

Sinfo

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The latest from Slovenia

ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA: **Slovenia opens new opportunities for foreign partners**
DEBATE: **Dr Ernest Petrič and Dr Matej Lahovnik**
IN FOCUS: **Celebrating 20 years of Slovenian national parliament**
NOTABILITIES: **Dr Jože Pučnik and the magic power of freedom**
IN PERSON: **Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia**
WONDERLAND: **Small vilage with a great soul**
HERITAGE: **Lady and the knight of Strmol – gone with the wind**



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SINFO – SLOVENIAN INFORMATION

Executive Editor and Editor – in – Chief:
Tanja Glogovčan, tanja.glogovcan@gov.si

Editorial Board:
Vesna Žarkovič, Polona Prešeren, Sandra Letica, Irena Kogoj
Photo Editor: Janez Vidrih
Production: Nuit d.o.o.
Translation: Amidas, DZTPS
Photo on the front page: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

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Photo: Bruno Toič

Tanja Glogovčan, editor

It's kind of fun to do the impossible

It is January now and, as the first month of 2013, it brings new challenges. In the following pages, we also remember December, which was important for at least two reasons. We celebrated the holiday of democracy and freedom.

Twenty years have passed since the first National Assembly – the first modern Slovenian representative legislative institution – was formed. In order to highlight and present key events appropriately, we prepared an overview of history of the National Assembly and collected statements from Presidents of the National Assembly from the past and current terms.

In connection with democratisation and independence, we must also mention Dr Jože Pučnik, whom many believe had the most important role in these processes in Slovenia. SINFO is giving him a special place among the most important people in Slovenian history.

We are also highlighting the inauguration of the new President of the Republic, Borut Pahor. At his inauguration as the fourth President of the Republic at a formal session of the National Assembly, President Pahor highlighted the need for a positive attitude. He thus sent the message that despondency and despair have to be resisted. Upon this occasion, the President of the Slovenian Government, Janez Janša, emphasised again that the Government is prepared to cooperate. The Prime Minister Janša and the President of the Republic, Borut Pahor, stressed the need for cooperation between all political players.

At the end of December 2012, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia decided that postponement of its enactment and a rejection of the Slovenia Sovereign Holding Act and the Measures of the Republic of Slovenia to Strengthen the Stability of Banks Act in a referendum would have unconstitutional results. With regard to this theme, we prepared an in-depth article supplemented by the views of the President of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Ernest Petrič and economist, Dr Matej Lahovnik.

Nevertheless, the future and riches of Slovenia lie not only in successful politics, but above all in its exceptional people. And there are many such people in sports, culture, economy and everyday life.

Imagine a world without the magic, roguishness and optimism of Walt Disney. Which is why I mentioned in the title his statement, 'It's kind of fun to do the impossible' (Walt Disney). This is the principal message of this January edition of SINFO. And to you, dear readers, dream and be successful and the best of luck in 2013!



SUCCESS IS NO LONGER MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

The Government of Prime Minister Janez Janša took the oath of office at the beginning of February 2012 in the circumstances of the largest budget deficit ever, an unbridled increase in the number of public sector employees, and the uncontrolled growth of costs in public administrative bodies.

The objectives were clear. The first objective was to deal with financial consolidation. Taking into consideration the complex legislation and the inflexibility of the existing arrangement because of a strong trade union presence supported with collective agreements, the ambitions of the Government to reach an agreement represented a 'mission impossible' for many people. After three hard months of carrying out coordination on a daily basis, an agreement was signed; Slovenia, for the first time in its history, decreased the number of public sector employees, reduced their salaries and reversed the trend of increasing the funds earmarked for salaries.

The next objective that the Government intended to achieve, in addition to the financial consolidation, was the adoption of three packages of measures to promote economic growth. As a consequence, certain taxes were decreased, the administrative burdens were significantly reduced, and numerous measures to renew economic activity were adopted. In implementing these measures, one of the leading businessmen in Slovenia said that the country had never had such favourable conditions for business operation.

The fragmented management of state assets (e.g. Slovenia has

four times more state assets per capita than France and ten times more than Slovakia) requires a new model of management. The solution is the establishment of the Slovenian Sovereign Holding, an asset management holding firm providing greater transparency and efficiency of management.

The credit crunch, as the result of very slow resolution of this issue in previous years, caused a deep reduction of economic activity; therefore, the Government took a decision to establish a 'bad bank', following the example of good practice from abroad.

Pension reform has been adopted, and labour market reform is under way. In the first year, the Government completed five comprehensive measures out of six objectives set. If we were asked one year ago, being familiar with possible systematic blockades by trade unions and the opposition, whether we believed in the success, we would have hesitated in giving a clear answer.

Today, the main objectives of the first year of the term of office are in place. Slovenia has a legal basis for dealing with the economic crisis. Success is no longer a 'mission impossible'; on the contrary, it depends on the performance of the team managing the legislative framework. It also depends on the willingness to place the interests of the state at the top of the priorities.

26. - 27.1.2013

COOPERATION IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

The Prime minister Janez Janša at EU – Latin America summit promoted efforts to prevent genocide. He highlighted the importance of the initiative for a genocide-free world while he addressed the summit of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago de Chile.

He said that the partnership between EU and the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (CELAC) is an extremely important forum for discussion and battle against the outbreaks of mass violence in different parts of the world. »Together we represent 60 countries with more than a billion inhabitants, almost a third of the UN members states. We have a great legitimacy and extraordinary responsibility«, he pointed out. According to him, the financial crisis has strengthened many factors of instability: social inequality, growing unemployment, limited access to drinking water, natural resources and education and health services. He also regretted that after so many decades and despite all the humanity has achieved, tragedies such as the war in Syria and most recently in Mali still happen.

On the sidelines of the summit, Janša held informal talks with several chief of states attending the summit. Meeting attended also Chancellor Angela Merkel, Spain's Prime minister Mariano Rajoy, Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, Mexico's Enrique Pena Nieto and Cuba's Raul Castro. The summit was also attended by European Council and European Commission presidents Herman Von Rompuy and Jose Manuel Barroso.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA



Minister Žerjav and business delegation in India. Photo: Archives of Ministry of Economic development and Technology

27.1.2013

PROMOTION OF SLOVENIA IN INDIA

In late January, a Slovenian business delegation, headed by the Minister of Economic Development and Technology, Radovan Žerjav, visited India. In New Delhi, Agra, Calcutta and Mumbai bilateral talks were organised between representatives of Slovenian and local businesses, and Slovenia-India business forums for the promotion of Slovenian knowledge and products, in particular in the fields of engineering, energy, the protection of the environment, as well as the metal and electrical industries.

Minister Žerjav met Minister of Commerce, Industry and Textiles, Anand Sharma, minister of heavy industries and public enterprises Praful Pate, and Minister of Micro, small and Medium Enterprises K.H. Muniyappa. Talks with representatives of the states of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, of the CII and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry were also scheduled.

In India, the industrial sector accounts for 26.4 % of GDP and employs approximately 20 % of the active population. The most important industrial sectors are textile and chemical sectors. The food, oil, mechanical and pharmaceutical industries are also well developed. The IT sector is in rapid expansion. Currently, India is interested in green technologies (photovoltaics), the distribution and storage of energy, achieving energy efficiency, and the treatment of solid waste and similar.

The Indian market offers Slovenian companies business opportunities in the fields of information technologies, automobile industry, transport and logistics, engineering, biotechnology, tourism and health.

26.1.2013
PRIME MINISTER JANEZ JANŠA MET BORDER ARBITRATION LEGAL TEAM IN PARIS

The Prime Minister Janez Janša met in Paris with members of the team of lawyers that represent Slovenia before the arbitration tribunal set up to resolve the border dispute with Croatia.

The team acquainted him with their activities concerning the drafting of the Memorandum Slovenia has to submit to the arbitration tribunal by 11 February 2013. They also presented him the proposed timetable of further procedural steps to be taken in order to resolve the dispute.

The Prime Minister informed the team members that the Slovenian Government has so far discussed only the Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Project Group in charge of the arbitration procedure. He stressed the sensitivity of the border issue for Slovenia which requires an appropriate degree of political consensus during the particular steps of the arbitration procedure.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

26. 1. 2013
SLOVENIA IS THANKFUL TO FELLOW SLOVENIANS AROUND THE WORLD

The Prime Minister Janez Janša met with representatives of Slovenian living in Chile, ahead of an EU-Latin America summit in Santiago de Chile. He thanked the representatives for their role in international recognition of Slovenia.

The Prime minister also expressed recognition for their work, ideas and example with which they help shape the Slovenian state, preserve the Slovenian language and culture and offer future to the new generations.

Janez Janša planted a linden tree in Santiago's Nunoa commune to mark the occasion. "Let the linden tree, a symbol of Slovenia and its people, grow in peace and serve as a reminder of the living bond between the homeland and you that live across the world," Janša said.

Estimates put the number of Slovenians living in Chile at about 300. A Slovenian association named "Altos de Triglav" has been established in the Chilean capital in 2009.



Photo:Stanko Gruden/STA

22.1.2013
ELYSEE TREATY WAS A TURNING POINT IN CONSTRUCTION OF EU

A celebration was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the Elysee Treaty, which set the foundations for reconciliation between Germany and France. President of Slovenia Borut Pahor said the accord also gave new impetus to European cooperation.

Pahor labelled peace a fundamental choice that needs to be nurtured on a daily basis; at the strategic level is needs to be upheld with decisions that strengthen international respect and trust, amicable resolution of disputes, and cooperation.

German Ambassador Werner Burkart stressed that the Elysee Treaty was a turning point in Franco-German relations and the development of Europe as a whole, noting that it was a key element in the construction of Europe as it is today.

Similarly, French Ambassador Pierre-Francois Mourier said the Franco-German reconciliation, dialogue, and negotiations for the achievement of good solutions represented the foundations of the EU.

24.1.2013
SLOVENIA HAS A GOVERNMENT WITH FULL AUTHORITY

"Slovenia has a government with full authority," the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, stressed at a press conference following a regular cabinet session in third week of January, where he also spoke about current issues.

"This Government has done a lot to exit the crisis. It has implemented several measures, which had seemed almost unthinkable," said the prime minister. The prime minister explained that Slovenia's Constitution does not recognise minority government. Therefore, the existing cabinet will attempt to implement adopted measures and establish Slovenian Sovereign Holding and a bad bank, which are crucial for re-starting growth. The prime minister Janša will not ask for a vote of confidence in the National Assembly, as past experience has shown that four months without a government in full authority constitutes time lost, particularly in such a difficult situation.



Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

8.1.2013
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROVIDES EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING JOINT PROJECTS

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, met with the Governor of Carinthia, Gerhard Dörfler. They exchanged views on topical issues faced by the Slovenian national community in Austrian Carinthia. The Slovenian Prime Minister informed the Carinthian Governor of the Slovenian national community's interest to see the Forum for dialogue to be fully operational as soon as possible, and to obtain a systemic solution to the issue of funding of the Slovenian music school in Carinthia. They agreed there are extraordinary possibilities of cooperation among educational institutions, the economic sphere and also, which is not negligible, in sports.

They discussed also the possibilities of revamping the existing infrastructure connections between Slovenia and Carinthia, in particular in the area of transports. Prime Minister Janez Janša acquainted Governor Dörfler with measures adopted by the Slovenian Government with the aim of improving the business and investment environment in Slovenia.

In the continuation of their meeting, Prime Minister Janša and Governor Dörfler assessed as very positive the options presented within the framework of the European Economic Area, in particular in connection with the new EU Multi-annual Financial Framework and the use of EU funds. In this context they agreed that cross-border cooperation provides excellent opportunities for developing joint projects.

15.1.2013

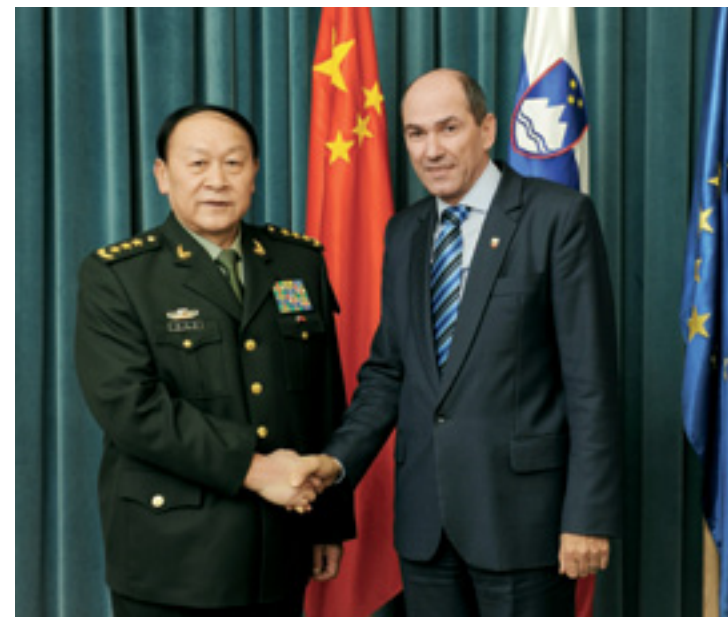
AZERBAIJAN PRESENTS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR SLOVENIAN COMPANIES

In January the Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša visited Azerbaijan, accompanied by the Minister for Economic Development and Technology Radovan Žerjav, the Minister of Infrastructure Zvone Črnač and a delegation of Slovenian business representatives. The aim of the visit was to better understand the Azerbaijani business environment in order to facilitate contacts with Azerbaijani companies and to promote business relations, trade and foreign investments between Slovenia and Azerbaijan.

In recent years, trade between the two countries has been primarily export oriented. Opportunities for furthering cooperation between the two countries are in the fields of clean energy, renewable energy sources (construction of small hydro plants), energy security (within the EU context), telecommunications and IT technology (Azerbaijan is developing broadband connectivity), agriculture, food processing and the wine industry (Azerbaijan is massively investing in projects of environmental improvement and the provision of quality food). They welcome proposals concerning the supply of appropriate machinery, the establishment of joint ventures, and importing food. In particular, exporting food to Azerbaijan is a very promising opening, as the country is in need of quality and varied food; but there are also other promising fields of cooperation, such as the maintenance of cultural heritage landmarks, the construction of infrastructure, the pharmaceutical and high technology industries, tourism (also health and wellness tourism) and the furniture industry.



Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša and Slovenian delegation in Azerbaijan. Photo: Tamino Petelinšek /STA



Minister of the National Defence of the People's Republic of China Liang Guanglie and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša. Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

9.1.2013

FIRST VISIT BY A CHINESE DEFENCE MINISTER TO SLOVENIA

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša received the Minister of the National Defence of the People's Republic of China Liang Guanglie. This was the first visit by a Chinese defence minister to Slovenia.

The discussion partners positively assessed the development of relations between the two countries. They particularly highlighted the mutual dialogue in the field of defence and the progress made since its establishment back in the time of the visit of the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša to China in 2007.

In addition, the Slovenian Prime Minister and the distinguished Chinese guest discussed economic cooperation between the two countries. They both agreed that Chinese initiative for cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe constitutes a solid framework for further strengthening of economic cooperation. At the same time, Prime Minister Janša acquainted Minister Guanglie with the Slovenian Government's measures aimed at enhancing the Slovenian business environment and its openness for foreign investments. They shared the opinion that all necessary conditions were in place for further development of economic cooperation in the future.



Jože Colarič, President of the Management Board and Chief Executive of KRKA. Photo: Rasto Božič/STA

24.1.2013

ALPE – ADRIA: THE LEADING TOURISM SHOW IN THE REGION

The Alpe – Adria: tourism and leisure international fair is the leading tourism event in the Alps – Adriatic region.

At the Alpe – Adria were presented more than 300 providers of tourist service from the Alps – Adriatic region, as well as from those more distant places such as Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia.

Each destination presented its opportunities for leisure activities for diverse types of tourists. Apart from the region's destinations, the fair presented Slovenian culinary delights and wines. It was held simultaneously with the Boat show, a nautical fair specialising in sports boats and pleasure craft.

24.1.2013

KRKA POSTS RECORD REVENUE IN 2012

The group around drug maker Krka posted good results in 2012, increasing its sales revenues by 6% to EUR 1.143bn over the year before.

Sales revenues of the core company have exceeded EUR 1bn for the first time, as it sold EUR 1.035bn worth of products and services last year. The company's net profit reached EUR 154.6m in 2012, up from EUR 150m in 2011, while its operating profit was at EUR 163m, according to unaudited data.

The group generated 92% of its revenues or EUR 1.053bn abroad last year. Sales increased in the regions of eastern Europe (+24%), western Europe and overseas markets (+5%) and SE Europe (+1%).



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek /STA

24.1.2013

SLOVENIA VODKA TO TAKE ON US MARKET

Slovenia Vodka, a vodka made from Slovenian buckwheat, will soon take the US market.

The drink, which aims at promoting Slovenia, is planned to be launched in New York in end of April, followed by New Jersey and Connecticut, and later other markets.

The project – in which beverage maker Fructal developed the drink, glassworks steklarna Hrastnik will make the bottles and plastics maker Ferroplast will produce the caps – was initiated in 2009, when renowned New York chef Peter X. Kelly visited Slovenia. Moreover, the drink will be promoted on social networks, addressing both young and old.

Vodka could become a global hit, as it »combines marketing knowledge and important personalities from the US. Among the investors are also two artists of global acclaim – actor Bill Murray and dancer and actor Mikhail »Misha« Baryshnikov.



Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

SLOVENIA OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOREIGN PARTNERS TO ENTER THE SLOVENIAN MARKET

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia managed to implement another two important projects: a sovereign holding and a bad bank, they came into force on 28 December 2012. Both are crucial for the stabilisation of the Slovenian economy and constitute part of the government's reform policy.

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECISION – REFERENDUMS WOULD HAVE UNCONSTITUTIONAL RESULTS

At the end of December 2012, the Constitutional Court decided that to postpone the entry into force of the Slovenia Sovereign Holding Act and the Measures of the Republic of Slovenia to Strengthen the Stability of Banks Act or rejecting them at a referendum would have unconstitutional results.



The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Tina Kosec/STA

The Court believes that constitutional values have priority. Had the referendums taken place and, even worse, succeeded in blocking both acts, these values would have been exposed to the point where the balance between various constitutional values would have been compromised. Thus, according to the Court, the right to call a legislative referendum must be renounced.

The Prime Minister, Janez Janša, welcomed the decision and characterised it as the 'bastion of Slovenian independence'. "It protects the welfare of people and enables the investigation of the historical robbery of Slovenian banks," he emphasised. The Measures of the Republic of Slovenia to Strengthen the Stability of Banks Act also stipulates criminal liability and liability for damages liability for issuing unsecured loans on the basis of personal relationships and political-banking alliances.

The Ministry of Finance characterised the decision of the Constitutional Court as sober. "We are pleased with this decision of the Constitutional Court, and primarily with the fact that, in these heated times, someone has kept a cool head, and thought about the advantages and disadvantages. They believe it is also important that the constitutional judges adopted the decision with a very large majority.

The position of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia regarding the decision of the Constitutional Court was that referendums were not the right method to form the legislation, policies or strategies which will take Slovenia out of the crisis. "On the contrary – in order for us to avoid the threat of constant referendums, we require procedures for the preparation of 'smart' legislation which would timely include all stakeholders, particularly experts," they emphasised.

THE SLOVENIA SOVEREIGN HOLDING WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS TO ENTER THE SLOVENIAN MARKET.

The Slovenia Sovereign Holding (SSH), which begins operations in April this year, will govern the entire capital wealth of the state; it will be managed by a three-member Management Board selected by international public tender. Guidelines will determine the Holding's priority tasks and the basis for preparing an investment management strategy. On the proposal of the government, the guidelines will be approved by the National Assembly (NA). A strategy for a five-year period will also be approved by the Assembly and prepared by the Management Board of the Holding. The Supervisory Board will consist of nine members. Four candidates will be proposed by the government, one of which will be proposed by the Economic and Social Council, a further four will be proposed by deputy groups and one by the Commission for Public Finance Control. Within one month of its appointment, the Supervisory Board must publish an international public tender for the Holding's three-member Management Board.

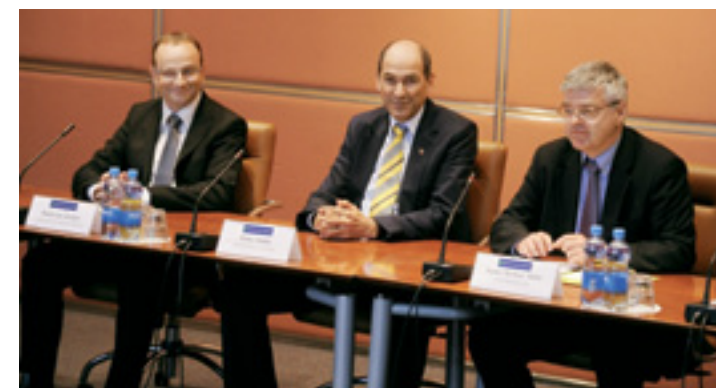
The management of state investments has already been taken over by the Slovenian Compensation Company (SOD), while the Capital Assets Management Agency (AUKN) has closed. The management by the Slovenian Compensation Company of state investments is only temporary, i.e. until it is restructured into the Slovenia Sovereign Holding, which is expected to happen by the end of February or March. In the transfer of state investments to the Slovenia Sovereign Holding, values which are now stated in the balance sheet will apply, and the Holding will then have to make evaluations.

The basis for the transfer of state investments to the Holding will be an investment classification which is being prepared and harmonised by the government and will be proposed for passage by the National Assembly. It will define the tasks of the state, the target stakes the state wishes to retain, and anticipated methods of sale. The classification will be valid until an investment management strategy is adopted.

The Ministry of Finance estimates that all the planned activities will be in operation by April. Later, the Holding will be merged with D.S.U. družba za svetovanje in upravljanje, d.o.o. (DSU), while Kapitalnska družba (KAD) will remain an independent legal entity. In accordance with the law, the KAD will be an affiliated company of the Holding and will transfer EUR 50 million to the pension fund each year. The liabilities of the new Holding also include the current liabilities of the SOD. The KAD, which will be an independent legal entity, has its own liabilities. The Fund for Financing the Decommissioning of the Krško Nuclear Power Plant will also be transferred to the SSH.

The objective of the proposed act and state capital investment management is primarily to increase the value of investments of the Republic of Slovenia through active management and the consistent establishment of corporate governance. Thus the proposed act pursues the objective of simplifying the management structure, defining the purpose and criteria of state investment management more clearly, and forming unified state reserve assets.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia has endorsed the act. However, it emphasised that the realisation of the act and preparation of executive acts, especially of the state property management strategy, i.e. the classification that the act discusses, must be based on a transparent economic plan and national economic calculations of priorities regarding the disposal of state property.



The Minister for Economic Development and Technology Radovan Žerjav, The Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša and the President of The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia Samo Hribar Milič. Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

Investments will be divided into three groups: strategic investments in which the state will retain majority ownership; portfolio investments, which will also be sold entirely in accordance with a prudent assessment of the SSH management, and other companies with ownership of 25 per cent and one share.

THE BAD BANK IS THE BEST OPTION TO STRENGTHEN THE STABILITY OF SLOVENIAN BANKS.

Regarding the Measures of the Republic of Slovenia to Strengthen the Stability of Banks Act, which anticipates the establishment of a so-called bad bank, the Ministry of Finance emphasises that activities relating to executive regulations must be completed first. The Ministry hopes to cooperate with the Bank of Slovenia, the Bank Association of Slovenia and international experts.

The government believes that after the Bank Assets Management Company has eliminated bad debts from the banks, the latter will clear their balance sheets and be able to commence lending to the economy. In return for bad debts, the banks will take over bonds with state guarantees determined by law, which stand at EUR 4 billion.

The Bank Assets Management Company will be managed by a seven-member Management Board, of which three will be executive directors selected by public tender, and four non-executive directors. Ministry of Finance has emphasised several times in press releases that the government's objective is to ensure that competent people manage the institution. The Ministry has been conducting interviews

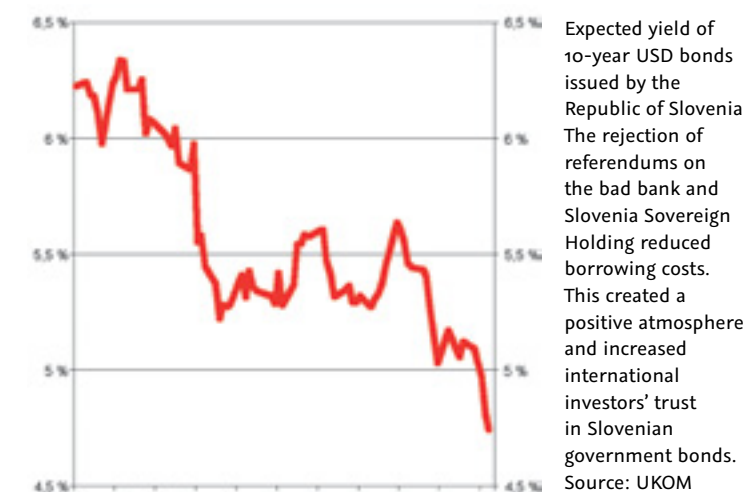


Ex - Minister of Finance Janez Šušteršič and The Director of the Bank Association of Slovenia, France Arhar. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

with individuals with the required experience in this field who could assume the role of supervisors or counsellors for the transfer of debt.

BANKERS AND ENTREPRENEURS RECOGNISE THE 'BAD BANK ACT' AS AN OPPORTUNITY AND NOT COERCION.

At the Days of Slovenian Bankers, the Director of the Bank Association of Slovenia, France Arhar, for media warned that in the field of banking, Slovenia has quite a few acts which are dead letters. He emphasised that bankers do not wish this to happen to the Measures of the Republic of Slovenia to Strengthen the Stability of Banks Act. Thus Arhar has already had a meeting with the Minister of Finance, Janez Šušteršič, who promised to include bankers and experts in the preparation of executive acts. This shows that bankers and entrepreneurs recognise the 'bad bank act' as an opportunity and not coercion. On the basis of executive acts, the most suitable way to act in order to resolve the critical problem of the banking sector will be assessed.



In this situation, this is virtually the most important source of investments besides European funds, and such investments bring growth and new jobs. At the beginning of its term of office, the government adopted numerous measures for growth and to stimulate new investments, such as lower income tax for legal entities, one hundred per cent relief on investment in research and development, and an increase in unlimited investment relief to 40 per cent.

If Slovenia implements all structural reforms (pension reform, labour market reform, bank rehabilitation, consolidation of public finances, measures for enhancing economic growth, tax reform, judicial reform), the revitalisation of the Slovenian economy can begin.

Dr. ERNEST PETRIČ

President of the Constitutional Court

THE RULE OF LAW BEGINS AT ONE'S OWN DOORSTEP



In the time of your chairing the Constitutional Court – your three-year term of office is due to end this year – it has ruled on several important cases, perhaps the most resounding rulings being on admissibility of referenda. For this reason, the Constitutional Court came in for much criticism. What is your explanation of the decision?

When deciding on the admissibility of referenda, we made a step forward. We focused on examining the constitutional values in connection with the meaning of referenda. Undoubtedly, the right to a referendum is one of the constitutional rights. In considering the values, we concluded that in the event of a referendum resulting in rejection of two legal acts we could find ourselves in a situation when other constitutional values – equally important rights – such as the right to education, employment, healthcare and others – would be threatened. In this case, and by a majority of eight to one, we voted against the referendum. Prior to this, we examined whether rejection of a legal act by way of referendum would prevent the existing anti-constitutional elements from being preserved, that is those which the new act, to be subject to a referendum, tried to eliminate. In our decision, emphasis was laid on these issues. As regards critiques, these are always welcome. They encourage further consideration for the future.

Disqualifications are certifications of their authors. In our country, this is particularly important, since the institutions keep losing their reputation and the state is moving towards ever increasing anarchy and chaos. Those contributing to such a situation should be aware that the fall of democracy and the rule of law entails catastrophic consequences. Pertinent critiques are justified, useful and necessary, while flat disqualifications hide risks.

The Slovenian Constitution is 21 years old. This period of time elapsed since the day when the Constitution was adopted and proclaimed by the then National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia; through it, Slovenia became independent from the former Yugoslavia also legally. In the meantime, the Constitution has been amended seven times, but in some people's opinion, further amendments should be introduced concerning the following: manner of Government formation, Constitutional Court status and competences, permanent terms of office of judges, change of electoral system and rules on referenda. When is the right time to bring in changes to the Constitution?

The Constitution is a document which is meant to be permanent and not easily subject to change. Such a view prevailed in the past. Nowadays, however, life is much more dynamic, the volume of knowledge doubles in three to five years, and the way of life has radically changed; accordingly, the Constitution should adapt to such changes concerning, in particular, the political system and/or the system of organisation of the state. As a result, considering changes to the Constitution after 20 years does not seem abnormal but rather necessary.

What is at stake are issues that you mentioned in your first question; in this respect, there is an ongoing debate, and some of them have already undergone changes. One of the hottest topics is the issue of referenda and the electoral system. It is hard to predict whether a two-thirds majority can be achieved, but the referendum issue is very relevant indeed and will have to be duly considered. Let me stress that the right to referendum constitutes the right of citizens to direct democracy. This field must remain wide open; however, questions arise whether a figure of 40,000 collected signatures is the right one or not, while another

question concerns referendum turnout with regard to validity of the results. Referenda may, among others, be required by one-third of the deputies; this means that any legal act without two-thirds support may hypothetically be subject to a referendum, all of which raises a question about the meaning of direct democracy when a minority is given a chance of subsequently blocking a legal act by way of a referendum.

Referenda make sense when such opportunity is given to electors/citizens; it is their right. This, as you can see, requires due consideration; this is the essence of direct democracy.

Borut Pahor has recently become President of the Republic of Slovenia. He has pointed out the need for cooperation and work for the benefit of Slovenia. What is your message to him at the beginning of his term of office?

As you know, I am not really in a position to send him messages. In the first place, I wish him every success in his work. My next wish is that every Slovenian citizen would as efficiently as possible and with a feeling for the common interest strive for the common good.

Do you think that in times of crisis of values and of institutions the Constitutional Court enjoys a strong enough reputation?

The Constitutional Court has its reputation. Our last decision was taken by the majority, which in democracy is a must. Let me take this opportunity to thank all those who were dissatisfied with our decision but who refrained from questioning it; this demonstrates that their thinking was statesmanlike and within the context of the rule of law.

In one of your statements for the media you said that the rule of law does not consist only of regulations and of the judiciary and enforcement authorities.

This is true. The rule of law is not only regulations: it implies something more, which is the attitude of every one of us towards it; we will all live better if we respect the legal order. It is bad when people get the feeling that lies have prevailed over justice; this is harmful.

In your view, does the rule of law have a significant role in economic development, in attracting foreign investments, resources and similar?

These things are highly interrelated. Particularly in capitalism, that is in a market economy characterised by competition. This must be regulated in legal terms, including the social dimension. Feral capitalism is dangerous, based on cliques and exploitative, and as such does not belong in our time; the thing which curbs negative tendencies is precisely the rule of law.

Capitalism is like a strong stallion: it may pull optimally, but when there is no bridle, it might jump into the field and trample the corn! The rule of law is capitalism's bridle. Without it, capitalism would be handicapped by all kinds of evil, most keenly felt by the weakest.

The Constitutional Court, like other courts, is faced with a backlog. How does this affect the quality of the Constitutional Court decisions?

In fact, the Constitutional Court is overloaded with cases. This may be seen through the lack of time to focus our work, along with processing the caseload of approximately 1,800 cases a year, on the most relevant matters. Regardless of this, the programme of elimination of the court backlog continues and is starting to bear fruit.

The President of the Republic already proposed a new human rights ombudsman. What are the qualities that this person ought to have in your view? I am asking you this in terms of principles.

If I were the one to choose, I would take human qualities over parliamentary arithmetic. The President of the Republic should also bear in mind that his candidate, in order to be elected, must get the relevant majority of votes in the National Assembly.

Does the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia cooperate with other courts around the world and if so, what are the main areas of cooperation?

We have excellent relations with many constitutional courts, such as the Austrian, German, Croatian, Hungarian, Czech, Russian and others, where sometimes we are able to offer help with our knowledge. Particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg and the national courts

Going back to the anniversary of adopting the Constitu-

tion: what were your feelings – perhaps those of pride – when you thought of the fact that we, the Slovenian people, now had our own Slovenian Constitution and our own Slovenian state?

You are talking to someone who is very proud of his country. I have always kept Slovenia in my heart; thoughts of its independence have been with me ever since. In the eighties, when I was writing a book on the right of nations to self-determination, I had the idea of an independent Slovenia in my mind. I love my country, I show it respect, it is precious to me. Our destiny is in our hands; everything depends on our wisdom, tolerance and culture. We are a rich country with excellent prospects and knowledge, a capable and diligent people; I don't see any reason why we should not believe in a bright future for this country.

As a diplomat, you lived abroad for many years, serv-

ing for instance in Ethiopia, India and Mexico. What is the thing that you remember most from the time of your diplomatic service? What country and which of its customs were the most surprising to you?

At the beginning of 80s, when as a professor I arrived in Addis Ababa, I was surprised by the legal and statehood tradition of this African country permeated with the history of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Going there, you expect to encounter a rather primitive society without institutions. Absolutely wrong! Ethiopia was a great positive surprise for me; it has a thousands of years old, rich and beautiful history. True, the country was then under a dictatorship, but only for a short period of time.

My second surprise was India, where there are so many things which you can not understand and which constantly challenge your mind. You try to understand a different

attitude to life from that in your home country. There, for example, people accept what they have with more optimism and understanding; they do not exhibit greed to have more. I saw happy people who possessed nothing.

My third surprise was the United States: I was surprised by the enormous optimism and trust that Americans place in dealing with their partners; so much rule of law can rarely be seen elsewhere. A handshake means a deal, and the awareness of one's own country by the citizens is amazing.

It is hard to tell where I felt best – problems exist everywhere, but so do wonderful things; and I always felt happy when on returning to Slovenia my eyes caught sight of the Alps and my native soil. I came home with a beautiful feeling that this is about what is mine – my Slovenia.

Dr MATEJ LAHOVNIK

Full professor at the Faculty of Economics and minister of the economy in the previous government

CERTAIN ISSUES DO NOT EVEN REMOTELY QUALIFY FOR A REFERENDUM





You welcomed the decision of the Constitutional Court which held that a referendum on the Slovenian Sovereign Holding Act and the Act Regulating Measures to Strengthen the Stability of Banks would have been unconstitutional. In the Constitutional Court's decision, you recognise at least three very positive aspects. What are they?

I think that the decision adopted by the Constitutional Court is very important, as it has sent a clear message to the referendum initiators that it will no longer allow referendums which might have unconstitutional consequences, and that the initiators must also deliberate on the consequences of filing initiatives. From this point of view, this decision constitutes a precedent which can also be quite

significant for other referendum initiatives. This decision demonstrated its positive effect when the public sector trade union withdrew their initiative regarding the referendum on the Budget Implementation Act. Carrying out this referendum would in fact have had serious unconstitutional consequences. Another positive side of this decision is that a clear boundary has now been set indicating that certain issues do not qualify for a referendum.

The second message is that the decision has produced highly positive effects on the economy, reflected in the response of the financial markets, since as a result of this decision, the expected yield on Slovenian government bonds decreased strongly, to even below 5%. This is substantially less than some months ago,

when the expected yield on the 10-year bonds exceeded the 7% mark, this being a kind of a psychological threshold for sustainability and representing the upper limit of Slovenia's borrowing.

Moreover, the importance of this decision lies in the fact that it lifted the institutional blockade and enabled the government to pursue the rehabilitation of the banking system and management of state assets according to the method put forward in its proposal.

The Constitutional Court clearly stated that the government had been given the mandate to resolve these issues. These measures are certainly better than the ones that were in force previously. Lifting a certain institutional blockade also represents a significant message to foreign investors. Any other decision would have

obviously pushed the country into a total development blockade, because the international community would not have understood why four years after the onset of the crisis, Slovenia was still not able to agree on the urgently needed anti-crisis measures.

Some economists consider the decision as wrong and politically motivated. What is your position on these critical remarks?

This decision was in no way politically motivated, but adopted after careful consideration. In the opposite case, Slovenia, due to a development blockade, would have run the risk of being forced to ask for international bailout, which could have threatened our sovereignty.

The Constitutional Court did its job and I expect that

also in the future it will not allow a referendum in connection with certain important national issues, such as tax legislation, the budget and structural reforms. These are issues and topics that do not belong on a referendum and a refusal to deal with them in a proposed manner could have unconstitutional consequences. Even in the event that the parliamentary parties fail to reach an agreement limiting the possibility of lodging proposals for a referendum, the CC decision has nevertheless sent a clear signal that it will prevent any issues which should not be subject of a referendum from being decided on in such a manner.

This is very probably an important signal to foreign investors.

It certainly is. It is also quite important because it includes a message that Slovenia is a well-regulated institutional environment. Therefore a different decision would imply great uncertainty, discouraging foreign investors. This decision has stabilised our political arena, a fact having a strong impact on the decisions of potential investors.

Foreign investors do in fact not understand our referendum rules and see them as an additional risk. Attracting foreign investments not only requires financial system rehabilitation and a better management of state assets, but also structural reforms, including the labour market reform which still needs to be implemented, as well as the elimination of administrative barriers for corporate operations, a goal which the government is attempting to pursue in accordance with the plan to improve the regulatory environment for business.

But the public sector trade unions have nevertheless withdrawn the referendum initiative on the Budget Implementation Act.

The initiative of the trade unions regarding the Budget

Implementation Act is utter nonsense. This is a technical law and no one should even have contemplated filing a referendum initiative. For various groups of population, this would in fact mean a violation of their social rights – to do this would simply be irresponsible. Fortunately, they realised this in time and withdrew the initiative.

The general public considers the pension system reform as one of the biggest achievements of this Government. What is your view on this topic?

The pension system reform is a significant step forward, as it is the result of a consensus between the social partners and has provided a solution which can serve us well over the next ten years and is better than the previous one. However, in eight years time we will need a new solution, i.e. an even more stringent reform.

In a way, the adoption of the pension system reform can indeed be considered as one of the biggest achievements of this Government and a victory of reason.

Borut Pahor has assumed the office of President of the Republic. Prime Minister Janez Janša and the new president both emphasise the importance of forging alliances. Which alliances would you, as an economist, consider most significant?

It is very important for Slovenia to have a new president. I worked with him in the previous government as a minister and I know that he is a good facilitator, capable of overcoming traditional left/right divisions and ideological oppositions. It is very important that he was elected president by such a great majority. In his capacity, he will therefore be a factor of stability and a contact point, and as a person of great veracity, he will

be able to positively influence political developments.

I believe that he will know how to use his moral credibility, while assisting the government in adopting important structural measures. He will not be among those putting spokes in the government's wheels, and neither will he act as its "on-duty" critic or advocate, but as a person who, with his moral stance, will tell whether things are moving in the right direction. It is also highly important that he has experienced himself what it is like to be a prime minister.

And what is your opinion about the initiatives to amend the Constitution?

There are at least three issues in this context that are crucial: changing the electoral system, restricting the possibility of filing referendum initiatives and simplifying the election of a government.



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF SLOVENIA'S NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

While the parliamentary history of the Slovenian people may be short, the beginnings of the parliamentary tradition reach back to the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This tradition helped maintain an awareness of the importance of the right to choose one's representatives, and the desire for democracy, which was suspended when the era of the one-party assembly began after the Second World War. It was not until broader processes of political modernisation and democratisation began in Central Europe, and the struggles of conscious Slovenians to institute a democratic system paid off, that modern parliamentarianism also began in Slovenia.



THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN SLOVENIAN PARLIAMENTARIANISM AND THE BIRTH OF SLOVENIAN DEMOCRACY

Recently, we marked the 20th anniversary of the inaugural session of the first term of the National Assembly. The preparations for this session began in April 1990, when democratic, multi-party parliamentary elections were held in Slovenia for the first time since the Second World War. Just over a year later, the newly-elected Assembly adopted the Basic Constitutional Charter and declared Slovenia independent. In December 1991, the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia was enacted, establishing a parliamentary democracy. The National Assembly became the highest representative and legislative body, performing electoral and supervisory tasks in addition to the fundamental task of law-making.

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CELEBRATED ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY WITH SEVERAL EVENTS:

- the official celebration marking the 20th anniversary of the first elections to the National Assembly (6 December 2012);
- the presentation of the book *Državni zbor 1992–2012: O slovenskem parlamentarizmu* (The National Assembly 1992–2012: on Slovenian Parliamentarianism, 14 December 2012);

- the documentary film *20 let Državnega zbora* (Twenty Years of the National Assembly, 21 December 2012);
- a formal session of the National Assembly celebrating Independence and Unity Day (22 December 2012), where the newly-elected President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, took the oath of office.

A chronology of the twenty years of the National Assembly is available at: <http://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/Home/ODrzavnemZboru/Dogodki/20obletnica/Drzavnegazbora>

In the autumn of 1992, the first parliamentary elections were held in accordance with the new Constitution, enabling the constitution and the first session of the independent Slovenian parliament to take place in Ljubljana for the first time in history (23 December 1992; Cerar, 2009). The Slovenian parliament comprises the National Assembly (the general representative body of the Slovenian people) and the National Council (the representative body of certain social groups). Soon after the first session, the newly-elected body constituted a government. Since then, democracy in Slovenia has evolved much as it has in other democratic European countries.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – 624 DEPUTIES HAVE HELD OFFICE IN THE SIX PARLIAMENTS TO DATE

Ninety deputies are elected on the basis of direct universal suffrage. The deputies of the National Assembly are representatives of all the people and not bound by any instructions. The office of deputy (which was recently made incompatible with the office of mayor and other offices or work in state bodies) is performed professionally; deputies enjoy immunity for the opinions they express or the votes they cast.

A deputy's term of office is four years, as elections to the National Assembly are usually held every four years. The fifth term of office was cut short by one year by the early dissolution of the Assembly due to a vote of no confidence in the President of the Government.

In the six terms of office to date, a total of 624 deputies have held office (the rate of re-election is 61.3%), the great majority of whom were male (310 or 80.9%). The proportion of women increased significantly only in the last term (also due to the implementation of a female quota). Only two people have been re-elected in all six elections: Roberto Batelli (the deputy of the Italian national community) and Janez Janša (representative of the Slovenian Democratic Party).



During their term of office, deputies are informed of matters of importance for passing legislation and other decisions in the Assembly. They also hear the opinions of citizens, experts, various associations and, of course, of their respective political parties. Therefore, the work of the Assembly is largely considered public, a fact ensured by the publication of all documentation on the web site (www.dz-rs.si) and the live transmission of the proceedings of the National Assembly and working bodies (which is accessible to journalists and citizens).

“A typical deputy is a man in his forties, who is aging – because he has persisted in politics for a long time. With long-running active participation in a political party, he takes great care when it comes to his appearance and public performances. He has a university degree and a good statistical chance of being re-elected. He is generally pleased with his salary as a deputy. He is confident in at least one political field. His average working day is from 10 to 12 hours, which makes it very demanding (the age structure is ideal; deputies are people in their prime who are able to cope with the strain). A deputy would generally define his work as passing legislation and the state budget.” (Gašparič 2002, pg 280)

ELECTED PRESIDENTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY NOW AND IN PREVIOUS TERMS

This so-called “little constitution” (the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly) has been continuously evolving (the greatest change was in 2002) and reflects political and other conditions in society.

The deputies elect a President by ab-

solute majority (he/she convenes and presides over sessions of the National Assembly and the Council of the President of the National Assembly, and signs statutes and other acts), no more than three vice-presidents and a Secretary General of the National Assembly. To date, the Assembly has seen nine Presidents.

PRESIDENTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THEIR TERMS OF OFFICE:

Herman Rigelnik, MSc

Term of office:

23 December 1992 – 14 September 1994

Jozef Školč

Term of office:

16 September 1994 – 28 November 1996

Janez Podobnik

Term of office:

3 December 1996 – 27 October 2000

Borut Pahor

Term of office:

10 November 2000 – 9 July 2004

Franc (Feri) Horvat

Term of office:

12 July 2004 – 22 October 2004

France Cukjati

Term of office:

22 October 2004 – 15 October 2008

Dr Pavel Gantar

Term of office:

15 October 2008 – 2 September 2011

Ljubo Germič

Term of office:

2 September 2011 – 21 December 2011

Dr Gregor Virant

Term of office:

21 December 2011 – 28. January 2013

Deputies work in deputy groups (several political parties have seats in parliament due to the proportional electoral system) and working bodies (committees and commissions). There were 24 working bodies in the first term of the National Assembly, 26 in the second, 20 in the third, 23 in the fourth and 23 in the fifth. There are currently 20 committees and commissions. Their task is to study documentation and submit their opinions and suggestions prior to decision-making in plenary sessions. Legal opinions are issued by the Legislative and Legal Service.

The National Assembly meets for regular (usually in the last week of the month) and extraordinary sessions. On the basis of an annual plan, regular sessions are convened during regular annual terms of the Assembly: in the spring term between 10 January and 15 July, and in the autumn term between 1 September and 20 December.

Professional services, led by the Secretary General, provide high-quality expert and administrative support for deputies.

AUTHORITY OF THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF POWER

The National Assembly exercises state authority, adopts the Constitution, enacts statutes (regarding which the National Assembly may be bound by the National Council's suspensive veto) and the state budget, ratifies treaties, calls referendums and elects (appoints) the President of the Government, ministers, Constitutional Court judges, members of



Žiga Zois, Carniolan nobleman, natural scientist and patron of the arts and Anton Tomaž Linhart, Carniolan playwright and historian, best known as the author of the first comedy and theatrical play in general in Slovene, Županova Micka (Micka, the Mayor's Daughter).

Slavic king Samo founded the first recorded political union of Slavic tribes, known as Samo's empire (Samo with other heads).

the Judicial Council, judges, the governor of the Bank of Slovenia, some members of the Court of Auditors, the Human Rights Ombudsman and other officials, as well as adopting other acts and decisions. The National Assembly's international activities include cooperation with international parliamentary institutions and international organisations.

The legislative procedure begins when, after a draft law has been proposed, the President of the National Assembly forwards the draft to all deputies; the procedure ends with the passage or rejection of the law. The National Assembly holds a public debate on each item on the agenda and takes decisions on the basis of a vote which requires a certain majority. Unless otherwise required by the Constitution or by law, decisions are taken by a majority of votes cast by those deputies present. However, a majority of all deputies must be present at a session, i.e. at least 46 of the total of 90. In practice, this means that if 60 are present at a vote, a law is passed when at least 31 vote in favour. Since 2001, an electronic voting system has enabled voters speedy web access to information on how individual deputies have cast their votes.

FOR CITIZENS, PARLIAMENT IS NOT ONLY A POLITICAL INSTITUTION, BUT ALSO THE BUILDING WHERE PARLIAMENT HOLDS SESSIONS

The parliamentary building supports the self-confidence and role of deputies, represents the state during important state visits and reflects parliament's role and significance. The building, which dates from the era of the previous Assembly (the official opening was on 19 February 1959), constitutes a means of communication with citizens.

The building is located on the northern side of Trg republike (Republic Square) and was designed by Vinko Glanz, a student of Jože Plečnik. The main portal was designed by Karel Putrih and Zdenko Kalin. In addition to the halls (extensive renovations were performed in 2000 and 2007), the building also houses conference rooms where the meetings of working bodies are usually held, reception rooms, a press centre, library and reading room. The National Assembly owns an extensive art collection; the vestibule to the Great Hall houses an almost 68-metre mural by Slavko Pengov depicting the history of Slovenians from the first settlement to modern times. There are

also permanent exhibitions: 'Slovenia in the Light of Parliamentary Tradition' and 'The Moment's Turning Point'.

Visitors (more than 13,000 each year) are welcome to the building every second Saturday of the month, when the National Assembly holds open-door days. Organised groups may visit the building every working day on prior arrangement with the Public Relations Office (e-mail: obiski@dz-rs.si).

THE PARLIAMENTARY FUTURE

Each sitting of parliament in the past twenty years has been colourful. The National Assembly has successfully managed to build the Slovenian state, opening the door to Euro-Atlantic organisations by adopting constitutional amendments and calling referendums. Today, we face new challenges, as described by the ex-President of the National Assembly, Dr Gregor Virant, speaking at the 20th anniversary celebrations: "We are seeking ways to lead the state out of the financial and economic crisis, to ensure prosperity and a decent life for citizens, and restore confidence in parliamentary democracy."



The Slovene peasant revolt of 1515

Primož Trubar: the Protestant reformer, most known as the author of the first Slovene language printed book, the founder and the first superintendent of the Protestant Church of the Slovene Lands, notable for consolidating the Slovene language. Trubar is the key figure of Slovenian cultural history and in many aspects a major historical personality.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS* IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (1992-2012)

1990	
8 April	The first democratic elections after World War II.
9 May	The inaugural session of the democratically elected, multi-party Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia.
6 December	The Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Plebiscite on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Slovenia Act.
23 December	The plebiscite on the independent state of Slovenia.
26 December	The Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia declares the results of the plebiscite. To honour this event, this day is declared Independence and Unity Day.
1991	
25 June	The Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopts the Basic Constitutional Charter, on the basis of which Slovenia becomes an independent state. To honour this event, the day is declared Statehood Day.
23 December	The Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia adopts the new Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia.
1992	
6 December	First elections to the National Assembly.
1993	
5 June	The National Assembly adopts the Rules of Procedure, comprehensively regulating its activities. They take effect on 18 July 1993.
1998	
26 February	The National Assembly adopts guideline views on the Government's strategy for Slovenia's membership of the EU.
1999	
21 June	William Jefferson Clinton is the first President of the United States to make an official visit to Slovenia. He also visits the National Assembly.
December	The monograph Državni zbor Republike Slovenije 1992–2002 (The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia 1992–2002) is published.
2003	
23 March	Referendums on the accession of Slovenia to the European Union and NATO.
2004	
24 February	The National Assembly ratifies the North Atlantic Treaty, on the basis of which Slovenia joins NATO on 29 March 2004.
1 May	Slovenia becomes a Member State of the European Union.
2006	
5 May	As well as plenary sessions of the National Assembly, television viewers may now also follow live coverage of the meetings of working bodies.
2007	
1 January	Slovenia adopts the common European currency – the euro.
December	A monograph on the National Assembly in Slovenian and English is published.
2008	
1 January–30 June	Slovenian presidency of the Council of the European Union.
29 January	The National Assembly ratifies the Reform Treaty of the European Union.
25 April	TV Slovenia's third parliamentary channel begins broadcasting.
2009	
19 February	50th anniversary of the opening of the People's Assembly building, now the National Assembly building (a film on the building in Slovenian and in English is published on DVD in May 2010).
1 December	The Lisbon Treaty comes into force, thus changing the role of the National Assembly.
2011	
4 December	The first early parliamentary elections since Slovenia became independent take place.
2012	
20 July	The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, visits the National Assembly.
21 December	TV Slovenia's documentary 20 let Državnega zbora (Twenty Years of the National Assembly), made by Ljerka Bizilj.

*The chronology includes events that mark some important activities at the National Assembly or a change in its work. (Source: Chronology of the National Assembly, <http://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/Home/ODrzavnemZboru/Dogodki/20obletnicaDrzavnegazbora>, 10 January 2013)

We asked some former Presidents of the National Assembly to talk about the outstanding events during their presidency of the National Assembly and how they see it today:

FRANCE BUČAR (1990–1992):

When I held the chair of the National Assembly, the country was gaining its independence. The recognition that the only solution for us was an independent state had matured and gradually become self-evident. If we had made one mistake, the dream could have been over. So, gaining independence was not only the result of military action, but also of thoughtful legal proceedings.



Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

BORUT PAHOR (2000–2004):

These were the years when Slovenia's accession to the European Union and NATO accelerated and were concluded. In particular, it was necessary to amend the Constitution and transfer some sovereignty to the European Union. In 2003, the deputies succeeded for the third time in eleven years and managed to lay the foundations for Slovenia's membership of the European Union. Naturally, this required a two-thirds' majority. So, you must realise that a lot of work, patient and often less obvious efforts were necessary to ensure that a series of difficult decisions were successfully concluded; that was a very tense period. However, it was also a very good period. When it ended with a referendum and the boundless happiness of our people, the work was rewarded.



Photo: Archives of Office of the President of the Republic of Slovenia

FRANCE CUKJATI (2004–2008):

I have the fondest memories of the Presidency of the EU. We had been thoroughly preparing throughout 2007, harmonising between parliamentary groups and individual parliamentary working bodies and also between the coalition and opposition. We received nothing but flattering commendations from all over Europe for our implementation. Also, in the present situation, it is necessary for the deputies to reach consensus, particularly on matters that deeply affect the emotions or living conditions of the entire nation. Without parliament, there is no democracy. In the last ten, fifteen years, it has gone through numerous technological and procedural improvements, which provide the required flexibility and efficiency. It would be sensible to continue to consider improvements to the proportional voting system combined with the elements of the majority system. And it is also still worth considering the possibility of recalling deputies.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

DR JOŽE PUČNIK AND THE MAGIC POWER OF FREEDOM

If somebody tried to prove the power of freedom empirically, a case study could be made of the life and work of Dr Jože Pučnik, the central figure in Slovenian political history in the second half of the 20th century. He began his political career as a rebel and dissident, a prisoner and expatriate. When he returned to Slovenia in the 1980s, he became the central figure of the democratisation and independence process.

He was born on 9 March 1932 into a farmer's family in the village of Črešnjevce, near Slovenska Bistrica. Even in his high school years, he suffered the distress of a young rebel. His cooperation on the secret newsletter *Iskanja* and membership of a circle who discussed human rights, among other themes, earned him his first punishments: exclusion from school and having to sit exams privately. He was forbidden to take the high school graduation examination, and decided to do his military service first; only afterwards was he allowed to sit for the exam.

He then studied philosophy and comparative literature at the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts. In the articles he wrote at the time, he dealt with the issue of personal freedom, concluding that "freedom should be implemented", i.e. striven for actively. This very concept of actively implementing freedom was (in his opinion) "probably the reason I was later incarcerated".

After graduating in 1958, Pučnik took up a position of assistant with Dr Alma Sodnik, at the philosophy department. It seemed that a successful academic career awaited the bright young intellectual. However, things turned out differ-

ently. Due to his articles, especially *Naša družbena stvarnost in naše iluzije* (Our social reality and our illusions), published in *Revija 57* magazine, in which he critically assessed the current social conditions, he was arrested in the autumn of that year. Bravely, although somewhat naively, considering the circumstances of the time, Pučnik advocated the abandonment of the "cult of untouchability" of the leading Party. He pointed to the gulf between the people and the authorities, and the growing mistrust of the authorities in the people. He blamed the authorities; in his opinion, the people had not become socialised, but privatised, while the authorities had become bureaucratized.

He was arrested for his views, and charged with hostile propaganda, associating against the people and the state and undermining the authority of the people. He was sentenced to nine years of rigorous imprisonment. After a general amnesty in 1961, his sentence was reduced to seven years; in June 1963, after five years in prison, he was released on parole. He was subjected to severe violence while in Maribor gaol, where he came to the opinion that Marxism was "...criminal, irrespective of the intentions of the people who worked on the basis of this philosophy." In Pučnik's opinion, Marxism embodied the Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means.

In spite of his parole, Pučnik wanted to continue his intellectual and journalistic work. He returned to Ljubljana and published the essay *O dilemah našega kmetijstva* (On the issues of our agriculture) in No. 33-34 of *Perspektive* magazine. In the introduction to the article, he

pointed out that the problem of agriculture was not economic, but that the revolutionary method had made it into an ideological, political and social problem. He believed the new authorities regarded farmers only as a hindrance and a problem. "Forced" collectivisation had only caused immense damage. In this regard, Pučnik demanded greater investment in the private sector, as well as greater moral and material support for greater economic entrepreneurship. Otherwise, he warned that socialist agriculture, which had an ideological instead of an economic basis, would be unable to produce enough food and the import of grain from the USA would have to continue. Later, Pučnik realised that "in spite of its extreme modesty...the article was a stark condemnation of the agricultural policy after the war." The magazine soon sold out, causing a great stir in the media. In May 1964, Pučnik was arrested again on the charge of disseminating hostile propaganda. The court revoked his parole and he had to return to gaol, this time to Dob. He spent twenty months in solitary confinement. After two years in prison, he searched for employment, but to no avail.

He sought help from his old friends, whom he still believed were on his side, asking them to allow him to continue his journalistic work. None gave him their support – neither Taras Kermavner, nor Venko Taufer, nor Veljko Rus. He felt excluded, betrayed and alone. His only option was to escape abroad. Due to the disgraceful fact that the University of Ljubljana refused to issue him a degree certificate, he had to start working as an assistant worker in a zinc factory in a port in Germany, where he was granted

political asylum. He enrolled in Hamburg University in 1967, studying sociology, philosophy and pedagogy, and concluding his studies in 1971 with a PhD. He was offered the post of assistant professor of sociology at the University of Lüneburg, where he earned his retirement in 1989 as a senior academic advisor.

After his years in Germany, where he distinguished himself as a university professor and scientist, he returned to politics in the late 1980s. First, as a journalist and later more and more as a politician, his courage, straightforwardness and analytical mind left the greatest imprint on the process of democratisation and independence.

Pučnik first returned with critical articles in *Nova revija* magazine. In 1987, he published one of the key articles in the famous 57th edition of *Nova revija* (*Prispevki za slovenski nacionalni program* (Contributions to the Slovenian national programme)). In that same year,

he published the book *Kultura, družba in tehnologija* (Culture, Society and Technology), which discusses the essential issues of development in a modern society and the Slovenian nation.

In 1989, he actively entered politics, first as the leader of the Slovenian Social Democratic Alliance, then as the leader of the united Slovenian opposition Demos. Under his guidance, Demos won the first free democratic elections in Slovenia in 1990, formed a government and held a referendum on Slovenian independence. Of the 93.2% of voters, 88.5% voted for independence. This is where the famous words of Pučnik's were first heard: "Yugoslavia is gone. This is about Slovenia now." The Government took six months to prepare everything required to implement the independence and collect the resources needed to defend the decision on independence. The official date of Slovenia's independence is 25 June 1991. Pučnik and the Demos government

played a key role in the Slovenian war for independence, which followed the aggression of the Yugoslav army.

After the war for Slovenia had been won and international recognition of the independent Slovenia began, Pučnik dissolved Demos under immense pressure. His party barely made it into parliament in 1992. A year later, he left the party to Janez Janša, focusing instead on his parliamentary work and on researching and rectifying the injustices of the communist regime. He retired in 1997, but remained active in the Slovenian Democratic Party until his death in January 2003.

All the key figures of the time acknowledge that Dr Jože Pučnik played the most prominent role in the process of democratisation and independence of Slovenia. Pučnik's commitment to truth, his sincerity, transparency and commitment to Slovenia and fair politics remain a bright example for future generations to follow.



Photo: Archives of Demokracija

SOCIAL DIALOGUE IS THE FOUNDATION OF A DEMOCRATIC, SOCIAL STATE, GOVERNED BY THE RULE OF LAW

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia considers social dialogue extremely important. The negotiations and harmonisation of views with trade unions by the Economic and Social Council, the negotiation commissions and individual harmonisation of views and negotiations under the auspices of line ministries are a proof of this.



Government representatives were negotiating with the public sector trade unions on measures to reduce the funds available for labour costs in 2013 and 2014. Photo: Archives of Ministry of Justice and public administration. Photo: Mojca Hardi

Precisely due to this positive attitude, the Government was able to enact both the Fiscal Balance Act and pension reform last year. The Government also proposed an agreement to public sector trade unions on measures to reduce the funds available for labour costs in 2013 and 2014. Four co-ordination meetings were held to this end, at which the Government presented arguments for reducing the funding for labour costs in the 2013/2014 budget and also presented a list of potential measures to be taken. The trade unions disagreed with these views and demanded negotiations on the funding in the draft budget for 2013 and 2014.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM IS TO REDUCE THE FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR SALARIES AND OTHER LABOUR COSTS.

The Government was therefore willing to negotiate on the manner in which Slovenia would achieve the aim of reducing funds for salaries and other labour costs. However, with regard to the budgetary situation, it was (and will be in the future) impossible to negotiate on the level of reductions. During the negotiations on the Fiscal Balance Act, an agreement was reached with the representative trade unions of the public sector on a reduction in the values of salary

grades, i.e. on reducing the level of basic salaries by 8%, on condition of simultaneously eliminating disparities in basic salaries.

For an individual public employee, the actual effect of reducing the values of salary grades does not amount to 8%, but approximately 3% on average.

After the Fiscal Balance Act was enacted, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia had to suggest further measures in order to fit the expenses for public sector employees into the framework

of what the Slovenian economy can support. Because, due to the agreement reached, it was impossible to propose further reductions in nominal salaries, the Government suggested an average 5% reduction in the funding available for salaries under the revised budget. The funding available for salaries is already at its maximum. The fact remains that there simply are not enough funds for the public sector at its current size.

The gross domestic product of the Republic of Slovenia in 2012 was below that of 2008. During this period, total gross salaries in the private sector fell by 1.5%, while in the public sector it increased by 7% (and by more than 12% in the general government sector). It was the Government's intention to rectify this imbalance with the proposed budget. In addition, taxpayers are unable to bear the large additional tax burdens. The amount of funds available is therefore an objective fact. Moreover, the rights of citizens cannot be curtailed and funds earmarked for social transfers diverted into salaries in order to satisfy the interests of public employees. The budget should also not curtail investment and thereby threaten economic growth and the competitiveness of the country.

Private sector employees have had to bear the heavy burden of harsh conditions numerous times before. The first time was when they had to accept a reduction in salaries or even lost their job as

their employers lost revenues in the global market. The second time was when, due to austerity measures, they faced a reduction in certain transfers to individuals and households. Private sector employees have therefore already taken their share of the load in the effort to achieve fiscal balance. It is true that last year public sector employees and the general government sector employees agreed to a certain reduction in salaries, but the level of this is disproportionate to the conditions in the private sector. Due to the budgetary situation, the public sector must therefore not be privileged and must bear a proportionate (and not just a minor) part of the burden of the harsh conditions.

In spite of certain statements made by trade union representatives to the contrary, the reduced funding for salaries in no respect constitutes a breach of the Public Sector Salary System Act or collective agreements.

Public employees will continue to receive salaries in accordance with the law, the collective agreement or the implementing regulations passed on the basis of the law. The Government also believes that, in spite of the extremely harsh fiscal conditions, the principle of the social state is not endangered by the measures taken by the Government.

IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT A RATIONALISATION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IS URGENT.

The fact is that a rationalisation in the public sector is urgent and taxpayers are

right to expect it. The same crisis measures and adjustments have been implemented by the majority of other states, richer as well as poorer, including our neighbours. A rationalisation in the public sector is therefore absolutely necessary, as are pension and labour reforms.

It should be remembered that, while public employees are employed by the state, they are also citizens with the same rights and obligations as others and must therefore take the proportionate consequences and cost of the crisis. They cannot expect the crisis to affect them any less than all the other people of Slovenia. The Government of the RS understands the dissatisfaction of the people and the fact that any curtailment of acquired rights and status is always unpleasant; nevertheless, measures must be taken immediately.

The Government's measures to reduce funds earmarked for salaries in the public sector are urgently necessary; however, the Government is striving to implement them in agreement with social partners and with the correct attitude to public sector employees. The crisis cannot be overcome without an effective public sector.

In any event, the measures will have to be taken with the least drastic consequences possible; however, drastic consequences await us all if we fail to act and leave matters as they are. If we fail to act immediately, the Republic of Slovenia will find itself in even more dire circumstances.



The minister of Labour, family and social affairs Andrej Vizjak and The President of the trade union Pergam Janez Posedi. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

BORUT PAHOR: TIME AND DETERMINATION FOR JOINT HARD WORK ARE NOW OF THE ESSENCE



Photo: Archives of Office of the President of the Republic of Slovenia

The President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, began his presidential term at a crucial time. He says he has enough leadership skills, composure and wisdom to take on the great responsibility.

According to the Constitution, the President of the Republic represents Slovenia and is the Commander-in-Chief of its Armed Forces. His responsibilities also include calling elections in the National Assembly, the promulgation of laws, the appointment and recall of ambassadors and deciding on amnesties. Borut Pahor will also have to make several important staffing proposals in the management of government institutions this year. The President has already proposed his candidate for the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia and the First Deputy President of the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia, and he must also propose a candidate for the Governor of the Central bank.

He is proud of the fact that he has been a Pioneer, a Youth, a Member of the Slovenian and European Parliaments, the President of the National Assembly and the President of the Slovenian Government. His term as Prime Minister ended early, when he received a vote of no confidence in 2011. He led the Social Democrats from 1997 until June 2012, when he lost in the second ballot to Prof. Igor Lukšič by a very small margin. President Pahor is convinced that we must resist despondency and despair in Slovenia, or be ruined. He is a sportsman at heart, a marathon runner, and also likes to mention his Primorska roots.

His election anticipates more tolerance and cooperation between citizens of various ideologies and political beliefs.

At his inauguration in the National Assembly, he expressed the guidelines for his term with the words, "Time and determination for joint hard work are now of the essence." Before the election and

immediately after, he announced that he would initiate dialogue between political players and try to achieve an outline agreement between the Government and the opposition for a way out of the crisis.

Janez Janša, the Prime Minister, said at the beginning of President Pahor's term: "You have taken on the office of the President of the Republic at a very crucial time, which can be compared to those decisive times twenty-one years ago, when the independent Slovenian state was being formed. Today, we also need united political leadership and a clear vision, and the role of the President of the Republic is very important in this."

On his first official visit to Brussels after taking office, President Pahor first met Herman van Rompuy, the President of the European Council, Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament, Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of the European Commission, and Catherine Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs. On this occasion, Borut Pahor again repeated the view which he had mentioned publicly several times before that "It is not permissible for a difficult decision on whether a referendum should be permitted or not to be repeatedly imposed on the Constitutional Court." The main theme of the discussions was the future of Europe and the role of Slovenia in it. President Pahor repeated his commitment to the European idea and support for the reforms which the Slovenian Government is making so that Slovenia can deal with the economic and financial crisis more successfully. The President of the Republic also ensured his discussion partners that he would try to create a political climate within his juris-

dition which would enable the smoother implementation of key reforms.

It is not surprising that, as a passionate sportsman, Borut Pahor hosted among his first guests at the presidential palace Srečko Katanec, the new coach of the national football team, an experienced coach who led the Slovenian football team in 2002 when it qualified for the World Cup which was held in Japan and South Korea. The President promised to attend the qualifying matches for the World Cup in 2014 because he believes that the Slovenian football team will qualify for the World Cup in Brazil in 2014.

In response to the demonstrations taking place on Slovenian streets and squares, where people have been demanding the resignation of the entire political elite, the President said that he understood and supported the people, although not their actions. He is aware that we all represent our Slovenian homeland and this homeland is a part of each and every person. We will have to find solutions together.

When he performed various jobs during his election campaign – he allegedly missed out only on being a pilot of Adria Airways and the main operator of the nuclear power plant in Krško – he promised that by the end of his term he would find answers to all the questions posed by citizens. He promised to call numerous meetings, forums, problem conferences, symposiums, working groups and consultations if necessary, in which he would act as a mediator and seek consensus between all, so that Slovenians could move forward together. Given the present situation, he may have his hands full during his term.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/ STA



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/ STA



Photo: Archives of Office of the President of the Republic of Slovenia

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Borut Pahor was born on 2 November 1963 in Postojna. He is a Bachelor of Political Science, majoring in international relations. In 1987, he received the Prešeren and Zore Awards for his diploma thesis at the former Faculty for Sociology, Political Sciences and Journalism. He and his partner, Tanja Pečar, a lawyer, have a son called Luka.

He began his political career in 1990 as a delegate in the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. He was elected to the National Assembly as a deputy for the first time in 1992. At the third congress of the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) in March 1977, he was elected the new party leader. He won another term of office as a deputy in the general election in 2000 and became the President of the National Assembly. In June 2004, before the end of his term in the Slovenian National Assembly, he was elected by preference vote to the European Parliament in the European parliamentary elections. He was a member of the Socialist Group.

The 2008 general elections brought a relative victory for the Social Democrats. On the basis of the election result and after having consulted parliamentary groups, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, asked Pahor to form a government, which was confirmed on 7 November 2008 by a ballot in the National Assembly. At the congress of the Social Democrats' party in June 2012, he announced his candidature for the presidential elections in autumn and in the second ballot of the elections on 2 December 2012 received the support of 67.37% of voters.

SMALL VILLAGE WITH A GREAT SOUL

I visited Gradež to see a nativity scene about which the word of mouth had spread widely at Christmas time, but I soon realised that this little village actually hides much more: a rich history, a well-preserved cultural heritage, and, above all, locals who know how to appreciate and nurture their background.

Gradež lies only 25 km from the capital, but the ambience here is utterly different. A hilly village lying 600 m above the sea level, Gradež is only a stone's throw from Turjak, the settlement on the top of the long Turjak slope, which is mostly known for the castle of the same name. A bit further stands Rašica, the birthplace of Primož Trubar, the author of the first printed book in the Slovenian language. Both Turjak and Rašica attract many inquisitive visitors and one might think that because of that Gradež would be overshadowed. By no means! The village offers many fascinating features and various stories, always attracting visitors, in spite of the village lacking its own inn, the villagers say.

DRIED FRUIT TO WARD OFF HUNGER

The fruit-drying house of Gradež bears the year 1938 written above its door – which was my meeting point with Boris Zore from the Association for Preserving Heritage, my guide through the village. You simply cannot overlook it, as it is this fruit-drying house that mostly brought the village of Gradež to the attention of outsiders. It is a charming drying house, hiding an oven for fruit drying, using the old, traditional method. The drying house was remarkably modern at the time of its construction. Recently, it has been entirely renovated and, now, it again serves its purpose. To date, the Association for Preserving Heritage in Gradež has not discovered an active fruit-drying facility of this kind anywhere else.

In Slovenia, the construction of fruit-drying facilities started in the years before World War II. According to Mr Boris Zore, the authorities of that time enabled the construction of such a facility to stop people from going hungry. These were the years of economic crisis, and the



inhabitants lacked food. However, nearby orchards abounded in fruit, and dried fruit would last through the winter and feed the hungry.

'The oven is fumeless, which means that the fruit does not come into contact with the flues', Mr Zore explains. The basis of the Gradež fruit-drying house is the oven, above which there are rooms where drying frames are placed. These are a kind of drawers with racks for fruit drying. The number of drying frames depends on the size of the drying room. The drying room in Gradež is one of the largest, with twelve frames lined up in two rows. The heating flues that are arranged in the interior between the oven and drying frames prevent the fruit coming into contact with the flues.

'When drying the fruit, five beech wood logs have to be loaded into the oven every four hours. The wood should be of high quality', Mr Zore explained. 'In this way, we create conditions simulating the fruit being exposed to an extremely hot sun and a gentle breeze. Such a drying method is entirely ecological, which is also the reason that we do not protect the fruit from oxidation,' he added.

The drying house, which is managed by the Association for Preserving Heritage, dries fruit grown in local and other orchards; the fruit must always be of known origin. When drying for other owners, sometimes the arrangement is made that the

association keeps half of their yield, and in return the owners are not charged for wood. Otherwise, the owner of fruit should pay for the wood and a contribution for the use of the oven.

The traditional Dried Fruit Festival in Gradež is organised every year on the third Sunday in September. If you are interested in experiencing fruit drying in the old wood-burning oven 'live', getting to know customs and traditional products, old equipment of tools and

cultural heritage of the place and surroundings, then do pay them a visit. On this occasion, the locals organise various handicraft workshops, walks through unspoiled nature, and tastings of organically grown dried fruits.

VILLAGE AS AN OUTDOOR MUSEUM

From the fruit-drying house, my guide and I head towards the centre of the village, where a mighty old linden tree stands; recently the place has been arranged for the villagers to get together and socialise – just like it used to be. Although Mr Zore has lived in the village for about twenty years and is not a native, he has become highly familiar with the history of the place. Our walk through the village was like a visit to an open air museum.

'Here on the right, you can see the Zabukovec' kozolec (hayrack) with a collection of old farming tools,' Mr Zore said. The old tools were exceptionally well preserved, and, among them, I recognised some of today's rare items that helped in the growing of millet, flax, or aided housewives with small chores around the farm. When the village displays the nativity scenes, there is one nicely set up under the hayrack in the shelter of the old tool collection.

However, the Zabukovec kozolec is not the only famous hayrack in Gradež. In fact, typical for this region is the Strle's kozolec, located on the other side of the village. In folk language, it is known to be as a 'goat' or a 'dog' hayrack, its unique feature being a drawer used for grain drying. It looks like a drawer on wheels and can be pulled out with a wooden pole that functions as a lever. Such a hayrack, which is typical for the wider surroundings of Velike Lašče, is made of oak wood. It used to be covered with thatch, but now has a tiled roof. The hayrack is opened on both sides and its ground space is used for storing farm equipment.

Gradež is also known for its wells, which can be seen in front of almost every house. Just a few steps away from the centre of the village and the old linden tree, the house with house number 2 still has a black kitchen. Ms Justina, who was the last to use it, is still able to tell anecdotes. Her descendants, who ate the food cooked there, say it was ever so tasty. I also come across a century-old cabbage shredder that is still in use by its owners. Another remarkable old tool!



KOGOJ'S HOUSE

Kogoj's house is another house that caught my eye. It is located just above the village centre. The house is named after the Slovenian composer, Marij (Julij) Kogoj (1892–1956), who spent much of his time there and married a woman from Gradež. His works are a form of musical expressionism, and he was a true representative of Slovenian musical avant-garde. Unfortunately, he suffered from schizophrenia, significantly affecting his creativity. He lived in a mental institution from 1932 to his death. In Gradež, he felt wonderful. He bathed in the nearby stream Rašica and explored underground caves. He found his peace here, and local people grew fond of him. Mr Boris Zore said that the Association for Preserving Heritage was planning to set up the Marij Kogoj Memorial Room in Gradež as well as arrange a Kogoj Promenade.

HIKING PATHS

While pointing to the meadow slopes of the village,

Mr Zore explains the surrounding paths to me. There are many in these beautiful and unspoiled forests. The locals have arranged theme routes. In the vicinity, there is the Velike Lašče Cultural Route; the Turjak Tourist Route is running through Gradež and the Turjak–Rašica Forest Educational Trail is the main part of the route leading to the home of Primož Trubar. Also, the E6 European long distance footpath runs nearby. The routes do not bypass the largest cultural monuments, such as the Castle of Turjak and its building complex, and Trubar's birthplace in the village of Rašica. If you decide to follow the Trubar Cultural Trail (a trek organised every year in the beginning of September), you will also be offered a 'Trubar snack' in Gradež.

Although the Association in Gradež operates on a voluntary basis, the locals have arranged their village and surroundings extremely well – a great example of good practice! After saying goodbye to Mr Zore, I promised to myself that I will come to Gradež again: with my hiking boots and a backpack for a full-day hiking tour in this interesting part of Slovenia. And once may even not be enough.

Further information: www.gradez.si/en

Kogoj's house Photo: Metka Starič

Zabukovec kozolec Photo: Metka Starič

Government Communication Office

NATIVITY SCENES IN THE VILLAGE OF GRADEŽ

Six years ago, when three locals came up with the idea to exhibit nativity scenes in the village, they did not think that a few years later the exhibition would become so large and successful. This year at Christmastime, Gradež exhibited as many as 140 nativity scenes that were brought to the village from all parts of Slovenia. This year's attendance caught them by surprise as Gradež saw more than two thousand visitors admiring the displayed nativity scenes.

The nativity scenes were set up through the entire village – under the hayrack, in courtyards, old granaries, bird houses and elsewhere. All were amazing, most of them original copyrighted products. Some of them were made of corn cobs, dough, or traditional pottery, while others were set up in a miniature pine cob or even in the screen of an old TV set. 'The nativity scenes are set up in facilities that also have another meaning, such as fruit-drying house, black kitchen, hayrack, or the old inn's cellar,' says Mr Boris Zore. In this way, the nativity scenes have their own place in the stories of this area.



Photo: Polona Prešeren

Sinfo – Slovenian information

LADY AND THE KNIGHT OF STRMOL – GONE WITH THE WIND

In cooperation with restoration professionals, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport has fully renovated Strmol Castle near Cerklje na Gorenjskem with European funds. For a long time, it has been renowned as one of the noblest and, foremost, well-preserved protocol buildings. In addition to its protocol activity, the castle is also open to tourists, who can enjoy the castle atmosphere for a day or two or even more. However, more than the fact that it will continue to be used for protocol purposes and culture tourism, the recent history of the castle relating to its owner, Rado Hribar, and his wife, Ksenija, has been causing controversy. Late one night in January 1944, a group of men from the security and intelligence service of the Koroška partisan detachment drove them away from the castle through deep snow. So far, it has been impossible to establish where they were murdered and buried. It is true, however, that locals have said many things.

FAMILY CHRONICLE OF DRAGOTIN HRIBAR AND EVGENIJA ŠUMI

In various written sources, Rado and Ksenija Hribar, a married couple, are the two people who appear to be the most interesting characters in the Hribar family, which is no surprise. In their time, they were both extremely modern, forward-thinking, educated and extrovert. They liked to have fun and enjoy life. I have talked about them with Angelika Hribar, the author of the book 'Rodbinska kronika Dragotina Hribarja in Evgenije Šumi' (A Family Chronicle of Dragotin Hribar and Evgenija Šumi) and several articles about her ancestors.

I also asked Angelika Hribar about her memories of Strmol Castle. She replied that it was hardly ever mentioned in her family, but that she remembered visiting it. Angelika Hribar's family was suspicious to the post-war communist authorities, and her father, Zoran Hribar, was convicted in the Nagode trial (among the intellectuals arrested were, for example, Elizabeta Hribar, a politician and doctor of geography, Črtomir Nagode, a Slovenian and British economist, Ljubo Sirc, founder and prefect of the London Centre for Research into Post-Communist Economies, publicist and teacher, Angela Vode, etc.), so they did not discuss their 'relatives from Strmol' very often. However, according to Angelika Hribar, the castle was already very different when some communists holidayed there.

Rado Hribar and Ksenija Gorup. Photo: Archives of Angelika Hribar



A CASTLE WITH A VIEW OF A POND

Strmol Castle, the majority of which was once ivy-clad, is located on a hill, at the foot of which you can enjoy a view of the castle pond and garden. Undoubtedly, it is more modest now than it was in the days of its owners. The information on the surroundings of the castle is sparse. There was probably an orchard on the slope in front, and four ponds, which were filled from a well with a spring not far from the building, on a flat area. They could be reached by a tree-lined path with benches. Visitors can climb the castle hill along a wide well-maintained path. The courtyard in front of the castle is rectangular and not too lavish. The garden wall, which is also a fence, contains statues of boys (putti, representing a figure of a chubby child, almost always male). The "putti" of Strmol hold various objects in their hands, such as animals and crops. On the opposite side, another path descends to a junction with a nearby road. An artificial lake lies between the two paths at the foot of the hill.

Angelika Hribar told me a lot about the history of the place; nevertheless, I will mention only the most important information. Strmol is one of the oldest castles in Slovenia and was first mentioned in the 13th century. It has had quite a few owners; the lords of Strmol, who figure in the history of Cerklje until the end of the 14th century, were mentioned as the first owners. The castle originated from a medieval turret, which in 1436 was bestowed on Jacob of Strmol by the Counts of Celje. The turret was the basis of the manor, and is still preserved in the core of today's building. The manor and its park and house have been declared a cultural monument. In 2003, it acquired a new attractive appearance. Below the castle, there was once a pond with a drawbridge, which was used as a barrier against Turkish attacks; today, you can admire a small artificial lake instead.

The last great renovation was carried out between 1936 and 1940, when the building was owned by Rado Hribar, who was assassinated by members of the security and intelligence service in January 1944. After the death of Rado and Ksenija Hribar, the manor was populated by German soldiers, who left everything intact when they left. The castle was left in equally good condition by the Slovenian rulers of the post-war political elite, who spent holidays here. Tito supposedly did not pay a visit, but Matija Maček



The Strmol castle now and in 1937.

often lingered here. The library is the most ruined room, although the Hribars ordered every book published at that time. An interesting question arises, which even Angelika Hribar could not answer: what kind of education did Rado and Ksenija Hribar have? They must have been very sophisticated and also practical.

RADO BUYS STRMOL CASTLE

Rado bought Strmol Castle on 18th April 1936 from poverty-stricken Marija Fuchs, the widow of Klemen Fuchs. Rado was from the prominent Ljubljana family of the Slovenian printer, industrialist, politician and an admirer of everything Slavic, Dragotin Hribar (1862–1935). His mother, Evgenija (born Šumi, 1875–1936), was from a bourgeois family who owned a confectionery factory. He owned a plane.

He was a cosmopolitan person and dressed like an English gentleman. In the 1930s, he was the president of a car club and flying club in Ljubljana, and also a municipal councillor. From 8th June 1934 to 6th January 1936, he was president of the Savings Bank of Ljubljana.

MARRIAGE TO KSENIJA GORUP

On 21st February 1926, Rado married Ksenija Gorup. Well-mannered and educated, Ksenija was a granddaughter of one of the wealthiest Slovenians at that time; her grandfather was an industrialist and merchant. Ksenija was extravagant and open-



minded. She had a small crocodile as a pet, which she used to take on a leash through Tivoli Park in Ljubljana. Unfortunately, ever since he bit Rado as he was taking a bath, he has been protecting the castle in a glass case. Ksenija was described as modest, but elegant. She was supposedly a beauty, with plenty of glow and warmth. She was the first Yugoslavian woman to acquire a pilot's license, and also enjoyed driving and riding.

Although Rado provided Ksenija with great comfort, partly also due to her wealthy dowry, she was not faithful to him. In 1932, she left Rado after falling in love with her riding instructor, a Serbian officer named Vladimir Glišič. In 1934, they married in an Orthodox church in Belgrade; but the marriage did not last long. They lived in Montenegro and Maribor for a while. Meanwhile, Rado bought Strmol Castle in 1936, and invited Ksenija to return. But she got away again; this time from Glišič. At first, she lived in Ljubljana; then, in 1939, she moved to Strmol with her mother Amalija. Rado filed a suit against Glišič, and on 27th March 1940, the court ruled with a 'Judgement of His Majesty the King' that Ksenija's second marriage was invalid, because the first had not ended. According to Vilma Mlakar, who was then a chambermaid at the castle, another 'wedding' was organised for a close family circle in Strmol upon this event, and the couple were symbolically chained together so that they could not separate again.



The furniture and decorations of the previous owners (mostly in the Baroque and Rococo styles) have been preserved, which is rare when it comes to castles in Slovenia. Photo: Archives of the State Protocol Services of the Republic of Slovenia JGZ Brdo

A LADY WITH A SMALL CROCODILE AND A KNIGHT OF STRMOL

Strmol Castle cannot be regarded merely as a museum, as it houses unusual objects which stir the imagination of the visitor. The parlours are richly furnished, with cupboards containing champagne glasses, ceramic plates and shiny silver candleholders, and carpets as if from 'The One Thousand and One Nights'. One does not need much imagination to hear the ringing laughter of the mistress and the sound an aircraft landing in a nearby field. Meanwhile, on the terrace of the manor, lords are socialising, drinking champagne and discussing the latest book - and, of course, village or town rumours, any thing spicy is interesting to everyone.

And in the lives of the Lord and Countess of Strmol, there were many spicy things. Can you imagine, for example, walking a small crocodile, instead of a dog, around Tivoli Park? Well, that was Ksenija for you. Stubborn and independent on the one hand, and spoilt and almost reckless or even stupidly brave on the other. And what of Rado? As you walk through the main entrance to Strmol, you can see his portrait, in medieval knight's costume in the hall.

He is holding a flag with a deer's head, surely to symbolise his love of hunting. In the lower left corner is a supposedly medieval image of the castle based on Valvasor's drawing, with the inscription 'Voivoda Stermolsky' beneath it; in the lower right corner is something like a coat-of-arms: the escutcheon includes colourful crossed candy canes and a lollipop with a chef's hat as a crown, which undoubtedly represents his main activity, since he owned a confectionery factory. The chef's hat also looks like the Prince's Stone which was used for the throne of princes and Carinthian dukes. In the transverse section of the coat-of-arms is a propeller, a symbol of his aviation activities. The painting was supposedly given to him by his brothers when he renovated the castle. It was probably painted by Božidar Jakac, who was patronised by Rado Hribar, on the basis of their commission and humorous ideas.

According to Angelika Hribar, both of the Hribars often hosted painters, writers and other artists at the castle, which was well-provided with drink and food. If Ksenija desired fresh strawberries in the morning, she could have them. After enjoying the excellent food and drink, the guests started to carouse more loudly and socialise in the billiard room in order not to disturb other in-



JGZ Brdo is organising protocol events at Strmol. The castle serves also as a hotel mainly for boutique guests who appreciate privacy and style. Photo: Archives of the State Protocol Services of the Republic of Slovenia JGZ Brdo

habitants of the castle. The Hribars were good friends with Izidor Cankar (a relative of Ivan Cankar), the poet and dramatist, Pavel Golia, and architect Miha Osolin. In 1936, Cankar was appointed the authorised minister and special envoy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Argentina. In 1937, he was also appointed authorised minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Brazil.

Angelika Hribar told me that with the lords of Strmol, the atmosphere was often festive, especially during the Christmas holidays. On Christmas Eve, they had a large and nicely decorated Christmas tree in the parlour, with plenty of gifts wrapped in shiny paper of various colours under it. Then they sang, listened to music and revelled in festive treats. The atmosphere at the Hribars' was also merry on New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras. They took every opportunity to be merry and socialise.

Angelika Hribar also mentions a former maid of the Hribar's, Vilma, whose story was told by Prof. Marija Cvetek. Supposedly, Vilma remembered the painter Jakac, who was astonished when he returned after the war and heard that the Hribars had been murdered. Many valuable paintings, supposedly even Rembrandts, had disappeared from the castle.

THE STORY OF STRMOL CASTLE IS ALSO A LOVE STORY

Ksenija and Rado Hribar, the last owners of Strmol, resided at there for only a few years, but they fatally marked it forever. The story of the castle is also a love story about a man who loved his wife so much that he married her twice and even chained himself to her to keep her forever. But love and, despite all the tests, their firm friendship and companionship, indeed joined them in death at the end. Although she had been unfaithful to him, she eventually chose him.

GONE WITH THE WIND

Rado Hribar was too open to be limited by fear or thoughts of escape, although several people had warned him that he too would be assassinated. Unfortunately, as I have mentioned, Rado was convinced that nothing could ever happen to him, because throughout the war he had supported the partisans' liberation struggle, also financially. But none of this helped, since the partisans had already put him on an 'assassination



A family of Dragotin Hribar and Evgenija Šumi with some relatives. (Archives: Angelika Hribar)

Rado Hribar with some friends at the old Aeroport of Ljubljana – in Šiška. (Archives: Angelika Hribar)



Ksenija Gorup, Vladimir Glišič and a friend Beba Hribar in Dubrovnik in 1934. (Archives: Angelika Hribar)



Rado Hribar with some friends at the castle in year 1937 or 1938. (Archives: Angelika Hribar)



Employees in the front of the shop "Šumi" in 1930. (Archives: Angelika Hribar)

black list'. Supposedly, Rado was cruelly murdered and Ksenija raped several times before she died.

The tragic destiny of Ksenija and Rado will perhaps never have an epilogue. Destiny weaves events together regardless of a person's will; they probably had the best time of their lives in this very place—near forests perfect for a passionate hunter, fields where both pilots could land in their sports plane, and a manor where they hosted famous and prominent people. They were both art connoisseurs; they renovated their castle with a concern for history and aesthetics, and collected art.

STRMOL CASTLE BECAME STATE-OWNED AND A PROTOCOL BUILDING

With a decision of the Local Court in Ljubljana, Strmol became the property of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia on 17th June 1946. It later came under state ownership and became a protocol building of the Republic of Slovenia.

ANŽE KOPITAR AND URŠKA ŽOLNIR VOTED SLOVENIAN SPORTS PERSONALITIES OF 2012

Ice hockey player Anže Kopitar and the judoka Urška Žolnir were Slovenian Sports Personalities of the Year in 2012.



Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

This year's award ceremony for the prestigious titles of Slovenian Sports Personality of the Year emphasised the social importance of the outstanding achievements of our athletes. They were commended for the ethical, moral and other personal characteristics which they displayed in striving for success with all their human essence, diligence, dedication and relentless persistence. Slovenian athletes are therefore not merely ambassadors of Slovenia,

but complete personalities, worthy of emulation. They represent a bright light and encouragement to each individual on how to lead a responsible and full life, even if one is not a world-class athlete. The event thus stressed the general behaviour of great athletes and their positive impact on society. Not just through the sweet oblivion when achieving success, but also through the hard work and persistence needed to achieve the one's goals.

THE QUEEN OF THE TATAMI

London woke up to a grey and rainy morning on 31 July 2012. It was on that day that Urška Žolnir stepped on to the tatami in the ExCeL centre hall. There are many factors in sport which can prevent an Olympic appearance. Three years before the games, Urška underwent urgent surgery on her knees. The end of her career in sport seemed near. In spite of that, the hard work, indescribable in mere words, took her to the British capital stronger than ever. Her stern gaze and complete steadiness of facial expression in the minutes before every match showed how extremely focused she was. Along with her trainer, Marjan Fabjan, she managed to direct her extreme physical and psychological fitness on an unstoppable march towards gold. With superb technique, she won her first three matches one after another. First, the experienced Claudia Malzahn from Germany and Estefania Garcia from Ecuador had to acknowledge her superiority in the half-middleweight division (-63kg). The quarter-finals saw the last of her long-term rival Schlesinger from Israel. In the semi-finals, Urška threw Munkhzaya Tsedevsuren of Mongolia on her back, already winning a medal. Urška won her place in the finals by all "ippons". She was one match away from gold. Lili Xu, her Chinese opponent, was a strong rival, but Urška managed a "waza-ari" that gave her the decisive advantage. At that moment, Urška's face changed completely, sparkling with the smile of victory. She became the first Slovenian female athlete to win an Olympic gold medal. It was a day that confirmed that persistence and hard work do pay off. It was one of the greatest days in the history of Slovenian sport. It was the day of the Olympic champion, Urška Žolnir.

You are the first Slovenian female athlete to win an Olympic gold medal. July 31, 2012 when you won the Olympic gold medal in London was a day that confirmed that persistence and hard work do pay off. How do you remember it? After the Olympic bronze in Athens in 2004 and seventh place in Beijing in 2008, you have now added the most prestigious – the Olympic gold medal – and you were unable to hide your joy.

July 31, 2012...It was a special day in my life, one that decided between to be or not to be. Seventh or third place would have meant I had repeated the success of the previous Olympics, but I cannot compare those with the success of that day.

You are the first Slovenian female athlete to win Olympic gold, the pinnacle of your prolific career, which is far from over. What are your plans and what are you currently working on? Is your next challenge to compete in a higher division (-70kg) perhaps?

I haven't yet taken the time to decide. I'm considering competing in the -70kg division, but my trainer Fabjan hasn't given me the green light yet.

Will you keep up with this pace of competition and will we see you at the next Olympics in Rio?

In any case, if I decide to compete, I intend to win. If not, I will participate in the Rio Olympics as a trainer with my students.

Slovenian judo recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. During the last decade, athletes competing in this sport have become some of the most successful in Slovenia. The new era or rebirth of Slovenian judo began in 2002, when Maribor hosted the European Championship. How do you rate the current situation in this sport?

For some time now, judo has been highly appreciated in Slovenia. However, Slovenians still don't recognise that 8 million people practice judo worldwide, that the International Judo Federation (IJF) has 195 members, and that 130 countries competed in the Olympics. All in all, judo is not just a sport; it is a way of life.

THE SLOVENIAN SUPERSTAR WHO WON THE STANLEY CUP

Before 2012, the Slovenian Sports Personality Award had never been won by a member of a team. Twenty-five-year-old Anže Kopitar, from Hrušica near Jesenice, was the first. Kopitar marked the season with personal and team achievements wearing the Los Angeles Kings jersey, becoming an NHL champion (the most prominent ice hockey league in the world) in the spring. He is the first Slovenian to have won the venerable Stanley Cup. Anže Kopitar showed his best in the NHL playoffs, when he shone with eight goals and twelve assists. He and his co-player Dustin Brown scored the most points in the playoffs. He was up for the trophy of the most valuable player of the playoffs until the very end, but it went to the goaltender Jonathan Quick. In the spring, Slovenia was delirious about his successes. The centre of the action was his hometown of Hrušica, where several thousand people would gather during the night to watch him play. In the current season, Kopitar has already played 82 matches and won 76 points (25 scores and 51 assists), but he was still unable to defend the title due to the lock-out. After arduous summer training, Anže took up temporary residence in Sweden, where he is playing successfully with his brother Gašper for the Mora team in the second division. In November, after more than four years, he once again played for the national team in the Euro Ice Hockey Challenge; he might be able to help the team again in the qualifiers for the Olympics in Sochi and in the 2013 World Championship.

He is the best athlete of the year, the pride of Slovenia, a sports phenomenon and a global superstar, who at the age of twenty-five is living his dream. He has reached the top of the ice hockey world. What he has achieved is the most he will ever be able to, because an Olympic medal or World Championship title are out of reach for the Slovenian national team. What he achieved with the Los Angeles Kings is unimaginable, but completely real and deserved. They say there is no room for coincidence in his fairy tale, and that in his sports career he has risked everything. He has reached the top with the help of his family, especially his father Matjaž, a great ice hockey enthusiast and trainer, who taught him to be modest, humble and hardworking.

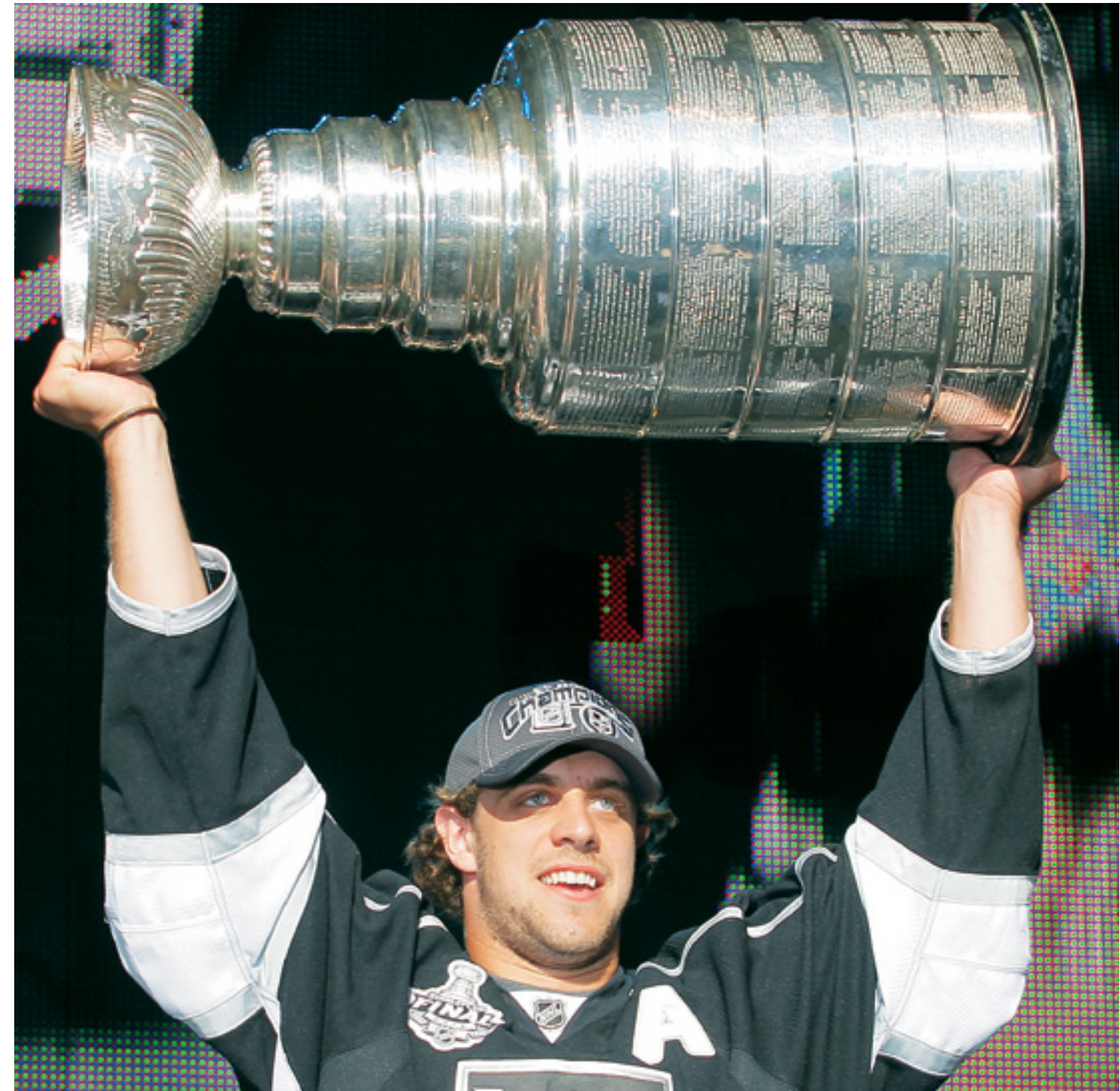


Photo: Daniel Novakovič/ STA

JOŽE PLEČNIK STADIUM COMES ALIVE WITH WINTER CLASSIC

Innsbruck ends Olimpija winning



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

During this year's hockey event, the team of Telemach Olimpija played against VSV EC from Villach, Medveščak from Zagreb and KAC from Klagenfurt. The Dragons, who had won the last two Winter Classics, this year had to say goodbye to the Jože Plečnik Stadium after being defeated 2:4 by the Klagenfurt team, which had also proved to be unbeatable in the previous four games of the season.

With the Bežigrad Ice Fest, Ljubljana's hockey returned to its roots. To mark the 80th anniversary of the first hockey game to have been played in Slovenia, the famous Plečnik Stadium in Ljubljana's Bežigrad became a hockey rink where a series of EBEL League games were played outdoors. On Friday 4 January 2013 the Bežigrad Ice Fest was inaugurated by Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Janković, who was also the sponsor of the last game of the event between Telemach Olimpija and KAC, watched, among others, by the Governor of Carinthia, Gerhard Dörfler.

Winter Classic annual events in which hockey games are played outdoors were first held on the other side of the Atlantic and have

also since become very popular in Europe. While most outdoor games of the extended Austrian EBEL League had been played at the Zagreb stadium of Šalata, there are two events that deserve to be highlighted. In 2003 the game between KAC and VSV, held at the Klagenfurt Hypo Group Arena, gathered 30,500 fans. But even more momentous was the event held in September 2012 in Pula. In the ancient Roman amphitheatre two hockey games were played, one of which was won by Olimpija.

After several years of abandonment, the Jože Plečnik Stadium again hosted a major sports event. This legendary facility has a special place in the hearts of many sports fans. They remember the successes of soccer club Ilirija before the Second World War, the unforgettable matches played by the Olimpija soccer club during the 70s, its winning the first title of Champion in the independent Slovenia, and the golden era of the Slovenian national soccer team under the leadership of Srečko Katanec. This stadium also hosted a spectacular concert by the rock group Siddharta.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

The Bežigrad stadium was designed by Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik in 1923 for the Catholic youth sports association Orel; construction began in 1925. For various reasons, such as lack of funds and political discord, construction proceeded slowly, and the stadium was completed only after the Second World War, when it was taken over by Fizikalna zveza Slovenije. The architect drew his inspiration from antiquity, as his idea was to create an open-air theatre. The stadium is surrounded by a brick wall. The entrance is beneath a portico supported by typical Plečnik columns. Inside, there are steps for seating, balustrades and a covered tribune. The honorary tribune was built in 1935 for the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress that was held in Ljubljana. Its roof is supported by

mighty pillars and embellished by a balustrade.

In the thirties, Ljubljana was the theatre of extensive urban planning projects, designed mostly by Plečnik, which are now known in the literature as Plečnik's Ljubljana. This, in terms of its concept, extent and the quality of the realised works, is a global urban and architectural phenomenon. Plečnik became globally famous for his exceptional solutions such as Tromostovje (the Three Bridges), Tržnica (the Market), the Ljubljana banks, Kongresni trg (Congress Square), the promenade in Tivoli Park, the building of the National and University Library, the Ursuline High School, the Church of Saints Cyril and Method in Bežigrad, the Žale cemetery complex, and the Church of St. Michael on the Marsh.

Sports events that marked 2012

IZTOK ČOP BIDS FAREWELL AT THE PEAK OF HIS CAREER

In the autumn, another giant of Slovenian sport bade farewell to his active career, which has been closely connected with the two decades of Slovenian independence. Iztok Čop put away his oars in the best way possible – while he was on top – after stepping onto the winner's podium with Luka Špik in London for the last time, adding another bronze medal to his impressive collection, this time with an Olympic tinge.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/ STA

ENTHUSIASM ABOUT THE RETURN OF PRIMOŽ KOZMUS TO THE OLYMPICS

Those who love stories of successful returns to sport were enthusiastic about Primož Kozmus. The Beijing gold medallist had ended his career, but decided to try again. Many raised their eyebrows and wondered how well he would do. The doubters were silenced at last year's World Championship in Daegu; he continued his successful streak in the most important competition of the season, the Olympics, where only one man managed to beat him, and Kozmus won another Olympic medal. The veteran Rajmond Debevec also returned from the Games with a medal; he holds the record for the number of times he has competed in five-round events. The Olympics in London were his eighth, where he took his third Olympic medal.



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/ STA

FRANČEK GORAZD TIRŠEK GAVE A SILVER SHINE TO THE PARALYMPICS

The Paralympic games take place immediately after the Olympics, and as in previous years, Slovenian athletes with disabilities added to Slovenia's London achievements: Franček Gorazd Tiršek's silver medal ensured that once again Slovenian athletes with disabilities returned home with a medal, as they have from all the Paralympics since 1992.



Photo: Daniel Novakovič

THE VERSATILE TINA MAZE ALSO MADE HER MARK ON THE YEAR

Slovenia's best female alpine skier shone in the 2011/2012 season, reaching for the overall title in the World Cup all season long. In the end, she had to acknowledge the superiority of her great rival, Lindsey Vonn, by a fraction, but Tina has managed to keep her form in the new season as well. Winning two races by the end of 2012, Tina has already shown that she means business when it comes to winning the overall Cup.



Photo: Nebojša Tejič/ STA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND PRAISE FOR ALL THE OTHER SLOVENIAN ATHLETES: FILIP FLISAR, JAKOV FAK, ROBERT KRANJEC, PETER MANKOČ, DAMIR DUGONJIČ, MITJA PETKOVŠEK AND OTHERS

Other athletes competing in winter sports were also successful last year, from the free-style skier Filip Flisar, who took over the scene with his recognisable moustache and won the ski cross title of the season, to biathlete Jakov Fak, who became world champion; the mixed relay team won the silver in the biathlon World Championship, and ski jumper Robert Kranjec became world champion in ski-flying, as well as winning the event in Planica, Slovenia; the Slovenian ski-jumping team won the bronze medal in the World Championship.

The swimmers Peter Mankoč, Damir Dugonjič and the women's relay team (Bežan, Sagmeister, Klinar, Isakovič) also achieved extraordinary success, winning medals in the European championship and the European short course championship, which yielded another medal for the mixed relay team (Čarman, Govejšek, Dugonjič, Mankoč); Mankoč declared that after the December world championship he would no longer compete in top-class events. The gymnasts Sašo Bertonec, Mitja Petkovšek, Saša Golob and Teja Belak each won the World Cup titles of the season on their respective apparatus. The slalom canoers Jure Meglič and Benjamin Savšek each won World Cup events, and Savšek also took bronze at the European Championship. Slovenian tennis players, especially men, pushed the boundaries, with Grega Žemlja becoming the first Slovenian ATP finalist. And climber Mina Markovič won the overall World Cup. Named here are just a few of the successful sportsmen and women of the last season. Maribor football players are proving successful for the second season in a row, playing in the European league; meanwhile the Olimpija basketball team surely cannot expect to join the elite automatically anymore – the fight for a place in the Euroleague will be fiercer.



Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA



Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

SLOVENIAN CHEVALIERS DES ARTS ET DES LETTRES

Last year, the French Ambassador in Slovenia, Pierre-François Mourier, presented to three Slovenian artists the insignia of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres: Jaroslav Skrušny, a literary historian and critic, Aleš Šteger, the head of a programme section of the European Capital of Culture, and Klemen Ramovš, the artistic director of the Brežice festival of baroque music.



Photo: Archives of French Embassy in Ljubljana

TREND AWARDS

In December, the ceremony presenting awards for visual creativity, called 'Trend', was held. The honorary award for life work was given to Stojan Kerbler, the pioneer of Slovenian photography. The awards for visual creativity were given to the collective project Kulturno središče evropskih vesoljskih tehnologij Vitanje (Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies Vitanje), to the visual artist Sašo Sedlaček, to Rok Predin, a painter, animator and director working in London, for his visuals projected onto the facade of the Buckingham Palace during the live performance of the piece 'Our House' by the group Madness, and Young@Squat, a group of young designers. A special feature of the Trend awards is that there are no nominations; the decision of who will receive the award is made exclusively by the thirteen members of the Trend awards committee. The awards were established with the objective of promoting the work of Slovenian artists in the fields of fashion, photography, architecture, graphic design and modern art.



Photo: Archives of Jožica Brodarič, Trend 2013



Photo: Matic Štojs

MEŠKO AWARDS 2012

The Borut Meško Awards for 2012, conferred by the Association of journalists and publicists, were presented to a retired journalist and publicist Viktor Blažič (for a life devoted to raising awareness in the society), photographer Primož Lavre (for a special achievement – raising the media awareness of Slovenian society) and journalist Tino Mamič (for raising the media awareness of society).

SLOVENIAN ARCHITECTURE PRESENTED IN THE FRENCH ARCHITECTURAL MAGAZINE D'ARCHITECTURES

In its December issue, the French architectural magazine D'architectures devoted its main article to a detailed analysis of Slovenian architecture. Slovenia is presented as a country where numerous very promising young architects work.



Photo: Vesna Pušnik Brezovnik/STA

Photo:www.slovenia.info

SLOVENIA AMONG LONELY PLANET'S TOP DESTINATIONS OF THE COMING YEAR

Lonely Planet, the world famous travel publisher, has included Slovenia in the top ten hottest destinations in the category of Best in Travel. Slovenia is presented as picturesque, not unlike Switzerland, and, despite the euro, more affordable than Italy or Austria.

Kayaking on the Soča river
Photo: J. Skok/STO



Ibexes on Kriški Podi, with Triglav in the background.
Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik/STO

Piran, Cape.
Photo: Ubald Trnkoczy/STO



Velika Planina, The Kamnik Alps
Photo: B. Kladnik/STO



Idrija žlikrofi (dumplings)
Photo: Dunja Wedam/STO



Women of Piran
Photo: Ubald Trnkoczy/STO

SLOVENIAN NATIONAL CULTURAL HOLIDAY

on 8th of February

Slovenian national cultural holiday is devoted to the memory of Slovenian poet France Prešeren (1800–1849). Here we point out some of the events that mark Prešeren Day.

LJUBLJANA CASTLE:

Free visit of the permanent exhibition “Slovenian History”, the virtual castle and the viewing tower. This includes free guided tours of Ljubljana Castle and the “Slovenian History” exhibition.

THE TOWN OF KRANJ:

It organises the Prešeren Fair, which will open on 8 February at 10:00 hours. The town streets will be marked by the nostalgia of Prešeren's times created by the cultural programme, presentation of 19th century clothes, barrel organ festival, horse carriage rides for visitors, stalls offering home craft products, antiquity fair and traditional recitations of Prešeren's poetry. Visitors can also try their luck at old social games, print the censored version of Zdravljica and see the presentation of old crafts.

If you cannot make it to Kranj on 8 February, you can still attend a free guided tour of Prešeren's trail each first Saturday of the month. You will get to know all the spots associated with France Prešeren and learn many an interesting story from the poet's life. Visitors meet at 11:00 hours in front of the Kranj House, at Glavni trg 2 in Kranj.

THE TOWN OF ŽIROVNICA:

The Žirovnica cultural institute organises a traditional walking tour along the Cultural Heritage Trail, which includes a free visit to the birth house of France Prešeren.

ALL OTHER SPOTS:

Entry to major galleries and museums and other spots of Slovenian culture is mostly free on that day.



France Prešeren
Photo: Tinkara Zupan

CARNIVAL PARADES

from 3rd to 12th February

February is the time of traditional carnival parades in different towns around Slovenia. Here traditional Slovenian masks are joined by modern designs. All the parades integrate the audience in their events.

THE TOWN OF PTUJ

The traditional Kurentovanje in Ptuj (3 to 12 February) begins on 3 February with the opening ceremony where the power is handed over to the Carnival Prince and ends on 12 February with the burial of the Pust figure. The most attractive event will take place on 10 February, when the international carnival parade will be held. The carnival events will be accompanied by an exhibition of autochthonous carnival characters and rituals of the Ptuj area.

THE TOWN OF CERKNO

Cerkno is where you can meet the traditional laufar characters from 10 to 12 February.

THE TOWN OF CERKNICA

The traditional carnival of Cerknica featuring the witches residing on Slivnica Hill above the town and the Butalci tribe will be organised from 9 to 12 February.



The witch Uršula, carnival in Cerknica.
Photo: Petra Trček/STA

Photo: Ubald Trnkoczy/STO



WINE FAIR

from 10th to 13th February

THE TOWN OF LJUBLJANA

The Ljubljana Exhibition and Convention Centre will host the 5th International Wine Fair from 10 to 13 February. The main purpose of the fair is to connect domestic and international customers, especially professional buyers, with wine growers and their top class offer of domestic and international wines. The fair will include the evaluation of wines by catering experts and business people and an evaluation of spirits.

ANTHOLOGICAL EXHIBITION OF SLOVENIAN VISUAL ARTS FROM THE LAST 100 YEARS

until 24th of February

THE TOWN OF MARIBOR

At the closing of the European Capital of Culture 2012 project, the Maribor Art Gallery has opened an anthological exhibition of Slovenian visual arts of the 20th century from impressionists to retro-avantgardists. The exhibition has been prepared in cooperation with major Slovenian galleries and museums and opens the view of the new practices of Slovenian visual artists of the 21st century.

The exhibition "100 Years of Slovenian Art" is divided into two parts, representing the 20th and 21st centuries. The 20th century part follows a chronological overview of Slovenian art from the impressionists to the end of the century, while the 21st century part points to the most interesting names in contemporary art. The exhibition will remain open until 24 February 2013 at the Maribor Art Gallery.



Ivan Grohar, Potatoes, 1909.
Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

Photo: STA



AVSENIK'S GOLDEN SEASON

22th of February

PRI JOŽOVCU IN BEGUNJE

The Avsenik Golden Season is organised in the Under Avsenik's Umbrella hall of the restaurant and guesthouse Pri Jožovcu in Begunje, the home of the famous Slovenian folk music ensemble Avseniki. Here you can listen to Avsenik's music and get to know it better at eight evening concerts devoted to the members of Avsenik Brothers Ensemble from the period of their most successful album Zlati zvoki ("Golden Sounds"). Half of the season is already over, but there are still four concerts to attend. The first of these will be held on 22 February 2013 and features the Mitja Quintet ensemble with guests.

Irena Kogoj

SLAVKO PENGOV: THE HISTORY OF THE SLOVENE NATION FROM THE SLAVIC COLONISATION TO THE START OF POST-WAR RENEWAL

'The history of the Slovene nation from the Slavic colonisation to this day' is the title of the epic mural by Slavko Pengov in the vestibule of the Large Hall of the Slovenian Parliament. The mural covers almost 95 square meters (it is 67.4 m long and 1.4 m high) and stretches along the four walls of the hall; it depicts the history of the Slovene nation from the period of great migrations and the Slavic colonisation of these regions, to the period immediately following the Second World War. The enormous mural is like a history book transposed in the language of fine art.

Pengov's history of the Slovene nation is an uninterrupted sequence of panels crowded with scenes showing historical periods through depictions of bygone events and figures. This extensive narration begins on the right side of the entrance to the vestibule and runs in an uninterrupted frieze on its four walls.

The panel on the first wall depicts the period between late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The history of the Slovene nation begins with the decline of the Roman Empire, the invasion of barbarian tribes across the present territory of Slovenia and the migration of Slovene tribes who arrive as shepherds and hunters and settle here permanently. The next scene shows the first attempts of organising Slovene tribes into a state – Samo's tribal union. This is followed by a section showing the election of Carinthian princes in Carantania and the covenant with the Bavarii against the Obri, which marks the fall of Carantania under Bavarii's rule. Christianisation follows.

The panel on the second wall depicts the evolution of the Slovene nation from the Middle Ages to the period of national awakening in the 19th century. The feudal social order is shown by the conquest of the territory by the Franks and the failed unification of southern Slavic tribes. The next scene shows peasant revolts in the 16th century, revolts of the oppressed, which, however, are rapidly stopped by the aristocracy and exemplarily punished with the "crowning" of the revolt leader, Matija Gubec. The following scene shows the development of the economy, river transportation and the construction of a medieval walled town. Protestantism is presented by the figure of Primož Trubar; next to him are people from the circle of the poet France Prešeren, and the panel ends with a portrait of Fran Levstik.

The panel on the third wall begins with a scene depicting the rising of the working class, first organised in a movement by the Social Democratic Party in 1896. The next scene shows the First World War with three Slovenian soldiers in Austrian uniforms, and symbols of a lost war. The panel ends with a scene showing the establishment of the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and the condition of the working class in it.

The panel on the fourth wall depicts the national liberation struggle during the Second World War and ends with a picture symbolising the development of a free homeland, with a group of young people marching across a field of ripe wheat, optimistically looking into the bright future.

Pengov imagined this majestic historic fresco as a sequence of historical scenes, and tried to make historical events recognisable through a reduced number of figures. Such an uninterrupted sequence of figures, among which certain are predominant (Carinthian princes, Charlemagne, Matija Gubec, Primož Trubar, Janez Vajkard Valvasor, France Prešeren, Ivan Cankar, workers and Partisans), while other are shown in groups to evoke the appropriate historical idea of the community, suggesting an uninterrupted organic historical line. Pengov tried to arrange the crowded composition by putting more prominent historical figures and events in the foreground and painting them in vivid colours, while placing images meant to elucidate the information in the background, in the manner of scenery, where, however, they are intended to act as a commentary and explanation of the core flow of events presented in foreground.

The mural, painted in 1958, for which Pengov received the Prešeren Award, was completely restored in 2010.

Source: National Assembly



From the left to the right: Matija Čop, France Prešeren and Andrej Smole. Some other symbols: parliament in Wien and the revolution in 1848; Eagl as symbol of Austro - Hungarian Empire and South railway (from Wien to Trieste) as the symbol of progress.