

Sinfo

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SLOVENIA
**A LAND OF
COUNTLESS
ATTRACTIONS**

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Veronika Stabej

Summer at last

That means it's also time to add a little difference to the daily rhythm. The evenings are longer and full of the sounds and colours from all over Europe and the rest of the world. Slovenia is full of summer cultural festivals that are part of the rich tourist products and services available in a country of countless points of interest that offer numerous possibilities for interesting and creative holidays. They offer a different kind of break and a chance to commune with nature. The unspoilt nature here – one of Slovenia's most attractive features – means you can enjoy your free time, recreation and tourist activities outdoors.

At the start of the holiday period we spoke to the President of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, who talks about his pride in the well developed culture of voluntary work in Slovenia. Many people work to help others in numerous ways without expecting payment.

We also have articles about Idrija lace, a beautiful craft product that the town's lacemakers have been producing for centuries with pins, wooden bobbins and thread. The deeply rooted values that Idrija lace embodies are extremely distinctive and attractive. We are also proud of the exceptional success of the Perpetuum Jazzile vocal group on the YouTube website singing the song Africa. It has had over 1.5 million views in just 6 weeks. And hand on heart it is the kind of performance that really makes your hair stands on end.

Further testimony to the durability of tradition is the saltmaking on the Slovenian coast, which goes back over a millennium. Saltpanning is one of the oldest economic activities in the north-east Adriatic.

As well as interesting reading I wish you a pleasant and wonderful summer full of new and different impressions and experiences. I wish you all the best, wherever you are, at home or abroad.

We'll be back in September.

Sinfo – Slovenian information

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● Andrej Savelli

PM Promises Reform Package by Autumn

Prime Minister Borut Pahor has announced that the government would unveil its package of structural reforms by the autumn. Slovenia requires structural changes to boost its competitiveness and give the country a new development impetus so that it can emerge from the crisis stronger, Pahor stressed, explaining that he had called the second development dialogue conference to gauge the degree of consensus on the need for reforms. Saying that Slovenia's economy has been exposed by the crisis as too rigid and dependent on the performance of its foreign trade partners, Pahor assessed that this was because of a lack of changes in the past. To improve its competitiveness, Slovenia will need to invest in company-driven innovation and promote cooperation between research institutions and universities, the Prime Minister said. Moreover, Slovenia needs to restructure its economy by placing more emphasis on high-tech companies and by improving the business climate.

The current system of social security will no longer provide for equal rights in times of economic downturn, which is why changes are needed in the pension and health purses, Pahor added. The government will also have to restructure public spending and the public sector.

Development Minister Mitja Gaspari noted that one of the key measures was changing budgeting practice by adopting programme budgets. Efforts will be undertaken to change the mindset in Slovenia about the public sector. "We're not talking only about pension and health reforms, but a new way of understanding what the public sector is about. The public sector is not about public institutions; it is about public services, which must be performed effectively," Gaspari stressed.

OECD: Slovenia Should Not Avoid Structural Reforms During Crisis

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) presented a report on the review of Slovenia's economy on 1 July stating that Slovenia should remove short-term crisis measures immediately when the economy starts recovering. The country should also enhance structural reforms even before the crisis ends.

According to the report, structural reforms, primarily in the pension system, are necessary for achieving the sustainability of public finance and for the country to catch up with the most developed economies. The report is being discussed at a conference in Brdo pri Kranju involving more than one hundred representatives of the Slovenian government, businesses, employers, employees, economists and NGOs. The global financial and economic crisis has hit Slovenia, which had been successfully catching up with the OECD average after 1997, without major structural imbalances, primarily in the area of international trade, the report finds. The organisation has forecast a 6% drop in GDP for Slovenia this year, while recovery is expected to start in 2010. The projections are uncertain, according to the OECD, as they are based on assumptions that exports will recover and that the crisis measures will be effective.

Short-term measures should be lifted immediately after the situation improves, most probably in 2010 or 2011, the OECD has assessed. This should also apply to subsidies for a shortened working week, which the organisation believes will be the hardest to eliminate. Structural reforms are meanwhile of key importance for securing the sustainability of public finance. Bad times should not be an excuse for postponing political discussion on the necessary reforms, the report says. Most important is reform of the pension system, because of the increasing costs related to an ageing population. It should be focused on increasing the actual retirement age and reducing the replacement rate.

A conference presenting the OECD Economic Review for Slovenia for 2009.



photo: STA

The Ministry of Public Administration wins a UN award

Irma Pavlinič Krebs, the Minister of Public Administration, was in New York on 23 June to accept, on behalf of Slovenia, the 2009 United Nations Public Service Award, awarded by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). Slovenia won the award for its e-VEM (one-stop-shop) project for the business enterprise sector. The e-VEM system was the winner in the category "Improving the Delivery of Services in the Public Sector", beating all other entries from North America and Europe.

This is the highest award that Slovenia's public administration has received to date, and one which is not only tied to electronic services but which also relates to solutions in the field of public administration services as a whole. At the ceremony at the UN headquarters, the Minister described the award as an honour and an obligation for the future. "This award obliges governments to take part in the exchange of information and good practices and to promote a culture of changes in the public sector as they work towards a common objective, that of a satisfied customer," said the Minister.

The award-winning Slovenian project is without a doubt one of the best in the Slovenian e-government sector. The portal offers electronic support for the registration of all types of businesses. This was previously a time-consuming and expensive procedure. The registration time for companies has been reduced from 60 days to just 4 days, while costs, which previously ranged between 250 and 600 euros, have been reduced to nothing. The system encourages the establishment of new businesses. The entire process is elec-

tronic and the project is responsible for an annual saving of up to 10.4 million euros, while following those public administration objectives that are oriented towards users and the creation of an enterprise-friendly environment.

The Minister of Public Administration receiving the UN Public Service Award from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.



photo: IMJU archives

16th international BledCom symposium on the relationship between culture and public relations

On 3 and 4 July the 16th international BledCom symposium took place in Bled. The focus of the symposium was the relationship between culture and public relations. Around 100 participants considered culture from various points of view: culture as the environment in which public relations takes place; public relations as a form of culture; and the effect of public relations practices on societal and corporate culture. The symposium was characterised by lively debates on cultural influences on various practices in public relations. The debates were further enlivened by keynote speakers from the broader field of culture: leading European poet and essayist Aleš Debeljak, Borut Vogelnik of the Irwin art collective (NSK), and renowned architect Vasa J. Perović.

The 16th international symposium was opened by the Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, with a speech on the interweaving of culture and media and the wider field of public relations. Keynote speaker Aleš Debeljak, one of Europe's leading poets and essayists, made some interesting reflections on the lengthy processes that led to the rise of the modern Western paradigm. Culture was also the focus of the talks by Borut Vogelnik, a member of the Irwin art collective (NSK) and the architect Vasa J. Perović. Vogelnik discussed the effect of the transition on Slovenian artists and the broader cultural environment, while Perović gave his view of architecture as presented in the media and, at the same time, of architecture as a medium itself.

BledCom once again featured prominent international experts from the field of public relations, including the social marketing researcher Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, the noted PR and corporate communication consultant Jon White, and Danny Moss of Manchester Metropolitan University, one of the co-founders of BledCom.

In the context of individual panels, the speakers discussed the influence of Chinese culture on PR, the links between African culture

and the development of the profession, and strategic communication at cultural/global intersections. Dejan Verčič and Jon White talked about public relations in popular culture.

Slovenia and the presidency of the Alpine convention

On 12 March this year Slovenia took over from France the presidency of the Alpine Convention for a period of two years. Each new presiding country takes on the activities from the inherited agenda and continues them during its presidency, while it may also set out its own priorities and implement and promote additional activities in this context. For the period of the presidency an expert council for the presidency of the Alpine Convention has been formed in Slovenia as an advisory body of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. The tasks of the Slovenian presidency are to continue the policy of protecting the Alpine area, where for over a decade the main challenge has been climate change. The Alps are an area of a very high concentration of capital, economic power, development and, at the same time, pressures on the environment. Despite ever higher environmental standards – and some of the Alpine countries (Germany, Switzerland, Austria) are among the environmentally most developed and conscious countries in the world – the Alps as a whole are still a net producer of the emissions that cause global warming. Thus the main challenge facing the whole of the Alpine area today at the local level, in municipalities and in regions, is the establishment of models of energy or CO₂ neutral areas from which to spread this model gradually to the whole of the Alps and the surrounding area. At the same time, owing to the fact that mountain areas are among the first areas to feel the effects of climate change – and on a greater scale than low-lying areas – local communities in the Alps are seeking answers to the problem of adapting to climate change with the fewest possible negative consequences. The first group includes measures designed to increase energy efficiency such as sustainable transport, energy-saving construction, and increasing the added value of local manufacturing chains that reduce energy consumption. The second involves changing the established patterns of living that have led to today's situation, for example changed forms of Alpine tourism, a transition to renewable energy sources, careful management of water sources. The measures of the two groups often overlap and complement each other.

In the context of this task, over the next two years Slovenia must achieve commitments from the Contracting Parties to the Convention to act more decisively in support of projects designed to reduce environmental impacts and adapt to climate change, particularly through the inclusion of local experiences and examples of good practice at the level of national and also international policies. The Alpine Convention is an international agreement on protecting the Alps and their sustainable development. The Contracting Parties are Austria, France, Italy, Lichtenstein, Germany, Monaco, Slovenia, Switzerland and the European Community. In Slovenia the Convention entered into force on 22 August 1995 and its implementing protocols, whose provisions represent the essence of the Convention, became Slovenian law on 28 April 2004 after being ratified by the Slovenian parliament on 28 November 2003.

Hayracks in Studor near Srednja vas, Bohinj, photo: D. Mladenovič

SLOVENIA

a land of countless attractions

Foreigners say that Slovenia is a land of countless attractions, a country that surprises you at every step. This small corner of Europe brings together the picturesque characteristics of the Al-

pine, Mediterranean, Karst and Pannonian worlds. Situated at the crossroads of diversity, this young (it turned 18 this year) and attractive country has many appealing faces.



Lipica horses, photo: J. Skok

Slovenia is an undiscovered green treasury of hidden tourist gems

Slovenia is a central European country situated between the Alps, the Dinaric Alps, the Mediterranean and the Pannonian Plain. With an area of just over 20,000 km², it is one of Europe's smaller countries and is distinguished by unspoiled nature and a good quality of life. This is what Slovenia offers to tourists: the chance for a different kind of holiday, with a genuine contact with nature at every step. Unspoiled nature – one of Slovenia's most important "draws" – is perfect for leisure activities, recreation and tourism in natural surroundings. Awareness of the importance of a healthy environment and the increasing need to conserve nature and an attractive landscape are increasing the number of nature lovers in Slovenia. This genuine contact is also reflected by a natural element that is available at practically every step in Slovenia – pure water. Slovenia is a land of water. The total length of its watercourses, including rivers and streams (permanent and torrential), is 26,600 km. In terms of the total quantity of fluvial water per inhabitant, Slovenia is one of the richest countries in Europe, with a figure almost four times higher than the European average.



Predjama Castle, photo: B. Kladnik

Slovenia is also a land of forests

More than half of its surface area – 1,163,812 hectares – is covered by forest (the only countries in Europe with more forest cover are Finland and Sweden). Almost 11% of the territory is protected, and much of this is forest. Slovenia can also boast an area of original forest – the virgin forests of the Kočevje region. The largest area of protected nature is the Triglav National Park (83,807 hectares). The protection regime in place in the Triglav National Park is one of the strictest in Europe.

The Škocjan Caves, which boast the largest underground canyon in the world, were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1986. The list of wetlands protected by the Ramsar Convention includes the Sečovlje salt pans, proclaimed in 1993, Lake Cerknica, part of the karst basin of the river Ljubljanica, proclaimed in 2006, and the system of underground wetlands in the Škocjan Caves, proclaimed in 1999.



Plečnik's Žale, photo: D. Novakovič



Plečnik's St Michael's church, photo: STA

Slovenia is an architecturally rich country

Its capital city, Ljubljana, is a unique showcase of the achievements of the eminent European architect Jože Plečnik. In the first half of the 20th century the great architect Jože Plečnik left a powerful personal architectural stamp on modern Ljubljana. The city's appearance was complemented by his pupils, who were also committed to more modern trends in architecture, and by the works of a "new wave" of rising young architects. All the different faces of Ljubljana combine in a unique manner to form a single image.

Ljubljana has everything one would expect from a modern capital city while at the same time managing to conserve the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of a small town. It is a lively city that constantly surprises. In Ljubljana, the old blends harmoniously with the new and it is as though the entire history of the five millennia that have passed since the first settlement appeared here has prepared it to be a national capital.

Slovenia has managed to conserve traces of all the periods of its rich history; the legacy of Roman Aemona, the Old Town with its Renaissance, Baroque and Art Nouveau façades, ornate portals, the romantic bridges that adorn the Ljubljanica river, crooked roofs and a park that reaches deep into the embrace of the city. The cultures of East and West met here, and the artistic conceptions of Italy encountered the aesthetics of the sculptors of the cathedrals of Mitteleuropa. The city owes its present appearance in part to Italian Baroque and in part to the Art Nouveau style of two hundred years later, specifically that of the Vienna Secession, which is reflected in the architecture of many of the buildings built immediately after the earthquake of 1895.

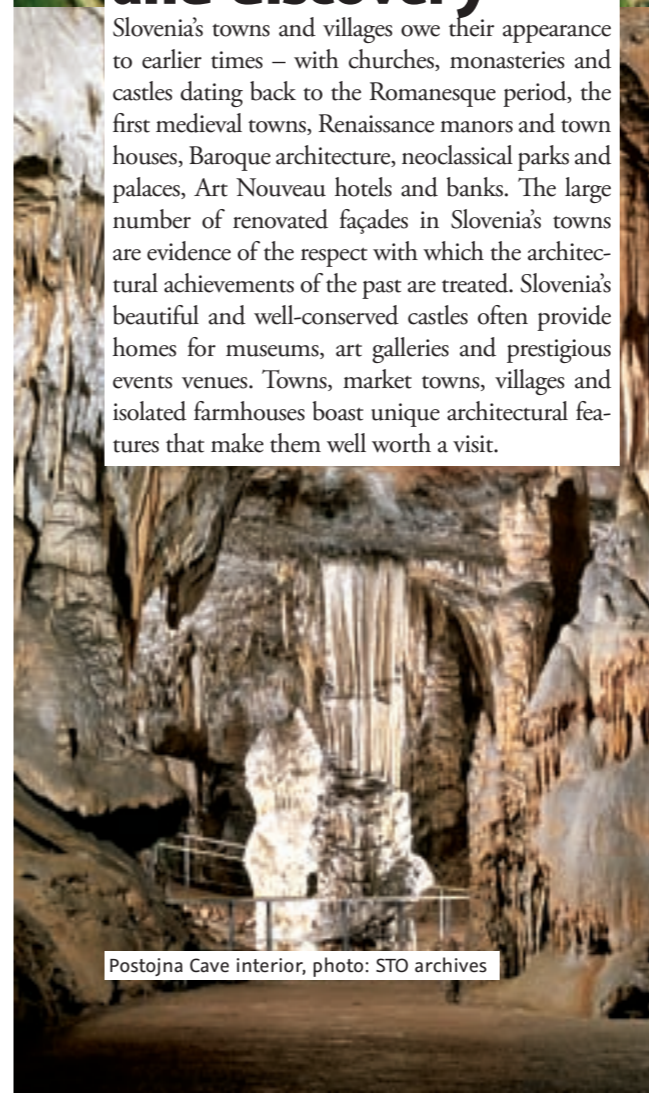
Slovenia is also a country of 200 museums and museum collections. The most important heritage is kept by the National Museum, the Ethnographic Museum and the Natural History Museum. Museums of European importance include the First World War Museum in Kobarid, a former winner of the Council of Europe Museum Prize.



Štanjel, photo: B. Kladnik

Slovenia is a country that invites exploration and discovery

Slovenia's towns and villages owe their appearance to earlier times – with churches, monasteries and castles dating back to the Romanesque period, the first medieval towns, Renaissance manors and town houses, Baroque architecture, neoclassical parks and palaces, Art Nouveau hotels and banks. The large number of renovated façades in Slovenia's towns are evidence of the respect with which the architectural achievements of the past are treated. Slovenia's beautiful and well-conserved castles often provide homes for museums, art galleries and prestigious events venues. Towns, market towns, villages and isolated farmhouses boast unique architectural features that make them well worth a visit.



Postojna Cave interior, photo: STO archives

Next Exit

Anyone who really wants to discover Slovenia should combine the sights and scenery offered by the principal routes through the country with experiences off the beaten track. Six routes leading off main roads that offer travellers through Slovenia the chance to see what sets Slovenia apart and discover its traditions, sights and pleasures. Each year the Next Exit project issues brochures presenting the Amber Route, the Wind Route, the Emerald Route, the Golden Horn Route, the Peddler Route and the Sun Route.

Slovenia's Wine Routes, with their delightful views of vineyard-covered hills, a vast choice of local specialities and the fact that they pass through a mixture of accessible areas and the more hidden corners of Slovenia, are not only attractive to wine lovers but to all who want to truly experience the pulse of rural life. A range of connections between places famed for their natural beauties, special local traditions and important sights from Slovenia's cultural history can be found throughout the country. In some places these routes allow a wide range of programmes lasting several days, like those of the heritage trails of Dolenjska and Bela Krajina. Elsewhere there are interesting walking trails, such as the Cultural Heritage Trail in Žirovnica, which link the birthplaces of important figures from Slovenia's history or allow tourists to experience the world written about by famous Slovenian writers such as Fran Levstik (the Levstik Trail from Litija to Čatež) and Josip Jurčič (the Jurčič Trail through the country in which his novel The Tenth Brother is set). A unique experience of Slovenian heritage is offered by the Association of Historical Towns and Cities and its guidebook Acta Slovenica. The Path of Venus connects castles and medieval towns in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Italy and Slovenia. Different kinds of encounters with nature are possible throughout Slovenia thanks to the various nature trails and forest trails, which are usually marked by boards containing descriptions of interesting natural features. Many of these trails run through protected landscape areas, regional parks and forest reserves. You can also discover the natural sights of Slovenia on one of the "transversals", mainly hiking trails, the longest of which is the Slovenian Mountain Transversal leading over hills and mountains from north-east Slovenia to the coast.

TOURISM AND CATERING GENERATE 12% OF GDP IN SLOVENIA AND CREATE APPROXIMATELY 8% OF JOBS (52,000). IN TOURIST AREAS THIS PROPORTION IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER. FORECAST TOURISM GROWTH FOR SLOVENIA UP TO 2020 IS 6% (STB FIGURES). TOURISM REPRESENTS 10% OF SLOVENIA'S EXPORTS OF GOODS AND SERVICES, COMPARED TO AN EU AVERAGE OF 30%.

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I FEEL
SLOVENIA

Visit Slovenia

Bled, photo: STA

Close to home, close to heart

In the run-up to the tourist season, the Slovenian Tourist Board (STB) has launched a promotional campaign called Close to Home, Close to Heart, which aims to bring the natural beauties of Slovenia closer to domestic tourists, along with a wide spectrum of holiday and short break ideas in Slovenia. Domestic tourists are very important for Slovenian tourism since they account for over 50% of the total number of tourists.

As part of this campaign, special 500ml bottles of spring water provided by Unitur, one of the campaign partners, have been available from petrol stations of the Petrol Group since 1 June. The bottles have a special label with the name of the campaign, a water motif and an invitation to take part in a prize competition run in conjunction with the Natural Spas of Slovenia Association.

Slovenia for a more active role in the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)

In recent years Slovenia has made great progress in the field of tourism and it is time that it became more active in the international community. The government has recently lent its support to Slovenia's application to chair the UNWTO Commission for Europe and for membership of the UNWTO Executive Council. This is another way in which Slovenia, as a tourist destination, can raise its profile in the world, given that the development of tourism in Slovenia is at a very high level. As a member of the UNWTO, Slovenia can contribute a great deal to shaping the organisation's policies. In past years it has shown great professionalism in its work in this sphere. The priority tasks of economic and other development include: regional development, employment policy, high environmental standards and all the elements of sustainable development. In view of the high level of development of Slovenian tourism and the existing development potential, tourism has the opportunity to become one of the leading sectors of the Slovenian economy in the next few years and in this way make an important contribution to the achievement of Slovenia's development objectives.

INTERVIEW

Vesna Žarkovič
photo: Mateja Jordovič Potočnik

Dr Danilo Türk:
We are on the threshold
of a new transformation

INTERVIEW

The Slovenian President, Dr Danilo Türk, says that his public work will not involve any dramatic changes, but predicts that there is possibility of transformation that will gradually grow in stature and strength. He is convinced that there is too little respect in personal as well as in international relations – people are not willing enough to listen, and that leads to tensions. He is proud of the well developed culture of voluntary work in Slovenia, saying many people work to help others, in numerous ways without expecting payment in return.

One feature of his own work as a statesman is that his spouse offers him considerable support, especially in relation to voluntary work. Though solidarity and support within a marriage is perhaps a given, he adds.

Mr President, you recently published a book entitled ‘On the Path to Change’, in which you have emphasised that political action includes changing the world, and that what is said in public has an impact. How are you changing the world, and what “goal have you set yourself”?

To claim that I’m changing the world would be too ambitious. It’s true that unlike academics, politicians do not just explain events, but must take a position in support of one option or another. That has an impact on reality, on our everyday lives, even if the consequences are not immediately visible. Since I’ve also spent a large part of my life in the academic ranks, I can tell the difference. Politicians think about matters of public concern and political action has a direct impact. Public debate affects our decisions and development, and that is what I wanted to point out. Perhaps people will ask why I chose the title, ‘On the Path to Change’. Some may say that there is no evidence of any particular change in Slovenia, but I believe that we are on the brink of a new transformation.

What kind of transformation?

At present the signs are subtle, not too easy to see, and we have to understand that. We have already been through one phase of the transition, there’s a new era ahead of us now, and changes await us in many different areas: in the economy, in politics, in our way of life. My work in public will not involve any dramatic changes, but there is the possibility of a transformation that will gradually grow in stature and strength.

As President of Slovenia your words are scrutinised, despite the fact that the role of president in Slovenia does not bring with it major practical responsibilities or executive power.

Let me say that I make sure I’m well prepared for every public statement. I give considerable thought to every public statement, frequently consult others, and although I don’t expect an enormous response, I do notice that occasionally key thoughts are picked up more widely and become part of public discourse and political activity. I have observed that my public statements are sometimes reacted to critically, sometimes less so, and I’m aware that public appearances are part of public discourse, so I try to devote myself appropriately to them.

You’ve been president now for a year and a half. How do you assess your presidency?

There’ve been three distinct periods: the first half of last year was the start of my term, and coincided with Slovenia’s EU presidency, the second period was marked by parliamentary elections, in which I had a role to play in the formation of the government, while the third period has been marked by the global crisis, which has exacerbated the problems of structural change in the public sector, where the issues are being addressed in new ways.

What is your explanation for the low turnout in the European elections?

The turnout was about the same as five years ago. In the first elections participation was only 28%, and that was at a time the EU had high approval ratings. Slove-

nia has a very low turnout for European Parliament elections, well below the EU average. How do I explain the low level of participation? There are a number of factors: there’s a feeling that electors do not gain significant influence over the course of events by voting, that the European Parliament is not a very influential body, and the general understanding of the EU is more closely related to intergovernmental aspects than parliamentary. I don’t support general theories of euroscepticism, but I think that some specific reasons relating to the European Parliament itself should be looked at, rather than the EU in general.

In talks on the future constitutional organisation with the prime minister, parliament and parties supporting a wider debate on the Slovenian constitution, you said that “Slovenia will remain sovereign and well integrated with the EU”. Why are changes needed and what differences will they bring?

The government is preparing a draft act that is ready for deliberation and I hope it will be adopted. We have to relieve the constitutional court of the burden of dealing with peripheral matters, and give it the opportunity to address major issues affecting human rights, the functioning of the Slovenian state system and our involvement in the EU. We have to solve long-term issues, which entails rearranging how tasks are distributed in order to improve quality. In addition, some other themes of the debate on potential changes such as the future shape of referenda and the procedure of appointment of the Government have also been launched. But they still have “to ripen”. At present it is important to agree on the priorities and I don’t want that phase to be rushed. This is a political debate on priorities that could be served by amending the text of the constitution. Some things may be assessed as being better addressed by ordinary laws. As I stated, here we are at the start of the debate, and it has to be carefully thought through. We must take care to ensure that this debate will not hinder work to manage the current crisis. We face a crisis at present and that has to be faced, without other debates interfering in that process.

In your speeches you have said there is too little respect in personal and even in international relations. What do you have in mind in this regard?

I would like us to achieve true pluralism at every level. In international practice I have found that agreement can only occur when people show each other respect. This applies even more to relations between states, where any form of disrespect leads to major problems and reduces openness to dialogue, so it is something that should be constantly pointed out.

In an interview published in the latest edition of the Banja Luka-based newspaper, Nezavisne novine you spoke about the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute and the blocking of Croatia’s EU negotiations, and said that some progress could be achieved in coming months, if Croatia relied more on reason and less on emotion. What did you mean by this?

In all areas of dispute one has to approach matters by assessing interests and accepting the fact that each side has its own interests, which are legitimate, and solutions must be reached by agreement and

cooperation. This seems clear and simple at the abstract level, but in practice people quickly slip into an emotional approach, making them unwilling to compromise and listen. I think there’s considerable work to be done, if we want matters to improve. If our two countries want to reach a solution, they must acknowledge that mutual respect is always essential, including expressing ourselves and making statements with respect. We must refrain from any aggressive or offensive talk. Otherwise there can be no solution. Relations between Croatia and Slovenia are at a very sensitive point.

Last month we celebrated our country ‘coming of age’. How do you assess that? What are the strengths and achievements and what are the weaknesses so far?

I have pointed out that 18 years old is still a very early phase for a sovereign state, but it is a good opportunity to take stock of the experience gained thus far. Let me mention a few of the weaknesses. If economic growth is high, the problems don’t seem so serious, but at a time of crisis the minuses become increasingly apparent. In chang-

ing conditions like those we face today, we need to make critical assessments. A major focus should be the concentration of ownership among ‘tycoons’ – this opportunity was created by the transition process and the laws in place then and now. We must put things right and, because I support the constitution, I would draw attention to Article 67 which states that ownership has three functions: economic, social and ecological. The mentioned means that we must understand that ownership of capital brings responsibility with it. We have yet to see responsible management of property here – we have to change regulations that permit fictive increases in wealth and power, without contributing to greater welfare. In one phase of the transition we were quite insensitive and paid insufficient attention to this issue, and now we have to put that right. Solving problems has to be transferred to the owners. This article of the constitution is not there for aesthetic reasons. Owners of capital must feel a responsibility for their economic, social and ecological impact. Burdening the state with this is not a good policy. Another weak point as we come of age is that we’ve done too little to technological-



INTERVIEW

ly modernise our industry – perhaps the last major drive was 20 years ago. I was recently in Tolmin, where the company Hidria opened a new plant with technology to produce diesel starter motors, that are ecologically friendly, and which have enabled Hidria to gain a market in Europe and globally. This is Slovenian technology, and I am in favour of offering as much support as we can to innovations like this, that create new prospects and achieve market success. We need to come together and dedicate our energy to that kind of ideal.

Do you think that the current crisis will make capitalism more humane?

That depends on the political will, and on political actions. It is being said that the crisis is an opportunity, but only for those who know a way out of it, not for everybody. Politicians face an important test of how to ensure we come out of the crisis well placed. There are no givens, however, and crises can also lead to increased intolerance, and other negative phenomena, which a mature political system must prevent. The opportunity is there, but only if we know how to find the right path.

How do you assess the government's measures to address the crisis?

They've been largely economic in nature, and I assess that they have been the right measures; I support the government in its efforts. I hope the government can improve its effectiveness and improve cooperation with parliament. I'm not a pessimist. As we've seen the guarantee scheme to assist individuals was put in place very quickly. An act was passed and people caught up in credit and finance problems can now count on state guarantees, which is new. Experience has helped the government to build support for this move much more quickly than has been the case in the past. I believe that during a crisis we can also learn, and better understand the decision-making processes that lead to sound measures.

What can the president do to strengthen the measures to counter the crisis?

I would point to mention international contacts. I have many international commitments; I visit foreign countries and prepare visits to ensure a strong economic delegation of business people travels with

me. Each visit of that kind is carefully prepared, we take time to establish contacts with companies, and to ensure that our business people meet foreign entrepreneurs and make deals. My visits can help in finding new market opportunities, which is important, because the Slovenian economy needs new markets. In New York last year I Board the of Goldman Sachs, which is interested in becoming involved in financing some very good projects in Slovenia. It is a bank that generates major profits, and is a successful investment bank, one of the largest in New York, and is interested in cooperating with Slovenia. I would like that communication to continue.

What trips are you planning in the near future?

In autumn I'll travel to New York, followed by Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, which are two very interesting countries. Both are oil states with great development potential and it is right for the Slovenian economy to appear on their markets.

We have heard you emphasise the importance of order. Is there sufficient order in Slovenia?

It could be better. I lived in New York, where things are somewhat less in order, but Slovenes do like order. The US has numerous regulations, Slovenia is still waiting for more formalised development, the US has more developed codes of ethics, but this all comes in time. Slovenia needs more time to achieve more formalised development.

How do you envisage Slovenia in 20 years?

As a successful state. Even the situation at present doesn't diminish my optimism. Some problems have to be resolved – Slovenia needs to find new markets, we must understand that our very close connections to European partners also make us vulnerable. The public sector must be reformed – both commercial and non-commercial. It is good that the government is preparing a new act on healthcare and pensions, there's a need for technological modernisation, and we are already dealing with major tasks, which we have to persist with. The previous prime minister, Janez Janša, attempted a number of reforms, but was unable to progress, because when things are going well people don't see any reason to

change. That means reforms can be harder when times are good. The tasks before us are enormous, but I am convinced we are capable. In 20 years we will be in a better position.

Which of your roles has been your favourite: as a diplomat, professor or president?

I'm still getting to know the presidential role, but it offers considerable room for creative work. The president's role is not defined in great detail, which is the reason one can leave a personal stamp upon it, so I strive to bring a creative approach to my work. I've found that people welcome this, though it would be foolish to expect that you could satisfy everyone.

Do you miss your diplomatic career in any way?

Not really. My work now means I deal with international issues a great deal, including diplomacy. I launched some activities relating to humanitarian assistance for children in Gaza affected by war. I visited the Palestinian administration and offered assistance, with Slovenian rehabilitation centres helping young people disabled in war. In June we welcomed a group of Palestine children for a 3-week rehabilitation programme. We will attempt to organise broader international networking for international assistance, since Slovenia has a very good cadre of rehabilitation experts. They have experience and give Slovenia a niche in which we can offer top quality solutions and contribute to humanitarian assistance in Gaza. In my position, I can contribute something to solving this problem, though there was also a need for diplomatic preparations for work to take place in a sensitive environment like that. As you see, my current role includes a great deal that requires diplomatic preparation ...

... in which your wife supports you.

Yes, very much. Though, of course, solidarity and support within a marriage is perhaps a given, isn't it? My wife does a great deal of work. Much of it is connected to voluntary work in Slovenia. I'm very proud I can say that Slovenia has a well developed culture of voluntary work. Many people work to help others in numerous ways without expecting payment. Voluntary firefighting and help for the elderly is particularly well developed. I feel it is very important to recognise this

kind of work, which strengthens the cohesion of our society.

I am involved in the You Can Choose, Win or Lose campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of alcohol abuse, and I hope my presence helps. In Žalec I visited a tourist farm that included three generations of people belonging to one large family. The solidarity that volunteers exemplify is worth a great deal, and isn't found in every country. We can be satisfied that we have a culture of neighbourly help and volunteering that is particularly precious today. There are many more positives in Slovenian society than we are ready to see sometimes. And there is this sense of local belonging and cultural life. I lived in the US and saw that things there are less universally developed. Slovenia has numerous cultural centres, theatre halls, which strengthen local allegiance and patriotism – important values that strengthen the cohesion of society. We have to acknowledge this, it shouldn't be overlooked. There are worrying phenomena in urban centres, however. I have decided not to go to the high school graduation quadrille dance as guest of honour next year, because there was so much drunken behaviour after the event this year. That behaviour is not right, and it would be better not to have the event, if it causes such problems. What would be right, would be for someone to speak to the young participants and point out how wrong that behaviour was. This is a problem that must be directly addressed and eliminated.

What makes you most angry?

Nothing makes me really angry, though when the media report complete untruths it puts me in a very sad mood. We have a sensationalist elements in the press that distorts the fact, and that's wrong. That should be reduced; it goes too far.

Can I ask you where you will be going on holiday?

As usual, I shall have a short vacation in Slovenia. I'll be going hiking, cycling and swimming, reading books and enjoying taking things easy. The fact I stopped smoking a long time ago makes a big difference to feeling healthy, as well.

Mr President, thank you and enjoy your holiday.

Thank you.



Vesna Bertoncelej Popit, DELO, photo: STA

Slovenia currently holds the presidency of the Council of Europe. The Government, meanwhile, is striving to hold the budget shortfall at five percent of GDP, which in the words of the Finance Minister France Križanič will also depend on non-postponable projects the Government receives for action. These should include cofinancing of the new factory for the Novo Mesto company Revoz.

In the opinion of the Slovenian Government, the first quarter of this year saw the bottoming out of the economic crisis in Slovenia, with GDP falling in this period by 8.5 percent, for which reason a recession was officially announced. The Government anticipates that for this reason the first half-year results will also be very poor. In the second half of the year, however, more favourable trends are expected. **In some opinions we might see a fulfilment of the May prediction from the Government Office for Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, under which this year Slovenian GDP will fall by 2.5 percent, while others, including international forecasts, have the drop in GDP being much more marked, and growth should only come next year.**

One source of reports on more favourable conditions is the Novo Mesto company Revoz, which first envisaged that the full night shift would be retained from April to July, but now they have determined that demand for Twingo cars is such that the full night shift will operate at least until the end of this year, and if conditions are favourable, even further.

On the other hand the Slovenian foodstuffs industry, which had previously concluded that owing to their product line the crisis could not affect them, since they were manufacturing products that everyone needed, now admits that the crisis has even shown its teeth among them, and the crisis is likely to be even more pronounced next year, since buyers are shifting to cheaper products. Meanwhile the Minister of Agriculture, Milan Pogačnik, pointed out that the operations of companies in crisis conditions also depended largely on the abilities of managers, and of course not just in foodstuff companies.

According to a survey by the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, **out of 775 small,**



Minister of Agriculture, Milan Pogačnik, pointed out that the operations of companies in crisis conditions also depended largely on the abilities of managers, and of course not just in foodstuff companies.

medium and large companies, 70 percent of these companies had liquidity problems. The payment conflict is apparent in the fact that buyers are extending the payment period, while suppliers want the shortest payment deadlines possible. Among those companies trading internationally, a third are receiving payment within 30 days, a third within 60 days and a third are waiting 120 days and more for payment. On the other hand companies operating as buyers abroad are paying faster, since for example a fifth of them must pay for goods in advance, a third within 30 days and a quarter within 60 days. Approximately half of the companies that took part in the Chamber survey have in recent months sought bank loans, which the banks have provided to a little over half the applicants. Here companies are finding that the loans are more expensive, and the procedures for their approval are longer. Companies are also finding that the deadlines have also been extended for payment to be received by the state for work performed. For this reason, and also because companies are paying them for work very late or not at all, the Slovenian Chamber of Crafts has demanded that the Government enact a 30-day payment deadline. If this cannot be done, it should prescribe the payment of VAT after fulfilment of payment. The Chamber of Crafts also proposes that companies that do not adhere to payment deadlines should not be entitled

to state assistance. Craft establishments also advise that in the crisis conditions the extent of illegal labour has increased. **Among the measures that should improve the position of companies in crisis conditions, the Government has adopted the measure of limited values (de minis), under which support would be provided up to a certain amount for scientific and research activities and development projects in companies. Support will also be provided for self-employment and re-employment in companies. They take the view that in this way they would be supporting 150 development projects in companies, 7,000 re-employments and 2,000 self-employment projects. By September the Government should have drafted plans for new pension and health reforms.**

On the scale of global competitiveness in 2009, published by the Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne, out of 57 countries Slovenia took 32nd place, which is the same as in 2008. This time the IMD also made a scale of competitiveness in terms of the response of countries to the economic crisis and on this scale Slovenia took 39th place. It lagged behind the average for the EU countries most in terms of business efficiency, taking 40th place. Slovenia's competitive advantages supposedly lie in the diversification of production and service activities, the quality of basic infrastructure,

public and private expenditure and education. In the opinion of Aleš Vahčić of the Ljubljana Economics Faculty, in 20 years of transition Slovenia has not made any serious shift towards increasing its economic competitiveness. He takes the view that the Slovenian education system is not sufficiently geared towards greater competitiveness. Marjan Hribar, head of the Tourism Directorate, reports that in the last five years they have received from European funds more than 800 million euros for 112 tourism projects. The municipalities are less happy, on the one hand because the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning has supposedly been confirming their spatial plans too slowly, and on the other hand because owing to disagreement in the EU on how much the weekly road toll vignettes should cost on the Slovenian motorways, the already approved European money is on hold. **According to the latest data from the European Commission, for the programming period 2000–2006 Slovenia received from the European Social Fund 83 million euros or around 93 percent of approved funds.**

The Government confirmed the first change to the national strategic rural development plan for 2007–2013, in which it took into account the latest data, and it will send this to the European Commission for inspection, since it anticipates receiving an additional 11.5 million euros from the European Agricultural Fund.

According to data from the Motorways Company (DARS), a total of 298 million euros should be spent in 2009 on motorway construction in Slovenia. Meanwhile a little over 32 million euros should be spent on repair of existing state roads. A decision has also finally been made on the contractor for constructing the Markovec tunnel (the motorway tunnel between Koper and Izola), which should involve the cooperation of the Vienna firm Alpina Baum and Cestno podjetje Maribor. However, appeals are expected from other construction companies, which assert that a tunnel cannot be built for that amount of money. So the final word will fall to an auditing commission.

After four years of preparation, procedures should now be continued, and in the coming year construction work should begin on a new track of the railway line between Koper and Divača, which will for the most part be run through tunnels. The track



Marjan Hribar, head of the Tourism Directorate, reports that in the last five years they have received from European funds more than 800 million euros for 112 tourism projects.

should be completed in 2017, and should cost a billion euros. According to current conceptual plans, the main junction of the railway tracks should be in a tunnel underground, where the railway would branch off towards Trieste and from there head towards Divača and Koper. Construction of the most difficult tunnel between Črni Kal and Divača should last three years, which is also extending the construction.

After 31 years, when Ljubljana Airport at Brnik was last completely reconstructed, and following modernisation in the 1990s, the airport has been renovating the runway and expanding the apron. This year Ljubljana Airport has seen passenger numbers drop by a fifth, but at the same time traffic of small commercial aircraft has risen by as much as 35 percent.

In the future the petroleum company Petrol will be headed by Aleksander Svetelšek,

former managing director of the Celje retail company TUŠ.

In the coming three years the Government should gradually increase the taxation on those motor vehicles, both personal and goods vehicles, whose emissions of carbon dioxide into the environment exceed the limits. The Government opted for incremental taxation so as to avoid some vehicles quickly becoming excessively expensive. The Government anticipates that owners of more polluting vehicles will then opt for environmentally cleaner vehicles.

In five years, the Ljubljana Hotel Bellevue should become a five-star establishment according to international standards. The new hotel, which will expand the current surface area of 1,314 square metres to 10,799 square metres, should have 90 rooms, while retaining the current historical flavour, and it will be aimed primarily at more demanding foreign guests.

Total of 298 million euros should be spent in 2009 on motorway construction in Slovenia.





photo: Pawel Flato

Inger Ultvedt, Swedish Ambassador to Slovenia

Slovenian–Swedish relations

Relations between Slovenia and Sweden are distinguished, and I can say that we have managed to forge ties in many areas, notably politics, economics, culture and sport.

As Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor mentioned after his visit to Sweden in May, political relations between Sweden and Slovenia can be described as excellent. This year Sweden was also visited by the Slovenian Speaker of the National Assembly, Pavel Gantar. There have been visits by the highest Swedish politicians to Slovenia in the past as well: Swedish PM Reinfeldt visited in June 2007 and the Swedish royal couple visited in 2004. Some of you may still remember former Slovenian President Milan Kučan's official visit to Sweden back in 1999.

In terms of economic relations I am delighted to see that several Swedish companies have established their activities in Slovenia, and I would like to see even more of them. Often, Swedish companies have used their presence in Slovenia as a springboard to expand their business to the markets of Western Balkan region. For several years now, there has also been a Swedish-Slovenian business group. It was initiated by the Embassy of Sweden, and it meets every three months. However, there is still much room to expand economic cooperation.

When we speak about culture, I will mention three future projects. The first one is the Swedish Film Week planned for October or November this year. Our intention is to share with Slovenians some remarkable Swedish films in Kinoteka. The second project we are working on is a performance by the well-known Swedish a cappella group The Real Group in Ljubljana, taking place in Cankarjev Dom thanks to an invitation by the Slovenian choir Perpetuum Jazzile. The third cultural project is a public celebration of the famous Swedish Santa Lucia, which we are planning in one of Ljubljana's churches in the city centre.

Good relations between Slovenia and Sweden are also seen in sporting activities. Every Slovenian still remembers our common hero, Ingemar Stenmark, and his loyalty to Slovenian Elan skis. Today, we share joy when we watch Tina Maze and Anja Pärson ski; Pärson has won the Golden Fox in Maribor. A passion for skiing is something which Slovenians and Swedes have in common, don't we?

The EU presidency

Sweden assumes the presidency of the European Union at a crucial time. The presidency will

consequently be characterised by challenge – and Sweden is ready to take on the challenge.

Our ambition is to lead an open, responsive and result-oriented presidency with the interest of the entire European Union in mind. It is a time of change and renewal for the European Union, especially if the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force.

There are two predominant challenges and priorities for the Swedish Presidency, namely to combat the economic crisis and to tackle the climate threat.

Europe and the rest of the world are in the midst of an economic crisis with declining growth and increasing unemployment. We will work vigorously to remedy the causes of the crisis, such as unemployment, as well as to build for the future. The task will entail stabilising the economy and improving supervision. It is also of considerable importance to restore functioning financial markets and confidence in them.

Climate change is an ever-present threat. Weather conditions are becoming increasingly extreme, yet the global greenhouse gas emissions have not begun to decline. Together with the rest of the world, it is imperative for the EU to reduce emissions. Sweden will work fiercely in order for the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen in December to be successful.

Additional challenges during the presidency include the adoption of a joint programme in the area of justice and home affairs, the Stockholm Programme. Our objective is to ensure a more secure and open Europe, where the rights of individuals are safeguarded.

Yet another goal for our presidency is to decide on an EU Baltic Sea Strategy. The Baltic Sea is facing urgent, serious environmental problems. The strategy must aim to achieve a cleaner sea and a decrease in overfishing and pollution.

The Swedish Presidency will strive to strengthen the EU's role as a global actor. It will be prepared for the unexpected and ready to coordinate EU action. The continued enlargement process is of strategic importance. There are summits planned for the EU's relations with third-party countries such as Russia, China and the United States.

Europe is facing two overriding challenges: the global economic crisis and efforts to halt climate change. Sweden cannot deal with these challenges alone – we need Slovenia's and all of Europe's support to be able to say that Europe succeeded in autumn 2009. My country and I are looking forward to a continued fruitful cooperation with Slovenia in the years to come.

Vojislav Šuc, Slovenian Ambassador to Sweden



photo: personal archive

Two countries that understand each other

For decades Slovenia and Sweden have been developing friendly relations, based on a kinship of mentality, work ethic and modesty, as well as on the sporting spirit of the two nations. Relations between the two countries attained a new level of quality with the beginning of efforts by Slovenia to join Euro-Atlantic organisations, when Sweden, which itself became a Member State of the EU in 1995, wholeheartedly supported our efforts.

Today we can speak of the two countries being close partners within the EU, sharing similar views of European and global issues. On his visit to Slovenia in 2006, before we assumed the Presidency of the EU, Prime Minister Reinfeldt ascertained in talks with the Slovenian leadership that there were practically no issues on which the two sides would not agree. Slovenian Prime Minister Pahor's visit in May this year also confirmed the high level of mutual understanding. Of course such understanding and mutual favour are exceptionally important, when a country is striving to fulfil its national interests, both within the EU and more broadly around the world.

The ties between the Swedish and Slovenian peoples are also being strengthened by contacts on the highest level. In the royal court there are still memories of the visit by King Carl Gustav and Queen Silvia to Slovenia five years ago, when their Slovenian hosts took them to what was in their words a "quite exotic" tour of a high-mountain Alpine farm. The royal entourage relates how they were enchanted by the beauty of nature, but quietly admit that they were also slightly scared by the narrow roads, high overhangs and ravines. The King had a rather easier experience, since he was taken to the farm in a Slovenian military helicopter.

Slovenia fully supports Sweden in its six-month leadership of the EU. The priorities on the list of the Presidency, which have been dictated mainly by global events, have been very well covered through Swedish national interests oriented to global markets and to an environmentally friendly economy. For this reason, too, the expectations relating to successful leadership

of the Union in eliminating the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and to an international climate agreement in December in Copenhagen are very high.

Sweden is one of those countries that is developing and introducing at home green technology, it is successfully exporting it around the world and is attempting on this basis to exploit the economic crisis for a leap from traditional to green industries. Here new opportunities are opening up for expanding bilateral cooperation, which would contribute to Slovenia being more rapidly involved in the most progressive economic currents in the world.

The Swedes who choose Slovenia as a tourism destination, in the words of one of the Swedish tour operators, are guided primarily by an interest in mountain hiking, golf and visiting recreational and health centres. With last year's introduction of regular air services on Adria between Ljubljana and Stockholm four times a week, tourist visits in both directions have been increasing. With slightly more inventiveness, much more could be done in the field of tourism.

During the Swedish Presidency of the EU, Slovenian drama will be showcased with a tour of the Slovenian Youth Theatre, staging Pograjc's play "Fragile!" in Stockholm and other Swedish cities in September and October. Recently an exhibition of the group IRWIN opened in Kalmar, and this will be followed by other cultural events. For the record, the Swedes are very involved in culture and value it highly, like the Slovenes.

Slovenian emigrants, of whom there are around 5,000 in Sweden, have over the decades represented a living bond between the two nations. The head of the Slovenian Union, Mr. Ciril M. Stopar, and the presidents of sectoral societies have been fighting unstintingly to preserve the Slovenian identity, and here there is an increasingly clear need for new approaches that would also tie in the second and third generations. Moreover there are quite a number of Swedish men and women who have Slovenian partners, and through them they have fallen very much in love with Slovenia.



TRNOVO WILL ONCE AGAIN BECOME THE CULTURAL CENTRE OF LJUBLJANA THIS AUGUST

Andrej Savelli, photo: Boštjan Pucelj

From 28 July to 30 August KUD France Prešeren will host the 17th edition of the now-traditional summer festival Trnfest, and will once again bring variety to summer events in the Slovenian capital. The five weeks of Trnfest 09 include a wealth of free events for young and old, catering for lovers of music, theatre, exhibitions and cinema, and also for children. The organisers expect around 40,000 visitors over the course of the festival.

In recent years TRNFEST has been one of the most popular summer cultural and art events in Ljubljana. From its beginnings in 1992 to this year's edition, which sees KUD France Prešeren organise and host the festival for the seventeenth time, TRNFEST has always meant a high-quality, unconventional and diverse programme involving both domestic and foreign artists from various fields of music, theatre, dance, literature, cinema, visual arts and educational and creative workshops.

The festival will be opened by a drumming performance in Prešeren Square by Les Frères Burkinabés from Burkina Faso. Artists appearing on the KUD France Prešeren stage will include Amadou Diarra (Burkina Faso), the Aggrolites (USA), and Ferus Mustafov & Džambo Aguševi Brass Band (Macedonia). The festival will close with a concert by The Stroj.

SUMMER WITH SLOVENIAN

Polona Prešeren

Although Slovenian is a language only spoken by just over two million people, more and more people are deciding to learn it. Whether they are the descendants of Slovenians living around the world or merely curious learners, summer courses and seminars of the Slovenian language are fully booked.

Slovenian is a member of the South Slavonic group of languages and is one of the few Indo-European languages to conserve the dual form alongside the singular and plural. The diversity that exists within the language is demonstrated by the extraordinary number of dialects that have formed within Slovenian. Students on courses do not learn all these dialects, of course, and instead concentrate on standard or literary Slovenian. For those studying or teaching Slovenian abroad, translators, journalists and others involved with the language in other countries, the Centre for Slovenian as a Second/Foreign Language also organises an annual Seminar of Slovenian Language, Literature and Culture. A seminar like this is very important for these people, since it allows them to make and maintain contact with authentic Slovenian, learn about the culture and form social contacts. According to the Centre for Slovenian as a Second/Foreign Language, this year's seminar was attended by 125 participants from 23 different countries, most of them students and university teachers of Slovenian, specialists in Slavonic languages and other academics, translators and people from cultural circles in Slovenian ethnic areas. This year's seminar was the 45th of its kind. This is quite a remarkable tradition, particularly if we consider how difficult it actually is to learn Slovenian abroad. The theme chosen by the organisers for this year's seminar was The Body in Slovenian, Language, Literature and Culture and involved reflections on the imagery of the body as it appears in literary works and attitudes to the body ranging from erotic seduction to the perverse, the grotesque and the comic. Most of the seminar participants came to Slovenia with the help of grants awarded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology for the promotion and academic study and diffusion of the Slovenian language, literature and culture at universities around the world and in Slovenian ethnic areas.



17th LENT FESTIVAL

Jože Osterman, photo: SNG opera and ballet archives

Towards the end of June, the town of Maribor was once again readying itself for its big summer event and the start of Festival Lent. The current financial and economic crisis had in no way curtailed the festival programme – in fact, the festival had never before seen such a range of social and cultural events as were lined up for visitors this time round.

The festival started on 26 June and finished on 11 July. For those two weeks or so, the old part of the town, called 'Lent', which lies along the banks of the River Drava, was occupied by masses of people in search of fun and of something to see. The district itself is actually organised somewhat in the manner of a separate town, with its own police station and radio and television station; all it lacked was its own mayor's office, but this role was performed superbly by the festival organiser, Narodni Dom Maribor.

The opening act at this year's Lent, which according to those well-versed in the festival scene is one of the 50 largest summer festivals in Europe, was Cuban band Cubanismo, who played in the town's main square as the festival flag billowed in the breeze. The festival took place across more than 20 stages, which played host to around 3,500 performers. Organisers were expecting around half a million visitors from Slovenia and abroad this year. They reckon visitor numbers were even higher than this, although the bad weather, which has sadly also become somewhat of a festival tradition, did thin out the crowds for some evenings quite considerably. Nevertheless, this did not dampen the festival spirit too much.

Over the 16 days of the festival there were classical, jazz, pop and ethno music concerts, evenings of music by singer-songwriters and evenings of 'chansons', as well as theatre, dance and puppet performances, stand-up comedy, creative workshops for children and a number of sporting events.

Three mini-festivals also took place within the larger festival: Folkart (an international folklore festival), the Jazzlent festival and a street theatre festival. Performers included 'King of Soul' Solomon Burke, the legend of Afrobeat, soul and free funk Keziah Jones, Đorđe Balašević, who was accompanied by a tambura orchestra from Vojvodina, Bajaga, who was celebrating his 25th year in Maribor, the Croatian diva Josipa Lisac and numerous Slovenian performers. Lent has quickly become an indispensable reference point for Slovenian acts and one that gives proof of the quality of their work.

FESTIVAL LENT 2009
<http://lent.slovenija.net>

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<http://lent.slovenija.net>

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REGENSBURG, CENTRE OF SLOVENIAN CULTURE IN GERMANY

Ivan Martelanc, photo: archive CD

The Bavarian city of Regensburg, which boasts the ranking of its city centre on the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage, has been providing the function in the heading above since 1 July this year. That date saw the start of a Slovenian reading room and library, the first institution of this kind in Germany and in fact anywhere abroad. The reading room will provide modern library and information services with Slovenian material, and will be linked to the Slovenian bibliographical catalogue COBISS. The Slovenian Minister of Culture, Ms. Majda Širca, who opened the Slovenian reading room, pointed out in her welcome address that this institution was not a “giant”, but was big for a nation that loves and appreciates the written word and wishes to share this love with others.

What could be called the initial capital of the library, which will be successively strengthened, amounts today to 500 books in the field of Slovenian literature, linguistics, sociology, history, economics, law and politics, as well as modern audiovisual material.

Here it should be added that the reading room accepted an initiative from Ljubljana to present the entire German-language literary opus of Igor Šentjurs, who was born in Slovenj Gradec and lived in the area of Regensburg. This opus is impressive, since the total print run of Šentjurs's books amounts to over 10 million copies.

The purpose of a further initiative, also fulfilled, was for this institution to acquire an additional, visually emphasised Slovenian feature. This has been ensured by the donation of two pictures with the theme “Trubar and the first Slovenian book from 1550” (by Studio Licul) and “Sebastijan Krelj”, dedicated to the Slovenian Protestant intellectual, who graduated and worked in Regensburg (by Lucijan Bratuš).

Last but not least: the presence of Slovenian books in “this beacon of Slovenian culture in Bavaria”, as we heard during the opening ceremony, motivated the Slovenian Tourist Board to set up in the reading room an information point on Slovenia's tourist attractions.



WHITE HORSES AT LIPICA TODAY AND AT THE TIME OF THE ILLYRIAN PROVINCES

text and photo: Jože Osterman

The Lipica Stud Farm, in cooperation with the French Charles Nodier Institute and with the support of the Slovenian Ministry of Culture, the Government Communication Office and the French Embassy, has opened an exhibition by the sculptor Iztok Šoštarec entitled “Beli konji / Chevaux blancs” [White Horses], which forms part of the programme of cultural events marking the 200th anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces.

This is a truly attractive project worth visiting. Sculptor Iztok Šoštarec has placed his project involving an installation of seven white horses in natural size in a fascinating origami technique (the material is planetary paper pulp) in the green lobby of the Hotel Klub at Lipica, where the elegant white horse silhouettes do indeed shine out as a “symbol of light and glory, for which reason since ancient times they have stirred the popular imagination”, as the artist himself describes his vision. The artist in fact created the project in June 2009 at the CAMAC modern art centre in the French Ardennes. The exhibition will be on display at Lipica until 15 August.

The Lipica Stud Farm has a good reason to be involved in celebrating the anniversary of the Illyrian Provinces. That was a turbulent period when since its founding in 1580, invaders meant the stud had to flee for the third time from its home location, that time owing to the French occupation. The herd of 289 Lipizzaner horses was transported to Pecs in Hungary, and in 1809 the French found the Lipica Stud almost empty. With some of the remaining animals at the stud, and with those they found among landowners nearby, they tried to revive it. On Napoleon's order, an Arab stallion of the Vizier was brought over from Egypt, and at the Lipica stud it remained a purebred sire even after the later return of the Lipica herd from Hungary. Napoleon gave the Lipica Stud Farm as a gift to the Governor of Illyria, Marshal Marmont. He in turn on his transfer in 1811 leased out the Lipica estate and other pertaining estates, but the leaseholders wished only to exploit the natural features of the estate and for that reason barbarically cut down the local forests. In memory of the French territorial rule, one of the roads at Lipica has been named Marmontov drevored, or Marmont Avenue.





HALF A CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHY BY OSKAR DOLENC

Jože Osterman, photo: Oskar Dolenc

At the end of June Oskar Karel Dolenc, photography master and professor, and one of the best known Slovenian photographers and activists in this field, has staged a retrospective exhibition entitled *Petdeset* [Fifty] at the Furlan Gallery in the Ljubljana district of Črnuče. Dolenc, born in 1938 and educated as a mechanical engineer, but in his heart of course primarily a photographer, a permanent associate in the international photographers union and holder of its honorary title Excellence FIAP, long-time president of the photo group ŠOLT, writer and translator of photographic literature, has been involved in expressive photography for over 50 years, and has now unveiled the best fruits of this to numerous audiences, including many of his students.

In her introduction, art historian Tatjana Kobe gave particular emphasis to the exceptional sensitivity of Dolenc, which quickly found expression in the diverse environments and moments in which he found himself. For this reason his work comprises numerous cycles that are at first glance almost unconnected, but common to them all is a practically perfect composition of pictures that pursue faithfully in particular the rules for creating artistic pictures, taking account of the golden mean and the proper relationship between the horizontal and diagonals. For this very reason Dolenc has contributed to the mosaic of Slovenian artistic photography several cycles that belong in the anthology of photographic creativity in Slovenia.



SLOVENIANS FROM ALL CONTINENTS MEET ONCE AGAIN

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

The start of summer each year is a time when numerous emigrant Slovenians who live abroad visit the locations where they themselves or their parents were born, meet up with relatives, acquaintances and friends and familiarise themselves with life in their original homeland. There are increasing numbers of these visits, for now the descendants of the third and fourth generation, born far from Slovenia, are coming over, and the homeland of their parents or grandparents usually generates just as much emotion in them, too. Human roots are indeed a thing that cannot simply be put out of mind. The Slovenian Emigrant Association has organised its traditional Meeting in My Country for the second time running in Nova Gorica, this time in the building of the National Theatre. Crowding into this space were more than 1,000 visitors with something to see. Firstly the President

of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, opened an exhibition at Kromberk Castle on the 'Alexandrines', Primorska women from the beginning of the last century, who went in large numbers to work as nannies and nurses in Alexandria in Egypt, where they were regarded as excellent workers. The meeting continued in the main hall of the theatre. In his speech, the president of the Association, Mr Pelhan, estimated that there are around 450,000 Slovenians living abroad, of which 80,000 have Slovenian citizenship, while some 150,000 Slovenians and their descendants keep up a permanent connection, and President Türk and the Minister for Slovenians Around the World, Dr Boštjan Žekš, stressed the exceptional importance of strengthening the cooperation and coexistence of all Slovenians in the future, since the country needs the joint energies of all its people. The outstanding artistic section then fea-

tured performances by cultural groups of emigrants, local people and other nationalities living in Slovenia, including the Slovenia society folklore group of Berlin, Sto ljudi of Trieste, the Serbian Sloga of Nova Gorica, the Davorin Jenko choir of Banja Luka, Triglav of Split and Kredarica of Novi Sad. The meeting then moved to outside the front of the theatre, where visitors could party late into the night. Simultaneously at the other end of Slovenia, in Šmarješke Toplice in Dolenjska, the Slovenija v svetu [Slovenia in the World] society held its 16th camp, which was attended by around 300 people. It is a pity that the two societies did not coordinate in planning their events, since the effect would undoubtedly be even better, suggested minister Žekš, without mincing his words, after shuttling urgently between the two locations.

OUR EXCELLENCE

Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Municipal museum Idrija archive



IDRIJA LACE

**Beauty created with needle,
bobbin and thread**



For centuries, Idrija lace has been a synonym for quality, prestige and an established reputation. The deeply rooted values that are expressed in Idrija lace are highly discernable and alluring.

It is not known precisely when and from where lacemaking skills came to Idrija; however, it is probably true that the lacemaking craft was brought to our parts by the wives of miners and mining experts from German and Czech lands who came to work in the Idrija mine. The beginnings of lacemaking in Slovenia date back to the 16th century. The frescoes found in some churches (Crngrob, St. Primož above Kamnik) testify to the widespread popularity of the lacemaking craft, as later described by the Slovenian polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor in his famous book, *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* (1689). The oldest written source revealing the existence of this craft in Slovenia dates from 1696 and speaks of lace and lacemakers from Idrija.

Since lacemaking skills were, for the most part, traditionally handed down from generation to generation, the introduc-

tion of organised lacemaking lessons in the form of courses and schools was both important and necessary. A lacemaking school was opened in Ljubljana in 1764 by Empress Maria Theresa, but the school operated for only a short time. A good hundred years later (1876), the school was re-established in Idrija and has continued to operate to this day. In the beginning, the school was run by a native of Idrija, Ivanka Ferjančič (1850–1879). The new technique of making bobbin lace with seven pairs of bobbins, which spread rapidly and gained popularity after Ferjančič's arrival from Tyrol, proved to be very successful.

Through the decades, the Idrija Lace School has trained a great many excellent lacemakers. Many became lacemaking teachers in the local environment, while others travelled far across Europe, and so the lacemaking skills and model of the Idrija Lace School spread to many countries. The Idrija Lace School, which also has branches elsewhere in Slovenia and offers various lacemaking courses around the country, ensures the preservation of numerous lacemaking techniques and elements that are rarely used in the most common lace products. The school is active in Slovenia as well as in other Euro-

pean areas, and through various activities and projects it connects Slovenian and foreign lacemaking centres.

Guided by the belief that Idrija lace – our heritage of the past – represents a challenge for the future, the Municipality of Idrija submitted the name “Idrija Lace” to the Slovenian Intellectual Property Office for an official “geographical indication”. In line with Slovenian legislation, this designation certifies that lace products bearing the name “Idrija Lace” are made of natural materials using traditional techniques and on patterns that may be copies of lace heritage, elements of the Lace School or the original designs of lacemakers, and consist of only those bases, elements and techniques that have received the prescribed number of points during evaluation. The awarded geographical indication not only brings economic potential, but also advantageous indirect benefits enjoyed by the region. Among the most important is undoubtedly the barely visible, yet continuous addition of new values to the “Land of Idrija Lace”.

It goes without saying that Idrija lace, which radiates exquisiteness and quality and a unique approach, can look forward to a promising future.

OUR EXCELLENCE

Ana Mrzlikar, photo: Irena Herak (Minutalmanj)

PERPETUUM JAZZILE

more than an XL choir

**'Outstanding!' ... 'Awesome!!'
... 'This is one of the best things I've
seen in a while. Thanks for sharing!'
... 'Amazing! What talent and more
than that they are having such fun'
... 'Absolutely, one of the best!'
'This is absolutely a masterpiece' ...**

At this point you are probably wondering who (or what) is being praised so extravagantly. Well, these are just some of the comments posted on Youtube by those who've come across the recording of 'Africa', originally by the well-known American band Toto, by 'XL' ('extra large') Slovenian a cappella group Perpetuum Jazzile. A mere six weeks after the recording was posted, the number of hits for the two busiest links has risen to over two million.

Boštjan Usenik, Perpetuum Jazzile's president and manager, explains: 'The extraordinary success of the video, which was recorded live and features vocals only, has put Perpetuum Jazzile into a wholly realm. The superb vocal arrangement, penned by artistic director Tomaž Kozlevčar, and the passionate performance by Perpetuum Jazzile have, in addition to being viewed online by huge numbers of people from 136 countries (and counting), given rise to an avalanche of praise via email, hundreds of calls for the group to go on tour to all parts of the world, from the United States and Brazil to Japan and Australia, and a barrage of orders for albums and advance sales of the new live studio al-

bum and DVD, both of which go on sale in October. One of the most intriguing suggestions, made to us and to FIFA, by foreign listeners is that Perpetuum Jazzile perform 'Africa' at the opening ceremony of next year's World Cup. Being in charge of organisation for Perpetuum Jazzile, I have already received tentative and concrete invitations from concert promoters and producers to organise a series of concerts around the world, although discussions with a number of organisers are still at an early stage. We are open to suggestions and invitations from anywhere and prepared for the big challenges that lie ahead. In the last few days one of the largest Japanese broadcasters has asked to use a live recording of 'Africa'. The recording of 'Africa' comes from last year's Vokal Xtravaganza concert at Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana. None of the members could have imagined that it would be so successful.

'It's become a phenomenon and one that still hasn't sunk in. It's difficult to think of the right response to all the opinions, praise and invitations,' says artistic director Tomaž Kozlevčar. 'I've carried "Africa" around in my heart for decades. In the

1980s I played the song with my band and heard it performed live in Vienna by Toto. At that time I would never have imagined that, after writing almost 500 arrangements, I would become in a matter of weeks the most listened-to Slovenian arranger, with an a cappella version of "Africa" ... I wrote it, like many arrangements of worldwide hits, simply out of enthusiasm for the song and with this huge challenge in mind: how to transfer the virtuoso rhythms and passages laid down by these stellar American studio musicians to a vocal group and, at the same time, remain true to the original sound and feeling of the song. Even less did I dream that the writer of the song, Mr David Paich himself, would seek me out and shower me with praise and thanks for the arrangement; he'd received more praise for the song from colleagues, critics and editors than ever before. He wrote: "I never dreamed of hearing such an innovative rendition ... I am truly honored that you not only would arrange a choir version of the song but the time and effort into creating REAL MAGIC!"; says Kozlevčar, proudly.

Who, then, are Perpetuum Jazzile? They say themselves that they are 'talent, ability and poetry. Energy, optimism and laughter. We are passion, drive and dimension. Friendship, respect and success.'



The official beginnings of the band go back to 1983, when a group of enthusiasts of jazz vocals came together under the leadership of founder Marko Tiran. At that time they were known as Gaudemus. At the end of 1998, just before their debut album, the choir, whose first loves are jazz and pop, which make up the bulk of their output, got their new name: Perpetuum Jazzile, which translates as 'unstoppable jazzists'. In 2001 the role of artistic director was taken over by well-known musician, producer and arranger Tomaž Kozlevčar, who was also singer with the Slovenian vocal group New Swing Quartet. Today they are still the only 'XL' vocal ensemble in the country working in the traditions of jazz and popular music; indeed, they are one of the few to be doing so in Europe as a whole. Their music is interwoven with the rhythms of Brazilian bossa nova, but it also extends across the genres of gospel, funk and pop.

'As a freelance artistic professional, being artistic director of Perpetuum Jazzile is just one of my activities, but one that adds to and is intertwined with the others. I am also the music producer of the group and often record them in my own SOS studio. I write most of the arrangements, as well as a fair number of original compositions. I occasionally record a keyboard part because I accompany the choir on piano at concerts, although I mostly act as conductor and producer, as well as taking care of the monitor and PA (the sound is otherwise in the hands of our superb sound technician Dare Novak). The success that I have achieved with Perpetuum Jazzile give me immense encouragement and help me to continue to preserve my youthful enthusiasm as I approach my mature years,' says Kozlevčar.

The members of the choir are always involved in choosing the repertoire. The idea for an a cappella version of 'Africa' came from them – or rather, the choir's executive committee, which is also responsible for the entire organisation, operation and strategic direction of Perpetuum Jazzile. They were

also the ones who came up with the idea of using vocal percussion and instrumentation. 'I was really struck by this TV advert which had a choir imitating all the sounds a car makes ... It was only a small step from that to the idea of a storm, of rain and thunder, which now opens every performance of the song and which is made by the voices of the choir,' says Kozlevčar.

Amateurs, but professionals too

The choir now has over 40 members. And although they are amateurs, their quality criteria are those of professionals. A number of them have decided to strike out on their own musical path, among them the brilliant singer Nuša Drašček. Their performances are dynamic and they sprinkle a special brand of magic on each song, even the mellower ones. Their performances are not merely balsam for the ears but easy on the eye, since the members also make the group visually interesting and attractive, whether on account of the carefully chosen and brightly coloured wardrobe (purple, red and orange shades, which they themselves call 'fruit salad') or the modern accessories. Every performance is choreographed, which gives added value to the music.

Perpetuum Jazzile are proud to be different. When the voice becomes an instrument and instrument becomes voice, one can hear the throb of fresh rhythms and the flow of their harmonies. Everyone who has attended one of their concerts or live performances calls it 'a heady experience'.

PJ are also great friends

Perpetuum Jazzile, or PJ as they call themselves, are only harmonious on stage but also hang out together off-stage. One could even say that a proper PJ community or sub-culture has developed. They have a well-constructed and regularly updated website which keeps us abreast of concert dates, and contains a group diary and the

opinions of site visitors; we can watch some of their videos and take a peek backstage ... Special mention should be made of their 'dictionary', in which members explain the meaning of the words they use among themselves. They have also come up with their own awards, the 'Golden Rupturewort', which is similar to the Oscar in form and is awarded at the traditional PJ New Year festivities.

Appearances, tours and awards

PJ perform regularly throughout Slovenia and, more recently, abroad.

'The longest tours we have undertaken were in 2008 in Brazil and Argentina, where we gave seven concerts in three weeks, from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires. In recent years we have, alongside an average of between 50 and 65 concerts a year in Slovenia, performed in several European countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Austria, Italy, Croatia and Ukraine. Perpetuum Jazzile have won several professional jury and audience awards at international competitions, including the 'Vokal. Total' international jazz choir competition in Graz, Austria, 'IVGF' in Tilburg, Netherlands, and gold medals at the 'Choir Olympics 2008' in the jazz and pop categories. We should also not forget the several PJ concerts at foreign and Slovenian jazz festivals, a series of collaborations with foreign and Slovenian vocal jazz composers and arrangers, big bands, and foreign and Slovenian national radio and television broadcasters, as well as a series of joint concerts and other projects with foreign a cappella groups,' says Boštjan Usenik, president and manager.

If you would like to get to know Perpetuum Jazzile or any of their members more closely, visit their website www.perpetuumjazzile.si, which is also in English.

You can also join the Perpetuum Jazzile fan-club, or join their Facebook fan page.

slovenian delights

Polona Prešeren, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

TRADITION WITH PROTECTION

Getting to know Slovenia and its gastronomic specialities means getting to know the country's tradition. Slovenian food has its own identity and, here too, the people of Slovenia like to conserve their traditions. Since we prize our national dishes and are proud of them, some of them have been given protected product designations, while others are covered by special certificates. This is a way to ensure that products of significantly better quality are available to consumers.



slovenian delights

Protected products can have several types of designation but we will focus here on those products with a protected geographical indication. This means that the foodstuff possesses a specific quality, reputation or other characteristics attributable to its geographical origin. It is also important that at least one of the stages of production takes place in the specific geographical area after which the product is named. And if you are wondering where you can try these products: they can be found in all good food shops and department stores. Alternatively, Slovenia is full of genuine traditional restaurants or gostilne offering products of this kind. Dober tek (Bon appétit)!

Kraški pršut (Dry-cured Karst ham)

The curing and salting of meat from pigs is a centuries-old tradition in Slovenia, and who has not heard of Kraški pršut? Hams dried in the natural conditions created by the burja (Bora) blowing over the Karst are the basis of a top-quality product with a protected geographical indication. Kraški pršut gets its special flavour from climatic conditions that are unique to the Karst and have a crucial effect on the characteristics of the ham. And of course from the strong winds like the burja that race down from the Alps towards the Mediterranean.

Kraški pršut is also characterised by its traditional and recognisable shape. The only “additives” in Kraški pršut are sea salt and the pure air of the Karst. The salting technique, using coarse sea salt, is also unique. Kraški pršut is usually aged for one year, although larger hams may be aged for longer.



Kraški zašink (cured neck meat)

Kraški zašink is a meat product with a characteristic cylindrical shape made from the cured neck meat of the pig stuffed into a casing. Owing to the great demand for neck meat, local farmers developed a way to cure it without the bone in natural casings. Originally the casing was a pig's bladder. Later, natural casings

of bovine origin and artificial casings began to be used. For the true Kraški zašink only fresh neck meat is used. When it is fully aged it has a distinctive, slightly salty flavour. Its texture is compact and smooth. And as any true gourmet knows, it melts in the mouth. Kraški zašink is an excellent addition to a cold cuts platter, while at Easter and Christmas it is also served boiled or baked in pastry.



Kraška panceta (cured pork belly)

Kraška panceta is made from pork belly. It can be dried with the skin on and has a rectangular shape, and is also made in rolled form. Its characteristic quality comes from the accurate selection of pork belly and a dry-salting process using sea salt. Naturally, the drying of this meat product has to be carefully monitored. Only in this way can quality be guaranteed.

The quality of Kraška panceta can be recognised from a slice of the product. If it is sliced thinly – as it should be – the cured meat should have an intense red colour and the fat should be creamy white. The aroma must be full and the texture tender.

Kraška panceta is excellent served sliced with bread and fennel or used as an extra ingredient – a little secret – in cooked dishes. It goes very well in stews and vegetable soups. Fried, it forms a unique combination with polenta. It is a succulent addition to pătés – or you can simply eat it for breakfast or brunch with fried eggs.



Jajca izpod Kamniških planin (Eggs from below the Kamnik mountain pastures)

These are not just ordinary eggs! Because of the high calcite content in the chicken feed, Jajca izpod Kamniških planin have a higher calcium content. The shell is smooth and uniformly thick across the entire surface of the egg. It also has a pleasant matt finish. Thanks to carefully devised chicken feed, Jajca izpod Kamniških planin have a higher content of omega-3 fatty acids and a better ratio of omega-3 fatty acids to omega-6 fatty acids.

Kranjska klobasa (Carniolan sausage)

A sausage that is more than a sausage. Internationally, it has been one of the most recognised Slovenian products since the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph. According to legend, this sausage, which the ethnologist Dr Janez Bogataj classifies as a traditional Slovenian dish, was once responsible for sending Franz Joseph into raptures. His Imperial Majesty was on his way from Vienna to Trieste when he stopped at the Marinšek carters' inn in Naklo. All the innkeeper had to offer him were the house's ordinary sausages that he had in the larder. But the Emperor found them so delicious that he cried out: “This is no ordinary sausage, this is Carniolan sausage!” The Emperor's words still apply today and Kranjska klobasa is more than just an “ordinary” sausage since it joins the other traditional products with protected geographical indication status. It is a high-quality product and its production has to conform to special requirements – a precisely defined recipe and an approved production process.

Only the finest pork (75–80%) and solid fat (25–20%) may be used in the preparation of Kranjska klobasa. It also contains ground pepper, dehydrated garlic and nitrite salt. The mixture is placed into a casing made from pig's intestine and skewered with a wooden skewer. Even the dimensions of the skewer are precisely defined: it can be 2.5–3 millimetres thick and 3–6 centimetres long, and may be broken or cut. It is very important that the sausage is skewered through the casing and not through the filling. Kranjska klobasa is best served hot, since this is when it reaches its true gastronomic quality.



Prleška tünka (meat from the lard barrel)

Records dating from 1487 prove that tünka has been produced in the Prlekija region for many centuries. Today the product is one of the protected special agricultural products produced in Prlekija, the region on the right bank of the river Mura. Prleška tünka consists of minced lard and the meat of the pig – leg, back, loin or neck. The name tünka derives from the process used to make the product, where the meat is immersed or packed tightly (in dialect tünkati) in minced lard. Prleška tünka is thus an effective and quality way of conserving pork in such a way as to conserve its sensory properties, rosy-pink colour and succulent flavour.

At one time tünka was only eaten on holidays and special occasions. Today it is an important part of the menu of restaurants and farm tourism establishments and is also a popular family meal. It is served with black bread, onions, peppers and of course the excellent white wines of Prlekija.

Pumpkin-seed oil from Štajerska and Prekmurje

The people of Štajerska and Prekmurje could not imagine their local cuisine without pumpkin-seed oil. In these parts of Slovenia they have been growing pumpkins since the 18th century and turning the seeds into oil. This pumpkin-seed oil is a high-quality unrefined plant oil. Producers who wish to sell their products as štajersko or prekmursko pumpkin-seed oil (bučno olje) have to make it according to the traditional process that involves pressing roasted pumpkin seeds of the finest quality, with the use of heat and with no additives. Did you know that you can even buy an exquisite dark chocolate with pumpkin-seed oil in Slovenia? This wonderful chocolate is of course hand-made.

Polona Prešeren, photo: Domen Grögl, STA

European Basketball Championship Will Slovenia enjoy a basketball fairy-tale?

Currently the Slovenian basketball team is in the midst of preparations for the European Championship in Poland. Expectations leading up to the 9th successive Championship on the old continent are very high. Training sessions are progressing under the watchful eye of coach Jure Zdovc, and are evolving in a real sporting spirit, with an exceptionally positive atmosphere among team members. And the lads are predicting that they will give everything they have at the European championship, since the objective is clear: a Championship medal!

Ivo Daneu, legend of Slovenian basketball

Coach Jure Zdovc was himself once an exceptionally successful basketball player. In his career he played for numerous European clubs, including Olimpija of Ljubljana, Kinder Virtus Bologna, Iraklis, Panionios and Split, and he helped Limoges win the title of European club champion. He was also a long-term member of the Slovenian and Yugoslav teams. In this way he also won the title of Slovenian and European champion. Now he is trying his hand in an entirely new role – Slovenian team coach. “We face some hard work, and it is no secret that our ambitions are not modest,” said Zdovc before the preparations.

The team captain this time around is Matjaž Smodiš, who plays on the club level for CSKA Moscow. He is convinced that he will play his part well as leader, and he is betting on the fighting spirit and sense of sacrifice in the team. Our boys also have 13 friendly games in the preparation period. But we will not have to wait much longer for results at the Championship.

Since basketball is an exceptionally popular sport in Slovenia, and one that a lot of people like to play, and many people like even more to watch, the Basketball Association of Slovenia expects large numbers of Slovenian fans in Poland. At least 2,000 fans are expected to follow the Slovenian team in Warsaw. For them and all others who are interested in the Slovenian team and Slovenia, during the Championship there will be a Slovenian bar in the centre of Warsaw. In the relaxed atmosphere of the Browarmia brewery, fans can get together over the live music of a Slovenian band and have fun before and after the game. Slovenian fans are famous for their positive support and their good nature.

Preparations with the European elite

Even before the European Championship, the Slovenian team will play a full 13 preparatory games. Just how strong the competition will be for those selected by coach Jure Zdovc can be seen in the fact that they will be playing against six of the best teams from the last European Championship in Spain. Against Russia (1st in Spain) on 9 and 10 August in Ljubljana and Novo Mesto, Spain (2nd) and Lithuania (3rd) on 20 and 21 August in Madrid, Greece (4th) on 30 August in Maribor, Croatia (5th) on 15 and 16 August in Poreč, and against Germany (6th) on 2 and 3 August in Bonn and Karlsruhe. At the Championship in Spain in 2007 Slovenia took seventh place.

Development of basketball in Slovenia

Basketball was already being played in Slovenia in 1905 in schools and physical training societies, and it was called korbball, while the proper beginnings date back to 1921. The initiator and herald of basketball in Slovenia was the physical education teacher and Sokol Maribor society member Ciril Hočevnar, who prepared for the

higher education acceptance exams in Prague at the Tyrš Institute, and he had to master the rules of basketball.

Students brought basketball to the area of the former Yugoslavia. They played it at grammar schools and in societies, including the Sokol society, which also spread the proper sporting spirit in other branches of sport. The first rules were printed in Belgrade in 1924. The first, unofficial, game in Slovenia was played between the Sokol societies of Maribor and Murska Sobota, in 1922.

Basketball Association of Slovenia

After the Second World War, basketball enjoyed a meteoric rise across most of Slovenia, and became even more popular. The new sport excited young people and became a success among sports generally. Before the founding of the Basketball Association of Slovenia, on 15 January 1950, basketball was played in numerous places around Slovenia, where it was organised mainly by physical education teachers in schools and sports societies.

The first Slovenian to play for the Yugoslav national team was Mirko Amon, who played for the Ljubljana club Železničar, and in 1950 he was the best shooter in the Yugoslav federal league. Mirko Amon also took part in the first World Championship in Argentina.

Following in his footsteps were Boris Kristančič (1951), Bogdan Mueller (1954), Jože Zupančič (1955), Marjan Kandus (1956) and Ivo Daneu (1956). In the next 40 years, Slovenian basketball players had an important role in the former Yugoslavia.

Ivo Daneu, legend of Slovenian basketball

Since the earliest times Slovenian basketball has had a special place in Europe and the world. This is easy to assert, since FIBA, the International Basketball Association, accepted the legendary Slovenian player Ivo Daneu into its Hall of Fame. The former member of the basketball teams of Maribor and Ljubljana Olimpija, even played a leading part in the select ranks of Yugoslavia, which he took to numerous medals at European and World championships.

Daneu started his sports career in his native Maribor, continuing and ending it at the Ljubljana club Olimpija. He won a full 209 caps playing in the shirt of the Yugoslav team, and in 1967 he was declared sportsman of the year in the former Yugoslavia. In the Yugoslav kit he gained the title of world champion in 1970 in Ljubljana, and won a silver medal at the Olympic Games in Mexico City, going on to win a further two silvers in World Championships and second place three times in the European Championships. In 1967 he was chosen as the most useful player at the World Championship in Montevideo. He was one of the best players in Yugoslavia, helping Ljubljana Olimpija become national champions of the former country a full six times. Slovenians will of course



remember best the World Championship in Ljubljana, which was also a major milestone in the popularity of this sport. FIBA placed Daneu alongside basketball legends such as Dražen Dalipagić (Serbia), Nikos Galis (Greece), Sergei Belov (Russia), Hortencia Marcari (Brazil) and Bill Russel (USA). The legendary Ivo Daneu took his leave of the team in 1970, after having become a champion at the World Championship in Ljubljana.

In later years the Yugoslav team won the title of European and world champion with Jože Papič (1977 – EC Belgium), Peter Vilfan (1978, WC Manila) and Jure Zdovc (1989 – EC Yugoslavia and 1991 – EC Italy, 1990 – WC Argentina). The World Championship in Ljubljana was a success in all respects.

SLOVENIANS IN THE NBA

The first Slovenian team member to play in the American NBA league was Marko Milič in 1997. He played for the Philadelphia 76ers and the Phoenix Suns. A total of seven Slovenians have played in the NBA, with Rašo Nesterovič, Beno Udrih, Goran Dragič, Saša Vujačić, Uroš Slokar and Primož Brezec playing in addition to Milič.

The first Slovenians to win the title in the NBA were Beno Udrih and Rašo Nesterovič. In the 2004/05 season they played for the San Antonio Spurs. In 2009 another championship title was won by Saša Vujačić with the Los Angeles Lakers. Beno Udrih was the first Slovenian to play in the NBA All Star Rookie game (2004/05).

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE SLOVENIAN TEAM

The Basketball Association of Slovenia became a full member of the International Basketball Association FIBA on 10 January 1992. The first game for the Slovenian team was on 20 May 1992. The Slovenian team, led at that time by Zmago Sagadin, played against Croatia in Slovenske Konjice.

Independent Slovenia's first official game was played in the qualifications for the Olympics held in 1992 in Barcelona. Slovenia played very well in these qualifiers, enjoying 7 victories out of 11 games. But the Slovenian team missed the Olympics by just one single basket.

The Basketball Association of Slovenia keeps a constant ladder of appearances and shooters at official games of the Slovenian men's team. In terms of appearances, first place is occupied by the current director of the team, Marijan Kraljevič (73 appearances), followed with 67 appearances by Jaka Daneu and Boris Gorenc, and in 7th place with 57 appearances is Jure Zdovc. As for shots, the Slovenian team coach is in second place with 755 points, while at the top of the ladder with 990 points is Teoman Alibegović. Third is Boris Gorenc (620), and joint fourth are Slavko Kotnik and Marko Milič (both on 605 points).

The Slovenian team first participated in the World Championship in 2006. An appearance in Japan was ensured by taking 6th place in the European Championship in Serbia and Montenegro in 2005. That team was led by Aleš Pipan.

Tadej Golob, photo: personal archive

Urban Golob

Man with ideas

This summer a new CD with quite an unusual cover fell into my hands. Three faces by a climber standing on a shelf below a vertical wall. 'Godba vertikale' or 'Music of the Vertical' is the name of this album with acoustic instrumental and mood music, and it has been created by three Alpinist-musicians: Tomaž Žganjar, Boris Kofol and Urban Golob. These are fascinating 'dudes', especially Urban, the youngest of them.

When he was eight years old, he developed cancer of the soft palate. This is a rare and dangerous form of the disease, for which reason many had given up on

him. But not his parents or himself. He survived, and today he does not like to talk about it. "I don't feel like it," he says, "and also I don't want it to be an excuse, although the disease and treatment had consequences." The strong radiation treatment halted the development of his facial bones, so today he still has considerable difficulty opening his mouth, and since part of his soft palate was removed he also has trouble speaking and eating. "It's ok now, I got used to it, but I still suffer every time I go to the dentist," he explains, adding: "but he does too, when he tries to get at some tooth further back."

From the winter ascent of the north face of Les Droites above Chamonix in France.

Alpinism

It was precisely because of his debilitated state from the treatment that his father Janez, himself an Alpinist, took him to the mountains, so he could get a little stronger. Since then he has kept the faith, as we say, and when he was old enough, he enrolled in Alpinist school and became an Alpinist.

“When I was fourteen I climbed to the top of Mont Blanc, and descended exhausted to Chamonix. It was such a powerful experience, and it struck me that Alpinism was the real thing. In time I recognised that this activity is exceptionally diverse and rich. So anything that lacks some form or other of climbing still just doesn't do it for me.”

There are several types of Alpinism, and Urban quickly devoted himself to its innovative and exploratory fields, where the difficulty of the routes he tackled was not the only noteworthy fact. Exploration was associated with remote, godforsaken rock faces, which were not visited by a whole lot of people, and with first-time routes never attempted by anyone before. For instance, with his climbing partner Iztok Tomazin, a well-known doctor and mountain rescuer from Tržič, he climbed 12 new routes in an isolated valley head below the eastern face of Mt. Škrlatica.

“That was a time when I was really interested in first-time ascents. On top of that, the remote face of Škrlatica offers an excellent cliff. It was these climbs with Iztok that led me to explore our rock faces and to seek possibilities for new routes. Yet this requires a good familiarity of Alpinist history, rock faces and climbed routes – in short a thorough grounding in Alpinism. And that knowledge always attracted me.”

Himalayas

This was followed by the Himalayas and an expedition to the highest mountain in the world. On Shishapangma he reached a height of 7700 m, before bitter cold forced him and his climbing partner to turn back, and on Everest in 2000 as the official photographer of the expedition he recorded the feat of Davo Karničar, who on 7 October of that year became the first man to successfully ski from the peak of the highest mountain in the world to base camp more than three and a half kilometres below. Yet rather than that expedition, which was more of a working assignment for him, he prefers the climb of Peak 41, which at 6654 m is indeed in the shadow of the Himalayan giants, but had remained untouched up until the ascent by Urban's squad of four Slovenian climbers.

“In seeking goals we are helped today by the internet, where I found this mountain. Of course the photographs and information on the internet are not sufficient, and you have to work at it in different ways, too. But this kind of exploration always makes me happy, and in doing this you realise how many more Alpinist goals there still are – both unclimbed lines and faces and untouched peaks. For exploratory Alpinists there are still plenty such goals. Sometimes you just need to go around the first corner of some very popular mountain to find an untouched world.”

Humanitarian traverse of the Slovenian Alps

Four years before that Urban performed a feat that pointed to an additional orientation of his, one that has many links to Alpinism

but stretches further. In thirteen days of February 1998, he crossed the Slovenian Alps from Tolmin in the west of the country to Maribor in the east, and in doing so he hiked, skied, climbed and over one small section he even cycled the 320 km, meanwhile ascending all the highest peaks of the three main mountain groups in Slovenia. He climbed Triglav, the highest peak of the Julian Alps, Stol, the king of the Karavanke, and Grintovec, the highest mountain of the Kamniško-Savinjske Alps. This was an exploit that previously no one had done ‘in one go’, and he did it not just out of sporting impulses.

“Through this crossing I wanted to draw attention to children who have developed cancer and collect money for them. Radio Val 202 came to my help as media sponsor, and I broadcast on it every other day. On the radio they gave the number of an account for the foundation to help children with cancer and blood diseases, and by the end of my crossing a nice sum of money had been collected. Another financial influx came after the broadcasting of a film that TVS made of the exploit. This film also won first prize at the international film festival in the Austrian city of Graz.”

The winter traverse of the Slovenian Alps demonstrates wonderfully how every ending is the start of something, and how new ideas are born from the fulfilment of old ones.

Projekt 3/glav

“That time I climbed Triglav, Stol and Grintovec, the highest peaks of the individual groups of our Alps. Then I got the idea of linking all three mountains together on foot, in one go, the quicker the better. I suddenly asked myself if it would be possible to do this in one day, although the average mountaineer would need a total of five days to climb the individual peaks. So a good portion of the route would have to be run. I told my idea to my best friends, and a team of four runners was formed, so now it's time to try to do this thing.”

When his geodetist friend using a satellite navigation system mapped out the intended route of the ‘projekt 3/glav’ [literally: ‘three/head project’], as it was called, and calculated the altitude differences between the ascents and descents, some interesting numbers came up. The entire route is a hundred kilometres, almost to the metre, and he and his three friends (a former runner, Nordic skier and fellow Alpinist) face the equivalent of a full 8000 metre climb and a 6000 metre mountain descent.

This year Urban does not plan to repeat last year's mistakes, when he intended to do the run in September, but was surprised by early snow. He will do it towards the end of July, which is the hottest time, but the days are longest. And if the ‘monsoon’, which gripped this part of Europe at the beginning of summer, finally abates, he will soon have notched up a new achievement, which cannot be ranked in any recognised branch of sport. And what then?

“Then I would replace running with climbing again, or combine the two things in some new idea. Sometimes I've had trouble trying to explain to some person why I set about doing some kind of sports project that cannot be placed in any pigeon-hole. Today I'm not troubled any more, because I'm doing this for my own joy and that satisfies me completely. But I'm still stumped about how to answer the question – why. I simply don't know. Or rather – because it's great.”



From the winter traverse of the Slovenian Alps to raise money for children with cancer.

CULTURAL TRAILS

Ljubljana, Town Square, photo: Marko Pršina

Cultural heritage, creativity and innovation

Dr Jelka Pirkovič, Nataša Gorenc

When someone mentions cultural heritage to us, we usually think of something old and bound up with tradition, or perhaps even something old-fashioned and covered with dust. Through the creative incorporation of cultural heritage into the modern life of European citizens, the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape, of which Slovenia has been an active member since 1992, is endeavouring to do away with this stereotype.

One of its most important achievements has been the drafting and subsequent adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005). The integrated conservation of cultural heritage as an interconnected web of different policies and measures at the national, regional and local levels can only be successful if citizens

in general, and members of civil society and local residents in particular, are included at all times in these processes and decisions. People have always played part in creating heritage and continue to do so today. This belief is also the basis of the Framework Convention's definition of cultural heritage as "a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently

of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions." Heritage is thus a dynamic phenomenon – its contents are constantly changing and expanding and people are constantly discovering new values, challenges and meanings in it. The Framework Convention also defines the common heritage of Europe, which consists of "all forms of cultural heritage in Europe which together constitute a shared source of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity." For this reason the Parties to the Convention (including, since 2008, Slovenia) undertake to promote cultural heritage protection as a central factor in the mutually supporting objectives of sustainable development, cultural diversity and contemporary creativity.

European Heritage Days

The declarative level of endeavours of this kind is complemented in everyday life by the European Heritage Days, a joint action of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. This initiative has its origins in 1984 with the first *Journée portes ouvertes* in France, which gave people the opportunity to visit cultural monuments that are usually closed to the public. In 1991, under the aegis of the Council of Europe and with the support of the European Commission, the initiative expanded to involve the participation of 12 states, among them Slovenia, in the field of popularisation of cultural heritage. Today the European Heritage Days represent the most successful initiative in the field of culture, bringing together 49 countries, 6,000 cities, 30,000 cultural monuments and 20,000,000 visitors.

Slovenia's European Heritage Days have developed hand in hand with the European initiative. Following an initially modest visitor response, 10,000 visitors attended Heritage Days events in September 1998 and by 2008 this number had risen to 25,000. To begin with we planned the European

Heritage Days thematically and we started in 1991 with a presentation of Baroque routes through Slovenia. Since then we have focused on Roman soldiers, vernacular architecture, historic parks, the heritage of monastic orders and the architecture of the Vienna Secession, and got to know medieval town centres, early industrial architecture, twentieth-century architecture, archaeology on Slovenia's motorways, restoration projects, intangible cultural heritage, the architecture of fortifications, and the legacies of Jože Plečnik and Primož Trubar.

The central medium of communication we have selected is a publication, which we have translated into several European languages. The guide to the monuments brings cultural monuments closer to the reader in an accessible manner. Eighteen guides have been published to date. Furthermore, in conjunction with the institutions engaged in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, we have designed events that draw particular attention to current happenings and findings and to the issues surrounding the protection of cultural heritage. In recent years the European Heritage Days have also represented an excellent example of the inclusion of civil society in the promotion of cultural heritage, allowing individual citizens a more active role in its conservation.



Ljubljana, Plečnik's Market Arcades, photo: Damjan Prelovšek

European Heritage Forum

When seeking a theme for this year's European Heritage Forum together with the Council of Europe, the decision was easy. The role of creativity and innovation in conserving heritage is a good choice of theme, particularly since in the case of the European Heritage Days the **Council of Europe works closely with the European Commission, and the European Union has declared this year the Year of Creativity and Innovation. The European Heritage Days, and the European Heritage Forum, which forms part of them, are an excellent example of the good and well-established cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission.**

The purpose of the Forum is to demonstrate the new solutions that advanced information and communication technologies can offer in the development of public awareness of the values of heritage and the role of the latter in sustainable development, above all in education, research and the local economy, particularly tourism and the creative industries. The Forum is aimed above all at experts from these areas and at the organisers of the annual European Heritage Days from Council of Europe member states. As has become the custom, the Forum will be accessible to the general public via the internet.

Because of the contents and purpose of the Forum, we have chosen the form of organisation that will best release the creativity of the participants. The second European Heritage Forum will take place on 22 and 23 September in the great hall of the conference centre at Brdo. Instead of the traditional format, it will be organised in the form of simultaneous round-table discussions. A brief general introduction will be followed by two thematic strands covering, respectively, "Innovation and Creativity in Heritage Interpretation" and "Heritage and Images". The Forum will be opened by the Slovenian Minister of Culture and the programme will begin with a keynote presentation by Professor Drago Rotar of the University of Primorska, on the theme of "Social Representation, Shared Memories and Cultural Monuments". The introductory tone of the two thematic strands and the round-table discussions will be set by presentations of examples of good practice from

around Europe. In the first strand there will be a presentation of a virtual museum of Polish history (Robert Kostro), new approaches to motivating visitors to the Tower of London and the Crown Jewels (David Souden), new technologies in the interpretation of Cluny Abbey in France (Jean-Paul Ciret) and the temporal/spatial visualisation of three Slovenian monument areas – the old town centres of Koper, Ljubljana and Ptuj (Franc. J. Zakrajšek). The second thematic strand will be introduced by presentations of the popular BBC television series "Coast" dedicated to the coastline of Britain (Mark Horton), a similar series from a Belgian production company entitled "Escapade Gourmande" on the theme of cultural tourism, presenting the heritage, including the gastronomic heritage, of various parts of Europe (including Slovenia, although this episode has not yet been broadcast in Slovenia) (Thierry Pérouse), a German television series on UNESCO World Heritage (Werner von Bergen) and a technically very advanced 3D presentation of the Lascaux Cave with its famous prehistoric paintings (Noël Coye and Thomas Sagory). Since the monument itself is closed to visitors, a presentation was prepared some years ago on the internet. Now it has been completely updated and receives one hundred thousand virtual visitors each year. The virtual visit shows more than an actual visit would do. For example: we can see an example of the reconstruction of the painting process, learn about the chronology of research and browse through a complete collection of photographs and other documents.

The themes of the Forum and the examples of good practice raise a series of questions and invite reflection, for example on whether new technologies will attract young people to heritage research, the border between creativity and manipulation in heritage interpretation, how to better connect the heritage sector and television/audiovisual production companies, and the level of commercialism acceptable in the presentation of heritage for the general public, for example in connection with the tourism industry. The forum participants will attempt to provide answers to these and other questions. A summary of the discussions and recommendations for further activities from the Council of Europe, member states and other decisive factors will be published in a special publication.



Koper, Tito Square,
photo: Miran Kambič, MK Indok center



Spodnja Hajdina, The first Mithraean Temple, photo: Boris Farič



Ptuj, The third Mithraean Temple, photo: Boris Farič

THE SALT WORKS IN SEČOVLJE

An activity that has survived for thousands of years

Jože Prešeren, photo: Mateja J. Potočnik, STO archives

Saltmaking is one of the oldest economic activities on the north-eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, and the salt trade was once one of the most important branches of commerce in the territory of present-day Slovenia. This trade had a decisive role in the development of Trieste, Piran, Izola and Koper. At the beginning of the last century, Slovenia's coast – all 46.6 kilometres of it – was dotted with salt works. The most important of them were the Piran salt works, although all that remains of them today is a section of the small salt works in Strunjan. The extensive Sečovlje salt works at the mouth of the river Dragonja, covering an area of around 850 hectares, are however still active today. In 1989 the municipality of Piran created the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, encompassing the area of these salt works and the nearby Seča peninsula. The Sečovlje salt works are the northernmost salt works in the Mediterranean.

The Sečovlje salt works are still an active operation today, and continue to produce excellent salt of a much finer quality than many imported salts or rock salts from inland salt mines. Newspapers in Slovenia reported that this year's first salt "crop" in Sečovlje was harvested in the first days of June, earlier than at any time in at least the last fifteen years. The saltmakers produced the first 25 tonnes of salt, which would appear to indicate a good harvest for this year. The newspapers also reported that almost three quarters of the total 26 salt fields were active at that time. This year 26 saltworkers are employed in the salt works. A recent record year occurred in 2007, when 3,500 tonnes of salt were produced, but last year the harvest was considerably poorer. Fleur

de sel is a highly prized salt product with a price that is typically 18 times higher than that of ordinary salt, yet even so there is no difficulty in finding buyers for it; most of it is bought by connoisseurs.

Past and present hand in hand

It is not precisely known when the salt works in Sečovlje first began operating, although the first written references to them date from the second half of the 13th century. It is assumed, however, that they are at least a few centuries older than that. Over the

course of their long centuries of existence, the salt works have gone through periods of prosperity and recession, and have not infrequently been on the verge of collapse. In the 14th century the Sečovlje saltmakers modernised the saltmaking process, taking as their model the process used in the salt works on the Dalmatian island of Pag. The process they developed is unique in the Mediterranean even today. The traditional manual harvesting of salt in salt ponds is a particular feature of the cultural heritage of Mediterranean Slovenia and helps ensure the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the salt works were owned by wealthy families, churches, monasteries and charitable institutions. The saltworker was merely the tenant of the salt field and the producer of the salt. The golden age of saltmaking in Sečovlje was from the 15th century to the end of the 18th century, when these areas were under the control of the Venetian Republic. This was the period in which regular-shaped salt ponds were built, in a strict sequence of evaporation ponds and crystallisation ponds. Following the collapse of the Venetian Republic (1797), the salt works came under Austrian control. Austria later proclaimed salt a state monopoly.

Beginning in 1903, Austria undertook a partial reconstruction of the salt works, but without notable success. Following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the First World War, the salt works in Sečovlje once again passed to Italy, which reconstructed them again. This had a positive influence on the quality and quantity of salt produced. After the Second World War the Yugoslav authorities prepared numerous studies and reconstructions designed to facilitate industrial salt production. Many organisational changes were made, but success was limited. In 2000 the Soline company (the company operating the salt works) also took over the management of the nature park. A year later the government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Decree on the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park in order to protect the valuable natural elements and biological diversity of the salt ponds ecosystem. In 2002 the salt works were acquired by Mobitel d.d., a mobile telephony company in which the state holds a majority share.

The salt trade is an interesting story in itself. This trade once centred on coastal towns, from where the salt travelled into the interior of the country along various routes. Great numbers of merchants and carriers were involved in the salt trade, and trade in salt was also connected with trade in other commodities such as grain. Many legends tell of smuggled salt. The conditions of trade changed constantly over the centuries, but the free trade in salt was eventually prohibited by state monopolies.

The Museum of Saltmaking

As mentioned above, salt is obtained in salt fields consisting of evaporation ponds and crystallisation ponds. Sea water is drawn from the evaporation ponds into the crystallisation ponds by a gravity system or with the help of pumps. In Fontanigge, part of the Sečovlje salt works which is today abandoned, these pumps were driven by windmills. In Lera, the newer part of the salt works, where salt is still produced today, a modern pumping system was introduced by the Austrians over a hundred years ago. Just over ten years ago, an up-to-date museum complex opened in Fontanigge, next to the Giassi canal. The salt works museum currently consists of two renovated saltworker's houses and the salt fields belonging to them, and a formerly navigable canal which was also the main seawater inflow. One of the houses contains a collection of old saltworkers' tools and an account of the history of saltmaking in words and pictures. The other house contains two salt stores, two simply furnished rooms and a kitchen for the use of the workers in the museum salt fields. A salt field consists of a series of ponds for the different stages of evaporation, and crystallisation ponds where the salt is "harvested" in summer. Visitors to the museum have the opportunity to buy elegantly packaged salt in special gift bags and a certificate of authenticity proving that it is genuine Sečovlje salt.

Today the Sečovlje salt works are also famous as a rich treasury of flora and fauna and are classified as one of the most important natural heritage sites in Slovenia. The abandoning of saltmaking in the greater part of the salt works has created special

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ecological conditions in which only organisms adapted to these special conditions can survive. These include a number of special plant species (halophytes) that only thrive in salty soil, while among the animals are representatives of some rare Mediterranean species such as the Etruscan shrew (*Suncus etruscus*), the smallest mammal in the world, the Italian wall lizard (*Lacerta sicula*) and the lesser mouse-eared bat (*Myotis blythii*), which are found nowhere else in Slovenia. There are also some rare species of shrimps, molluscs, fish, etc.

The salt works in Sečovlje are also a refuge for numerous birds, which find ideal living conditions here. Over 200 different species of birds have been observed in the area of the salt works, and 80 of them also nest here either permanently or periodically. In spring and autumn flocks of migratory birds stop in the salt fields, and great numbers of birds also spend the winter here – gulls, ducks, geese, sandpipers and other species. The salt works are also protected by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as a wetland of international importance as a waterfowl habitat.

Salt works as an additional tourist attraction

The Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is today an important tourist attraction on the Slovenian coast, although of course this is not allowed to impact on conditions inside the nature park. The buildings in the area of the salt works represent a valuable example of cultural heritage, from both the architectural and technical points of view. Documenting the way of life of the former saltworkers is also very important, and for this reason hunting and all activities that could threaten the biological diversity of the salt works area are prohibited. The nature reserves within the park are subject to special protection and any interference with the flora and fauna is strictly prohibited. This means, for example, no picking flowers or interfering with nests. Understandably all construction is also prohibited in the area of the park, including the Seča peninsula.



Since the nearby town of Portorož still retains something of the status of a health resort, it is worth mentioning that some hotels there use mud from the salt works for therapeutic purposes: specifically for treating rheumatic illnesses. It should be pointed out, however, that this mud only has a therapeutic effect when the crystallisation of the water is strong enough for salt production. In order for the mud to

have its effect, it has to dry on the part of the body that is being treated, and then rinsed off with salt water. The nature park also includes the Seča peninsula, a feature of which are areas of intensively farmed agricultural land in the form of terraces. For visitors, however, the biggest attraction is the outdoor Forma Viva sculpture exhibition, which has been designated an artistic and architectural monument.



I FEEL SLOVENIA



Sečovlje salt works
Photo: J. Skok - STO archives