar and Muršak. The absence of these exceptional players from the NHL league has left a huge gap in our team, led for the first time at the World Cup by Matjaž Kopitar (the father of Anže Kopitar, one of the world's best ice-hockey players). Therefore, after falling out of the elite league, Slovenia can expect to see better times – hopefully in time for next year in Ljubljana.

SLOVENIA'S SCORES:

Slovenia : Slovakia 1:3
Slovenia : Russia 4:6
Slovenia : Germany 2:3
Slovenia : Latvia 5:2
Slovenia : Austria 2:3
Slovenia : Belarus 1:7

THE PLAYERS IN SLOVENIA'S TEAM WERE AS FOLLOWS:

A. Hočevar, Kristan, Kranjc, Kovačević, Kužnik, Gregorc, Pavlin, Pretnar, Tavželj, Robar, Dervarič, M. Rodman, D. Rodman, T.Razingar, Tičar, Jeglič, Sabolič, Šivic, Hebar, B. Goličič, Ž. Pance, M. Hočevar, Pajič, and Ankerst.



Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Robert Merzel

DISHES FOR KINGS AND PRESIDENTS

At Brdo Castle, the Slovenian protocol venue, its chef, Robert Merzel, and his staff have long been meeting the demanding gourmet wishes of high-ranking guests, including presidents, ministers, kings and queens. For a dish to be tasty, one must put his heart and soul into it, take the changing seasons into consideration and, from time to time, supplement old recipes with modern ideas.



Robert Merzel and his staff have long been meeting the demanding gourmet wishes of high-ranking guests.



Those dishes that smell of Slovenia have a juicy and flavoursome feel, but also follow modern culinary procedures. These may include slow baking, marinating meat without salt in order to preserve water and not lose meat juice, or slightly different ingredients. It is important not to overlook the season, to consider the colour of the food, to follow the rule forbidding the repetition of methods used, that is to say not to prepare fish and meat in a same way, such as, for example, boiling both; it is equally important to serve appropriate side dishes, apply appropriate thermal processing, use less fat, use appropriate oils, prepare sauces without the use of concentrates, etc. We tend to forget that cooks are only human and behave as such – all flaws included. Good cooking requires a lot of emotion, says Merzel; if one is in a bad mood, one's cooking will not be as good and this will be reflected in the quality of the dishes. It is also important that the working atmosphere is conducive to making every effort to cook well and to feel, think and create dishes.

And what was on the menu at the dinner held in honour of the Norwegian royal couple on their recent visit to Slovenia? A creamy cheese dumpling with sautéed vegetables on rocket with olive bread, smoked trout fillet with horseradish, spelt risotto and young spinach, fillet of beef au gratin with leek štrukelj (rolled dumplings) and carrot purée, velvety chocolate cake with caramel sauce flavoured with mint and coffee with pralines. Six cooks prepared food for sixty-four guests, who were accompanied by fifteen others. 'The food was served to the guests from plates by sixteen waiters, with each attending to four guests. Our waiters have the knowledge to answer the guests' questions regarding food; you know, we would

cut a poor figure if a waiter does not know the answer to a guest's question. This casts a shadow on our reputation. We are trying to work well despite public salaries not being amongst the highest. I am proud to say that there is a close bond between our waiters and cooks; we work together in a friendly atmosphere, which is vital in maintaining high standards. Our waiters are rarely stumped for an answer because they are well acquainted with the dishes they serve. All this results from good interpersonal relations.'

They also appear as a homogeneous and unified group before the guests. All sixteen waiters at the gala dinner held in honour of the Norwegian royal couple moved away and towards guests simultaneously. They managed to do so by exchanging glances before every move they made. When the guests are eating, they leave the hall together and all at once, wine is poured simultaneously, bread is taken away and all plates are removed at the same time – everything is done in a synchronised manner, like dancing on water. This behaviour contributes to the sophisticated level of service appropriate for the most important guests. How do they prepare dishes? 'If a guest stays at Brdo for several days, menus are adjusted to avoid repetition. No efforts are spared in preparing the best dishes; unfortunately, this is not always possible because public procurement rules must be followed, which means that we have to find the best quality ingredients for the lowest price. Food is alive and it must be of high quality; if it is not at the required standard, we pay the price because we are no wizards,' explains Merzel. 'Poor ingredients cannot make a good meal. By all means, it would be useful to change the current rules.'



How do they devise a menu? First, they receive an order from State Protocol as well as information about the event, the guests, their number and the number of meals to be eaten during their stay; at times, a price is also indicated – a limit which is not to be exceeded. ‘We do our best to serve Slovenian food – light and balanced thematic dishes, such as, for instance, during the asparagus season. If guests only stay for one meal, the menu is devised rather quickly; if they stay for several days, we do our best to offer something new – also because this presents a challenge. The President hosts the majority of state visits and is often here; it is also for his sake that menus are changed and particular requests met.’ When a menu is devised, the Protocol Service gives its approval, sommeliers pair the perfect wine with every dish, then they all sit together to create dish layouts. The cooks work independently, one of whom is the chef and others are his assistants; when another dish is prepared, somebody else assumes the role of chef and leads the assistants; in principle, each cook prepares one dish each. Normally, dishes are not prepared at random; the cooks decide beforehand who will prepare a particular dish.

Do they undergo additional training? Yes, they visit fairs and various competitions. They are most excited by the variety of products offered in the markets in some countries. They can also get quite grumpy if these items are not available in Slovenia. The best recognition of their work comes from appreciative guests; the Norwegian royal couple were the last to thank them. This practice was introduced to Brdo by Queen Elisabeth II during her visit in 2008. ‘You know, gratitude extended by a queen is a beautiful compliment, an extraordinary and distinguished acknowledgement,’ said Merzel, delightedly. On such occasions, formal attire is also prescribed for

the waiters and cooks; they must wear black trousers and white shirts. ‘Cooks are always somewhere in the background. The nature of a waiter’s work requires him to be at the forefront and they are usually more open; there is not much talking in the kitchen: everybody is busy preparing his dish.’ The guests appreciate it when a cook comes and asks whether they enjoyed the food. For that reason, cooks are keen to see the waiters engaged in studying the food and explaining it to guests. All the aforementioned contribute to a culinary culture which is carefully nurtured at Brdo. They know that they can offer something more, something interesting to break the monotony, such as, for example, showing guests how a particular dish is prepared. Of course, protocol events are not like other events: guests come on business, and food is not the central focus; rather than coming to eat, statesmen come to talk to each other. The protocol sets the itinerary for a visit, detailing the time for the toast, cold starter, hot starter, dessert, coffee and also when the visit is to end. Attention is also paid to details such as who receives the guests, which door they are to enter, and how they are escorted to their tables and seats; the dress code decided upon is obligatory; for example white tie-decorations and long evening gowns for ladies.

Is there an event they remember with particular fondness? Yes. ‘When Mr Kučan was President, he would accompany his guests to the airport and then return to Brdo, call all who were on duty – waiters, cooks, dishwashers, etc., open a bottle of wine himself, fill our glasses and have a cordial conversation with us. You know, people need this, they need to know that they are worth something.’ Working in a protocol facility makes them proud; however, they would like to see their salaries brought closer to those earned by private caterers.



**MENU FOR A DINNER HELD IN
HONOUR OF THE NORWEGIAN
ROYAL COUPLE, WHO VISITED
SLOVENIA IN MAY**

A creamy cheese dumpling
with sautéed vegetables on
rocket with olive bread

Smoked trout fillet with
horseradish

Spelt risotto and young
spinach

Fillet of beef au gratin
with leek štrukelj (rolled
dumpling) and carrot purée

Velvety chocolate cake with
caramel sauce flavoured with
mint

Coffee with pralines



Happy Bled

What should one write about Bled – a town that has for many decades encapsulated the beauties of Slovenia, a small country richly endowed with natural assets? What should one write about the image that appears on almost every other brochure or leaflet inviting tourists to the country? And what of the widely held opinion, known to everyone, that there is practically nothing left in Slovenia to discover?



BEAUTY

The idyllic – almost kitschy – image of nature with which Bled surprises its visitors, continues to be the strongest card held by this small town, despite the increasing number of other man-made attractions. A wealth of natural riches have accumulated on an almost miniature surface area, on which nature has placed a relatively small Alpine lake, leaving a large rock in its centre that has become the sole Slovenian island and is of exactly the right dimensions to fit a nice baroque church, and left a hill on one side of the lake, a part of which it hollowed out to reveal grey rock, to enable people to build a castle on the brow of the hill. People are touched by this image. I saw firsthand a number of quite cosmopolitan foreigners, regardless of whether they hailed from a similar environment, such as Bavaria, or from totally different surroundings, such as Japan or China, almost in a trance marvelling at this beautiful work of nature. Further evidence of Bled's beauty lies in the Slovenians themselves. A surprisingly large number of respected Slovenian people, scientists, artists, businessmen and other elite and influential people moved to Bled in later life to settle there. Local people, on the other hand, have a more indifferent attitude towards the town, although the pride they take in it, compared to that of other people hailing from other, less beautiful places, does not pass by entirely unnoticed – a trait for which they have not always been viewed in the best light. Thanks to its natural conditions and thriving tourism industry, Bled is one of the richest places in Slovenia, which, of course, has certain consequences for its relationship with others. However, this is a matter of personal opinion, often based on rumours and impressions rather than well-supported facts.

Bled, as is the case with most Alpine locations, is situated among hills that were carved by the massive glaciers which once covered the European continent. The varied landscape stretches to the forest-covered slopes of the biggest Slovenian treasure chest of wood – Pokljuka in the west – and then beyond to reveal the jagged peaks of the Julian Alps, dominated by Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia. The landscape boasts an abundance of waters, characterised by the river channels of the Sava Bohinjka in the south and the Sava Dolinka in the north. Most of the area lies within Triglav National Park, which provides a strong natural background vital to the development of tourism. The ground is rather porous, karstic in fact, with an underground cave



with beautiful stalactite formations just a short distance from Bled, called the cave under Babji zob (Hag's tooth). Babji zob was named after a large distinctive rock that fell on the mountain and brings to mind the last remaining tooth in the gap-toothed mouth of a hag. Bled is also known for the healing properties of its water, which comes from a spring right next to the lake shore and is used in a variety of health therapies, especially in Grand Hotel Toplice. Thanks to this water, Bled earned itself a reputation as a health resort. Its reputation was further enhanced by the Swiss doctor, Arnold Rikli, who, at the end of the nineteenth century, built a health centre there offering health therapies frequently used by the

aristocracy, nobility and even emperors from Central Europe, particularly the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. However, the nature in Bled cautions that tourism has its limitations. After the Second World War, the town hosted an increasing number of tourists, who left their mark. Once a sophisticated holiday resort, Bled started to become a town increasingly visited by organised groups of workers and students. In the former Yugoslavia, Bled featured on the list of places that should be seen in the flesh by each citizen of the country of more than 20 million people, which prompted masses of people to visit the town. Bled's inadequate sewage system took its toll on the lake, resulting in muddy sediments which by

* cultural trails *

1975 almost filled the entire basin of the lake as the basin itself had practically no major source of fresh water. The lake then became a source of disagreement about the most effective way to solve the problem. The argument was between those who advocated bringing fresh water from the nearby Radovna River and those who insisted on building a siphon tube to flush water from the bottom of the lake. Both solutions were implemented, requiring enormous work, and the state of the lake improved, but the sewage system has remained inadequate to date. However, it is more and more difficult for the lake, which is in a fairly good state, to endure the hordes of swimmers who overrun its shores in hot summer days. It is also becoming increasingly clear that something should be done in this respect. All the more so because the lake is abundant with freshwater fish, with species such as sheatfish, pike, dace, and carp swimming around the lake. However, the number of species has declined over the past few decades. A more recent addition, however, is the swans, beautiful white birds that have embellished the lake with their presence and obviously feel good there, together with a variety of wild ducks that give the lake an appearance akin to lakes in the far north, such as in Finland, for example.

THE MYTH

In a way, Bled is a holy place in Slovenia. The greatest Slovenian poet, France Prešeren, who was born in a village eight kilometres away from Bled, included Bled in his treasure chest of myths and positive stereotypes about Slovenia in a very clear and precise manner. This can be most clearly seen in his epic poem *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism at the Savica Waterfall), in which he described battles between pagans, Slavic people at the time of their settlement in AD 800, and Christians, German people who at the time increased their influence in territories inhabited by Slavs, and then remained masters of these lands for a thousand years. “Dežela kranjska nima lepšga kraja, ko je z okolšno ta, podoba raja (There is no other place in Carniola more beautiful than this one with its surroundings, a piece of paradise)” is a verse written by France Prešeren, who also wrote about the golden light above the water of Lake Bohinj below Triglav, thus proclaiming these places, distinctively marked by Lake Bled, Lake Bohinj and nearby Triglav, the cradle of the Slovenian nation. The myth, however, does not end there, but continues with the coat of arms of Slovenia. Its designer, Marko Pogačnik, argues that the coat of arms, which bears



an image of Triglav with two bending lines below it representing the sea and rivers, and three golden, six-pointed stars above it, is a spatial and energy imprint of Slovenia's most important features; in the past, it was also embraced by Prešeren in the above-mentioned *Krst pri Savici* and by the famous Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik in the pillar of the Blessed Virgin Mary that stands in front of the Parish Church of Bled – on the rear of Mary's mantle, Triglav is carved with a six-pointed star above it.

If we look back in history, it becomes clear that Bled has taken on a significance far beyond that which would be accorded to it as a small village and, subsequently, a

town. Since first being referred to at the beginning of the second millennium, Bled had been the most important property of the Bishops of Brixen (in present-day Switzerland). At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a sophisticated European holiday resort, and during the Second World War, a seat of the German occupation forces, and a venue for many political, cultural and sports events. With outstanding rowers, volleyball players, skiers and hockey players, Bled, given its number of inhabitants, is today probably one of the most sporting towns in Slovenia – a town that absorbs the energy of its environment and thus exudes the air of a sophisticated, elite resort.



EVENTS

It is only logical that Bled attracts large numbers of people every year and, consequently, hosts many events. Fortunately, the years of mass tourism are long gone, and for the past several decades, the town has been increasingly visited by foreign rather than local guests. Among Slovenians, Bled is a popular destination for Sunday family excursions. That is when the walking trail around the lake swarms with strollers, and the restaurants of Park Hotel and Grand Hotel Toplice are packed with people looking to buy a

famous Bled cream cake – undoubtedly still one of Bled's best trademarks. All this makes Bled an increasingly cosmopolitan resort which hosts a variety of selected events every year that further enhance its reputation around the world. The Mayor of Bled, Janez Fajfar, a long-serving worker in tourism, can be satisfied with the course of events. This year, Bled has already hosted the Meeting of Alpine Protected Areas as Slovenia presided over the Alpine Convention, and the traditional PEN meeting. In September, it will host the summit meeting of leaders

from the private and public sectors – the Bled Strategic Forum. The cultural programme is centred on folk traditions, with the most interesting events being the traditional Okarina Folk Music Festival, the music festival, and the Wind Band International Competition in Avsenik music held in mid-June. Bled also hosts several sports meets. At the end of August and at the beginning of September, it will host the greatest sports event of this year – the 2011 World Rowing Championship. Indeed, quite a busy year for this happy town.



Mayor of Bled, Janez Fajfar.



Last month, we celebrated the 1,000th anniversary of the first mention of Bled Castle.

The linden tree

A TREE OF FRIENDSHIP, LOVE AND LOYALTY

THE LINDEN TREE IN FOLK TRADITION

The linden tree is a symbol of the Slovenian nation, although Slovenian folk tradition lacks any real arguments to support this, especially since the role and importance of the linden tree stretch as far back as the period before there was any real sense of national awareness.

Linden trees can live to a great age and their trunks can be truly massive. There are quite a lot of linden trees in Slovenia that have taken several hundreds of years to grow, with the oldest being over 700 years old. Ancient linden trees can be found today in front of village churches, in castle yards, and in village or town squares. The linden tree marks the place where the village community met for social gatherings and where decisions on matters of common interest were made. The branches of a linden tree provided shade for stone tables and benches, a popular meeting place for local leaders and the village community.

The tradition holds that, since time immemorial, people have planted linden trees to mark special occasions. It is said that the oldest trees were planted as early as at the time of the Turkish incursions; they were planted in places where the Turks were either defeated or forced to retreat. These linden trees are still known today as 'Turkish linden trees'. Several

linden tree plantations, especially linden tree-lined avenues, originating from the latter years of the Ages of Enlightenment and Classicism, have been preserved up to the present day. The most famous of these is Napoleon's linden avenue at the entrance to Logatec along the state road, which was once the major road from Ljubljana to Trieste. The linden tree avenue, which comprises 290 trees, is almost two kilometres long. Part of the avenue had to be restored because of its age – it was planted in around 1810, at the time of French-ruled Illyrian Provinces, to mark the wedding of the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Austrian Princess, Marie Louise. The avenue was therefore first named after Louise and then eventually changed to Napoleon's avenue. The avenue is protected as a horticultural monument. Several other linden tree avenues of an earlier date are also protected as monuments, along with tens of old linden trees in front of village churches and in village squares at a number of locations in Slovenia.

THE LINDEN TREE AND SLOVENIAN STATEHOOD

During the period of the Slovenian national awakening and the Slovenian people's increasing national awareness, the linden tree became one of the symbols

of the Slovenian nation, in contrast to the oak tree, a symbol of the German nation, or for example, the birch tree, which is associated with Russia and the Russian nation. There has never been a special emphasis on the linden tree in Slovenian national iconography, although, prior to Slovenia's independence, the coat of arms of the People's Republic of Slovenia and, subsequently, the former Socialist





Republic of Slovenia – as a part of the former Yugoslavia – featured linden leaves wound around ears of wheat. Linden leaves, however, took on an even more meaningful significance in a large advertising campaign entitled ‘Slovenia, my country’, which was launched in the 1980s. The campaign was initially designed to promote Slovenian tourism, but went well beyond its initial purpose and, by virtue of being advertised on television daily and on a number of billboards, heralded a more self-confident Slovenia. This, as some suggested subsequently, contributed to Slovenia’s stand which led to its independence at the beginning of the 1990s.

Another such symbol is GEOSS, the Geometric Centre of the Republic of Slovenia near Vače nad Litijo – a project that indicated that Slovenia’s statehood was being strengthened as early as ten years prior to Slovenia’s independence. The Geoss memorial marker was erected in 1982, right next to a linden tree that had been planted there a year earlier and has since grown into a mighty tree. In the years just before Slovenia gained independence, an attempt was made to introduce Slovenia’s own currency, called the lipa (a linden tree). The architect of this project was Bogdan Oblak, who earned himself the nickname ‘Hammurabi’. However, the project did not bear fruit, but the proposed currency is remembered by the people at the time as being a symbolic milestone in Slovenian history.

The linden tree, however, continues to have most symbolic importance in terms of the establishment of Slovenian statehood. Twenty years ago, on the day the Republic of Slovenia proclaimed its independence and sovereignty, a linden tree was planted in Republic Square (Trg republike) in front of the National Assembly building. Slovenia’s independence was also marked by a number of other linden trees which were planted all over Slovenia at that time. The tradition of planting linden trees to mark particularly important events, which can be traced as far back as the Middle Ages, is still honoured today, not least on occasions such as official visits

by foreign statesmen, who often plant a memorial linden tree to mark a special occasion.

MEETINGS OF SLOVENIAN STATESMEN UNDER THE NAJEVNIK LINDEN TREE

To conclude this short overview of the significance of the linden tree for the lives of Slovenians in the past, of how it accompanied and affected their lives, of what they saw in it and of the importance they attached to it, we should return back to the oldest linden tree in Slovenia – the linden tree on Ludranski vrh, high in the hills above Črna na Koroškem. It was named the Najevnik linden tree after the Najevnik farm on which it was grown and is the oldest of all the linden trees in Slovenia. The Najevnik linden tree is said to be over 700 years old, although its exact age can only be estimated as its trunk, which measures over ten metres in circumference, is hollow and its rings cannot be counted. In 1993, the Najevnik linden tree was successfully restored to health according to the principles of tree surgery and protected from destruction. The legend says that the Turks stopped under this linden tree on one of their expeditions and ate here with golden spoons, which they had to bury in a hurry under the roots of the tree as they had to flee before the advancing army of the legendary King Matjaž, who lived under nearby Mount Peca.

In August 1991, only one month after Slovenia had proclaimed its independence, Slovenian statesmen met for the first time under the Najevnik linden tree to visit these places, meet local inhabitants and continue the tradition of democracy in its original sense in village communities – an arrangement in which power remains most closely linked to the people and which is committed to open dialogue with political opponents and the opposition. In the years that followed, these meetings became a tradition; they were held annually, although more prominent politicians no longer attended in great numbers. The somewhat naïve, but spontaneously developed initiative to hold these meetings, however, continued

to exist, and the owner of the Osojnik farm, better known as the Najevnik farm, will now have the opportunity to invite Slovenian politicians and statesmen to a meeting under the Najevnik linden tree for the twenty-first time. The Najevnik linden tree, with its widely spreading branches that dominate the scene, symbolises an urgent need to bring democracy back to its roots, enabling statesmen to reflect on their commitment to fundamental democratic values while interacting with ordinary people.

DISTRIBUTION OF LINDEN TREE SPECIES IN EUROPE AND SLOVENIA

The linden tree can be found in large parts of Central and Southern Europe, from the Iberian peninsula to the Black Sea; linden trees are sparse only in the more northerly latitudes of the continent. In ancient Greece and Rome, this tree was a symbol of friendship and tender, faithful love, and many European peoples, especially those of Slavic origin, elevated the linden tree to a ritual tree that became an object of worship. In Slovenian folk tradition, this attitude towards the linden tree can be seen, in particular, in folk dances around the linden tree in villages in the Koroška region, also known as *rej pod lipo* (dancing under the linden tree). There is also a popular belief that the linden tree has healing properties – linden flower tea and linden charcoal have particularly beneficial health properties – which cannot be overlooked.

In Slovenia, as elsewhere in Europe, there are two species of linden tree. One is *navadna lipa* (Large-leaved Linden or *Tilia platyphyllos*), which is a feminine word in Slovene, and the other is *lipovec* (Small-leaved Linden or *Tilia cordata*), which is a masculine word in Slovene. They differ according to the size of their leaves and the shape of the tree crown – *navadna lipa* has larger leaves and can reach a greater height than *lipovec*, which has smaller leaves and a more wide-spreading crown. In reality, however, these differences often blur since the two species often crossbreed and are both commonly called *lipa* in Slovene.



**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**

