



# Sinfo

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**Feel Slovenia – Feel 2010**



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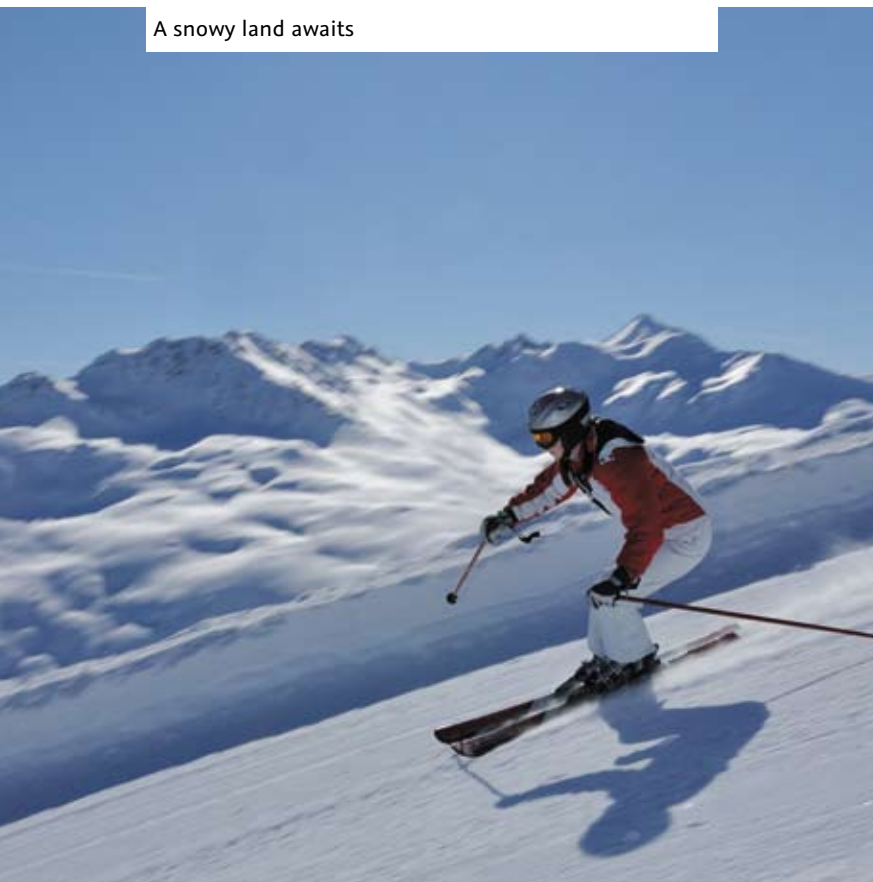


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Veronika Stabej

## Feel Slovenia – Feel 2010

The season we are in right now appears to us as a major challenge to our modern way of life, as we weigh up the significance of our cultural heritage. This season brings into our frequently alienated modern world creativity and intimacy for the individual and family. The heritage of Christmas celebrations has always been focused towards the individual and the family circle, so not outwards into commercialisation and any kind of Christmas marketing. From this stems an even greater need for us to be increasingly aware of the dimensions and quality of the celebrations communicated to us by our heritage. Through heritage we preserve the rich palette of European cultural diversity and uniqueness as the greatest asset of individual nations and countries. Specifically through better mutual understanding we will create inexhaustible resources for creativity and spiritual enrichment, which will be appropriate to us and will enrich us with their messages and qualities. Year in, year out, from December to December. This issue the Letters from Ambassadors showcase Spain, which is just about to take over the half-yearly Presidency of the EU Council. It faces, as do all the other Member States, several extremely important challenges: according to many predictions the economic crisis will continue in 2010, and the Spanish view is that only greater cohesion of economic, financial and fiscal policies can contribute to more rapid economic progress. The desire for real European openness dictates for Spain a strong, unanimous, mutually supportive and promising Europe which should serve as a model for other regions of the world.

You can also read about how Slovenia is a major draw with its numerous ski resorts and health spas, and not just in the coming weeks, but later, too. And the growing numbers of foreign visitors coming to our capital city are thrilled each year by the festively lit seasonal Ljubljana, which the experts say is unique around the world for emphasising the most beautiful elements the city has to offer. For this reason, we would like the coming year to bring out in all of us, including you, our valued readers, whatever is noblest and most genuine that we carry within us, so we can, in short, live and feel the fullness of the New Year 2010. With this in mind we are delighted to enclose a free I feel Slovenia badge for you. This slogan and the badge symbolise, as an outward sign of the Slovenia brand, an authentic sensing of what is agreeable and inspiring upon every contact and meeting with anything Slovenian – nature, products and services, and above all of course, the people. So feel Slovenia – and feel 2010. All the best!

### Sinfo – Slovenian information

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 Slovenian Chamber of Craft: [www.ozs.si](http://www.ozs.si)  
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 State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia: <http://e-uprava.gov.si>



● Andreja Šonc Simčič

## Prime Minister Pahor receives President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy

Prime Minister Borut Pahor hosted the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy on his first official visit to the Republic of Slovenia since taking on his new position. The Prime Minister and President devoted the main part of their talks to implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. Prime Minister Pahor stressed that Slovenia is committed to involving all member states in talks on the operation of future European institutions and effective cooperation between the new institutions and the state holding the presidency. EU President Van Rompuy also set out his guidelines for managing the EU, emphasising that he wanted to find a new impetus, improve the functioning of the EU, and demonstrate the importance of the EU's role. Among the main themes he will deal with as the new EU President, Van Rompuy emphasised energy policy, the Western Balkans and Afghanistan, and relations with Russia. He also stressed the importance of returning foreign policy topics to the EU agenda.

The Prime Minister and the President agreed that social policy is one of the main current European themes, and that sensible, necessary social reforms are of key importance for member states facing the current crisis.

EU President Herman van Rompuy and Prime Minister Borut Pahor.



photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

## Janez Potočnik, candidate for new European environment commissioner

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso presented the allocation of portfolios in his new team, entrusting Janez Potočnik with the environment portfolio. Barroso said that he was extremely pleased, as in the last five years Potočnik had demonstrated a "direct and special interest" in this area and he is a "dedicated environmentalist". For his part, Potočnik said that he was delighted and that this was recognition of his past work. "This portfolio is

certainly close to my world view and to what I've always wanted and worked for," he emphasised. Potočnik, currently European science and research commissioner, described his new portfolio as an area that is central to our lives and at the heart of global problems facing Europe and the rest of the world; it is also an area in which much European legislation is adopted. Final voting on the second full European Commission under the leadership of President Barroso is scheduled for 26 January.

Janez Potočnik.



photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

## Second working meeting of the governments of the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Hungary

Festetics Palace (Keszthely) on Lake Balaton hosted the second working meeting of the governments of the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Hungary, led by Prime Ministers Borut Pahor and Gordon Bajnai. Both sides believed that the meeting was a reflection of the very good relations between the two countries. During the meeting, the prime ministers also met representatives of both national communities, with whom they discussed the importance of systemic financing of the Slovenian national community, as well as urgent transport infrastructure improvements, which will significantly ease the everyday life of people in the border region. Hungarian Prime Minister Bajnai said that the Felsőszölnök-Verica road would be opened in 18 months. The prime ministers also stressed that their countries must ensure for both minorities the conditions for quality of life without the need to assimilate with the majority nation.

Another subject of discussion was possible forms of cooperation in Hungary's preparations for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2011. The two foreign ministers, Samuel Žbogar and Dr. Péter Balázs signed a joint declaration on the Euro-Atlantic future of the Western Balkans region, as the two governments agree on the need to ensure continuity of focus on the region on the part of future presidencies. The Hungarian prime minister also congratulated Slovenia on the signing of the arbitration agreement with Croatia.

Regarding the economy, the governments exchanged views on methods to resolve the financial and economic crisis, and undertook to promote investment and strengthen cooperation between small and medium-sized businesses on both sides of the border.

During the meeting, ministers also emphasised the importance of the Slovenian-Hungarian cross-border cooperation programme, and expressed their support for minority projects. Construction and modernisation of the deficient infrastructure and energy links between the two countries, which the governments agreed to do in the memorandum on cooperation in the energy sector, are strategically important for economic cooperation.

## Milan M. Cvikl, candidate for member of European Court of Auditors

The Government agrees with the candidacy of Milan M. Cvikl for a member of the European Court of Auditors. As Prime Minister Borut Pahor explained, the candidate meets "all the requirements of the European Court of Auditors for this post".

Cvikl was employed for a number of years by the Bank of Slovenia, was an economist with the World Bank from 1992 to 1997, and was state secretary at the Ministry of Finance from 1998 to 2000. He later worked for NLB, where his roles included assistant to the board, and from 2004 to 2008 he was a deputy in the National Assembly. He is currently secretary general of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

Milan M. Cvikl.



photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

## President Danilo Türk hosts the Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Željko Komšić and President of the Hellenic Republic Dr Karolos Papoulias

President of the Republic of Slovenia Dr Danilo Türk received Chair of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Željko Komšić, who had arrived on a two-day official visit to the Republic of Slovenia. President Türk described relations between Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as very good, on the political and economic level, and on all other levels, while the two countries hold regular political consultations. The President said that Slovenia supports the European orientation of all successor states to the former Yugoslavia, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. He emphasised that Slovenia strongly supports granting Bosnia and Herzegovina an action plan for NATO membership as soon as possible, and is also

pushing for progress towards membership of the European Union. The President said that at present the greatest effort was being invested in visa liberalisation between the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presidents also discussed possibilities to strengthen economic relations. President Türk said that trade between the two countries was good, and that there were many Slovenian investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also suggested that there are still many unexploited opportunities for the two countries to appear together in third-country markets.

President of the Republic of Slovenia Dr Danilo Türk also received the President of the Hellenic Republic Dr Karolos Papoulias, who was on an official visit to the Republic of Slovenia. The presidents stressed in their talks that both countries are part of the European Union, and it is therefore right that they jointly consider the future of the Union as a democratic community. President Türk committed himself to the best possible development of political, economic, cultural and other relations between Slovenia and Greece. He said that political relations between the two countries were excellent, while expressing Slovenia's interest in greater and more balanced trade with Greece. The presidents also met Slovenian and Greek businesspeople to discuss deepening economic cooperation.

Greek President Karolos Papoulias and President of the Republic of Slovenia Danilo Türk.



photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

## Slovenia to host the European energy agency ACER

European Union energy ministers have decided that the new Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) will be based in Slovenia. Apart from Ljubljana, the two other candidate cities were Bratislava and Bucharest, the capitals of Slovakia and Romania. "This is an important and historic day for Slovenia: for the first time, we will host the headquarters of a European agency, and not just any agency, but the very important Agency for the Cooperation of European Energy Regulators," said Minister of the Economy Matej Lahovnik following the decision.

Minister Lahovnik declared that Slovenia would do everything in its power to provide a positive and stable environment for the operation of the agency and to offer a warm welcome for the agency's staff who will work in Ljubljana. He also ascribed Slovenia's success candidacy for host of ACER to the very well coordinated work of Slovenian diplomats, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Economy and the Prime Minister's Office, as well as the Prime Minister personally. In addition, it provides evidence that Slovenia can have influence in Brussels, that it can be successful despite its small size, and that it has considerable professional expertise in the energy sector.



Ana Mrzlikar

# A SNOWY LAND AWAITS

Slovenia's geographical position at the meeting point of the Pannonian plains, the Alps and the Mediterranean is reflected in its colourful and diverse range of tourist attractions. In the winter season, our high mountains receive on average more than 4 metres of snow, and then all those who appreciate the joys of winter have rich pickings.

Along with the snow-capped Alpine peaks in the north-west of Slovenia, where there are some of the biggest ski centres, Slovenia's winters draw people to the big ski resorts on the white slopes of the Maribor and Zreče Pohorje range in the north-east of the country, to Krvavec in central Slovenia and to Cerklje and Kanin in the west. Below we will take a tour of just the biggest ski centres in Slovenia, since last season a full 32 ski centres were in operation, and occasionally another 13 smaller ones.

"While guests come to Slovenia during the winter in slightly smaller numbers than at other times of year, they like to come back, although this applies mainly to those from neighbouring and nearby countries. Guests from overseas come back less often, since Slovenia is frequently just one of the countries on their itinerary. The highest numbers of guests come here from Croatia, Austria and Italy. For the most part it involves organised groups, and slightly less individual tourists. They are most numerous during the Advent-Christmas-New Year period and during the holiday times in their own countries. Our agency adjusts its services to suit their wishes, which for the most part involve brief visits to cities and the surroundings, sometimes a skiing programme, very often stays at health resorts, and more recently we have seen a greater number of entirely tailor-made programmes. These involve primarily culinary tours, and those aimed at wine connoisseurs, cyclists and runners," notes Mišo Mrvaljevič, adviser to the board of Slovenia's biggest incoming agency Kompas d.d.



### Kranjska Gora, host of the Vitranc Cup

In the north-western part of Slovenia lies the country's biggest winter tourist resort of Kranjska Gora. Its southern margins extend into Triglav National Park, one of the oldest parks in the Alps. And while the park, with its numerous glacial valleys, gorges, waterfalls, lakes and crystal clear white-water streams, lures hikers, climbers, skiers, kayakers and others, the main advantage of Kranjska Gora is without doubt the ski resorts situated in the forests, covering 80 hectares and 30 km. Of this 2 km are difficult, 8 km intermediate and 20 km easy, and there are a total of 7 chair lifts and 18 drag lifts. There are 40 km of trails intended for cross-country skiers, while provision has also been made for snowboarders at the snow-fun park. In the high season, tourist capacities are fully occupied.

This location offers ski equipment rental, ski schools for Alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding and similar, while there is also a diversity of catering establishments, and visitors are especially delighted by the sunny days when they can indulge themselves in sunbathing on snowy beaches.

When the sun does go down, the ski slopes do not all close at Kranjska Gora; every day except Monday, night skiing is offered right up until 10 pm.

Happy campers! Kamp Danica in nearby Bohinj is equipped with heated bathrooms, electricity and wireless internet. So you can also park your trailer or mobile home there between 15 November 2009 and 15 April 2010, and staying there will earn you discounts on ski passes at the nearby slopes. And while you are in that part of Slovenia, be sure not to miss an unforgettable toboggan ride down Vogar.



photo: Matej Vranic/STO

### Kanin, now linked to Italy

Kanin is the only Slovenian ski resort with skiing areas higher than 2000 metres above sea level. A special feature of Kanin is its sunny aspect, dry snow and unique views far into the heart of the Alps on one side and down to the Mediterranean on the other. It is just 60 km as the crow flies to the Adriatic Sea, and in good visibility, from the top of Kanin you can pick out the big ships in the Gulf of Trieste. The ski season on Kanin lasts from December right up until the May Day holiday. This year the biggest novelty of Slovenia's ski resorts is being prepared at Kanin. After the New Year they will open up the first international ski centre in the wider region; the construction of a new lift facility and ski slope will link the Slovenian resort of Kanin with the Italian ski resort of Sella Nevea. The same ski pass will offer access to the ski resort from both the Slovenian and Italian sides. The new arrangement will offer skiers 30 km of runs. Kanin also has 15 km of trails on offer for cross-country skiers and 9 km of toboggan runs. Ski touring is also possible in the Krnice Valley.



photo: J. Skok

### Krvavec, the closest popular ski resort to Ljubljana

Krvavec is a mountain in the Kamniško-Savinjske Alps where a popular high-mountain ski resort has evolved at an altitude between 1450 and 1971 metres, and here the well-groomed pistes are a delight for all types of Alpine skiers. It is just 25 km from Ljubljana, and offers a total of 26 km of groomed slopes, of which 8 km are difficult, 15 km are intermediate and 7 km easy. It also offers on average 100 skiing days a year. Krvavec provides a kindergarten in the snow, and this year they have also arranged a new run for children and beginners. They also offer a ski school, a competition piste, a beginners slope, a safe driving training area, full equipment rental and a ski service. We will give details about the Igloo Village, which was first developed right there on Krvavec, later. Krvavec also boasts a snow-fun park, and offers 3 km of trails for cross-country skiers. It might be good to know that the ski resorts of Krvavec and Rogla are linked via a single ski pass, under their system of "two resorts – one pass".



photo: Tomo Jesentčnik

### Cerkno, an ultra-modern family ski resort

In addition to magnificent views from the peaks, the hills around Cerkno offer enormous scope for walking, cycling, skiing and other recreation. More than anything, Cerkno is proud of its ski centre and thermal spring, and you can bathe in the thermal water at the Hotel Cerkno pool. Cerkno has the most modern family ski centre in Slovenia, and is the only one in the country with two reversible 6-seat, two 4-seat and two 2-seat lifts and two drag lifts, while the town also offers a ski school, ski kindergarten, servicing and rental of ski equipment, a toboggan run and skiing competitions. The ski centre covers 70 hectares (18 km) of groomed ski slopes that are suitable both for beginners and experienced skiers. There are 5 km of groomed trails for cross-country skiers. This very year a snow park for boarders and skiers has been built in Cerkno, so they can get up to all kinds of mischief without fear of disturbing or hindering other ski centre visitors. Right at the top of the ski centre there is a new self-service restaurant in the Alpine style, and a special games and video room intended for children. And anyone who wants to stay right there on top of the ski centre can book into one of six apartments offering a total of 45 beds, and featuring everything you would need for a comfortable winter holiday.

### Rogla on the Zreče Pohorje, and the biggest snow-park in SE Europe

For those who want to enjoy active leisure pursuits, the locations of Zreče, Rogla and their surroundings are an ideal holiday choice. Rogla has won six Golden Snowflakes for being the best-kept Slovenian ski centre. Skiers can enjoy a hundred skiing days on exemplary, groomed slopes covered with natural and compact snow. The total area of the skiing areas is 100 hectares, featuring 11 drag lifts and two 4-seat chair lifts, while cross-country skiers have 10 km of trails to enjoy. The Rogla ski centre is family-friendly; the youngest guests are provided for at the ski kindergarten in the snow play area, and individual childcare is also offered. Equipment rental is available and there is a snow sports school at Rogla, and for a number of years in succession it has won a Golden Snowflake for the best ski school in Slovenia.

The cross-country ski trails are located right by the Rogla sports centre and climate health resort. The snow-fun park at Rogla is the biggest park of its kind in South-east Europe, and offers a full kilometre and a half-long run. It is intended for anyone seeking fun and games in the snow, and has facilities that are ideal both for freestyle beginners and for those who have had more experience of freestyle boarding and skiing and perform complicated moves on the more dangerous facilities. At Rogla, like Krvavec, you can spice up your day with a visit to the Igloo Village, and this year the organisers are preparing a new feature with the "Ski Plus" ski pass, which will be valid between 1 pm and 9 pm, and so will include day and night skiing. The biggest ski centre of the western Pohorje range is Kope. Beneath the highest mountain of the eastern Karavanke, Mt. Peca – under which sleeps King Matjaž – one of the attractions is the "King Matjaž Castles" snow castle building event; this season it will take place on 31 January and 1 February.

### The Maribor Pohorje, host of the Golden Fox competition

After Ljubljana, the Štajerska regional capital of Maribor is the second most important urban centre in Slovenia, and in the winter it boasts the biggest winter sports centre in the country. It is barely a 15-minute drive from the city centre. In summer the Maribor Pohorje range is a paradise for hikers and those in love with cycling, horse riding and high-adrenaline pursuits, and who also like to stop in at the numerous tourist farms and wine cellars along the way. In winter the abundant snow cover is intoxicating for skiers and other fans of snowy pleasures and wellness. The Maribor Pohorje boasts the biggest number of skiers in Slovenia, and the longest night ski run in Europe, while at the same time it was awarded the Golden Snowflake as the best-kept ski centre in Slovenia. According to all the criteria of the FIS, the organisation of the Zlata Lisica (Golden Fox) competition is outstanding.





photo: Tomo Jesentnik



photo: Tomo Jesentnik

On 31 January and 1 February 2009 the tourist event King Matjaž Castles, now in its 18th year, will be held at Črna na Koroškem, in the King Matjaž Park. The main feature of the event once again will be the team competition in snow castle building; both days will also be accompanied by numerous sports and entertainment events.

**The hunt for medals in the 2009/2010 winter season**

In the 2009/2010 season, there will be no shortage of world-level sports events in Slovenia. On 30 and 31 January Kranjska Gora will host the 49th Vitranc Cup (a traditional competition since 1961) and the finals of the European Alpine Skiing Cup. At Maribor Pohorje every year there is the Alpine skiing competition for the Zlata Lisica, the Golden Fox, where the excellent organisers set up defences against the strongest possible thaw. This year's 46th Golden Fox can be watched on 16 – 17 January 2010. This winter

photo: B. Kladrnik



**Cheaper access to the slopes with the Active Slovenia card**

If you often take to the white slopes, it will probably pay to consider buying an Active Slovenia discount card. Costing 20 euros, it is on sale at all the sales points of Slovenia's ski centres. You can use it to get a 20-percent discount on all day passes at the majority of Slovenian ski

season Planica, the cradle of ski jumping and flying, will be hosting the finals of the world ski jumping cup between 18 and 21 March 2010. Here we should recall that it is at Planica that more than 60 world records have been set, including the first jump of more than 100 m by the Austrian Sepp Bradl in 1936 and the first flight of more than 200 m by the Finn Toni Nieminen in 1994. The world record in ski flying, set at Planica in 2005 by Bjoern Einar Rumoeren, stands at a full 239 m. Would you dare to fly so far?

We should also mention the major competitions in cross-country skiing. Pokljuka is the main Slovenian centre for cross-country skiing, and every year it holds the world biathlon cup. This year it was held from 16-20 December. Almost at the same time (between 18 and 20 December) the Rogla Open cross-country skiing cup was held in the Zreče Pohorje, and this was accompanied by the winter sports festival Rogla Open 09. Meanwhile you should not miss the Telemark World Cup at Kobla on 16 and 17 January 2010.

centres, while at the same time it will bring savings on visits to cultural events, museums, wellness centres and more. The benefits offered by the Active Slovenia card will expand continuously, so it is a good thing to monitor the benefits on the website [www.activeslo.com](http://www.activeslo.com). You can identify suppliers and discount partners in the project by the recognisable Active Slovenia logo.

**Slovenian spas drawing even more visitors in winter**

Slovenia is a benign country where world-famous natural health resorts have developed around numerous thermal and mineral springs. So those seeking relaxation of body and spirit can enjoy more than 15 natural thermal and climate resorts around Slovenia. Meanwhile Slovenia's thermal spas are giving increasing importance to wellbeing, beauty and relaxation – in other words wellness programmes. These programmes are being offered not just by the "classical" health resorts, but also at many of the more up to date hotels and at independent wellness centres in the bigger cities, and especially at tourist destinations. On the official website of the Community of Slovenian Health Resorts [www.termegiz.si](http://www.termegiz.si) you can check out the entire additional sports and recreation services offered by Slovenian health resorts, and decide what you would like to do apart from spoiling yourself in the pools, saunas and salons (skiing, cross-country skiing, tennis, golf and more).



photo: Tomo Jesentnik

**The Slovenian countryside and farm tourism**

During the winter people also have fun on tourist farms, and there are more than 200 of them in Slovenia. It is of course most exciting on those farms near the ski centres, but even at the more remote locations the capacities are filled up, since the hosts make very sure that the guests don't get bored. Given the excellent local cuisine, the unspoilt natural beauty and the enormous scope for a diversity of recreational pursuits in the countryside, guests are very happy to return. In recent years tourist farms, where tourism is a supplementary activity, have seen increasing numbers of foreign guests, since this way of spending their holiday time is also financially attractive. The farms are most heavily occupied at the major holidays, for the Miklavž (Saint Nicholas) weekend (6 December) and over Christmas and New Year. You can check out what is on offer at all of Slovenia's tourist farms on the official website of the Association of Tourist Farms, [www.turisticnekmetje.si](http://www.turisticnekmetje.si). Watch out for the number of apples assigned to the individual tourist farm offering accommodation, since these indicate the quality of services – the more apples, the higher the quality (the maximum is four apples).

photo: Dejan Dubokovič





## Igloo Villages at Krvavec and Rogla

The first Igloo Village in Slovenia was set up a few years ago at Krvavec. The project won a Golden Sower prize, the highest accolade from the Slovenian Tourist Board for creative and innovative achievements in tourism contributing to the enhanced identity of Slovenia's tourist attractions. Last year an Igloo Village was also set up at Rogla. In the middle of the Igloo Village is an igloo hotel, offering five standard igloos for six people and 2 special romantic igloos for couples. The air temperature inside the igloos is 0-4 °C. The beds are made of special snow blocks covered firstly with insulation material and then with sheepskins on which are spread special expedition sleeping bags (-30 °C). You get to eat in the igloo restaurant, and if you want a little extra relaxation, you can check out the igloo bar, and sip an exclusive Eskimo drink to some cool chill-out music.

Every year the Igloo Villages organise special events; at Krvavec the following events will be held: PokerStars Ice Challenge (23-24 January 2010), Full Moon Party (30 January 2010), Audi Quattro Snow Golf Challenge (6-7 February 2010), Freeride Endurance Challenge (13-14 March 2010).

## Toboggan and pležuh rides, concert in Postojna Cave and other great events

Winter pleasures can be spiced up with snowmobile rides, which are offered at Kranjska Gora, Pohorje, Pokljuka, Krvavec and elsewhere. Some places even offer dogsled rides for tourists and excursions in a horse-drawn sleigh.

Groomed toboggan runs outside the ski centres are also becoming very popular. There are especially attractive toboggan runs down snow-covered roads over mountain passes (such as Mangart) that are closed in winter, and they are groomed by properly qualified sports agencies. The Julijana agency in Kranjska Gora offers night runs down the first 35-floodlight illuminated slope in Slovenia. If you feel like some night sledging on Podljubelj, the people to see about it are Koren

Sports, while the Raj Jezersko agency offers not just toboggan rides but also the unique experience of ice climbing on frozen waterfalls. A slightly different, but equally adrenaline-pumping experience is riding a pležuh, one of the oldest means of winter transport around here. According to the oral tradition, the pležuh [a kind of single-ski sledge] is more than 200 years old. You can experience a meeting of old-time means of transport on snow and the 14th traditional pležuh run at the snow stadium of the Maribor Pohorje on Saturday, 6th February 2010.

There are also of course many other events before and after the New Year period. The Slovenian Tourist Board has published a catalogue of events, called Slovenia Events, and their website has daily updates of the calendar of events. "Of course we are trying to offer tourists and guests as much as possible, and we are creating special programmes for the most demanding ones. Unfortunately, however, in some respects Slovenia cannot compete with other countries, since for instance we don't have any big city with millions of people and limitless facilities.



We are innovative, however, and we are building on what we have, ranging from the culinary and natural to the historical. The concert and experience of a live Nativity scene in Postojna Cave is unique, as is a horse-drawn carriage ride around Lake Bled, hiking with views of the sea, or the wine route in autumn in the Jeruzalem area," affirms Mišo Mrvaljević of the Kompas agency. So let this, along with the whole article, stand as an invitation: come and visit snowy Slovenia in winter, and we promise you will be enriched with unique experiences.

## Websites offering useful information about winter tourism:

[www.slo-skiing.net](http://www.slo-skiing.net)  
[www.sloveniaski.com](http://www.sloveniaski.com)  
[www.activeslo.com](http://www.activeslo.com)  
[www.snezni-telefon.si](http://www.snezni-telefon.si)  
[www.turisticnekmetje.si](http://www.turisticnekmetje.si)  
[www.term-giz.si](http://www.term-giz.si)  
[www.plezuh.net](http://www.plezuh.net)  
 and of course the official portal of the Slovenian Tourist Board,  
[www.slovenia.info](http://www.slovenia.info).

## Guide to Slovenian Ski Centres

In cooperation with the company Geoset d.o.o., the Slovenian Tourist Board has produced a Guide to Slovenian Ski Centres for users of GARMIN navigation devices. This Guide operates on all Garmin nūvi devices and on the latest handheld devices (Colorado, Oregon). It shows 27 Slovenian ski centres with information on location, ski slopes and infrastructure at the ski centres as well as pictures.







### New Year Message

of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk  
Ljubljana, 31 December 2009

The year behind us has been a testing one. The whole world – including our homeland, Slovenia – has been through the greatest economic crisis since the Second World War. The most serious test is now behind us. Signs of a recovery are already apparent. We must do everything necessary to ensure that the economic recovery continues in the year to come. We have, moreover, the opportunity to make radical changes and improvements that will ensure the prosperity of the next generation. Slovenia's economy is facing the challenge of transformation. This is vitally necessary in order for us to secure new markets, modernise our economy and enter the era of green technologies and environmentally friendly development as soon as possible.

In the year that we leave behind us, we have once again demonstrated our solidarity. Society came to the aid of those who were worst affected by the crisis. Numerous charities and other NGOs and many volunteers distinguished themselves by their willingness to help. As the old year comes to an end, our special thanks go out to all of them. Further strengthening of the network of our civil society organisations is a task for all of us in the coming year. This will enable us to take better care of our fellow human beings and bring a better quality of life for all of us. Each one of us, especially during this festive season, can do something for those who need help, particularly the sick and the elderly. We are a society which is growing older. This means greater maturity and prudence, but also greater mutual understanding. All of us must do more to ensure that young people find their rightful place in the development of society, and that in this century that is now properly under way they will find a path that will recognise and engage in full measure the youthful energy and creative power of the younger generation.

As we enter the New Year, I wish great personal happiness, satisfaction and success to all Slovenian citizens, to our compatriots in neighbouring countries and around the world, and to everyone living in Slovenia. Special good wishes go to all those who will spend this, the longest night of the year, at work and on duty. My best wishes also go to the members of our armed forces and security forces, in particular to Slovenian soldiers on peacekeeping missions abroad.

*May the year that is before us be a year of bold visions and courageous decisions, and may this be a time of good deeds. I wish you all a happy 2010!*



**New Year Message****from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor****“THE CRISIS HAS NOT DEFEATED US”**

Just over a year ago, I was sworn in as the new head of the Slovenian Government. At that time, I voiced concern about the extent of the imminent global economic crisis. I promised that the Government would do its best to tackle the crisis and its effects. I wanted to quote Winston Churchill who, in the midst of WW2, when the Allied forces had suffered severe setbacks, but just as the first prospects of victory began to emerge, said: “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

Resisting the temptation to overtake reality, I nevertheless dare to say – before this assembly and to our people here and abroad – that we may be far from defeating the crisis, but the crisis has not defeated us and we are facing a real prospect of emerging victorious in the coming years. Therefore, I see no better opportunity than the day we are celebrating today – the day our people showed the will to establish their own country – to talk about what we see as our victory for the present and future. What do we Slovenes seek to achieve now and in the longer term, and how? This is a matter of our common goals, and incorporating them into our visions.

Tonight, I wish to address these questions, above all, because throughout this difficult year it has too often seemed as if we had been left at the mercy of the economic and social crisis, without knowing where we were or which way we needed to go to escape from its grip. I see it as my responsibility that our people may have shared this sentiment, regardless of whether or not it was in proportion to the actual situation, and also the failure that our efforts were not presented in a meaningful way. But despite the impression, the goal of each and every one of the Government’s practical and strategic measures to battle the crisis was that Slovenia would emerge from the crisis an even more competitive economy and with greater solidarity than before.

One year later, I can confidently say that while we were not successful in all our efforts and did not address all the problems in time or in the right way, we did succeed in bringing Slovenia to a point where we can begin a fast economic recovery and strengthen our social cohesion. A year ago, I looked forward to the year that is now coming to an end with courage, but with concern, too. I now regard the coming year not only with more courage, but also with eagerness to carry out our plans and lead Slovenia out of the crisis. There is some concern, of course, but this time we have much more control over our present and future development goals than at the time of the world’s biggest economic crisis since the Second World War. Technically speaking, 2009 has been the first year to see economic recession since Slovenia became independent, but we managed to find a way out of the crisis before the year ended.

If in 2009 we had to rely on the success of the international community in tackling the crisis, and although this will still partly remain so, our future development will much more depend on us. It will depend on our judg-



ment of what is right and wrong, on our ability to set common goals, and on our confidence and courage to fulfil them. The Government is well aware of this responsibility. We have been drawing up a package of practical and structural measures for our partners in social dialogue to ensure around 1% positive growth, reduce the budget deficit by about 0.5% and bring ILO unemployment under 7.5%. The current unemployment rate in Slovenia is 6.1%, which makes the country the fourth most successful EU member state in fighting unemployment. The Government will do its best in the coming year – when unemployment is expected to become the main problem both here and in the EU – so that all unemployed people have jobs with higher added value as soon as possible, including through additional training and education. These annual goals should be regarded as part of a broader vision and strategy. I simply cannot put this more concisely: Slovenia – a learning society based on sustainable development. Several things need to be clarified here, however. Firstly, claims that the ethical dimension of the crisis has caused shifts which may end the market or competitive economy are exaggerated. There is no doubt that financial and other markets will face stricter regulation in the future, but they will still be markets. And our competitiveness will be determined there. And the level of competitiveness we achieve will determine the level of solidarity among us.

If last year I felt the need to stress solidarity, so that the crisis would not destroy the social fabric of our society, and the large share of the burden would not be shifted on the most vulnerable people, the present situation not only enables, but also demands that we stress the element of competitiveness, because our final victory – a safe society with a high standard of living – largely depends on it. Next year I will work toward drawing up an exit strategy, including tough reforms of public institution management, encouraging entrepreneurship, competitiveness, and the labour market, transport and energy infrastructure, and streamlining and adapting the system of social security and health care. On key guidelines, the Government will strive to reach a good compromise with social partners, which will enable progress.

The business environment needs to be developed so that it will be more attractive to domestic and foreign investment. It is of strategic importance that we reduce export dependence on the EU market, and that we diversify foreign investment in Slovenia and our investments abroad, including in non-European emerging markets, particularly China, India, Brazil and some countries in the Arab world. This means the maximum effort from economic diplomacy. Speaking of maximising our efforts – our whole development strategy must be based on green technology. The environmental aspect of sustainable development is becoming increasingly significant, also for the competitiveness of national economies. It is a question of whether we will be in the forefront of green technology development, or follow behind because of our dependence on old technologies and the high costs

related to pollution. If, today, we cannot invest €1 in advanced green technology, we will end up paying €2 in ten years, because we will still be using old solutions. The first option is not easy, but the second is virtually catastrophic. Today, this is still in our hands, and although we still have to catch up, there is still time for ambitious decisions. In this respect, next year will be decisive.

This year has been difficult for another, particular reason. Slovenia was compelled to interrupt Croatia's negotiations with the European Union, which was not a goal in itself, since it is in Slovenia's interests that Croatia join the European Union. It was a last resort intended to reach a solution to the 18-year-old border dispute between the two countries. I must say this. Few people in Slovenia and the international community know how long it took to find the right solutions. This could not have been postponed. It had to be done, and in such a way that the issue would be resolved fairly and impartially. We had to find the moment when there was a window of opportunity to reach such a solution this year. Now we have a solution. With this gesture, we have significantly increased our international reputation and prestige. We can now say that we are strengthening relations with all the countries of South-East Europe, and have genuine and sincere relations with their leaders. This is very important for our geo-political goals. When people decide on whether to support the arbitration agreement, I hope they will consider all these dimensions – when we succeeded in turning a problem into an opportunity.

At the same time, this is an inspiration for next year. We will be successful and emerge as winners to the extent that we turn problems into opportunities. Nineteen years ago, when we voted in the plebiscite, we created an enormous opportunity from an enormous problem. Today, we are a sovereign country, a member of the EU, NATO, the Eurozone and the Schengen area. Next year, we will become members of the OECD. And in succeeding years, we wish to exceed the EU development average.

Today's holiday is not only a day of independence, but also of unity. As one of the people with the greatest political responsibility in the country, I will do everything to strengthen our mutual trust and respect. Let us not reject the helping hand. Let us also believe good news. Let us be proud of those who succeed by keeping to the rules. Let them be a model and an inspiration. Let us strengthen our confidence. Let us show the best of our national character. We proved nineteen years ago that we can and will do that. Today, we face different problems and challenges, but they are just as significant for us and future generations. Let us remember the dreams and expectations of nineteen years ago. Let us reveal the best of our character, so that now the problems are grave and demanding, we can overcome them to the greatest possible extent. With this in mind, I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

*/The speech of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, on the state celebration of Independence and Unity Day /*



Vesna Bertoneclj Popit, DELO, photo: STA

Slovenia's Minister of the Economy, Matej Lahovnik, and the Russian Energy Minister, Sergej Shmatko, signed a cooperation agreement on the construction and use of the Southern Flow gas pipeline in Slovenia. This means that after 2015, when gas will flow in through the new pipeline, Slovenia will have an uninterrupted supply of natural gas. The agreement with Gazprom is also important because Slovenia's signature means direct access to the Italian market for the Russian oil giant. Alongside Slovenia, agreement on the construction of the Southern Flow pipeline was reached with Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. However, the agreement between Slovenia and Russia on construction of the new pipeline, talks on which started back in the spring of 2008, still needs to be ratified by the National Assembly. The course of the pipeline through Slovenia should be known by the middle of 2011.



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Slovenian craft establishments and sole traders are facing increasing problems owing to poor payment discipline. In the past, big construction companies were often late in paying subcontractors, and in some cases they were not even paid at all for their work. The economic and financial crisis has exacerbated this situation, for as they say, there is no more money in construction at the moment. Small construction companies and finishing work contractors are anticipating a very difficult winter for this sector, and then conditions should improve. The crisis has also hit road hauliers hard, especially those delivering loads for the metallurgy and wood industries. Transport operators predict that demand for their services will increase only in 2011. They also state that there is increasing unfair competition in road haulage.

Owing to the large shopping centres that major domestic and foreign retail operators are still building throughout Slovenia, more than four thousand small shops have had to close. The small retail section at the entrepreneurial and retail chamber has ascertained that small and local retailers will have to adapt to the current conditions, and start merging in order to stand up better to the large retail concerns. Craft establishments and sole traders have

also found that the state, too, is getting increasingly late in making payments, although companies like doing business with the state because they know they can count on being paid for their work. The administrative committee of the Craft and Enterprise Chamber of Slovenia has therefore demanded that the state immediately finalise procedures that will allow implementation of a 30-day deadline for the payment of subcontractors for all payments for which the clients are either state authorities or a local community. After the debate, held some time ago under the previous government, on how many regions Slovenia should be divided into, there was no support for the proposal that this should be 14 regions, since apparently that was too many. At that time six or seven were deemed to be more acceptable numbers. Yet when the government now submitted a proposal of just three regions, the proposal in fact garnered scant attention. However, the inhabitants of two areas decided they want to be independent municipalities, and if the National Assembly confirms this, two more will join the current 210 municipalities, although supposedly one of the jobs of the new local government minister, Henrik Gjerkes, is to implement less fragmentation into

municipalities, since the majority are not capable of maintaining themselves and the state has to provide them with the necessary funding. At the same time, no one has said clearly that each municipality must ensure its own means of existence. Employees in Slovenia have been persistently demanding that the minimum wage for full-time work be increased to 600 euros. In this light some companies have already increased the lowest wages of their employees, and in this way they have avoided strike action, which first hit the metallurgy and electrical industry, while at the end of November there were major worker demonstrations in Ljubljana, in which students and pensioners joined in. However, neither the government nor the Chamber of Commerce are in favour of such an increase in the minimum wage, and they stress that such an increase would cause additional unemployment. The trade unions do not believe this, since it has been easy enough to make high severance payments to replaced directors, state officials and others, while it is a major problem to increase the minimum wage of employees by a few euros. Following the strike the government has proposed to the unions that the minimum wage be increased gradually.

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Boštjan Vasle, director of the Government Office of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (OMAD).

While the Ministry of Labour points out that government measures have saved around 20,000 jobs, the registered number of unemployed according to Employment Service of Slovenia figures for October approached 95,000 people. Boštjan Vasle, director of the Government Office of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (OMAD) states that economic conditions are improving, although not for all companies and not in all sectors. Vasle predicts that the unemployment rate will approach 11 percent in 2011, meaning around 110,000 unemployed persons. It is also a source of concern that job seekers include a large number of first-time job seekers.

In the future, the Slovenian tourism sector

Dimitrij Piciga, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board.



will present itself in green, with the aim of emphasising the green quality of Slovenia and its ecology. The Slovenian Tourist Board, which has determined that income from tourism will fall by a tenth this year, will devote greater attention and funding in the future to promoting Slovenia in the British market, so as to attract a greater influx of British tourists in the future. As pointed out by Dimitrij Piciga, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board, in other countries people see Slovenia as a country that has excellent scope for green tourism, and also offers impressive health and wellness facilities. Yet since some also point out that environmental pollution in Slovenia has in fact increased slightly, Piciga underlines the need to combine the environmental efforts of farming, transport and manufacturing, in order for Slovenia to establish the conditions for green travel, since the competition, as he says, is fierce. On the ladder of superchampions for 2008, which the Slovenian newspaper Delo has composed by means of 20 business indicators for a little over 500 companies, which last year were ranked as the biggest Slovenian exporters and the biggest companies by income and net profit, first place was taken by the Ljubljana company Arkas, second place by the companies HSE and Litostroj Power, in third place was TP Portorož, fourth Splošna plovba, while the pharmaceutical company Krka ranked ninth. Alongside Arkas, the top ten featured some other small and micro companies that performed superbly last year, including Garnol of Kranj, Unireal of Šmartno and Premik Net of Nova Gorica. For the most part these are companies which operate entirely or mainly on the domestic market and are most commonly involved in commercial or financial services and consulting, while alongside high value added per employee and the rapid increase of that value, they ranked among the best mainly because the big companies, especially the major exporters and major employers on which the Slovenian economy is based, performed worse owing to the crisis last year, and the situation will be similar in 2009.

Slovenia's European Commissioner Janez Potočnik, who covered the field of science in his previous term as a commissioner, will now be in charge of the environment in the new term of the European Com-



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mission. The current European Transport Commissioner, Antonio Tajani, has notified the Slovenian Minister for Transport, Patrick Vlačič, that he will withdraw the proceedings against Slovenia owing to the price of road toll vignettes, which should mean that Slovenia can use 88 million euros of funds from the Cohesion Fund for the motorway between Slivnica and Draženci, which previously Tajani had blocked through the proceedings relating to the suspected discriminatory nature of the Slovenian vignette system. The withdrawal of proceedings against Slovenia is not linked only to new findings by Commissioner Tajani, but also to the new composition of the European Commission, in which henceforth Tajani will be responsible for industry and enterprise, while transport will now be the responsibility of the Commissioner from Estonia. Slovenia was visited by the Greek President Karolos Papoulias, who attended a Slovenian-Greek business forum in Ljubljana, at which it was stated that trade is growing between the two countries, especially Slovenian imports from Greece. The Prime Minister, Borut Pahor, visited Libya, addressed a Slovenian-Libyan business conference and met with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.





photo: personal archive

## Anunciada Fernández de Córdoba, Spanish Ambassador to Slovenia

I took up my appointment as Spanish Ambassador in Slovenia in the middle of May, a time when people are starting to come out onto the streets again after the long winter. During these first months I have travelled a great deal around the country, fallen in love with its landscapes and the power of its nature, and savoured its characteristic dishes and its wines.

I have made an effort to get to know Slovenia's rich cultural world and its leading lights. I have enjoyed numerous festivals, contests, concerts, exhibitions. *Druga Godba*, Lent, Tartini and Vilenica in particular are etched on my memory. My aim is to plan joint activities that bring the realities and particularities of our two countries closer together, that create links between our peoples, and to insert our activities into the local cultural programme, trying to meet existing needs and respond to the proposals that Slovenian institutions make to us.

We want to reach every section of the public, which is why the support we offer ranges from classical music and flamenco to the most innovative artists such as Sol Picó or Mercedes Peón, not forgetting the plastic arts (we are celebrating our national day with an exhibition by Spanish artist Manolo Dimas in Ljubljana Castle) and audiovisual arts. We support the teaching and dissemination of Spanish, collaborating with the Instituto Cervantes and Slovenian schools, and maintain close daily contact with the Chair of Romance Languages at the Faculty of Arts, which does such an excellent job. In 2009, the Spanish Embassy awarded the ESASI Spanish-Slovenian translation prize for the second time. On this occasion the prize was reserved for young translators under thirty. We are responding to genuine interest – in both directions – as demonstrated by the popularity of Slovenia as a destination for Spanish Erasmus students, and vice versa.

We must strengthen our relations by increasing commercial exchanges and the presence of Spanish enterprises in Slovenia. During his recent visit to Spain, Prime Minister Borut Pahor raised this question with his Spanish counterpart José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, indicating two fields where Spanish-Slovenian cooperation could be strengthened: railways and renewable energy – two sectors in which Spain is a pioneer.

In 2008 the successful weekly Adria Airways service between Barcelona and Ljubljana was joined by a Madrid-Ljubljana service, and the flights are always full. I hope, for the sake of the strengthening of relations, that these flights will be maintained throughout the year and not merely in spring and summer.

We have many things in common: our membership of the European Union, NATO and the Council of Europe. We share a Mediterranean dimension within the EU, via the Olive Group and the Euro-Mediterranean University in Portorož.

The authorities in Slovenia and Spain have been working in perfect harmony in the months leading up to the Spanish Presidency of the EU in the first six months of 2010. Spain begins its Presidency as part of a troika with Belgium and Hungary, and this will be the first rotating

Presidency after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, with the important challenges that this implies.

The Spanish Presidency will have two watchwords, innovation and equality, and will focus on four priorities:

1. Economic recovery and job creation: the reform of the Lisbon Strategy is the key to a way out of the crisis. We aim to strengthen the fight against climate change by applying the conclusions of the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, and to work on energy security.

2. European citizenship: the new European Social Agenda for 2010–2015 needs to be drawn up, and we will give priority to eliminating gender violence. We want to place the European citizen at the centre of Union action when it comes to implementing the Stockholm Programme.

3. Europe as global actor: nine summits will take place during the Spanish Presidency: the EU-LAC Summit, the EuroMed Summit, an EU-USA Summit at which we hope to renew the Transatlantic Agenda, and so on. We share with Slovenia a commitment to the European dimension of the Western Balkans, we expect the accession of Croatia and we will take advantage of Slovenia's knowledge and experience of this region and the special ties it enjoys.

4. Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty with the institutional changes envisaged therein: President of the European Council, High Representative, European External Action Service etc. In this way Europe equips itself with precise instruments in order to be more effective.

Spain will assume the Presidency of the EU Council for the fourth time, in a key moment for Spain, for Slovenia and for Europe as a whole. We share with our Slovenian friends the desire to foster a European spirit, the awareness that we are members of a Community of values sharing a supranational political project, and we will work together in this undertaking.

## Peter Reberc, Slovenian Ambassador to Spain



photo: personal archive

There are few countries in the world that have faced through history so many rises and falls, internal conflicts and wars, natural disasters and diseases, and yet have been largely consolidated by these experiences and their people given self-confidence, such that they can boast the glory of what was once the biggest global empire and are able, with the help of their quite proverbial resourcefulness, to weather the worst of times with optimism.

Spain is preparing for its six months of holding the EU Council Presidency, and it faces, as all the other Member States do, several extremely important challenges: according to many predictions, the economic crisis will continue in 2010, and the Spanish view is that only greater cohesion of economic, financial and fiscal policies can contribute to more rapid economic progress. On the other hand, through the Lisbon Treaty the EU Member States have provided themselves with the possibility of strengthening the identity of the Union, and the first steps in implementing the Treaty, that is, during the Spanish Presidency, will show whether the new institutional structure will be able to meet the common expectations regarding the effectiveness of the Union and the authority of its highest representatives. During its Presidency, Spain wishes to send several important messages to its partners in the Union regarding the equality of all citizens regardless of sex or other circumstances; partly this is because just recently Spanish society was still witnessing rigid patterns in the relations between the sexes, and is now boldly tackling a high level of domestic violence. Spain is one of the leaders of the Union in exploiting renewable energy sources, where it has been developing new technologies with exceptional success, and this offers other Member States the fastest possible attainment of targets to reduce their share of consuming sources of energy that pose a long-term threat to health and sustainable development. Yet Spanish eyes are not just focused on the north: its position in the Mediterranean area, its historical understanding of different cultures and apparently mutually irreconcilable social and religious systems enables it to open up barred doors and to soften the most hardened prejudices. Certainly Spain is the country that, in moments when internal issues seem to be the only ones worthy of attention, can open the Union's eyes once more to the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, to a millennial common economic and cultural space of countries that now number a full seven EU Member States. At the same time, Spain is a bridge from the European Union to Latin America: over the centuries it has invested there its knowledge, capital and solidarity. At the same time it is Spain that is constantly reiterating: "More Europe!", since it still has a living memory of the experience of international isolation, and the desire for real European openness dictates

a strong, unanimous, mutually supportive and promising Europe which should serve as a model for other regions of the world.

When I departed for my first posting as ambassador three years ago, I knew that I faced a major challenge. This country outstrips Slovenia 23-fold in terms of number of inhabitants and 25-fold in terms of land area. Spanish territory produced three Roman emperors: Trajan, Hadrian and Theodosius; the famous philosopher Seneca was also born here. The world was immeasurably enlarged for Europeans when the expedition of Christopher Columbus returned to the Spanish court; and an exceptional love of art over the centuries provided a living for many famous artists, including Titian, El Greco, Velazquez, Goya and numerous others, right up to Picasso, Dalí and the world of modern art. Who has not heard of the poet Lorca, the film director Pedro Almodovar, or the singers Julio Iglesias, Plácido Domingo and the young Enrique Iglesias? Spanish cultural openness also offers opportunities to Slovenians working in the arts: the productions by Tomaž Pandur are enjoying incredible success. The main cathedral in Madrid is decorated with the exceptional artistic creations of the modern Slovenian mosaic artist, Father Marko Ivan Rupnik. Meanwhile an increased interest in Spain and the Spanish language in Slovenia holds the promise that there will soon be a growth in economic cooperation, since decades of ideological, economic and linguistic distance have kept Spain an unknown quantity for much of the Slovenian economy, which has in the meantime forged links elsewhere.

Few in Slovenia are aware that the common crown of the Hapsburg family succeeded in linking the mines in Idrija and Almaden, and in that way enabled the exchange of professional experiences, as well as quite everyday practices such as lacemaking. The Lipizzaner horse was produced at around the same time by crossing an Andalusian stallion with a Karst mare; nor did the Spanish court forget Slovenia later, when the crown was assumed by the French Bourbon family. In the succession dispute revolving around Charles de Bourbon, the exiled portion of the Spanish royal family of Bourbon purchased an estate near Trieste and Gorica, and chose Kostanjevica, near Nova Gorica, as its final resting place.

As a former student of the Spanish diplomatic academy of 1993, upon my return to Spain in 2007 I was enchanted. Creativity, resourcefulness, diligence and the unbelievably pleasant climate have changed Spain, which after 1975 breathed the air of democratic freedom and then with the European Union gained the motive force to build its infrastructure and to renew itself from the ground up, into a country that is faster than its neighbours, more adaptable than many smaller Member States of the Union, and diplomatically more successful than many large countries.

In its foreign policy contacts Spain ascribes a special place to Slovenia. Ties which historically were apparent only occasionally and intermittently, have in this period of common membership in the European Union been firmly intensified and consolidated. We are tied by our common efforts for a stronger Europe, for social justice and a democratic society that respects human rights and ensures equality for citizens; we both seek the kind of Union that will decide together about relations with third countries, both with the major players of the world and with societies that urgently need development aid.

Despite the increasing challenges, the intensification of economic, political and cultural ties and the importance of Spain in relations with the Mediterranean and Latin America, this summer the leaders of Slovenia's diplomatic efforts administratively reduced the strategic importance of Spain in internal payment schemes. As an ambassador, however, I would hope to assert quite the opposite: my efforts to date have shown that in relations between the two countries, there is still much fertile ground to explore, and it would be worth devoting much greater attention and strategic consideration to this country. Especially in the period when Spain is preparing for the Presidency, and also in the first six months of next year, the intensity of contacts and the strengthening of cooperation with the Spanish side will be vitally important for the successful exercising of Slovenian interests. A point of interest worth noting is that the main political topics in Spain revolve around similar issues to those in Slovenia: the relationship with the past and the historical memory of the period of dictatorship, the issue of balance between social and economic development, the relationship between the state and the Church, the issue of national identity, the rights of minorities and so on. In all these issues we have much to say to one another, and it is no coincidence that the residence of the Slovenian ambassador in Madrid was the only one in Europe that was visited by the foreign minister of the host country on the conclusion of Slovenia's Presidency.





## 25<sup>TH</sup> SLOVENIAN BOOK FAIR

Albert Kos, photo: STA

The now traditional Slovenian Book Fair this year saw its jubilee 25th 'edition'. As every year at around this time, the doors of Ljubljana's Cankarjev Dom centre were opened for five days in the last week of November for readers and book lovers, who were able to view the selection of Slovenia's literature for the past year and also buy books at fair discounts. Around 120 Slovenian publishers had a presence at the fair, having published around 5,000 new titles in the last year. Both figures are records, and they point to the vitality of Slovenian publishing, which is clearly not succumbing to the current crisis and recession, and is counting on Slovenian literature maintaining a sufficient circle of readers and buyers. This was also ultimately confirmed at the fair, where publishers were satisfied with sales, and some of them even found that the 'recession stranglehold' in the book market had clearly already been loosened.

In contrast to the most famous book fairs in Europe, the Slovenian Book Fair is not a venue where major publishing deals are made, but it is intended first and foremost as a presentation of what is on offer in the Slovenian book market, and especially as a popularisation of literature among readers, particularly young ones, who represent potential book buyers in the future. This is also their established operating plan, with an exhibition section where books are displayed, and a sales section where books on stands and shelves can be purchased. All the days of the fair also feature accompanying events that give the fair venue a social pulse, with plenty of meetings and relaxed talks and get-togethers focused for the most part on books.

The well-established forms of this diverse communication nexus include debate cafes, at which fair visitors can listen to relaxed conversations about individual books and book-related topics, and they can also join in with their own opinions and questions. This year saw debates on traditional and electronic reading and on the danger of the former supplanting the latter, on the role of the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter in establishing even closer relations between authors and readers, on language and its dimensions of expression, formation and communication that define literary production, on the advantages of group appearances of publishers from several countries in promoting Central European literature abroad, on literary cooperation among the countries of the former Yugoslavia, on the promotion of children's and youth literature and on the relationship between literature and the mass media. All these talks and some others have drawn a considerable response from visitors, and have stimulated broader reflection on books and their role and importance in modern times and circumstances in society.

Under the aegis of the Publishing Academy there were two lectures aimed at professional circles, which stimulated debates that are of special interest to publishers. The first was devoted to the challenges posed for traditionally printed books and the reading culture by new media and technology, although these challenges should not constitute a threat to literature but an opportunity to make use of them in securing new venues and audiences. The other lecture dealt with the more widespread phenomenon of 'chick-lit', that is, books

written by women for women, which are classed among the lightweight literary genres set in the thematic triangle of money-beauty-sex, but such popular literary output should not be scorned, since it involves authors who are often capable of great humour and irony, and they can achieve high quality within their genre.

Young visitors to the fair were offered numerous workshops and children's events intended to animate them to reading. Here we should also point out the Saturday family book day, when the fair organisers awaited numerous families with a Forum for visitors, which comprised puppet playlets, a presentation of cookbooks for children and literary events for adult readers.

At the opening ceremony, at which the guest speaker was the Slovenian President, Danilo Türk, and the keynote speaker Igor Lukšič, Minister for Education and Sport, this year again prizes were awarded for the highest achievements by authors and publishers. The Schwenter Prize for life work in publishing went to the writer and dramatist Miloš Mikeln, long-time director of one of the biggest Slovenian publishing houses, who takes credit for successfully introducing innovative publishing approaches and methods. The prize for the best literary debut went to the author of *Popularna zgodba* [Popular Story], Vesna Lemaic, while the prize for the best young translator was taken by Tatjana Jamnik for her translation of the novel *The Cremator* by the Czech writer Ladislav Fuks. Several prizes were also awarded for literary design and for book printing techniques.



## 80 YEARS OF SLAVKO AVSENIK

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

At the end of November a major anniversary was celebrated by one of the most famous Slovenians, Slavko Avsenik – musician, founder and leader of a legendary group that carried Slovenian popular folk music in the sixties around the world, a group that especially in the Alpine areas of Austria and Bavaria, where they performed most often, became established as "Oberkrainer Muzik". For 40 years this incredibly popular trademark produced more than 31 million records and other recorded media, and achieved 31 gold, one platinum and one diamond record. Of course no other Slovenian cultural entity has achieved anything like that. But that is not all: in countless Alpine villages today there are many popular folk groups for whom even now the Avsenik ensemble remains a role model beyond their reach. Slavko Avsenik in fact retired from performance for health reasons more than 20 years ago, when the group itself split up, but he then devoted his creative efforts to composing.

His birthday was first celebrated in his home town of Begunje, while the local municipal council of Radovljica held a special ceremonial meeting and awarded the birthday boy a special gold coin given only to the most eminent citizens. Avsenik was also received by Slovenia's Prime Minister, Borut Pahor, and together with him, albeit rather bashfully, he sang the famous composition *Slovenija, odkod lepote tvoje* [Slovenia, Where Does Your Beauty Come From?]. Well, a trademark of that quality deserves that, too.



## FESTIVAL OF WINE AND FOOD

Polona Prešeren, photo: STA

Without doubt one of the more popular wine and food events in the capital is the Slovenian Festival of Wine, which in the decade of its existence has become solidly anchored among wine lovers. In part, of course, because they have succeeded in bringing together the best Slovenian, and several foreign, wine makers.

This year the organisers attracted experts, traders, restaurateurs, the media, passionate devotees of an excellent drop and good food, and of course plenty of visitors. The visitors not only tasted the wines, of which there were many more than 200, but also some culinary delights, the kind that go perfectly with good wine. In this way the organisers showed that they were right in step with international trends, which are geared towards foodies (bringing together excellent wine and cuisine).

The culinary part of the festival offered numerous Slovenian treats – from vinegars, olive and pumpkin oil to cheeses, spreads, chocolate and chocolate products, patés, the famous kranjska klobasa sausages and salamis, stomachs and cured hams. The educational workshops also generated enthusiasm, bringing to Ljubljana some major names in the world of master chefs.

The festival also has a competitive dimension, and connoisseurs, visitors and journalists all got to choose their favourites. Visitors

awarded the main prize to the wine KHMER 2006, produced by Reia of Neblo in Goriška Brda. In the category of dry white wines, the experts gave first place to the Chardonnay 2007 produced by Planeta of Italy. In the dry red wines category, first prize was taken by a Syrah Cabernet 2008 from the cellars of Skovin. First prize for rosé wines entered in the competition went to the managing director of the cellar Jeruzalem Ormož VVS d.d. for their Rosé 2008. The best sparkling wine of the festival was judged by the expert jury to be the Jakob's Creek Sparkling Rosé. The wine that garnered the highest points in the opinion of the expert jury was a wine with a hint of sugar, the Laški rizling 2007 from the cellars of Kmečka zadruga Krško z.o.o.

The Bakhos media prize for the most pleasing wine went this year to a pinot gris (dry white, 2008, Jeruzalem Ormož VVS d.d., Štajerska Slovenia wine-growing region). The Bakhos 2009 media prize for special achievements in making and promoting wines was received by Janez Lešnik, who in the core wine-growing region of Konjice found an opportunity for the long-term development and introduction of a new style of wine that reflects the authenticity of the growing area. Meanwhile, journalists regard Egon Krampač, with his Prekmurje wines, as a rising wine star.





## AFTER KINO ŠIŠKA, ALL CHANGE AT DOM ŠPANSKIH BORCEV

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

Ljubljana is undergoing some major changes in the cultural sphere. After the cinema Kino Šiška, a “centre of urban culture”, started to shine out as a new cultural venue in September, barely a month later the Miniteater stage group moved to new premises in the neighbourhood of Ljubljana’s Križanke, and at the end of November these new acquisitions also involved the Dom španskih borcev centre, in which the Theatre for Children and Youth had resided rather unambitiously. That group moved to the premises of the Puppet Theatre [Lutkovno gledališče] below Ljubljana Castle, where it shares the stage with the ancient Šentjakobsko gledališče.

The renovated Dom španskih borcev [Spanish Fighters Centre], built in an old working-class section of Ljubljana called Moste, was constructed back in 1978 and was regarded then as a model of new functional architecture for new cultural centres. Now it has been renovated, and its new administrator is the institution En Knap, which was established on the basis of the internationally acclaimed dance group by the dancer and choreographer Iztok Kovač. In this way the modern dance group has finally and for the first time acquired a permanent home.

Kovač takes credit for in no way restricting his view of the new cultural centre to the needs of his dance institution, for his programming concept is much broader. In addition to dance shows by his own

group, the programme envisages a merging of performance and visual art, music, literature, programmes for children and youth and numerous club programmes. At this centre, high art will encounter the amateur culture of arts societies, thereby establishing a unique bridge between audiences of all types and ages, something that cannot be seen anywhere else in Slovenia. To this end the En Knap institute has signed a cooperation agreement with a host of permanent partners and collaborators, while the programme envisages annually at least 200 events with around 50,000 visitors, which of course means that this will be one of the most heavily frequented cultural centres in the country. The centre will be up and running practically the whole day, and in it people should be able to find something to attract their interest in effect at any time, from the early morning to late in the evening. In some way Iztok Kovač’s concept marks a return to his roots, the industrial town of Trbovlje, where the producers-workers through their cultural activities produced a new aesthetic of movement, work, reading and artistic endeavour in general, and in this way they attracted the interest of their wider surroundings. The centre was also opened in this way: a host of performers and big audiences took part in a 30-hour cultural marathon, which has brought to the city a new way of attending arts events – more accurately, living with culture.



## HOW DOES MY LIBRARY SMELL?

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

In the cultural field, November in Slovenia was undoubtedly and distinctly devoted to books. Apart from the book fair, general libraries also celebrated their own festival, presenting their operations at a round table in Maribor entitled How does my library smell?, and this places them among the most influential cultural institutions overall in Slovenia.

Data was gathered by staff of the library development centre at the National and University Library. As is evident from their reports, in 2008 Slovenia’s general libraries were organised as 57 public institutes. Library services were provided at 258 local and central libraries. Bibliobus mobile libraries had 663 stops in 584 locations. At fixed locations, but with shorter opening hours and less extensive material, libraries organised 86 stops for mobile collections.

Analysis of the accessibility of library services has shown that primarily smaller municipalities in less developed areas still lack adequately developed library services. Indeed as many as 48 municipalities have no local library or mobile collection stop.

In 2008 libraries recorded almost 10 million visits, which is 4.9 visits per inhabitant. Compared to 2007, the level of visits increased by 4.3 percent. Equally, there was an increase in home borrowing, with the number of units lent rising by 2.8 percent. There was even an increase in the number of events at libraries, including literary evenings, fairy-tale hours, courses, workshops and similar, and there were 11 percent more of them in 2008 than in the previous year.

Last year Slovenia’s general libraries had 502,627 members, which is 24.7 percent of the population. The proportion of children and youths up to and including 15 years of age is much bigger than the proportion of adult members. Last year libraries recorded 47.6 million euros in revenue, with four fifths coming from municipalities and a tenth from the state. Their own revenue from providing a public service amounted to 8 percent of their total revenue, with membership fees accounting for 2.9 percent of the total.

So my library does indeed smell good.



## IT’S ABOUT IDEAS

Polona Prešeren, photo: Michele Drascek

Although on the international scale, Slovenia is still slightly lagging behind the advanced countries in the field of innovation, the gap is narrowing from year to year. In witness of this are certain Slovenian innovations that were presented at the innovation forum in Ljubljana. The Slovenian innovation forum is a national event showcasing innovative entrepreneurial ideas, technical improvements, proposals, innovations, inventions and innovative products.

The Slovenian innovation forum is an event where once a year Slovenia’s innovation potential is gathered together, and it is intended primarily to promote and support the development of innovation, the development of innovative companies and of course to link science and manufacturing. The central part of this year’s forum was an exhibition space that showcased innovations selected by an expert committee. Meanwhile, another important part of the event was the business contact point poslovno stičišče, where innovators and entrepreneurs usually meet.

At the opening of the forum, the Minister for the Economy, Dr. Matej Lahovnik, pointed out that such events strengthen and improve the support environment and change the atmosphere of the business environment. “By number of trademarks and patents per inhabitant, Slovenia lags behind the most advanced countries,” he said, adding that in innovations the important thing is that they

be protected and put into practice. He also highlighted the importance of such events for the Slovenian economy, since they improve the climate in which ideas are born.

Meanwhile the innovation forum is also aimed at young and innovative people who are helped by such events on their path of entrepreneurial ideas, on which the individual must progress from the concept to the internationalisation of business. The path of entrepreneurial ideas in some way comprises five developmental steps that mark the more or less difficult path of the innovator, from the moment he gets a new idea for a product/service up to the successful marketing of the innovation. The individual steps are clearly evident and linked to institutions that can help innovators in individual development stages.

In fact there is no lack of innovation among Slovenians. This year we were able to see this for ourselves again – a wide variety of commercial interests participated with their innovations, from makers of gaming machines to manufacturers of building fixtures. In recent years the development of innovation has most certainly been helped by the favourable economic climate of previous years, including membership of the European Union, adoption of the euro and of course Slovenia’s resourceful and intrepid character. Events such as the innovation forum certainly add impetus to the development of this kind of climate.

## DEATH OF A GREAT LONER

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

This year, 2009, has been a sad year for Slovenian climbing. The Himalayas, that great challenge for all alpinists, claimed the life of three outstanding Slovenian climbers. The latest of them was Tomaž Humar, probably the best known Slovenian climber of all, conqueror of some of the hardest routes on the highest ranges of the planet. He died on the southern face of the 7727 m high mountain of Langtang Lirung, apparently one of the most magnificent peaks there, and he was also buried in the heart of the Himalayas. The Himalayas have thus now claimed the lives of 20 Slovenian alpinists.

No one knows exactly what happened on the mountain; maybe he fell, maybe he was buried by an avalanche. Most probably he was injured on his descent from the 7227 metre high mountain. He supposedly told a Sherpa at the base camp the day before his probable death, when he last made contact, that he had a broken backbone, ribs and leg. He supposedly told him that he could not move and that he was in a very critical state. Then, when the rescue mission was held up by bad weather – including snowfall, fog and high winds – the weather finally improved enough for a helicopter with Swiss rescuers to take off. After about three hours of searching, they succeeded in finding his body at a height of 5600 metres, much lower than they first imagined.

Humar, an unusual alpinist loner, who preferred to climb solo in order to experience to the full extent the harmony of ice-clad mountain walls and the individual ascending towards the peak, often seemed to many ordinary people weird and irrational. Yet this time, after several days of bad news indicating a bad ending, people were gripped with increasing concern for this unusual man, and news of his death generated immense sadness. At the same time people began for the first time to feel a sincere understanding of him in his excelling of himself. Through his death he ultimately achieved a victory over the trivial mindset that the great risks are a lunacy that can never justify great achievements.

Humar was a subtle thinker and a good explainer of the motives that drove him to extreme achievements. In the foreword to the book about him written by Bernadette McDonald, and published this year by Mladinska knjiga, he wrote: “Talents are a gift for life. Talents are without price, they cannot be bought, increased, lent out or lost, talents are a value given to us with a purpose, and they need to be respected. Whoever rejects his own talents ultimately loses himself. The more you accept them, appreciate them and learn to live with them, the closer you are to the purpose of your existence. We have come into this world for a purpose; when we come to know ourselves by purifying our minds, we also know the purpose of our life.”





Polona Prešeren, photo: personal archive

# ARCHITECT ANDREJ BLAŽON'S CHARITY CHAIR



The Charity Chair is no ordinary chair. It is a chair with a special story – interesting, exceptional, unique, inspired and on top of all that, environment-friendly. It was designed by the Slovenian architect Andrej Blažon, and it earned him the highest accolade at the competition One Good Chair: Fit Right Here, which was held in Las Vegas. Blažon's chair won over the management there.



## WINNING LOUNGE CHAIR

“The lounge chair is conceived in such a way that the fabrication can be extremely low-tech, keeping energy consumption to a minimum. Use of recycled/recyclable materials can be applied to conserve Earth's resources. In fact production with any flexible material with sufficient rigidity is possible, ranging from hard rubber, plastic to metal sheets. This is because the rigidity of the structure is achieved by the curvature of the surface. This means the transport expenses can be cut because the chair can be produced from a material that is locally available,” was how the chair was described on the competition website.

In his concept of the winning chair, Andrej Blažon brought together several ideas, possibly even on a subconscious level. One inspiration was from the design of the headgear worn by nuns of the Daughters of Charity order up until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The competition was aimed at selecting an environment-friendly chair with a regional stamp, and was organised by the non-profit Sustainable Furnishing Council, which is in fact a kind of coalition of various manufacturing interests, and the World Market Center Las Vegas. The designer that won over the jury was Andrej Blažon. An architect, who is involved in graphic design and interior furnishing design. His chair won in a competition of several hundred entered from all over the world. The theme of this year's One Good Chair competition was focused on lounge chairs that reflect their origin. The catchphrase of the competition was “Fit Right Here”, or design solutions for any environment. Priority was given to projects whose design and selection of materials, as well as method of production, were in step with the modern trends of sustainable design that is friendly to nature and people both now and in the future. Fit Right Here is a theme which through the concept of what is local, attempts to emphasise the importance of sustainable development in design and the furniture industry.

The challenge of the competition was to incorporate identity, the origin of the chair, regional ecology, protection of resources through selection of materials and design, and ultimately the culturally accentuated grasp of the concept of comfort. This year the competition was focused just on chairs and associated with the culture of sitting. As they say on the competition website, how we sit relates more to culture than anatomy.

Then there are influences from Escher's endless surfaces, the Möbius strip and membrane architecture. The main concept and principle in designing the chair came from an idea born of the recession: to make a product whose value would be in the idea and associated design, and not in the price of materials and construction. As Blažon says, the name Charity Chair is a play on words, infused with various ideas and meanings. The name incorporates one of the origins of the concept and design, and also the purpose that the chair seeks to fulfil. It is environment-friendly, tradition-friendly and simplicity-friendly, in short a true charitable lounge chair.

There are numerous advantages to this lounge chair. The jury in Las Vegas was unanimous – it is an amazing design. “Apart from everything else, we should point out another interesting observation from a member of the jury in Las Vegas. G. Roger Thomas, interior designer of some of the more prestigious hotels in Las Vegas, was inspired by the variety of character shown by the chair with different colour selection for the product material. To be specific, in black it is almost fearsome, while the white version is more elegant. The chair has this capacity owing to the single concept running through it, and despite its rich lines it is essentially minimalist. To put it simply, since the chair is simple and without additional design details, a mere change of colour is sufficient to change its character.”

## HOW IS THE CHAIR “GREEN”?

The sustainable, co-natural principles of design followed by the chair function for the benefit of all of us as a global organism, which with the continued use of resources in the way we have known to date, will drown in its own garbage. “I will answer that question by drawing from the thoughts of the famous writer Cliff Kuang, who writes about my chair as an example of a new paradigm in sustainable development. He says that the Charity Chair is an example that speaks of fundamental changes regarding how we view design. Instead of producing continually more products, it would be better to produce good ideas that can be put into practice only as needed, locally. The Charity Chair is therefore not just an imaginative design, but a production and distribution philosophy,” responds Blažon. The specific properties that make it “green” are built into its design. The lounge chair is designed in such a way as to minimise the use of resources in production, transport and storage. Equally, it requires no mountings, bolts and similar. It is comprised of one single piece of thin flat material (use of recycled materials is not ruled out) that is folded into the final form. There is practically no waste in cutting out the material. The design allows it to be opened back into its original flat form, meaning negligible space-taking for storage and transport.

Meanwhile Andrej Blažon has not yet found in Slovenia any candidate up for manufacturing the chair, but he is hoping for the best. Alongside interior design, which has been occupying him less of late, his main focus of professional activity is on graphic design. “But I have ambitions of further product design, and I even have some new ideas for chairs that will need to be developed.”



Tadej Golob, photo: Rafael Marn, Ad Pirum

# Eda V takes retirement



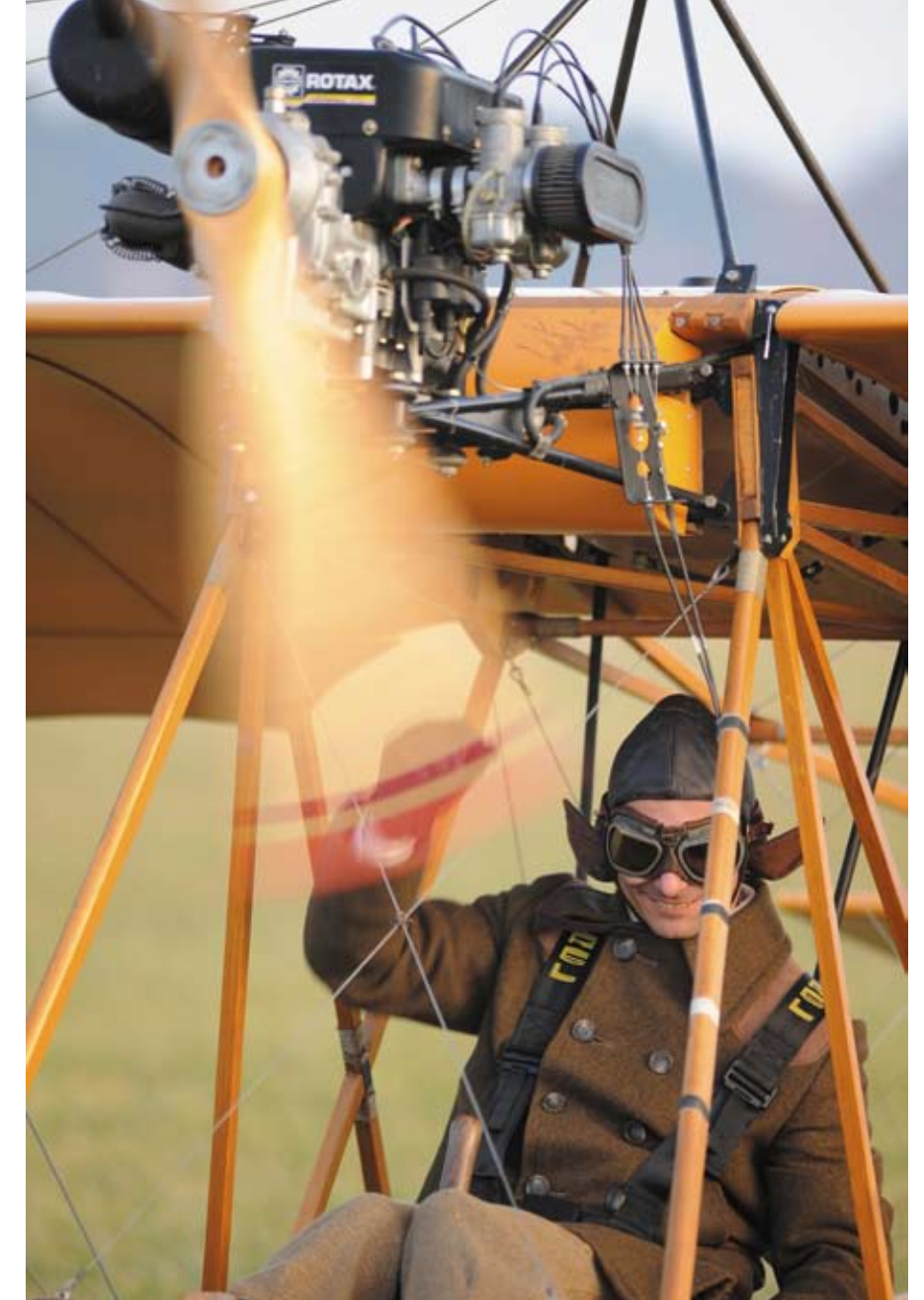
Recently a photographer friend of mine invited me to take a trip with him to the recreational airfield at Lesce, where a very interesting aircraft was supposed to be flying that day. "This might be one of the last chances ever to see it in the air," he said, and off we went.

It was a fine September day, afternoon already, when two men emerged from the hangar pushing something that I estimated must be around a hundred years old. "What's that?" I asked the older man, who turned out to be Albin Novak, the conceptual director and father of that wooden contraption with wings on wheels. "EdaV," he replied, "a replica of Rusjan's most successful aircraft." They are probably taking it to Brnik, to Ljubljana's Jože Pučnik Airport, where similar wonders from another time – I now remembered – are suspended from the ceiling. But in 2009 which person of sound mind would sit in that thing and go up in the air in it? Does it even fly?

I was wrong. They took it out to the middle of the flat grass of the airstrip, the younger man, Tomaž Nose, sat in the contraption, started the engine, rocked along in it to the start of the runway, opened the throttle, lurched along, I don't know, maybe fifty metres or so, then lifted off into the air. In my life I have seen quite a few aircraft and helicopters, and landed in them at some very strange, er, let us call them airports, but I had never had the chance to observe a scene more improbable than the Eda V and its pilot in a leather helmet flying over Lesce. And this was indeed one of its last flights. Since November 2009, the Eda V has been retired. The date of its last flight was not chosen at random.

## THE RUSJAN BROTHERS

The date of 17 December 1903 is regarded as the birthday of aviation. On that date, over the sand dunes of the darkly named Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina in the USA, the brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright executed the first flights in a powered aircraft. The first flight, performed by Orville, covered 39 metres, and the second, by Wilbur, covered 279 metres. A full six years later (and six years in those times was indeed "full"), in November 1909, the first Slovenian aircraft, the Eda I, lifted off the grass at Male Rojce near Gorica, piloted by Edvard Rusjan. The aircraft was made by Edvard with his brother Josip. It was 12 metres long, with a biplane wingspan of 8 metres, and an engine used shortly before that by the Frenchman Louis Blériot for his historic flight across the English Channel.



The Slovenians became the fifth (by some calculations) or sixth nation of this planet to take to the skies. After this, over the span of a year the Rusjan brothers made many more aircraft, the Eda II, III and up to the VI, VII and VIII, with which Edvard performed at aviation meetings. The meeting in Belgrade in January 1911 was fatal for him. Despite the wind, owing to the large crowd, which had not yet seen anything in the air that was not a bird, he took off, the crowd applauded, but then a gust of the south-easterly Danubian wind broke his wings and the plane nose-dived. The stick for controlling elevation, which was strapped to Edvard's back, broke his backbone and he died on the way to the hospital. All that was left of the Rusjan legacy was debris, some photographs, drawings and newspaper articles.

## REBIRTH

And this was all that the now retired, then still very active commercial pilot Albin Novak could rely on, as he set about making a replica of Eda V with Rado Kikl, who contributed the aerodynamic specifications, back in the nineties. Why the fifth and not, for instance, the last, the eighth Eda, the 'most modern' one? This is because although they were bold and driven, the Rusjan brothers were no aeronautical experts, nor were they technically educated to any great level. This is evident in their series of aircraft, in which models differed greatly from each other. Eda V was their smallest aircraft, the most compact and most successful, particularly if we take their Gorica period of activity into account. Equally, it is most reminiscent of modern aircraft. It has high-





For ten years Meze flew the Eda V, and he was the main attraction at numerous aviation meetings, including in Belgrade, where he was received especially warmly, but all good things come to an end. “Enough was enough,” he explains. “In the end, flying that kind of aircraft is dangerous, and it was already ten years old. So when should we retire it, if not right on its ‘centenary?’”

### LEGACY

Aviation, particularly the manufacture and design of aircraft, is for big nations, isn't it? The majority would no doubt agree, but in doing so they would be wrong. The legacy of the Rusjan brothers shows this clearly. In Slovenia there are quite a few companies involved in one way or another in aircraft design. I could think of two straight off the top of my head. The first, Pipistrel, which makes the best ultralight aircraft in the world in Ajdovščina (Matevž Lenarčič flew one of them around the world, the first person ever to do so in that category of aviation), and the other, MIBO, which makes fantastic aircraft models in Logatec. One of their planes – a model of a Thunderbolt, the American warplane – earned this small company, for which Meze himself does design and construction work, first prize at the biggest American competition, the title of ‘Top Gun’. Small is beautiful, they say... Even if it is not. Anyone who loves bigger aircraft should do a little Googling and discover the background of Joseph Sutter, who built the legendary Jumbo Jet, and whose father was actually called Suhadolc.

Yes, the Eda V has come a long way. We wish it a happy retirement.



set wings, meaning it is also fairly stable. This stability needs to be taken with some reservation, while also remembering the year the original Eda V was born. In contrast to today's aircraft, the Eda V needs constantly active piloting. This means that it will not itself deal with any disturbance encountered during a flight, and it will not right itself after being upset by some turbulence, rather the effect of such disturbance will simply intensify. In short, if the pilot lets go of the joystick, it will hit the ground. This was shown by the replica that Novak and Kikl were able to build, when its engine cut out during a flight. Novak survived the crash, but the aircraft did not. Kikl then corrected the Eda V on paper, modifying it with a greater wing surface and adjusting its profile. In 1998 the project was taken up by Tomaž Meze, a pilot with the Police Air Unit and a graduate of the Mechanical Engineering Faculty, who perfected the plans and as the aeronautical construction supervisor oversaw the building of the aircraft. Novak tested it, performed a few flights, and then, since he had already reached the age when he could no longer renew his pilot's licence, he stopped flying. From that time on until the final flight of Eda V, the role of Edvard Rusjan was played successfully and safely by Tomaž Meze.

### FLYING WITH EDA

“This aircraft differs very little from the one flown by Edvard Rusjan,” explains Meze. This was also the challenge for the group that embarked on the project: to construct an aircraft that would be a fairly faithful copy of the one from a hundred years ago, while at the same time satisfying the aviation

standards of today. So there were some essential variances, primarily for the sake of safety and strength. Certain other variances arose, because the group had no plans available. “We went to Belgrade to view the wreck, or what was left of it, to actually see how the aircraft was constructed.” Yet despite careful preparations and more reliable construction, flying the Eda V is a special challenge. “We aviators are familiar with a certain degree of fear,” admits Meze, “and we call it ‘respect’. Respect for the aircraft. And of course we had this respect. Still, this aircraft differs so much from modern construction that you have to prepare for it. It has its peculiarities, especially the fact that the pilot is exposed to a powerful jet of air, because he sits directly behind the propeller, and the completely open cockpit offers an entirely different perspective that aircraft pilots are not used to, they are not used to looking vertically down, so we helicopter pilots have an advantage here.”

## SPORTS



Simon Demšar, photo: Reuters, Metod Močnik

## ADDICTED TO CYCLING

When Lance Armstrong won his first Tour de France bicycle race in 1999, Jani Brajkovič was a high school bloke, not even thinking about cycling. Ten years later, he is one of the most respected assistants to the legendary US cyclist. Brajkovič, 26, stepped into the spotlight in 2004, when he became the Junior (under 23) World Champion in the time trials. After that, the only way was up, but not without stumbling.

As a world champion, he was spotted by another legend, Belgian sports director Johan Bruyneel, who coached Lance Armstrong to all of his seven Tour de France victories. Such was the Belgian's desire to lure Brajkovič to the then Discovery Channel team that the young native of Novo Mesto joined the US team camp at the beginning of 2005 when he was still a member of his original team, Krka Adria Mobil. In the following year he rewarded his employers with a string of impressive results, such as 5th place in the general classification of the Tour de Suisse. Later that year, he was wearing the leader's jersey for two stages in the Vuelta a España (Tour of Spain), the world's third biggest race. And then early in April 2007, he won his first professional stage race, the Tour de Georgia, becoming the first non-American to do so. But then, when things couldn't be going any better, storm clouds started to gather. Discovery Channel pulled the plug on its cycling programme and the team was dissolved.

Brajkovič remained loyal to his team even in turbulent times. “In August 2007, we were told that no replacement sponsor had been found and that we were free to go. A few days later, Bruyneel called me and asked me to wait, saying that he was considering an offer from some investors [which later turned out to be the Astana team]. If this failed, he promised to find another team for me.” However, this was not the end of the problems. Astana was granted a Pro Tour licence but was barred from competing in the Tour de France. Last year, Brajkovič was ready to take part but

was left out in the cold due to political and sponsorship issues. “I was in top form, but I could only go on holiday with it. This has been one of the biggest regrets of my career so far,” commented Brajkovič. This year, he is joining his third team but only as far as the name is concerned. The Radio Shack team, formed around Lance Armstrong, will mostly involve former Astana personnel.

Brajkovič began his career relatively late, when a high school fellow invited him to go on a ride. Since then, he has been addicted to cycling: “After one day without a bike, I already feel nervous and I become very difficult to get along with,” concedes Brajkovič. “Cycling is on my mind for most of the time.” On par with cycling are his wife and baby: “You can do your best as an athlete only when your personal life is in order and you can concentrate solely on training.”

At 26 years of age, Jani admits that the time has come to show his potential. “I can no longer live under the illusion that I am an up-and-coming cyclist. It is time to take a step forward and next season will be the first test.” He admits that the competition among top cyclists is extremely tight but that there is still room for improvement. “The amount of training is pretty much the same, but its quality and approach can vary greatly. There are many analyses and tests involved, but in the end, it is still your feeling that tells you what is good and what is not. I achieved my best results when I was listening to my body, when I worked individually with my coach, without regard to what others were doing. My body has never misled me. If you want a good overall result, your team has to appoint you team leader first. The rest is down to your fitness and mental preparation.”

Jani is of course aware that as long as Armstrong is around as a cyclist, he will be limited to a supporting role; however, he doesn't seem to mind too much, as he is a big fan of Armstrong. In a way, it even cost him a place on last year's Tour de France team roster:

“They wanted to prevent internal splitting of the team into two blocks: one supporting Armstrong and the other Alberto Contador [Armstrong's team mate and greatest rival].” Brajkovič still remembers his first encounter with Armstrong and his current team: “I was invited to join the Discovery Channel team in California. Before that I had travelled by plane only once. Everything was new to me and the team was much bigger than anything I had been used to. Regarding Armstrong, he is a very down to earth guy. Once you speak to him you realise why he has achieved all those results; he would rather die than fail to do what he has decided to do. And you can never forget the look in his eyes. He could kill with it.”

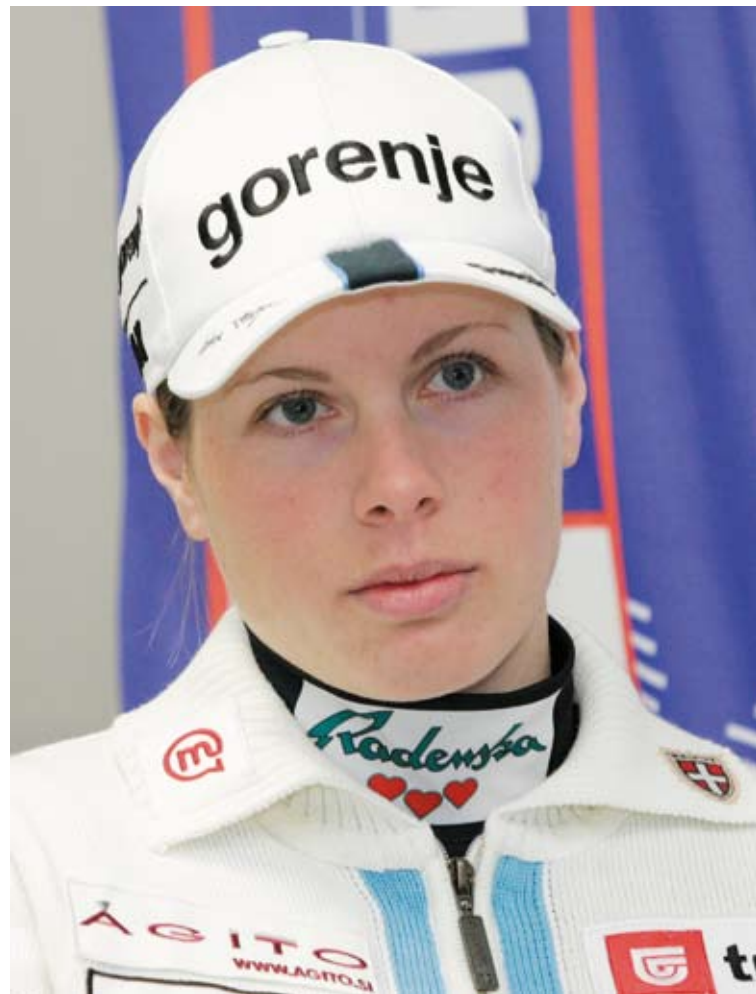
Brajkovič doesn't say it openly, but privately he probably already counts on the post-Armstrong era. Bruyneel's philosophy in terms of nationality also plays into Brajkovič's hands. “One thing I like about him is that he makes no differences among cyclists based on their respective nationalities.” Despite the high-profile public image, Brajkovič keeps his feet firmly on the ground. “I haven't made any big money yet and my contract is not that lucrative. I am aware that in the next ten years I will have to earn for the rest of my life. The family I have makes me even more responsible and I don't waste money. Brajkovič's long-term ambition is winning the Tour de France, of course, “but a top three finish would also do,” he says.

Jani Brajkovič does not have a personal sponsor, but he has an interesting story to share. “When I became world champion I told a journalist that I was eating Čokolino [high-carbohydrate baby food] every morning. The next day an article appeared in a newspaper with a headline that read: “World Champion Runs on Čokolino”. The following day I received a call from the chief manager of the producer of Čokolino, who promised to supply me with Čokolino for the indefinite future. The company duly did so, without expecting anything in return.”

### Brajkovič in numbers

- 2004: Junior World Champion
- 2006: 5th overall in the Tour de Suisse
- 2007: Winner of the Tour de Georgia
- 2008: 3rd overall in the Deutschland Tour
- 2009: 18th overall in the Giro d'Italia





Source: STA

## FABJAN: I'M LIVING THE DREAMS I'VE HAD SINCE I WAS LITTLE

Alongside the football fairy-tale conjured up by Slovenia's team qualifying for the World Cup in South Africa, another fairy-tale is in the making. It is being written by the cross-country skiing girls, who have had a fantastic start to the new season. Following her return from Düsseldorf, where Vesna Fabjan recorded a career achievement with her first trip to the podium, there will be no time for rest. The girls already face a new competition.

At the world cup on 6 December in Düsseldorf, Slovenia's cross-country skiers Vesna Fabjan and Petra Majdič won fourth place in the team sprint, and prior to that Fabjan, the young woman from Besnica, came third in the sprint and stood on the winners' podium for the first time in her career. Majdič secured 13th place, and Katja Višnar 26th. They also enjoyed success in

earlier performances at the preliminary world cup competitions in Beitostolen and Kuusamo, where Majdič came second in the classic sprint. At Beitostolen, Anja Eržen, Petra Majdič, Vesna Fabjan and Barbara Jezeršek won ninth place in the relay, and thereby qualified for a place at the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

On their return to Slovenia, the girls offered some of their impressions in the premises of the Skiing Association of Slovenia in Ljubljana. Even before that these skiers, who this season are closing in on the best in the world, were congratulated by representatives of the umbrella skiing organisation. There is a lot of satisfaction over their results. Director Jaro Kalan is convinced that the achievements of the cross-country girls hold great promise for fine and successful performances at the

## SPORTS

Vancouver Olympics. The highly successful start to the season has also brought satisfaction to the head of the cross-country teams, Marko Gracer, who is proud of the girls, and in his opinion there is a fine future ahead for this sport in the competitive sense.

After Majdič reigned supreme last season, one more competitor has joined the best in the world. The greatest media attention was, as expected, focused on Fabjan, who has not hidden her great pleasure at stepping up onto the winners' podium for the first time. "That was my goal before the season, and luckily it happened right at the start of the season, and this gives me further motivation for the time ahead. I see that I can do this. I'm living the dreams I've had since I was little."

This sports woman will certainly not stop with third place, and her goal is to get a level or so higher. Katja Višnar, too, slightly in fun, but with serious determination, points out that she is hoping next time to get a place on the podium: "I think I've made progress and I'm no longer that far from the podium."

The greatest expectations are understandably focused on by far the most successful Slovenian cross-country skier in the history of this sport, Petra Majdič, whose feet are solidly on the ground and who is fully determined about her ultimate goal: "This is a good start. In a way I like it even more that I didn't start winning right at the beginning. After that our appetites would have been too big. Yesterday in the double sprint I was already really fast. Unfortunately a day late. We are slowly getting where we need to be. In training we have done a huge amount of work, so I have no bad conscience about the results. And I didn't make a single mistake."

"I'm really pleased with the results. This season is quite distinct, not just because of the Olympic Games, but also because of the motivation and readiness, which is changing. At each competition there are plenty of favourites. Some have shone in one competition, and at another they have taken a back seat. Everyone is changing their plans and goals, they are trying the whole season to compete at the highest level, but they are forgetting that the highest goal for everyone is the Olympic Games," said Hudač. It is also important that the service team now has one more technician, meaning that the girls can also count on better prepared skis. Hudač has yet to reveal the squad for participation at the New Year Tour de Ski competition.

## slovenian delights



Janez Bogataj, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

# FESTIVE SLOVENIA SETS ITS TABLE





In its culture and way of life, modern Slovenia represents a unique area where for centuries the cultural influences of the Alps, the Mediterranean and Pannonian regions have met. Yet this is more than just the meeting point of different regions, and is not just the sum of their parts. In their centuries of dwelling in this part of Europe, influenced by this meeting point the Slovenians created a rich span of cultural forms, ranging from those that characterised, and still do, their everyday lives, to those that characterised festive occasions. Of all the components of culture and way of life that are rooted in heritage and are at the same time in their own constant process of modern change, a special place is occupied by the customs and habits in the festive period of December. The crux of all the events revolves primarily around 24 and 25 December, in other words around the direct celebration of Christ's birth, for which we use the single term "Christmas". In the 20th century there was also the major development of celebrating the transition to the New Year. Where Christmas is a more intimate personal, family celebration, New Year has all the characteristics of a mass festivity. Today's celebration of Christmas is to a large extent linked to the enjoyment of festive dishes. The media often ask us questions about typical Christmas foods, about their features and differences by individual Slovenian region. Almost every year catering establishment operators are also offered special seminars, where they can find guidance on the special features of Christmas menus. This is of course a reflection of the modern world

and consumerism, and most of all an emphasising of the outward signs of the holiday. The heritage of enjoying foods at Christmas indeed points to certain fundamental dishes that have been laid on tables. In general we can say that the food on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day itself is of course festive, in other words it stood out from everyday eating habits. The differences were between the country and the towns.

One of the oldest features of the Christmas holiday is the preparation or baking of Christmas bread. This dates back to the distant past, since like ancient wall or room decorations for Christmas, it originates in the pre-Christian period. In Slovenia there are various conceptions of Christmas bread, which today of course no longer has such deep significance and associations as in the past. Most commonly it is called **poprtnik** or **poprtnjak**. These most widespread terms and all the others show that it got its name from the place assigned to it during the Christmas season: that is, under the tablecloth on the table or directly on the table. Particularly in north-eastern Slovenia, bread is still baked from a mixture of black flour and dried fruit, and is called "krhljak" or "klojcov kruh", that is, "dried fruit bread".

Today's Christmas fare in Slovenia is festive primarily in terms of different dishes. In the countryside the table is set with all the best things they have produced, which are prepared by the housewife as tasty dishes. In urban areas Christmas dinner and (or) lunch are also associated with the



preparation of the best dishes, outstanding among which are for instance poultry (turkey or goose), various roasts, game, fish and perhaps even a piglet or sucking pig, which is actually more typical of New Year celebrations. During Christmas, cod with potato and parsley is also especially popular in the urban areas.

A central culinary event in the Slovenian countryside comes in the run up to Christmas, and this is the slaughtering of a pig, which we call "koline" or "furež". Slovenians make a wide range of products from the pig, including sausages and various semi-cured and cured, dried and smoked meat items. The basic purpose of pig slaughtering in this season is to ensure high-quality meat dishes and other meat products for a richly laid Christmas table. For this reason the Christmas table often bears a pork roast, various types of blood



pudding and sausages stuffed with groats, steamed stuffed pork stomach and other delights.

The festive Christmas table features one more typical dish, this being a sweet cake called "potica". Today this is the most typical and widespread Slovenian sweet dish, made of leavened dough spread with a filling, rolled up and baked in a clay oven. Various types of potica are made, given the different fillings. There is the walnut potica, which is most common, then hazelnut, almond, poppy seed, fritter, tarragon, chocolate, which is one of the youngest variants, and then also carob, various fruit poticas and others. Urban dwellers are also familiar with potica baking. Both for Christmas and New Year celebrations, various types of local pastries are baked, including biscuits, which often right at Christmas time still represent one of the areas of household culinary creativity, in contrast to numerous others, where we are now entirely dependent on what the shops have to offer.

The feast of **St. John the Evangelist** (27 December) is also an important day for Slovenians. On that day we bless the best wine – "šentjanževac" [St. John's] – which landlords have kept since the earliest times for special occasions, be it to seal transactions, for wedding rituals or as the final glass upon leave-taking after some celebration. For this reason landlords have always kept the best wine

## slovenian delights

challenge to our modern life. Into this frequently alienated modern world, they bring ingredients of quality founded on the creativity of the individual and the family. At least once a year they offer us a great opportunity to take some time, so that we ourselves can create, shape and make something better. The heritage of Christmas celebrations shows us that it was always directed towards the person and the family circle. In other words not outwardly, to commercialisation and some kind of Christmas marketing. Undoubtedly this area of our lives and culture will not be able to entirely escape this general "disease" of the modern world. For this reason it is our task and duty to become increasingly familiar with the dimensions and quality of the celebrations communicated to us by heritage. At the same time this also means preserving the rich palette of European cultural diversity and uniqueness, which are the greatest asset of individual nations and countries. Only through better mutual understanding will we create inexhaustible resources for numerous forms of creativity and spiritual enrichment, which will be appropriate to us and will enrich us with their messages and qualities. Year in, year out, from December to December.

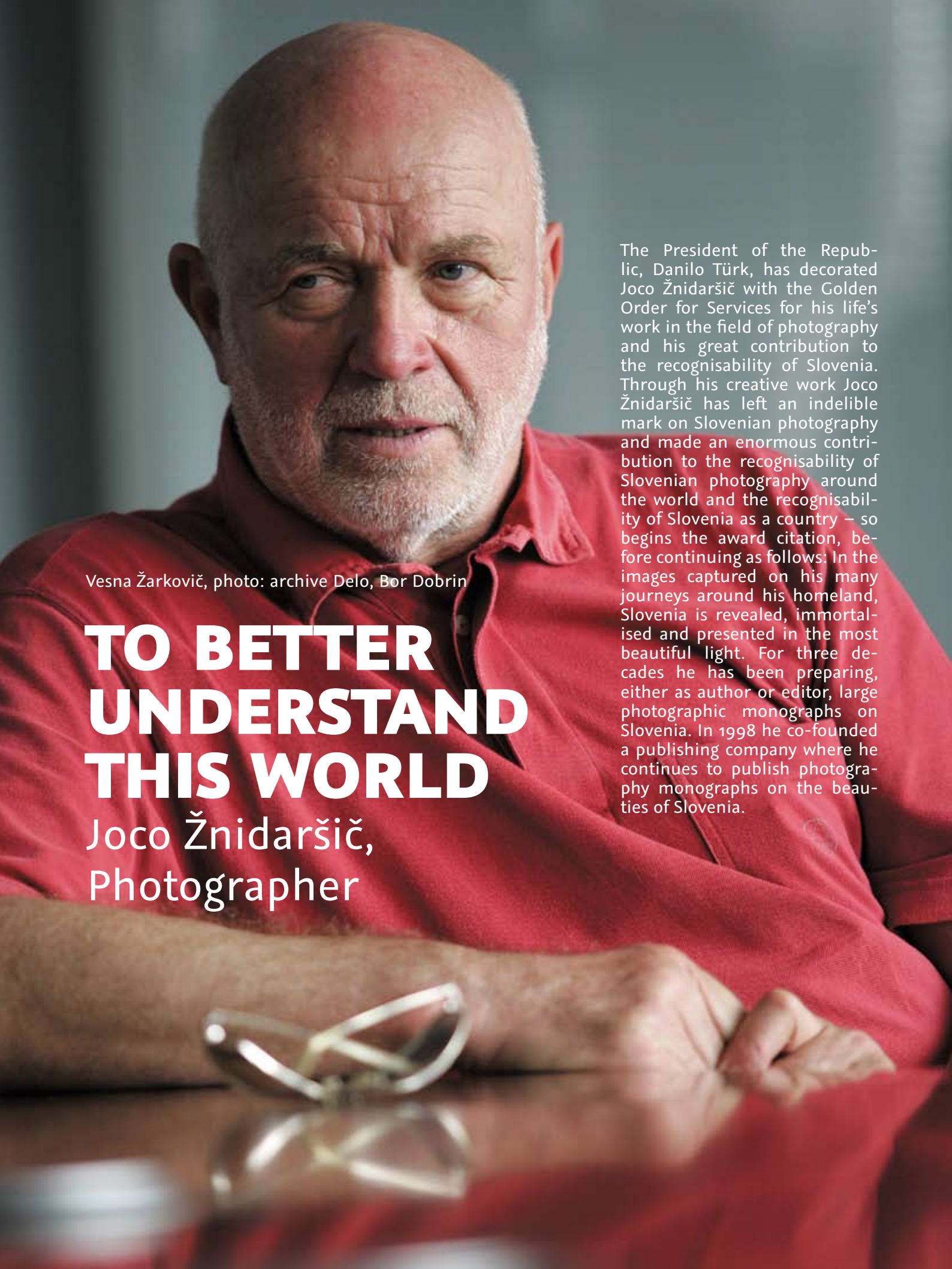
to use as their "šentjanževac". Of course in connection with wine, the Slovenians have two other saints outside the December Christmas season. These are St. Martin (11 November) and St. Urban (25 May). The former is celebrated during the period when the young must is turning into wine, and the latter in the period when the vine is in flower. All three thereby complete nicely the festive lives of our people, which are tied to that popular gift of the vine – wine. All three holidays represent the integrity of our vineyard, wine and drinking culture.

In individual compositions of December festivities and dishes associated with them, there is therefore an interweave of ingredients or memories of cultural heritage and modern creativity. Every year this so-to-speak tradition acquires ever new substance and forms. This is essentially entirely natural and right, for no component of a culture and way of life was ever something permanent and immutable. The same is true today. Yet with all these changes and the modernity of celebrations, the question does indeed arise, out of the positive components of cultural heritage, from the noble range of creativity that has been "tested" many times in history, have we really not learned anything for our present and future?

In the context of thinking about the importance of heritage, the December holidays appear to us primarily as a major







Vesna Žarkovič, photo: archive Delo, Bor Dobrin

# TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THIS WORLD

Joco Žnidaršič,  
Photographer

The President of the Republic, Danilo Türk, has decorated Joco Žnidaršič with the Golden Order for Services for his life's work in the field of photography and his great contribution to the recognisability of Slovenia. Through his creative work Joco Žnidaršič has left an indelible mark on Slovenian photography and made an enormous contribution to the recognisability of Slovenian photography around the world and the recognisability of Slovenia as a country – so begins the award citation, before continuing as follows: In the images captured on his many journeys around his homeland, Slovenia is revealed, immortalised and presented in the most beautiful light. For three decades he has been preparing, either as author or editor, large photographic monographs on Slovenia. In 1998 he co-founded a publishing company where he continues to publish photography monographs on the beauties of Slovenia.

'I am extremely proud to have received this extraordinary accolade,' says Žnidaršič. He sees the award as a recognition for all photojournalists who strive to present this world to people in such a way that they can better understand it, recognise it and feel it. 'Of course even today I say, or think, that I am not an artist, despite the fact that I have garnered all these awards, but merely an amateur. And that in fact it has been given to me to show people, through the camera, that which they themselves perhaps do not see. But the artist is Nature, which offers and creates all this.'

What is more important, the eye or the camera? 'Without a doubt the eye behind the camera is more important than the camera itself. I have taken my best pictures with very simple cameras.'

Despite having reached an age at which most people want nothing more than to enjoy a comfortable retirement, Žnidaršič is still tirelessly seeking new subjects, his camera always within reach, in a constant state of readiness for when his eye catches sight of some new image that is worth photographing. Where does all this will-power come from? 'A person who is used to working cannot simply stop. I want to do it, I like doing it and I also know how to be very inquisitive. This is something that does not pass with the years. I wanted to become a photojournalist in order to be a witness to events, in order to be there, in order to travel... And thanks to a number of lucky circumstances I have achieved all of this. When I photograph people, I am already thinking about where to place them. I photograph the beauties of nature when I see them. It is incredible how many of my photographs I have taken literally from the car, before the days of motorways, when we were still allowed to stop anywhere. Today it is different. You can't stop on the motorway.'

And how does he approach photography? 'As a professional I had a kind of computer in my head – I knew exactly what shutter speed, what exposure I needed. It is not like today, when cameras are automatic and you can touch up photographs on the computer. Practice makes perfect and I knew exactly how the photograph would turn out when I photographed a specific

## people

subject. Photography is not merely equipment, it is not merely one or two old men in suits whom we place alongside an article, but it is part of the story, a constituent element which often, particularly in the case of the best photography, forces the author of the text into an uncompromising competition.'

Through the lens, his subtle eye has sought, seen and experienced the charms of nature. He has also recorded the atmosphere of St Martin's Day celebrations in a very personal manner. A particular challenge, besides the landscape, have been the faces of people. He has documented artists in the process of creation or in friendly, relaxed gatherings. With these photographic portraits Žnidaršič moved into the field of psychological depth and thus offered an insight into the individual.

He has received over 50 awards for his work, most notably a Prešeren Award and a World Press Photo prize. The only Slovenian photographer to date to be so honoured, he won the latter for his sequence of photographs of a horse and its leader as they are hit by an avalanche somewhere below Mount Triglav.

He lectures to journalism students on the beauties of the landscape and the creation of books, while in his private life he is active in numerous charitable and other associations.

He studied medicine at the Faculty of Medicine in Ljubljana but never graduated: his love of photography prevailed. 'I made the right choice. I have been successful in many things, I have enjoyed considerable public attention, I have received the State's highest decoration, I have been a member of an expedition to the Himalayas, all the dreams of my youth have come true.'

When he was still a student his first attempts at photography grew into photojournalism on the student newspaper Tribuna. His many published reports, embellished by his photographs, revealed the general social and political life of the time and always placed the human being in the foreground. With his camera in his hand, Žnidaršič followed and recorded all interesting and important events in Slovenia and further afield in Yugoslavia.

In 1974 he became photo editor at the

Delo newspaper. He put together an excellent team which for many years fulfilled its mission in exemplary fashion and enriched the imagination of readers. Even more than for his numerous awards he is famous for the following piece of advice: 'Get out into the field, look around you a little, and you will come back with good photographs. As long as you don't just sit in an office.' Žnidaršič is thus not only a good photographer and editor, but a man who has directly or indirectly nurtured all photojournalists, reporters and editors in Slovenia. 'I was lucky to have good bosses at Delo. They gave me the chance to develop, to travel a great deal with Tito and walk around with him.'

He has created the following photography monographs: Ljubljana, Bohinj, Vineyards of Slovenia, The Path to the Father (Himalayan travelogue), Let's Meet at the Market, Golf in Slovenia, Ten Years of the Slovenian State, My Slovenia, Lipizzaners. He has also conceived and edited a further 17 photography monographs to which he has been a significant contributor. Particularly successful among them have been Treasures of Slovenia, The War for Slovenia, Beautiful Slovenia and Planica.

How does he see today's young photographers? 'There is a lot of competition among photographers, and only the best survive. It is not much fun rushing from event to event as part of a jostling crowd. They often get in each other's way. When I was young there were only three of us. We were discovering the world, and everything was interesting. Unfortunately television is also destroying the profession of photographer. I am actually pleased to be retired so as not to have to compete with the youngsters any more. And if on top of that you have a boss who is pressuring you... When it comes down to it I am lucky to have lived at a time when photography was more appreciated and generated more interest. What characteristics should a good photographer have? He has to be someone who thinks, he has to know what he wants, he has to know the landscape, the light he wants (the best light is just before and just after a storm – that is when it is at its most dramatic). Your photograph has to reveal the essence of people so that their character can be seen.'





In mid-November, three decades after the original, a new edition of Treasures of Slovenia was published. Joco Žnidaršič's photographs are once again accompanied by a text by Matjaž Kmecl. The publisher decided to bring out a new edition by these proven authors because much has changed in thirty years. 'I had the privilege of discovering Slovenia at a time when many of its beauties that have since disappeared still existed. Slovenia is changing greatly and therefore I am happy to be photographing the beautiful things that can still be photographed. I am saddened by the degradation of the landscape in the Karst, which is above all the consequence of industrialisation. The book is therefore also an appeal to our conscience not to lose these beauties we have but to preserve them for future generations. Naturally, in three decades many jewels of modern architecture of which we can be proud have appeared, but the beautiful mountains will always remain, and protected areas will defend themselves from major interventions. For we Slovenians should realise that our country is small and beautiful and that we must preserve its beauties.'

Albert Kos, photo: Michele Drascek

## 90 YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

The University of Ljubljana, Slovenia's oldest higher education institution, has this month been celebrating the 90th anniversary of its founding. It is not, of course, one of Europe's oldest universities, with a tradition dating back centuries, but in the past 90 years of uninterrupted work, growth and development it has in many ways made up for its relatively late founding and taken its place alongside many renowned centres of higher education in Europe and the rest of the world.

The reasons behind the relatively late founding of Slovenia's first university are to be found in the unfavourable historical circumstances which impeded the development of knowledge within the boundaries of present-day Slovenia and made it impossible to organise local academic potentials in a permanent manner in institutional form. An embryo did however exist. The Academia Operosorum Labacensium, an association of 'industrious men', was active in Ljubljana from 1693 to 1725, while Jesuit colleges, whose origins date back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries, offered a level of instruction that fell somewhere between grammar school and university studies. Following the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773, the philosophical and theological studies organised within its ambit passed under the direct control of the state, and the Jesuit colleges became state lyceums, a sort of intermediate stage between gymnasium and university. As well as philosophy and theology they taught medicine and, lastly, veterinary science. After the changes in 1848, Austria abolished the lyceums. As a result, it was no longer possible to study at a higher level in Slovenia. Slovenians were only able to gain a higher education at foreign universities. In the beginning, several centuries ago, these were mainly Italian universities, most often Padua, and then for a long time Vienna. In the second half of the 19th century an increasing number of Slovenians also studied at other universities in the Austro-Hungarian

Empire, particularly Prague, Graz and Zagreb.

From as early as the mid-nineteenth century, calls for the founding of a Slovenian university began to be heard. These grew particularly strong in the years preceding the First World War, but the Austro-Hungarian authorities continued to refuse them, and as a result the founding of a university in Slovenia did not take place. An opportunity was offered immediately after the end of the First World War and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, when one of the first moves of the provisional National Government for Slovenia, which had taken control of the greater part of Slovenian territory, was to establish, in November 1918, a University Commission responsible for managing all preparations for the founding of a Slovenian university. The University of Ljubljana was actually founded on 23 July 1919, with the adoption of the University Act of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. At the time of its founding the university had just five faculties: theology, law, arts, engineering and medicine (the last of these was incomplete, since it only offered two years of preliminary study). Lectures began at the newly founded university in the 1919/20 academic year, in the premises of what until then had been the Carniolan Provincial Assembly, a magnificent building in the centre of Ljubljana. Teaching at the university was initially entrusted to 18 professors, the majority of them from foreign universities. A total of 942 students – including just 28 women – enrolled in the various courses offered by the university. The university's first rector was the world-renowned mathematician Josip Plemelj.

The first two decades in the new Yugoslav state were not propitious for the development of the University of Ljubljana, since it was not viewed with favour by the authorities in Belgrade and preference was given, particularly from the financial point of view, to the universities

## CULTURAL TRAILS

of Belgrade and Zagreb. Attempts were made to truncate its study programmes or even to have it abolished, but these were successfully resisted by the Slovenian public, headed by the students themselves. Despite their financial difficulties, the faculties developed well in educational and academic terms. They widened their circle of teaching and academic staff, established specialist institutes and – their greatest achievement – founded a university library just before the outbreak of the Second World War. At the start of the war the University of Ljubljana had 124 professors and 2,474 full-time students, more than a fifth of them women.

Somehow the university managed to survive the war years and the Italian and German occupations, although for the last two years of the war lectures and practicals were suspended and the ranks of professors and, particularly, students were considerably thinned by wartime violence. The liberation in 1945 gave a new impetus to the University of Ljubljana. The existing faculties picked up where they had left off and the faculty of medicine now offered a complete degree course. A number of new faculties were founded in the years that followed: science and engineering faculties, an economics faculty and a faculty of social sciences. With the new buildings for the new faculties and their institutes, and investments in their equipment, the premises available for university studies also gradually increased, and an increasing

number of courses and branches of study were offered.

Today the University of Ljubljana has 26 member institutions (23 faculties and 3 art academies) employing 2,717 teaching staff, and the number of enrolled students is almost 50,000 – with female students the clear majority. The faculties and academies are concentrated in several areas of Ljubljana, while the original university building today houses the rector's office and common administrative and support services. The development of the University of Ljubljana from its beginnings to the present day has thus covered an enormous distance in less than a century, not only in terms of numbers and statistics, but also in terms of the reputation that the University of Ljubljana has gained in this time, both among the public in Slovenia and in international academic circles. Although it remains a medium-sized university in European and world terms, in several international tables measuring course quality and staff excellence it appears among the 500 top universities in the world. Many of its teaching and academic staff are internationally recognised academics and experts at the very pinnacle of modern scientific thought and scholarly achievement. Its degrees and doctorates are qualifications that are respected not only in Slovenia but also abroad.

In many ways the University of Ljubljana owes its reputation to its openness to the world, an openness that was inbuilt from the very beginning, since its first teachers included many foreign professors, at a time when home-grown teachers were still completing their studies abroad. In recent decades new information technologies and an increasing number of international exchanges involving both professors and students have further increased the flow and applicability of knowledge in the international academic arena. A major boost to the modernisation and renewal of study programmes, and the guaranteeing of the compatibility of studies at the European level, has recently been provided by the Bologna Process which, among

other things, encourages greater mobility of professors and, in particular, students, and places the university and its faculties even more firmly within European frames of reference.

Eloquent proof of the University of Ljubljana's position in the currents of global academic thought and artistic creativity is provided by the honorary doctorates that the university has awarded and continues to award to eminent figures from the academic, cultural and political spheres. Holders of honorary doctorates from the University of Ljubljana have included the philosopher Tomáš G. Masaryk, who became the first president of Czechoslovakia, the heart surgeon Michael E. DeBakey, the linguist Noam Chomsky, the semiotician Umberto Eco, the legal expert Robert Badinter and many others. Honorary members of the University Senate include the writer and former president of the Czech Republic Václav Havel and the distinguished Polish philosopher and sociologist Adam Michnik.

The University of Ljubljana marked this year's 90th anniversary with particular ceremony, with a University Week commencing with a solemn session of the University Senate at which the Nobel prize winning chemist Jean-Marie Lehn was awarded an honorary doctorate, the law professor Dominique Breillat, the chemist Anthony G. Collins and the linguist Erich Prunč were made honorary members of the University Senate, and the CEO of the Novo Mesto-based pharmaceuticals company Krka, Jože Colarič, was awarded the Pro Universitate labacensi plaque as a recognition of his support for the university's links with the business enterprise sector. The keynote speaker at the formal jubilee celebration was the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Danilo Türk.

The University Week coincided with the date – 3 December – on which the professor of Slavonic Studies Dr Fran Ramovš began regular lectures at the newly founded University of Ljubljana in 1919.





Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Michele Drascek

# FESTIVE LJUBLJANA

Every year on 3 December, the event People, let's light the lights and the switching on of the seasonal lights in the centre of the capital city kick off festive December in Ljubljana. The traditional cultural event People, let's light the lights [Ljudje, prižgimo luč] is dedicated to the memory of two Slovenian classical literary authors: France Prešeren, the greatest Slovenian poet, who was born on that day, and Fran Milčinski - Ježek, the most popular Slovenian humorist of all time. Ježek also wrote a poem from which the event acquired its name. The name holds a symbolic meaning. Every year the event marks the start of the festive December atmosphere in the streets of Ljubljana. It concludes with the simultaneous lighting of all the festive lights in the city. In the square of Prešernov trg, in the city centre, the Miklavž [St. Nicholas] Fair is also opened. Festively decorated stalls sell a variety of gifts appropriate to the traditional gift-giving of the Feast of St. Nicholas. The tradition of Miklavž or St. Nicholas, who is also the patron saint of Ljubljana, and who brings gifts for children on the eve of his feast day, 6 December, is a popular part of the Slovenian folk tradition, and was first mentioned in written records in 1839.

## CULTURAL TRAILS

At the same time seasonal fairs open along Cankarjevo nabrežje embankment, Prešernov trg and Petkovškovo nabrežje, while one is already operating in the square of Pogačarjev trg. Since this is also a social event, every day between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. there are also stalls offering food and drink, from which the whole of December bears the aroma of tea, mulled wine and other festive December treats.

On 2 January the festively decorated old town centre will be the venue for a range of events intended for people of all ages and a variety of tastes. The festive atmosphere will reach its peak, as in every year, with the New Year's Eve street celebrations in the squares of Prešernov trg, Mestni trg and Kongresni trg and with the traditional fireworks from Ljubljana Castle, which mark the start of the New Year at midnight.

Between 26 and 30 December, children can see the arrival of Jack Frost, while the Good Fairy will fulfil wishes in Mestni trg. During the festive season there will also be music and dance events in Dvorni trg and Prešernov trg.

City residents and visitors will also be attracted by the rich programme and special lighting and decoration designed by Karin Košak and Zmago Modic. This time the city will be adorned with new decorations which the artist Zmago Modic has titled Birth of Forms [Rojstvo oblik]. The 59 galaxies that make up "Universal Ljubljana" and Modic's original project,

will be supplemented with new ones and will adorn Čopova Street, Prešernov trg, Ciril Metodov trg, Stritarjeva Street, Trubarjeva and Wolfvova Streets, the start of Cankarjeva Street and Gornji trg. Architect Karin Košak's project involves the illumination of the most outstanding buildings architecturally in the wider city centre, bridges and squares in the old town centre and the Castle Hill and Ljubljana Castle.

Karin Košak has been involved for over ten years in lighting projects, and has already provided similar projects for Piran, Portorož, Koper, Bled and Zagorje.

"This is in fact an old project that was headed by the architect Karel Pollak of the City authority, who also heads the project Ljubljana My City. Along with Meta Hočevar, Aleš Vodopivec and Jure Kobe, they established the first concept for decorating Ljubljana, then in 1999 they invited me to join them, and later they were joined by the painter Zmago Modic and architect Andrej Erjavec. Of course we take the decoration concept a step further every year," says Košak. Given her rich experiences from Vienna in set design, costume and lighting design, she has approached the lighting project in a very theatrical way. "I was guided by the concept of how to conjure up an atmosphere that will be elegant, magical, individual and linked to Ljubljana. I wanted something more, and most of all I thought that we should go beyond the existing industrial and kitsch lighting that makes all European cities the same. Ljubljana deserves something more. The exceptionally beautiful medieval old centre is in fact a fantastic base for high-quality enhancement. With the lighting I highlighted architectural elements such as squares, individual elements in the squares, bridges, embankments, buildings ... visitors from abroad praised this kind of lighting a lot, saying it was magical, fairy-tale, in short something special. Blue and golden-yellow lighting emphasise the romantic and elegant atmosphere





in the city. An important contribution to the visual dimension is music, which in previous years has been provided by Primož Lorenz with some fine Christmas music. Music is a very important element for the whole atmosphere, and in this way I combined the musical and lighting elements, which together create this atmosphere. Sound and light together were established several centuries ago by the French in Versailles, where Louis XIV organised music and light shows. Cultural monuments in France also have sound and light installations. Architecture is in fact a merging of theatre, opera and ballet, and fireworks are also from those times.”

And a comparison of the festively decorated Ljubljana with other European cities? “The initiative of Mr. Pollak regarding festive lighting seems to me very positive, especially because it is personal. I don’t know of any city in the Central European area as beautifully decorated as Ljubljana. Every year I tour a number of cities, especially the ones nearby in Italy, plus in Austria, Britain... and they don’t captivate me as much as Ljubljana. Ljubljana has one fine quality, it is small and compact and is therefore easier to deal with. All this contributes to better lighting. It is practically impossible to decorate a big city, since the city centre is not compact,

and for the entire decoration of the city centre to cover such dimensions is not possible. Ljubljana tried to extend the decoration to local city wards, but the costs relative to the effect were too high. Large dimensions of course require so much more funding, although it would be nice to have decoration in other parts of the city. I love Ljubljana very much, and I feel good especially in the old town centre. I like it that in recent years many things have been put in order, the quality of the facilities has been raised, and all my acquaintances from abroad are really enthusiastic about the changes the city has experienced in the last 15 years. This year there are some building sites hindering some of the decoration, but without them you don’t get renewal.”



**Karin Košak**, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, Department of Textiles:

*The seasonal decoration of Ljubljana is unique in the world for emphasising the most beautiful side the city has to offer.*

## CULTURAL TRAILS

Jože Prešeren, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

# SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS STORIES

### Christmas, that most beautiful of Christian and family holidays

December is the most festive month in Slovenia, so it is a time we all look forward to. It is a month full of festivals and symbols, and the end of the year is approaching. It is also the time of the winter solstice, to which numerous ancient customs are linked. Christianity partly subsumed the old traditions, while introducing some new festivals and customs. But most people are not concerned about when we started celebrating a particular holiday, they just go with the flow. It is also noteworthy that the majority of December festivals are associated with Christianity, but they are so well established and popular that they are also followed by total atheists or those of non-Christian faiths.

The festive nature of the entire month is especially emphasised by the Catholic Advent, the four-week preparation for Christmas, which usually begins on the last Sunday of November. Many homes put up special Advent wreaths with four candles, one of which is lit each week. On 6 December we celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas, whom Slovenians also call Miklavž – and this festival is eagerly awaited especially by children, since it brings them some much desired gifts. Numerous places around Slovenia stage wonderful miklavževanja, or St. Nicholas festivals, and these form part of the old customs that are still alive or are being newly revived. The typical miklavževanje in the countryside involves a festive procession through the village on the eve of the festival, and the main figure in this procession is St. Nicholas, dressed as a bishop, accompa-





nied by good angels and wicked demons or parkeljini. They walk from house to house bringing presents to children. Of course they first ask the children if they have been really good this year ... In recent years Miklavž and his entourage have also been seen in procession around the city centre streets of Ljubljana.

**The crib as a symbol of Christ's birth**

Miklavž and his gifts are followed by Father Christmas, or božiček, who for a little over forty years retreated into the privacy of individual Christian families in Slovenia, for well-known reasons. A week after that, children (and often adults, too) are brought gifts by a third benevolent man of December, Dedek Mráz or Jack Frost, who is a throwback to atheist celebrations of the New Year; the custom was brought to us from the former Soviet Union. It is interesting to note that both the latter two mythical figures come from the coldest parts of Europe – Father Christmas supposedly brought to children here by reindeers from chilly Scandinavia, while Jack Frost supposedly came from chilly Russia; children were usually told that Jack Frost came from below Mt. Triglav.

In Slovenia numerous earlier Christmas customs have almost been forgotten, while some new ones have appeared. Of course one essential part of Christmas celebrations is a young spruce tree arranged as a “Christmas tree”, which the previous political system dubbed a “New Year Fir”. This custom is more recent, and putting up Christmas trees only became established here after 1900. Today the majority of these trees are plastic – for environmental reasons.

A much older Christmas custom, and one that is very popular in Slovenia, is the arranging of Christmas cribs, three-dimensional depictions of Christ's birth. The tradition of setting up such Nativity scenes dates back to the monastic environment of the 16th century, from where it gradually spread to urban and later to rural homes. Nowadays there is practically no family residence in Slovenia that does not set up a crib during the Christmas period. The majority of cribs are of course bought in shops, but many people make their own. It is incredible how much creativity Slovenians put into preparing and making these

cribs. In the days leading up to Christmas, in many areas of Slovenia there are exhibitions of hand-made cribs. Many self-taught as well as professional artists put on show their uniquely crafted cribs, which are generally carved from wood, or formed from clay or paper. There is a great deal of creativity evident, and the quality of these exhibitions is growing from year to year.

One of the more recent Christmas customs is the “live crib”, which in some parts of Slovenia is presented by amateur theatre groups. This involves a live portrayal of Nativity scenes, featuring the appearance of all the figures in the traditional crib – Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, shepherds, a cow, donkey, sheep, the Three Kings and so on. Despite the difficult conditions, since after all it is really cold at this time of year, the organisers work hard to make the shows a success and to attract large audiences. Most areas repeat their Nativity scenes several times. One of the most popular settings of recent years has been Postojna Cave, where live cribs are presented in the exceptional surroundings of dripstones in the most magnificent of Slovenia's underground caves.

**Many customs are forgotten**

I would now ask readers for a little indulgence as I delve back into memories of my own childhood. I remember how in our family we waited impatiently for Christmas Eve, since our mother was able to conjure up the exceptional nature of that moment in very meagre circumstances (our father had been carried off by the ravages of the Second World War). In a procession through the house, our mother ceremonially burned incense and sprinkled holy water in all the rooms, and the procession ended at the crib and by the warm bread oven, while on the table stood special Christmas bread, potica nut cake and a basket of nuts, which our mother would sometimes strew about the floor, and we kids eagerly gathered them up. Awaiting us on the table was also a hot buckwheat and pork fritters potica roll. Then we would usually all go together to the midnight mass ... It was exceptionally beautiful and unforgettable, one of the most wonderful memories of our childhood. It seems to me that similar customs have been maintained in very few Slovenian families, which is understand-



able, since living conditions today are completely different from those first few years after the war.

You only rarely hear now of carollers singing carols at Christmas time in some town, while earlier they were a regular feature of the season. Equally, few people now mention the feast of the “Holy Innocents”, 28 December, when – of course in jest – children are “thrashed”. Nor do many people recall the otepovci in Bohinj, where a group of young lads with covered faces and sheepskin coats would go visiting from house to house.

In recent years Slovenia has seen a revival of the custom of blessing horses on the Feast of St. Stephen, 26 December. On that day numerous horse breeders gather together, with their horses for the most part saddled, and the local priest has a blessing ceremony arranged especially for the occasion. There are some similar and especially popular events in the Dolenjska region (e.g. Šentjernej and Mirna Peč) and also in other Slovenian regions. Stephen has become the true protector of horses and cattle, which is undoubtedly another custom going back to pre-Christian times, the ethnologists say. Some families have also maintained the tradition of going around on the holidays to offer season's greetings and to wish fortune and health in the New Year to all their relatives and close friends.

It seems that we are slowly losing sight of the “third day of Christmas”, the day of the Three Kings or Magi, which we celebrate on 6 January. We are often reminded of this festival only by films of the Christmas story. At one time, however, the Feast of the Magi appeared to be the main holiday of the Christmas period, since it was only after three hundred years that the celebration of Christ's birth on 25 December became established.

**A song that became popular across the world**

The musical symbol of Christmas is without doubt the song Silent Night. It was composed a little less than two hundred years ago in Austria, but soon blazed a trail throughout the Christian world. The song was composed by Joseph Mohr, who wrote the words, and by Franz Gruber, who set it to music. On Christmas Eve it is the main hymn in the majority of Slovenian church-

es, and is sung by everyone with special pride, indeed plenty of people mistakenly believe that it is a purely Slovenian song. The song is sung by choirs and soloists, and has been recorded in myriad versions, being performed by opera singers and pop stars. In the Slovenian lands, then of course still part of Austria-Hungary, it was first intoned and translated into Slovenian by the priest and composer Jakob Aljaž, who is famous for his numerous choral compositions, although he is recorded in Slovenia's history books primarily as the builder of the Aljažev stolp tower on the summit of Triglav. We should also note that a multitude of other Christmas songs are known in Slovenia, many of them original Slovenian compositions from both the folk and artistic tradition, and many imported here from elsewhere.

**Christmas cards**

Nowadays the former glory of Christmas cards is perhaps fading, since in places they are being taken over by e-mail, often without even any graphic depiction typical of Christmas. Nevertheless many Slovenians still cling to the tradition of writing and sending Christmas cards in the old way, by mail, and if possible bearing special Christmas postage stamps. We are especially proud of an exceptional artistic figure, the painter Maksim Gaspari, who is a veritable synonym for depicting folkloric motifs in Slovenian art. He is particularly famous for his Christmas postcards, on which he depicted numerous now forgotten customs and traditions of the season. So we can find on his postcards the majority of the customs also mentioned in this article, such as the ritual blessing of homes, carolling, thrashing children, ritual Christmas dishes and so forth. Although Maksim Gaspari (1883-1980) died a few years ago, many of his Christmas postcards are still reprinted today, and they still stand as extraordinary documents of Slovenia's national and cultural heritage.

So how does the most typical Slovenian Christmas greeting go? Without dispute it goes like this: Merry Christmas Holidays and Happy New Year! Now it is up to us whether we stick with the old patterns, or whether we can think up anything more original.





**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**