

Sinfo

Changes are the way of life, and
our lives are the drivers of change

I FEEL
SLOVENIA



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Photo: Bruno Toič

MAY YOUR EYES SPARKLE

We are awaiting the new year full of optimistic expectations. December always reminds us of our loved ones and of the importance of understanding, gift-giving, socialising, and being attentive. Slovenia has many nice customs at this time of year.

Nataša Pirc Musar is beginning her term as President at the end of this year, and in the magazine you can read an interesting interview with her, in which you will get to know her personally and also learn about her vision for the country. Prime Minister Robert Golob will also address you in his New Year's message. We have also included an article on the National Assembly with its 30 year history and presenting the thoughts of Urška Klakočar Zupančič, President of the National Assembly.

This year has been full of sporting challenges, and next year there will be even more. We look forward to the Nordic World Ski Championships in Planica, and other great sporting events. That's why we've also included an interview with Tina Maze, Slovenia's most successful Alpine skier.

All of us here at the Sinfo editorial board, who love investigating and documenting interesting stories specially for you, hope you will meet even more interesting people and enjoy new experiences in the new year. May your eyes sparkle and your lips smile. We wish you a happy and contented 2023.

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Editor-in-Chief

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Changes are the way of life, and our lives are the drivers of change



Prime Minister Robert Golob.
Photo: Office of the Prime Minister

Dear Readers,

The year that is coming to an end has certainly left its mark. This has been one of the most difficult and challenging years for Europe since the end of the Second World War. At a time when we had not yet fully recovered from the global COVID-19 epidemic, we were already faced with the unjust Russian aggression against a sovereign Ukraine. In these challenging times, the European Union and NATO presented a united front and this is the key message for the future.

The maelstrom of war taking place on European soil and its consequences have had an unimaginable impact on our lives. European values are under direct attack and the global order has been irrevocably shaken. We are witnessing uncertainty, but we are also standing strong and united in solidarity with Ukraine, which is bravely resisting the military invasion by the neighbouring nuclear power.

In spite of these demanding circumstances, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia has set ambitious development and economic objectives that focus on breakthroughs in key fields, from green transition in energy, generous support for science and innovation to social justice. Although we have been investing all of our efforts into tackling the high energy and food prices in recent months, the crisis must not be an excuse for a lack of ambition and subsequent stagnation. The crisis must bring into our sedated political and particularly into our environmental conscience the realisation that it is necessary to act and embrace urgent changes faster and more energetically. Changes are the way of life, and our lives are the drivers of change. If people were not to change their views and opinions, they would be stuck in limbo, with time passing by. Crisis is thus an opportunity to evolve, here and now.

There were quite a few changes made in Slovenia in 2022, which we can be proud of, starting with the creation of a different, friendlier and more tolerant atmosphere in our society. The key pillars of our approach are dialogue and integration, with all the measures adopted in cooperation with the civil society and experts.

In foreign relations, we reoriented Slovenia back to the core of Europe, back into the company of those where the rule of law comes first. As a country, we have also made a major step forward in the field of human rights. By enacting amendments to the Family Code and eliminating discrimination against same-sex partners we have reaffirmed that Slovenia is an open and tolerant society.

We are aware that the year ahead will not be easy. It is therefore all the more important to utilise all the resources available to us as a country and as a people: our knowledge, our talents, our creativity. The measures that should bring us more certainty in these uncertain times require all of the above. There is no room anymore for prestigious political games and petty selfish interests. Our domestic fights should take the form of a democratic confrontation of expert opinions and development policies. This is the best way to prove the usefulness of our work to our people and for their welfare. In the end, this is the only purpose of any policy.

Slovenia of the future will be built with joint and ceaseless efforts on the progressive foundations of dialogue, of cooperation and of a free society.

Happy holidays and plenty of luck, good health and victories in the New Year.

*Robert Golob
Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia*

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

I wish to deal with strategic and not ideological topics

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ
PHOTO: MATEJA JORDOVIČ POTOČNIK



"The President's task is also to speak up if strategic projects are suffering due to a lack of acceptance of the ideas from the opposite political pole."

On 13 November 2022, Slovenia elected its first female president in the nation's history as an independent state. After two terms, Borut Pahor will be replaced in the Presidential Palace by 54-year-old Nataša Pirc Musar, who was supported by almost 54 per cent of voters in the second round of the election. She says she will work hard for fundamental human rights and democracy. As a former journalist and Information Commissioner, she is assuming the highest political function in the country as an attorney with no political experience, committed to liberal values and human rights protection.

In the present circumstances, the presidential duties seem more important today than ever before. This also increases your responsibility, which requires decisiveness and courage. How will you approach this?

My vision of a presidential office is that it becomes a symbol of the overcoming of party and ideological divisions in the Slovenian political and social sphere. As the President, I wish to deal with strategic and not ideological topics. Politicians are the ones who must primarily ensure that people are not divided in accordance with ideological topics. And I will invest a lot of effort into this. The President's task is also to speak up if strategic projects are suffering due to a lack of acceptance of the ideas from the opposite political pole. It's time to bridge the divisions of the past and work constructively towards a better future.

I will work hard to reach a social and national consensus regarding key strategic fields that require continuous implementation for public welfare.

Among these, I would particularly highlight four fields: healthcare and pension reforms, green transition and comprehensive human security. The presidential term lasts five years, so I will be in the role of the President under at least two governments. I will always strive for the implementation of good policies and projects, irrespective of which political option is in power.

The President's impact on the economy due to foreign policy is not negligible. Those who do business abroad know that a country's reputation is important. In what way do you intend to contribute to our country's reputation?

The President is one of the foreign policy actors who must, first and foremost, be harmonised with other foreign policy makers, the National Assembly and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that is the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. I wish to see Slovenia as an active country at the core of Europe. I advocate for the European Union, European values and Slovenia's membership in the NATO Alliance. This will certainly be the foundation of my work. Coherence in Slovenian foreign policy to attain jointly agreed objectives and priorities is thus crucial. I will always support the democratic values, transparency, and human rights and freedoms, including in foreign policy.

The values of democracy, respectful dialogue, and a free and open society won at the elections. You and your opponent proved that ideological differences are not insurmountable. Can you comment on this?

Politicians should lead an exemplary and respectful dialogue, but unfortunately the opposite is too often true. This is why I'm particularly pleased that Mr Logar and I proved that respectful, tolerant and cultural discourse was possible during this presidential campaign in spite of different views and positions. We must know that everyone cannot share the same opinion about everything – and that is how it should be.

Diversity enriches us and if we know how to listen to one another, and above all, communicate respectfully, then we can find joint solutions.

I think there are many topics that can connect us. If everyone works together for a better future and does not harbour resentments from the past, we have better chances of finding a common path quicker.

You are also expected to enrich the institution of the President with reputation and authority, looking ahead and renouncing past divisions.

Slovenia deserves a decisive, fair and devout President. A President with a statesmanship stance who advocates tolerant and respectful dialogue at all times. I will aspire to such service. I will always be on the side of the people, defending the Constitution and human rights. As the President, I will always defend the social state and highlight possible slips of democracy.

As the key priorities, you mentioned the harmonisation of solutions in the four fields that you assess as crucial for the development and social cohesion of the country. These are the healthcare and pension reforms, climate neutrality and the provision of comprehensive security. How will you make them happen?

The first step will be to reach a consensus on the fact that these fields need to be regulated in the long term. We must initially agree on the problem, only then can we start thinking about how to address it. I will strive for the consensus on key strategic topics to be built in cooperation with the public and politics, by means of consultations and public debate. In this regard, I will give the floor to the experts in various fields.

I am well aware that I am not in possession of all the knowledge in this world, and I will get help and support from my advisers.

In particular, I will listen to the people, especially those whose voice is otherwise not heard in society.

At this point, I want to highlight that I don't just want a debate. I will do my best to find suitable solutions and reach conclusions on the key topics relating to Slovenia's future.

What are your first tasks in your new role?

First, I want to meet the presidents of the parliamentary parties. If we wish to do something positive together, ground-breaking, make a breakthrough for Slovenia, I know that one meeting will not be enough. I wish to offer them my help in what I think is good and smart to do for Slovenia. I believe that they all have many ideas about what we need, and I am certain that it won't be difficult to find at least one or two that we can realise together. All of us.

You're already anticipating a tour of the Western Balkan countries.

There's still some time until 23 December. But recent developments in the Western Balkans will probably require me to go on a tour of the Western Balkan countries soon after the official taking over of my duties. I want to meet the presidents of these countries and continue the Brdo-Brijuni Process, which I wish is not a meeting that takes place just once a year, but something that happens more frequently, at least twice a year. We could make commitments to one another at these meetings about what can be done in the periods between the sessions for the Western Balkans to become part of the united Europe more quickly.

Another short-term objective is to become actively engaged in Slovenia's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

This is a state project and I support all the efforts of the Slovenian diplomacy in this regard and Slovenia's readiness to play a responsible role in the international community and not just that of a passive observer or a follower of developments.

Which conditions resulting from your work and presidential duties will have to be realised for you to be satisfied at the end of your term and say: I succeeded.?

I place our internal affairs, our national spirit, understanding of each other, and mutual respect first. If I, by setting an example

and through my messages, and respectable and tolerant communication, contribute to the nation being more unified in our objectives and wishes, everyone will be better off. This is a never-ending path, but the moment we step on it, we will be on our way to the goal. On the international stage, I wish to contribute to the progress regarding the status of the Western Balkan countries striving towards EU membership. These will be my personal criteria to assess my success.

You stated that you look up to certain European presidents. Which of their statesmanship qualities do you respect the most?

The idea that I highlighted throughout the election campaign, and which will also follow me in the role of the President is that a politician works for the win at the next election, while a statesperson works for future generations.

A statesmanship stance is something I exceptionally appreciate in individuals holding this position and I, as the President, also intend to assume it myself.

The qualities I particularly respect in this regard are decisiveness, fairness, integrity, advocacy for tolerant dialogue, respectful communication and the ability to be reassuring in key moments or crises that demand such response. And of course, honest and proactive endeavour for the common good of citizens and future generations.

How do you "recharge your batteries" in your spare time? What inspires you in particular?

I bowl for relaxation. I take singing lessons and enjoy going to the theatre. My big passion is riding a motorcycle. I also enjoy baking desserts, adrenaline sports and travelling. All of the above relaxes and inspires me at the same time, but I get the most energy when spending time with my loved ones.

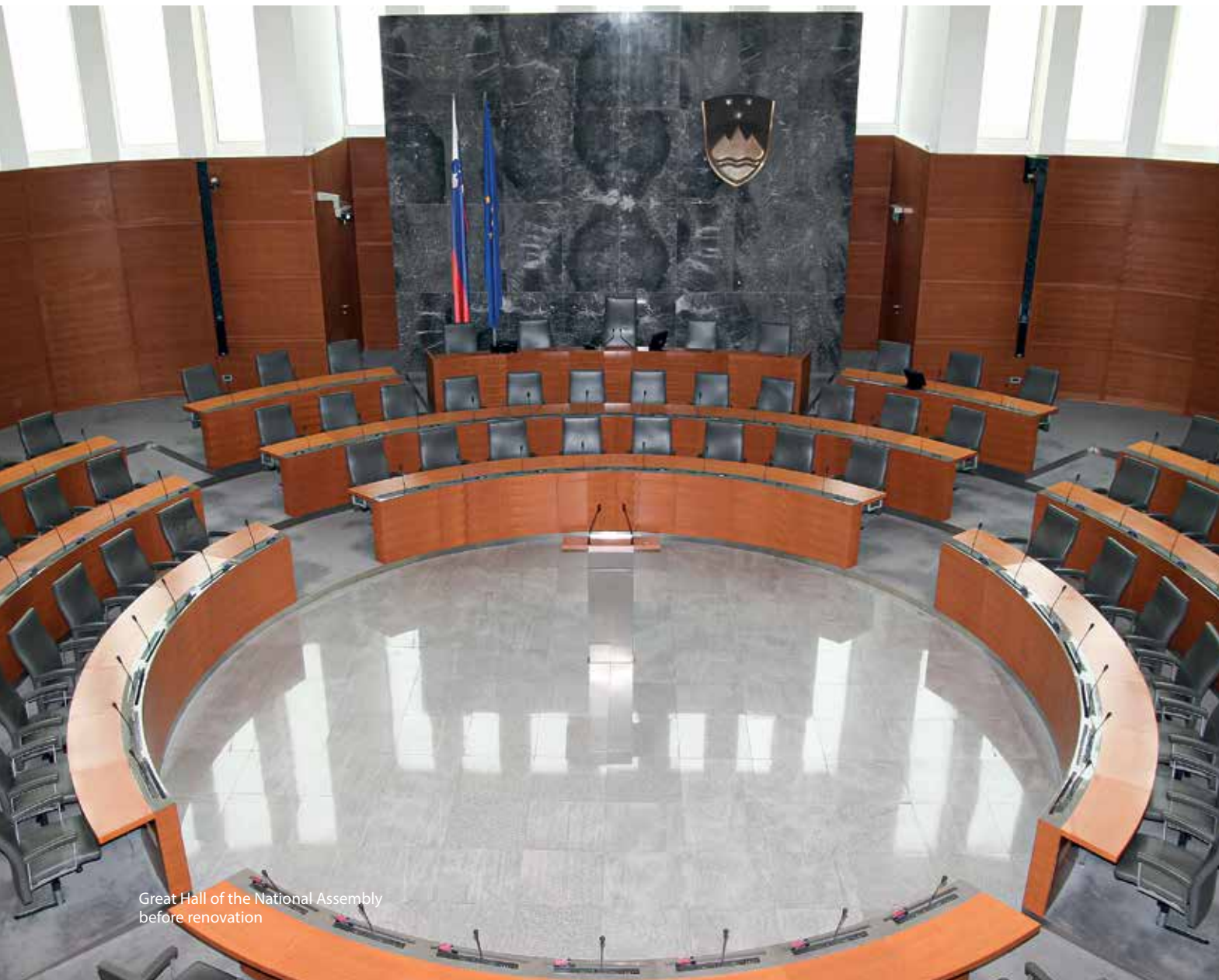


"I wish to see Slovenia as an active country at the core of Europe."

30 years of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia

KARMEN UGLEŠIČ

PHOTO: THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ARCHIVES



Great Hall of the National Assembly before renovation

2022 is a special and important year for the Slovenian Parliament. It marks 30 years since the establishment of the National Assembly, the highest representative and legislative authority in the Republic of Slovenia.

Based on the new Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia that was adopted on 23 December 1991, the National Assembly and the National Council developed from the independence assembly, i.e. the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. The foundation of the parliamentary regulation of the young country by separating the powers into legislative, executive and judicial branches was thus established.

The National Assembly was first constituted on 23 December 1992.

At the inaugural session, 90 deputies (two of whom represented the Hungarian and Italian national communities) were present, who were elected at the election on 6 December 1992.

During all three decades, the National Assembly carried out an exceptional amount of work, with each term being special and different. For example, the second term was characterised by Slovenia's accession to the European Union and its work focused on the intensive approximation of the legislation to that of the European Union, while the recent eighth term was marked by the COVID-19 epidemic.



Inaugural session of the National Assembly

THREE DECADES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN NUMBERS

14 male presidents have led the National Assembly up until today;
 in 2022, this role was assumed by female president, Urška Klakočar Zupančič
 946 is the total number of deputies
 289 regular sessions
 508 extraordinary sessions
 15,997 hours lasted the National Assembly's sessions in total
 4,609 adopted acts
 8,248 adopted instruments
 11 adopted constitutional acts
 26,768 questions and initiatives were submitted by the deputies to the Prime Minister and ministers
 2 presidencies of the EU Council



President of the Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, addresses the National Assembly



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the National Assembly

CENTRAL BUILDING OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SLOVENIA

The building which houses the National Assembly and the National Council celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2019. Slovenian history has been formed in it and the Slovenian state was born in it. The building was designed by architect Vinko Glanz, a student of the world-renowned Slovenian architect, Jože Plečnik. High-quality local materials (marble, stone and wood) were used in its construction. In the past 30 years, the building has been renovated several times. In addition to the central fresco in the lobby of the Great Hall, the interior of the parliamentary building is also embellished by the works of famous Slovenian artists.

OPEN TO FOREIGN COOPERATION

The National Assembly is cooperating with international parliamentary institutions, organisations and bodies. Permanent delegations of the National Assembly attend plenary sessions, sessions of committees and are involved in other activities of international parliamentary assemblies, a member of which is the National Assembly. In the last 30 years, the National Assembly hosted numerous presidents of national assemblies and states, prime ministers, kings and queens, representatives of various organisations, associations, movements, etc. There are 50 parliamentary friendship groups currently active in the National Assembly, which cooperate with individual countries or groups of countries.



National Assembly welcomes its 200,000th visitor on Open Day

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The Slovenian temple of democracy is open to all Slovenian citizens and foreign guests. Up to 15,000 people visit the National Assembly annually. On Saturday, 14 November 2015, the 200,000th visitor was welcomed on the open day. Since 2011, the National Assembly has been participating in the Summer Museum Night project when, in addition to seeing the fresco by Slavko Pengov in the lobby of the Great Hall, an exhibition is showcased annually, which is organised particularly for this night (we have already exhibited protocol gifts, paintings, technical heritage, porcelain and cutlery, history of the building, etc.).

Activities, particularly plenary sessions and sessions of the working bodies, are also accessible via direct television and online broadcasts and numerous publications and multimedia content on the web portal and social networks of the National Assembly.

As the first parliament in the world, the National Assembly also introduced the UNICEF safe point for children, which was established on 16 November 2009 on the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Peace, happiness and welfare that are symbolically depicted in the sculptures on the entrance portal of the parliamentary building are not self-evident and guaranteed. Ongoing efforts are required for their attainment. Through the decisions it makes, the National Assembly will further provide space for society to be creative and to persevere in the coming years and decades.

FIRST WOMAN AT THE HEAD OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY – URŠKA KLAKOČAR ZUPANČIČ



President of the National Assembly, Urška Klakočar Zupančič

More than three decades ago in December 1990, the Republic of Slovenia declared its sovereignty and independence on the basis of the plebiscite and became a sovereign democratic state by adopting its Constitution, in which the rule of law applies. On the same day, but two years later, on 23 December 1992, the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia was constituted for the first time.

The first parliamentary decade was characterised by the history of gaining independence and the adoption of new legislation, while the focus in the second one was on the accession to the NATO Alliance and the European Union. Various events also took place in front of the parliamentary building itself, i.e. state ceremonies and protests against the state.

Fourteen presidents led the National Assembly in the current eight terms and the ninth National Assembly has been led for the first time by a female president.

In the last 30 years, various political parties have certainly had the most impact on the functioning of the National Assembly. Although the decisions in the National Assembly are made by the deputies with exceptional expert support by the National Assembly's services, the voters always have the last word, which has contributed to the stability and international recognisability of our young country and the development of a democratic society that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms.

FIS Nordic World Ski Championship Planica 2023

POLONA PREŠEREN
PHOTO: PLANICA OC



FIS Nordic World Ski Championship
Planica 2023 will start with the
opening ceremony on 21 February
2023 and will last till 5 March.

The highly anticipated FIS Nordic World Ski Championship Planica 2023 will start with the opening ceremony on 21 February 2023 at 20.23 and will last for two weeks. On 5 March, the Championships will conclude with the men's 50 km cross-country skiing. During this time, 24 medal battles will take place in three disciplines.

The Planica Nordic Centre, an outstanding venue for ski jumping and flying, is also one of the most modern Nordic centres in Europe.

The organisers have been working for years to bring this great event in Nordic skiing to Slovenia, and next year Gornjesavska dolina will host the best Nordic skiers in the world. During the two weeks of competitions, we will see 12 final decisions in cross-country skiing, seven in ski jumping and five in Nordic combination. Also worth mentioning is the first ever mixed team Nordic combined competition at the World Championships.

All competitions will be held at the state-of-the-art venue in Planica, which boasts world-class facilities, ski jumping hills and cross-country skiing trails. Talks were also held to organise the women's and men's 30 km and 50 km cross-country races between neighbouring Tarvisio in Italy and Planica as the first cross-border events at the Nordic World Ski Championships, but for reasons of sustainability and reduced energy consumption, the decision was taken to hold all races at the venue in Planica.

Senior representatives of the International Ski Federation (FIS) have already visited the World Championships venue and carried out a final inspection.

The Planica OC team received a special mention from Michel Vion, Secretary General of the International Ski Federation FIS: "We are very pleased with the work done by Planica OC. The team is well prepared and all we need now is snow and cold." Enzo Smrekar, President of the Ski Association of Slovenia and Planica OC, said at the successful final inspection of the FIS that Slovenia has once again shown that it is able and capable of hosting sporting competitions at the highest level.

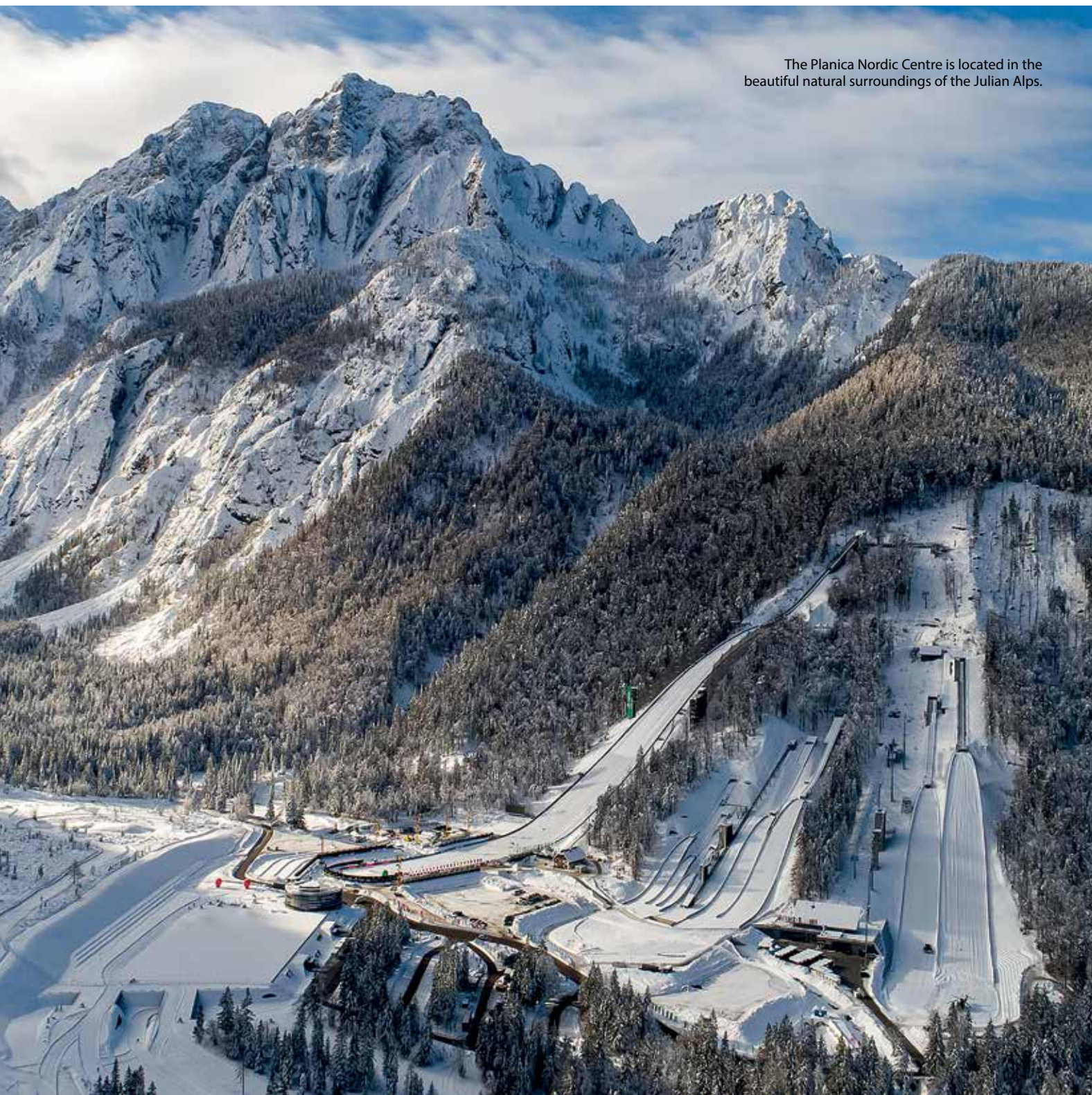
TICKETS ALREADY AVAILABLE

The Planica OC has carefully designed the World Championship programme together with the International Ski Federation. The competition day visit is designed so that visitors can see several sports in one day; even during the week they will not be deprived of sporting pleasures. Tickets for the Nordic spectacle are on sale now. Children up to 6 years old are admitted for free and children between 7 and 14 years old receive a 50% discount on tickets.

TEAM SLOVENIA

The Slovenian national teams are already preparing for their home championships, and so are the fans.

Many successful Slovenian athletes have already expressed their support for our Nordic skiers and wished all the competitors every success.



The Planica Nordic Centre is located in the beautiful natural surroundings of the Julian Alps.

Anže Kopitar, two-time Stanley Cup winner with the Los Angeles Kings, expressed his delight that Planica, the valley of Nordic skiing, is hosting the Nordic World Championship. Planica holds a special place in the life of Primož Roglič, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic time trial champion and three-time winner of the Tour of Spain: "When I was still jumping, it was in Planica that I won the Junior World Championship title in the team event with my team!"

Tadej Pogačar, two-time winner of the Tour de France, hopes to be able to see a race as he enjoys watching our sportsmen and women perform. "Competing at the World Championships is a special privilege and a reward for every athlete, and it is often a competition that you think about and prepare for over a long time," said Janja Garnbret, Olympic champion in sport climbing at Tokyo 2020.

You are all invited to visit the Nordic spectacle in Planica!



The organisers will award 12 prizes in cross-country skiing.



Ski jumping has an extraordinary tradition in Slovenia.

SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE IN SLOVENIA

We create excellent conditions for athletes

DANILO GOLOB



The Sports Centre Triglav Pokljuka is operational 365 days per year.
Photo: The Sports Centre Triglav Pokljuka archives

Slovenia may pride itself on numerous top-level results in various sports. What contributes to the successes of our athletes is also an excellent sports infrastructure.

The development of professional and recreational sports requires good sports infrastructure, both in terms of sports facilities and areas for outdoor sports. Many sports-related investment projects have been carried out in Slovenia. More than 90 football fields, fields for other sports, fitness trails, track and field facilities, swimming pools and ski jumping hills have been built or renovated. Several large sports centres have also been built, such as the Sports Centre Triglav Pokljuka, the Ljudski Vrt Sports and Tourism Centre in Maribor, the Kidričevo Sports Arena, the Podčetrtek Sports Arena, the Ravne Sports and Recreation and Tourist Park, the Stožice Stadium in Ljubljana, the Rogla Cross-Country Skiing Centre, the Bled Rowing Centre, Ljubljana Gymnastics Centre, Brdo Football Centre, Bonifika Sports Complex in Koper and the Podmežakla Sports Arena.

PLANICA NORDIC CENTRE

Standing out in particular among sports facilities is the Planica Nordic Centre, which is a modern sports complex intended for ski jumping, cross-country skiing and the Nordic combined. The backbone of the facility stretching on 100,000 m² are seven ski jumping hills and a ski flying hill. The centre also features a cross-country skiing stadium and a facility supporting cross-country skiing tracks. There is also a snowmaking system, a chairlift, a track and field and football stadium, cycling and walking paths, a cultural heritage park and an information centre with a restaurant, while quality tourist and sports services are also provided both in the summer and in the winter.

The Planica Nordic Centre is an example of sustainable construction located in the protected area of the Triglav National Park.

By incorporating sports facilities into the natural environment,

the centre is exceptionally sustainability-oriented, while also enabling year-round performance of sports activities with multi-functional facilities intended both for athletes and visitors.

FROM CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING TO BASKETBALL

Pokljuka is traditionally known as the home of Slovenian biathletes. The Sports Centre Triglav Pokljuka is intended for top-level and recreational athletes, as well as tourists who value pristine nature. The sports complex, standing at an altitude of 1,250-1,350 m, features a 1.5-km roller skiing track, a 6-km IBU and FIS approved cross-country skiing track (in winter), a biathlon shooting range with 30 electronic targets, air rifle targets and a 1,500 square metre tarmac surface for futsal and other team or group sports. There are also many forest trails and cross-country ski tracks of various levels of difficulty. More than 30 kilometres of regularly maintained cross-country skiing tracks connect various parts of the Pokljuka plateau.

In Ljubljana, the Stožice Arena is the right place for major sporting events.

The multi-purpose state-of-the-art event arena, which covers an area of 14,164 m², is the largest indoor arena in Slovenia, meeting all the requirements for major international competitions. Next to it is the Stožice Stadium, which was built at the same time as the arena.

The centre of sporting events in Koper is the Bonifika Sports Park. The facility, covering an area of 52,411 m², features a football stadium with stands, a large and a small football field with artificial grass and lighting, an auxiliary grass football field, 9 clay tennis courts, 4 hard surface tennis courts, a track and field stadium with an 8-lanes tartan track, long and high jump runways, a discus throw field, 2 outdoor futsal courts, 2 outdoor basketball

courts and a fitness trail, an outdoor gym and a children's playground. Part of the Bonifika Sports Park is the Bonifika Arena, an indoor sports arena that can accommodate 3,000 spectators. In 2013, the arena co-hosted the European Basketball Championship.

Measuring 12,782 m², the Ljudski Vrt Stadium in Maribor is the third largest football stadium in Slovenia. The sports complex fea-

tures a football field, stands and auxiliary facilities. It is intended for football matches and practice sessions as well as organised cultural events. Under the east stand there is a martial arts hall where judo, karate and aikido practice sessions are held, as well as a basketball, volleyball and badminton hall, which is mainly used by youth teams. Under the west stand there is a fencing facility and a gymnasium for the football academy. The stadium also features sports facilities for people with disabilities.



The Ljudski Vrt Stadium in Maribor is the third largest football stadium in Slovenia.
Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

There are two basketball courts in Celje (Mavs and Dončić) whose renovation was financed by the Dallas Mavericks basketball team, where Slovenia's Luka Dončić stars.

Good infrastructural conditions for top-level and recreational athletes have been provided in Slovenia over the past few decades. Future objectives are primarily focused on the efficient use of the network of sports facilities and its improvement, economical management of sports facilities, maintenance and modernisation of outdated ones, and utilisation of the natural resources of our country in accordance with sustainable development principles.

In Laško we have the Dragič Basketball Court – the first smart basketball court in Slovenia, sponsored by the brothers Goran and Zoran Dragič.



The basketball court in Celje, which is sponsored by the Dallas Mavericks basketball team.
Photo: Lili Pušnik/STA

EXERCISE IS IN US

Athletes from their very early days

DANILA GOLOB



Slovenia is very successful at actively encouraging young people to do sport.
Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info

Slovenes love their sport. This love of exercise, recreation and sporting achievement is also passed on to our children, who learn about a variety of physical pastimes first in kindergarten and then in school. Some of them commit to training in a particular sport even in their early years, which then steers their career path. Perhaps one of these young athletes is the next great climber or basketball player, the new Janja Garnbret or Luka Dončić?

The proximity to nature, the good public infrastructure and the multitude of sports facilities allow Slovenes to take part in a variety of sporting and recreational activities. Six out of ten people in Slovenia spend more than two and a half hours each week engaging in recreational sport, and four out of ten spend more than five hours a week doing some kind of sport.

ACTIVE IN KINDERGARTEN AND SCHOOL

Children in kindergarten have options such as swimming, hiking and dancing. They develop their motor skills in the *Mali sonček* (Little Sunshine) programme, which includes mountain hiking, skiing, gymnastics and many other sports. There is also a hiking programme called *Ciciban planinec* (Ciciban the Hiker). Primary school students take part in the *Zlati sonček* (Golden Sunshine) and *Mladi planinec* (Young Hiker) programmes. There is also the *Let's Learn to Swim* programme, and other sports programmes such as *Krpan* (Krpan) and *Hura za prosti čas* (Hurray for Free Time).

PE is a mandatory subject in primary and secondary schools, with each student getting an average of 4.46 teaching hours each week.

Schools also organise sports days, and schooling in nature, where students can ski, swim and hike.

A variety of extra-curricular sports are also available.

Slovenia is very successful at actively encouraging young people to do sport, and this is reflected in their mass participation in school sports competitions. According to figures from the Planica

National Institute of Sport, over 90,000 primary and secondary school students in Slovenia take part in such competitions, more than one in three in total.

Ever since 1987 we have been monitoring the physical fitness and motor development of children and teenagers in Slovenia who attend primary and secondary schools as part of the Sports Education Card programme, later augmented by the Moj SLOfit online app. This makes life-long monitoring of physical fitness and other connected data available to all.

YOUNG ATHLETES IN THE COMPANY OF THE BEST

Having achieved success outside the country, Slovenian sports stars act as a role model and valuable support for our young athletes. They encourage them in the belief that with persistence and courage they can become great athletes and achieve amazing results.

Each year young ice hockey players get the chance to learn a huge amount from Slovenian ice hockey icons.

This year saw Anže Kopitar and Tomaž Razingar host a training camp in Bled for children of all ages for the seventh consecutive year. The academy was attended by around 160 children aged 7 to 14, from nine different countries. There were 17 coaches running the training alongside Kopitar and Razingar.

Academy participants are given coaching exercises that their club colleagues see only rarely during the season. Top coaches



Young ice hockey players can train with the best at the academy.
Photo: Matej Mišič



The children's ice hockey academy welcomes young hockey players from various countries.
Photo: Matej Mišič

with a host of theoretical and practical knowledge guide the participants past all obstacles on the rink, while animators make sure that even free time is filled in the best way. The academy gives children a wealth of experience in all areas, not just sport. Because more and more participants from different countries are enrolling in the academy each year, the children learn about different cultures and forge new friendships, which makes the whole experience even richer.

BASKETBALL COURTS FOR THE YOUNG

In October of this year Celje welcomed two new basketball courts in the colours of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, the team of Slovenian basketball star Luka Dončić. The court next to the student dorm has been named Mavs, while the second court has been named Dončić. Mavs was the first court in Europe to be built by an NBA team, and was fully funded by the Texan club. The two courts are dedicated to the young basketball players of Celje.

Slovenian basketball star Goran Dragić opened his fourth court in Laško in September, having refurbished it as part of the Come and Play campaign.

He had previously refurbished courts in Ljubljana, Maribor and Novo mesto. The campaign to refurbish courts across Slovenia is being run by Goran Dragić's charity foundation. They make smart courts with info displays and links to the #podamdaigram app, on which you can see other court users, find teammates or opponents, access coaching content, and learn a variety of fun basketball games.

Laško also hosted a Goran Dragić basketball camp. Around 100 basketballers spent the whole week training and playing under the guidance of Goran Dragić and his team of top coaches.

EUROPEAN YOUTH OLYMPIC FESTIVAL IN MARIBOR

Maribor will host the European Youth Olympic Festival between 23 and 29 July 2023. The city with a great sporting heart will give an opportunity for athletes from fifty countries and visitors to come together in a unique event, to strengthen the values of fair play, friendship and tolerance.



The two new courts in Celje are dedicated to the city's young basketball players.
Photo: Lili Pušnik/STA

The Youth Olympic Festival has a tradition of more than thirty years, and is the biggest multi-sport event for athletes aged between 14 and 18. It involves more than 50 European countries, with approximately 3,600 participants in the summer games and approximately 1,600 participants in the winter games.

Slovenes enjoy their sport in stadiums, fields and courts, and in the stands. We are proud of our sports stars, and also of the younger generation whose time is yet to come.

We support our sports heroes, and wish them the best of luck.



Slovenian handball and 2022 European women's championship

JANI DRNOVŠEK
PHOTO: JURE MAKOVEC/STA



Slovenian team

Between 4 and 20 November of this year Celje and Ljubljana hosted the largest women's sports event in Slovenia since the country gained its independence, together with Skopje and Podgorica: the 15th European Women's Handball Championship.

HISTORY OF HANDBALL IN SLOVENIA AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TEAMS

The Handball Federation of Slovenia (RZS) was founded in 1949 as part of the Handball Federation of Yugoslavia. The biggest success for Slovenian handball during those times came in the 1979/80 season, when Ljubljana's Slovan took the men's national title, and then went on to reach the final of the European Champions Cup. Following Slovenia's independence, the RZS became a fully-fledged member of the EHF and the IHF (the European and international handball federations) in 1992. The first national championships in newly independent Slovenia were held in the 1991/92 season, when the men's title was taken by Celje Pivovarna Laško and the women's title by Belinka Olimpija. Slovenian clubs first participated in European cup competitions in the 1992/93 season.

Slovenia's women's team has appeared at seven European championships, and has finished between ninth and sixteenth in the placings.

Their best result came in 2004, when they came ninth in the championship held in Hungary. Slovenia have also appeared seven times at the world championship, finishing between eighth and nineteenth. The best performance came in 2003, with eighth place in Croatia. The national team have won one medal at major championships, taking bronze at the Mediterranean Games in 1997.

Slovenia's men's team have appeared at twelve European championships, placing between second (Slovenia in 2004) and twelfth



WOMEN'S EHF EURO 2022

SLOVENIA • NORTH MACEDONIA • MONTENEGRO
4–20 NOVEMBER

(Sweden in 2002). They have also appeared at nine world championships, with a best result of third in France in 2017, and a worst placing of eighteenth in Iceland in 1995. The men have also competed three times at the Olympics, taking eighth in Sydney 2000, eleventh in Athens 2004, and a best of sixth in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

WOMEN'S EHF EURO 2022

The European championship is the biggest women's sporting competition to have been held in independent Slovenia. For the first time at such a large sporting event in Slovenia, the organisers included a professional head of sustainable development along with his team. This brought a greater focus on protecting natural resources and the climate, on the wellbeing of the local community and society at large via the inclusion of local stakeholders, and on caring for the health and safety of championship spectators and participants.

The championship also promoted women's empowerment: a team of seventeen prominent women acted as championship ambassadors, encouraging the public to support the empowerment of women in sport and business, and their participation in politics and society.

The aim was to increase the number of active young female handballers and women's activity in general, which will also be an aim at next major international sporting event for women, the European basketball championships hosted by Slovenia and Israel in June 2023.

The European handball championship was hosted jointly by Slovenia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. A conference entitled Business Opportunities in Slovenia was also held in Ljubljana in the days leading up to the championship. This was part of an initiative run several times by the RZS under the slogan Slovenian business centre – I feel Slovenia, which aims to promote business ideas and design concepts, and opportunities for business cooperation between the hosts of the championship and any other countries that show an interest in this area. On this occasion the initiative focused on several areas of interest: fresh, innovative business ideas and models, contemporary approaches that emphasise the importance of sustainable development, women's empowerment in sport and society, and the promotion of Slovenia as an attractive destination for tourism.

The RZS organising committee, together with the EHF and the co-organisers, put together an engaging Europe-wide promotional campaign.

This included promoting the championship on social networks with the help of the anthem Play with Heart, written and performed by the championship's special ambassador, the singer Senidah. A video of the song on YouTube has been seen by more than half a million people.



The women have steadily been improving their game, and consolidated their position in the world of handball in recent years. Since 2016 they have participated in all European and World Championships, with competitions held each year on an alternating basis.

A vision for the future: sustainability and sport events

POLONA PREŠEREN
PHOTO: KOLEKTIFF IMAGES



The European Women's Handball Championship was the most sustainable championship ever held in Slovenia.

Sport plays an important role in society, in fact one of the most fundamental roles, going beyond physical activity and health care. The role of sport in society is much broader - sport enables people to engage and participate, improves quality of life, contributes to health, gives pleasure, is fun and transmits values such as hard work, tolerance, fairness and team spirit.

Sport plays an extremely important role in the field of integration and education and in raising awareness of various issues in society.

It can make a significant contribution in key areas of action and awareness-raising, such as sustainable development, the fight against climate change, future mobility, urban development and biodiversity conservation. With many major competitions, which certainly have an impact on the environment, there are many questions - from the ego, and how to preserve habitats, to how to ensure that our carbon footprint is minimised and how to guarantee that the generations after us also have access to nature, games and sport. Above all, the question of how sport can be a catalyst for progress towards a sustainable society has been raised more and more recently.

This is why the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in Slovenia has started to develop guidelines and recommendations on a sustainable approach to organising major sporting events in Slovenia.

Meanwhile, the organisers themselves in Slovenia have committed to a sustainable approach. We saw the beginnings of this at the Men's Volleyball World Championships, which took place in Slovenia in August and September, and the European Handball

Championships in November, which set high standards in the field of introducing sustainability into sporting events.

THE MOST SUSTAINABLE COMPETITION EVER

The European Women's Handball Championship was the most sustainable championship ever held in Slovenia. The organisers took a sustainable approach inspired by the Clean Win methodology of the environmental organisation Umanotera.



Electric buses were important part of the official transport fleet.

With carefully selected objectives, the organisers have prepared the ground for putting a number of measures into practice.

The experience of national and international institutions and experts in this field has been taken into account.

“We want to be different and set an example and make it easier for all future organisers to organise sustainable sport events. We

will continuously monitor the realisation of the set objectives and, if necessary, make any targeted changes,” said Dr Gašper Pavli, Head of Sustainability at Women’s EHF Euro 2022. This is the first ever championship to have a dedicated sustainability manager in the immediate organising committee. In this way, the organisers ensured that the focus was on the protection of natural resources and the climate, the well-being of the local community and society at large through the involvement of local stakeholders, and the health and safety of spectators and participants at the championships.



The organisers involved kindergartens and schools to take part in sustainability projects of the championship.

WHAT WAS THE APPROACH?

The organisers focused on social responsibility and engagement with the local community and paid close attention to gender equality. They introduced sustainability focuses in 12 areas relevant to the organisation and delivery of a sporting event, with 40 objectives identified and 100 activities planned to achieve them.

The organisers involved kindergartens and schools, local cultural and tourist attractions, included people with disabilities in event organisation, women’s inclusion and empowerment, reduced the number of emergency transports by 30 per cent, and provided official transports with electric and hybrid vehicles.

Visitors were encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport to reach the venues.

The organisers also tried to minimise waste, checking that waste could be reused and, if it could not be reused, ensuring that it was properly recycled. Old handball nets and cotton sports shirts were collected and donated to a partner, who sustainably processed them into material that will be turned into bracelets with a special symbolic value.

The championship tried to use as little energy and water as possible, using tap water, which is drinkable and of excellent quality everywhere in Slovenia.

They also took care to provide information and raise public awareness about everything. We are still awaiting the calculation of the multiplier effect of the Championships, which will certainly contribute to an integrated sustainable approach in the future.



Planting the trees was one of the sustainability activities.



The goal of the championship was to minimise waste and to ensure the proper recycling.

TINA MAZE

I've always wanted to make people happy

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

The best Slovenian skier of all times and a sportswoman was among those pushing the boundaries. And simply just Tina, who was never an unreachable celebrity, but has always respected her fans.

In her career, she has won in all five skiing disciplines: slalom, giant slalom, super giant slalom, downhill and the alpine combined.

She has won all three classes of Olympic medals and was selected the Best Slovenian Sportswoman of the Year six times.

Tina was breaking records in the 2012/2013 season. She retired in 2017.

IT'S A DELIGHT TO BE A WOMAN AND A MOTHER

New challenges awaited her. She says that it was often difficult to be a woman in sports, as top sport requires a great deal of explosiveness, aggression, dominance and leaves little space for the gentle way of life. She can be more feminine now and enjoy her family life while being a mother and a partner to her once top sportsman and coach Andrea Massi.

"I've always thought that motherhood was the greatest thing."

After ending her sports career, she had a daughter with her partner. "When we go on holiday, we play all sports: badminton, ball games etc." Sport is her way of life and the family spends their time actively outdoors. In addition to skiing, Tina also loved volleyball, which she still enjoys playing and was even considering it professionally after the end of her skiing career.

SHE SUCCESSFULLY UTILISES SPORTS KNOWLEDGE IN HER CAREER

As an athlete, she fostered strong working habits that help in her business career. She cooperates with various Slovenian and foreign companies. She tried being a writer, a singer, and an event hostess, but she

is particularly happy if she can share her knowledge as a sports commentator.

COUNTRY'S AMBASSADOR

Although Tina is no longer a professional athlete, that which brought her into sport remains.

As a primary school pupil, she watched numerous professional athletes in the Koroška region where she was born and grew up.

Her village, Črna na Koroškem, was also the home of the Alpine skiers Katjuša Pušnik and Mitja Kunc, ski jumpers Drago and Danilo Pudgar, and others.

"When I saw how much joy, enthusiasm and fun these athletes brought into our village, I wished that I could also make people happy." And she did. Tina was close to people, and they were close to her.

As she stood on the winner's podium, she showed pride, but also vulnerability, happiness, relief and excitement when the Slovenian flag was raised at the sound of the Slovenian anthem.

"We are lucky in Slovenia that there is plenty of investment in young people and that we have an excellent sport infrastructure. There are also many recreational athletes in Slovenia, and our homeland offers the ideal conditions for all



Charity evening of the Miroslav Cerar Foundation. The moderator of the event was Tina Maze. Photo: Bor Slana/STA



Opening of the renovated Athletic Stadium in Črna na Koroškem. Photographed: former President Borut Pahor, Tina Maze and mayor Romana Lesjak. Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA



After becoming the world's top female Alpine skier in 2013, when she scored a record points total to claim the FIS large crystal globe, Slovenia's Tina Maze underlined her status with two golds at Sochi 2014. Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

types of sports, including mountain climbing, cycling, diving in rivers and the sea, sailing, jogging, skiing and more. As a former top athlete, I practically travelled around the entire world and I can safely say that Slovenians can be proud of our sport education card (systematic monitoring of physical activity and endurance in primary schools) and the school syllabus that enables young people to try themselves in various sports, many of which are free, or their fees are minimal. To be involved in sports is part of our identity in Slovenia."

The Slovenian sports ambassador has a message for young people, "Enjoy sports, engage in sports, as sports make us happy. In general, I always say that everyone has to do what enriches them spiritually. I'm proud that I've been able to present our country to the world during my career and I continue to do so. We have a wonderful country and exceptional people and we should be proud of that."

Tina Maze was born in 1983 and has spent her childhood in Črna na Koroškem.

In the World Cup, Tina recorded 26 wins and was on the podium 81 times. She has won three crystal globes, two silver and two gold Olympic medals. In addition to other awards, she received the Medal of Merit of the Republic of Slovenia and the Golden Order of Merit for outstanding sporting achievements.

She now lives with her family in Gorizia.



As the ambassador of the 'I feel Slovenia' brand, Tina attended the event organised by the Government Communication Office as part of the promotional activities during the European Women's Handball Championship. Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Handball Championship characterised by women

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ
PHOTO: RZS

The conference ended with a round table that featured Marta Bon (on the right) and Deja Doler Ivanović (in the middle).



On 4 November, the day of the first win of the Slovenian women's handball team against Denmark in Celje, a three-day sports and business conference ended in Ljubljana, as part of the European Women's Handball Championship held in Slovenia, North Macedonia and Montenegro. The last day of the conference at the Grand Hotel Union focused on empowering women.

Women's empowerment is one of the main topics and an important pillar of this year's European Championship hosted in Ljubljana and Celje in Slovenia.

The theme of the third day of the sports and business conference was dedicated exclusively to the enhancement of women's role in all spheres of society from business to government, arts, culture and sports.

Female speakers sharing their personal and professional backgrounds emphasised the importance of fundamental values that highlight creativity, successful management and satisfaction as the right path to success and accomplishments.

"Women's empowerment has always been at the centre of my political agenda. As the first female Minister of Foreign Affairs, I also wish to manage a responsible feminist foreign policy. Women occupy almost half of middle and senior positions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and manage about 40 per cent of our embassies. We can be proud of this data, since it serves as a solid basis for long-term fulfilment of our foreign policy commitments in the field of gender equality," said Tanja Fajon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the event.

Katarina Karlovšek, Director of the RTA Agency and Ambassador of this year's European Championship, emphasised that determination and hard work, not only in business, but also in sports, are the right direction for attaining success and personal satisfaction.

"If I look around in my environment, the women surrounding me are very inspiring, strong, tough and have exceptional focus. I find this very important in our small political and national environment. I think there are a lot of women in Slovenia who are brave and know how to focus, persist and do good. Let us connect more, support each other more and make everyone from abroad see our inspiring Slovenia," said Živa Ploj Peršuh, the first Slovenian female conductor at the Slovenian National Opera and Ballet Theatre of Ljubljana.

Jerneja Jug Jerše, Head of the European Commission's Representation in Ljubljana, presented the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. The key objectives include the ending of gender-based violence, the challenging of gender stereotypes, the closing of gender gaps in the labour market, achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy, addressing of the gender pay and pension gaps, closing of the gender care gap, and achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics.

Hedvika Usenik, Member of the NLB Management Board, presented her role and experience as the first female management board member of the largest bank in Slovenia and pointed to the urgent support of corporations for sports and the hard work necessary to attain success.

The conference ended with a round table that featured Marta Bon, Professor at the Ljubljana Faculty of Sport and coordinator of female ambassadors of the 2022 European Championship, and Deja Doler Ivanović, Sports Director of the Krim Mercator Handball Club, who is also one of the championship's ambassadors. They both shared important stories from sports and their experience on how to succeed as a woman in professional life and sports.

What is women's empowerment?

What exactly does it stand for? Women's empowerment means enhancing women's rights to self-determination by changing social structures through political and legal changes. It is a challenge to be addressed at the level of a community and less at the level of an individual. Everyone should strive for a society that is based on equality and solidarity.

FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE

Opportunity for socialising, giving gifts and making each other happy

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ



Photo: Mostphotos

How great it is to spend holidays with our loved ones, spend time with the people we love, toast in the warm embrace of our home and bake *potica* or holiday biscuits. How exciting is the sound of wrapping paper with a bow on the present, the tinkling of twinkling lights and decorations on the Christmas tree. It is nice to know that someone is thinking of you when you open the letterbox.

Slovenians have many wonderful customs. Some have long traditions, while others are emerging anew. But we never get tired of this festive season. It is even better if there is snow to add to the festive spirit.

THE MERRY HOLIDAY MONTH BEGINS WITH TRADITIONAL RITUALS

In many towns and shop windows, lights are lit the end of November, when creative workshops for making Christmas cards and Advent wreaths are organised in schools, libraries and museums and the children start practising Christmas carols.

The first good man that the children are waiting for is St Nicolas, who traditionally brings symbolic gifts such as dried fruit, chocolate, candy and useful presents like gloves and caps.

On the feast day of St Barbara, Slovenians traditionally sow Christmas wheat and put the Advent wreath on the table on the first of the four Sundays before Christmas.

Old traditions also include the blessing of a home with incense and holy water, caroling, the blessing of horses on St Stephen's Day and a whipping day when the children can get back at parents and gently whip them with a hazel switch.

In addition to St Nicolas, Santa Claus and Father Frost also visit children in Slovenia.

LIGHTED HOMES AND SQUARES

It is a special challenge for children to decorate natural or artificial Christmas trees. Since festive December is a special time, decorations can also be special and personal, for example, old postcards, souvenirs reminding us of places we have visited, grandma's old decorations, homemade biscuits, etc.

Every Christmas tree tells its own story, even if we comply with colour trends or modern high-end decorations. White, gold and red are timeless colours.

It is also fitting that we think about the decorations from the sustainable aspect, but it is our free choice in the end.

GIFTS

Before toasting with sparkling wine at the rich festive table, let us think about the meaning of these holidays.

There is always an opportunity to think about those who are lonely and in need.

Happiness is the most wonderful part of this festive season. Let us make everyone smile and be happy. And Slovenians are generous.

Opening of the Christmas market and switching on festive lights in Ljubljana.
Photo: Katja Kodba/STA



St Nicolas procession in Ljubljana.
Photo: Anže Malovrh/STA



We enjoy socialising with a glass of mulled wine on festively decorated streets and at Christmas markets.
Photo: Matej Vranič/www.slovenia.info



Many local and foreign visitors travel to Mojstrana to admire the Live Nativity Scene.
Photo: Matej Vranič/www.slovenia.info



Potica is a traditional holiday dessert that is made in Slovenia on all important holidays, including the festive end of the year.
Photo: shutterstock.com

SLOVENIAN WINES ABROAD

A Slovenian who was born in Poland by mistake

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ
PHOTO: DUŠAN ARZENŠEK



Damian Buraczewski (on the left) with winemaker Žan Bric.

He came to Slovenia ten years ago, particularly for the climate. Sunshine and warm weather have always attracted him, as Poland was just too cold. When he decided to move, Slovenia was the only Slavic country in the EU with access to the sea. Pole Damian Buraczewski never felt a foreigner in Slovenia and people took him for their own. After one year, he already had a number of very good friends, so good that they even came to Poland to his wedding.

He says confidently that he has two homelands, Poland and Slovenia. He knew that it would be easier for him to live in a Slavic country because of the language and culture. After arriving in Slovenia, things were better than he anticipated.

He finds Slovenia truly beautiful. He likes the diversity of nature, which is not as boring as the endless Polish plains.

He lives in Vogrsko near Nova Gorica with his Polish wife and their two children. Damian comes from Bełchatów in central Poland. He holds a Master's degree in political sciences, but at heart, he is a photographer and a journalist.

WINE BLOG OF THE YEAR

He was impressed not only by the climate and people, but also by Slovenian wines. A desire arose to present Slovenian wine to the Polish people. He wanted them to get used to drinking wine instead of vodka and beer, and not just any wine, but good, high-quality wine. The easiest way to realise this idea was to start a blog, on which he has been writing about Slovenian wines and presenting them to his fellow countrymen for a number of years. His blog dedicated exclusively to Slovenian wines was even declared the wine blog of the year in Poland.

On his blog, SloVine, he writes in Polish about Slovenian wines. But not only about the wines.

He also writes about everything that excites him in Slovenia, including cultural heritage, natural sites, friendly and hospitable people, young Slovenian wine producers, etc.

At the Enoexpo wine trade fair in Krakow, which is the largest event of this kind in Poland, the most recognised Polish wine

magazine Czas Wina (Wine Time) presented awards for the best wine blogs of the past year and Damian's SloVine was named the Best Wine Blog of 2019. But he does not rest on his laurels.

He wishes to attain greater recognition of Slovenia as a wine country in Poland, where it is still not sufficiently known, but he is happy that the interest of the Polish wine industry and buyers is increasing. This was certainly confirmed by the jury's citation for the best blog award, which stated that the blog is revealing a new and excellent wine destination to the Polish people. The title the blog received was very resonant in the Polish wine industry and made him a leading ambassador of Slovenian wine and cuisine in Poland.

Damian recently hosted Polish journalists and bloggers and took them on a wine and culinary exploration of the Slovenian Istria.

What does he miss the most, and what would help him in the promotion of wine in Poland? What he misses the most is a central institution, similar to the one in Austria. An organisation that would centrally represent Slovenian wine producers in foreign markets. That would be of great help. He is pleased that the wine culture in Poland, which only started to develop not so long ago, has improved significantly in recent years. It is to his great satisfaction that he has contributed to the visibility of Slovenian wines in Poland. The Polish importers he has brought to Slovenia are already showcasing Slovenian wines in their stores or supplying the best restaurants and hotels in Poland. The sales market is growing, which is great news for all wine-producing countries, although the competition is fierce. Damian represents eight Slovenian wine makers and introduces them in Poland as coming from a country of good boutique wine makers who are ecologically conscious and make wines that can easily compete with the best in the world.

Compared to large Western European countries, Poland is a small wine importer. However, it is the largest wine importer in Central and East Europe, importing wine of a total worth of EUR 212 million in 2015, which reveals an average annual increase of 1.7 per cent since 2011. As there is no significant national wine production in Poland, the wine consumption mostly consists of imported wines.



YELKA

A Christmas tree made of Slovenian wood

DANILO GOLOB
PHOTO: HELLO YELLOW HOUSE ARCHIVES

The modern, sustainable, and environment-friendly Yelka.

Slovenian designers from the Hello Yellow House studio have created a very special Christmas tree. The Yelka is made of Slovenian wood, and is modern, sustainable, and environment-friendly.

Hello Yellow House is home to two architects, Tinca Furlan and Evgen de Gleria, and graphic designer Uroš de Gleria, who together want to turn their love of wood and sophisticated design into something practical, high-quality and reasonably priced. The idea of the Yelka was born when Tinca and Evgen were unable to find a suitable Christmas tree for their home, namely sustainable, minimalist, not made of plastic, with minimal packaging, and no fear that it might be knocked over at any moment by a child or pet. They could not find any tree to suit their needs, and therefore decided to make it themselves, and were joined in this by Uroš, Evgen's brother.

The team pooled their knowledge and passion for wood, design and innovation to create The Perfect One.

It leaves no needles, it is sustainable and 100% kind to the environment, and furthermore it looks beautiful. The Yelka was also showcased on Kickstarter, with the campaign ending in success in 2018, since when they have launched production of Yelkas each year.

THE PERFECT TREE FOR ANY HOME

The Yelka is made of solid wood treated with an environment-friendly wood oil. Three types of wood are available (walnut, medium-light oak, and light maple), in three different sizes (150 cm, 100 cm and 75 cm). The feet are made of metal for the sake of stability, spray painted using a method that does not harm the environment. The stand comes in black and white. The product contains no dangerous small parts, and is child- and pet-friendly. The packaging is designed to be reused.

Putting up the Yelka is simple. The wooden "branches" can be arranged into the desired form on the metal base.

It also suits smaller spaces, and can be fitted tightly against a wall.

Created with a long lifespan in mind, this innovative Christmas tree can be used year after year, and can be put up as you like, limited only by your own creativity.

This is Slovenia

DANILA GOLOB

Capital city: Ljubljana

Language: Slovenian; in nationally mixed areas, Italian and Hungarian as well

Surface area: 20,271 km²

Population: 2,108,732 (1 July 2022)

Currency: euro

Length of the coast: 47 km

Highest peak: Triglav (2,864 m)

The largest lake: Cerknica lake (26 km²)

The longest river: The River Sava (221 km)

The longest subterranean cave: Postojna Cave (19.5 km)

Largest protected area of nature: Triglav National Park (83,982 ha)

26 December 1990: official proclamation of the results of the plebiscite held three days earlier in which 88.5% of all Slovenian voters vote for an independent and sovereign Slovenian state.

25 June 1991: Slovenia became an independent and sovereign state.



Slovenia is the third most forested country in Europe, as **60 per cent of its territory is covered by forests**.

Slovenia boasts almost **10,000 kilometres of mountain trails** and a **1,200-kilometre transversal**.

In terms of the number of water sources, Slovenia is among the richest in Europe. The total length of all surface **watercourses** in Slovenia is almost **27,000 kilometres**.

The valley of the emerald green **Soča River** is the one of **the most beautiful and best preserved Alpine rivers in Europe**.

Ljubljana is the green capital of a green country. The image of the town next to the Ljubljanica River with picturesque bridges and a marketplace was designed by the famous **architect Jože Plečnik**.

In Slovenia, there are **355 Natura 2000 sites**, of which 324 sites were determined on the basis of the Habitats Directive, and 31 sites on the basis of the Birds Directive. These sites cover just over 37 per cent of the country's territory.

Some **22,000 animal and 3,500 plant species** live in Slovenia; more than 2,000 of these are on the red list (of endangered plant and animal species), and more than 800 animal and 300 plant species are protected.

We are proud of the **Carniolan honeybee** – *Apis mellifera carnica*, a native Slovenian bee, which is considered to be one of the most widespread honeybees in the world. At the initiative of Slovenia, which is aware of the exceptional role and mission of bees, **20 May** has been declared **World Bee Day**.

Our **karst caves** are home to the largest cave animal in the world – *proteus anguinus*, or **olm**.

Slovenia is home to the world-famous **Lipizzaner horses**, which is considered to be one of the oldest cultural horse breeds in the world.

The oldest wheel with an axle in the world is **5200 years old** and it was discovered in the **Ljubljana Marshes**.

Kurents are typical **Carnival character** from Ptuj, the Drava Field and the surrounding area, and during Carnival Kurent perform at traditional *kurentovanje* celebrations.

Skiing on the Bloke plateau was reported as early as in 1689 by J. V. Valvasor in his work titled The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola, so the **people of Bloke** are considered to be **the oldest skiers in central Europe**.

The Škofja Loka Passion Play has been **inscribed on UNESCO's List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**. It is also the oldest preserved European director's book.

The Neanderthal Flute is **the oldest instrument in the world** and visitors can see it at the National Museum in Ljubljana.

In Maribor **the oldest vine in the world** can be found. It is more than 400 years old.

Potica ranks first among **Slovenian traditional festive dishes**.





Kindergartens, primary schools and other institutions participate in the **Traditional Slovenian Breakfast** project. On this day, traditional breakfast foods such as honey, butter, milk, bread, apples or other fresh and dried fruit of local or Slovenian origin are served.

Slovenians are among the **top winners of Olympic medals per capita** and winners of numerous World Championships medals.

Sport is in our nature and this has been recognised by the state, which declared **23 September the Slovenian Sport Day**.

Slovenian scientists are both pioneers and leading researchers in the field of **artificial intelligence**.

Peter Florjančič was one of Slovenia's most **famous inventors**. His signature can be found on approximately **400 patents**, of which 41 have been realised.



Welcome to Slovenia

Magic words: I'm sorry (oprostite), **please** (prosim) and **thank you** (hvala)

Hello! Živijo!

Welcome! Dobrodošel!

Good Morning Dobro jutro

Good Afternoon Dober dan

Good Evening Dober večer

Good Night Lahko noč

Goodbye Nasvidenje

How are you? Kako gre?

I'm fine, thank you! Dobro, hvala!

My name is... Ime mi je...

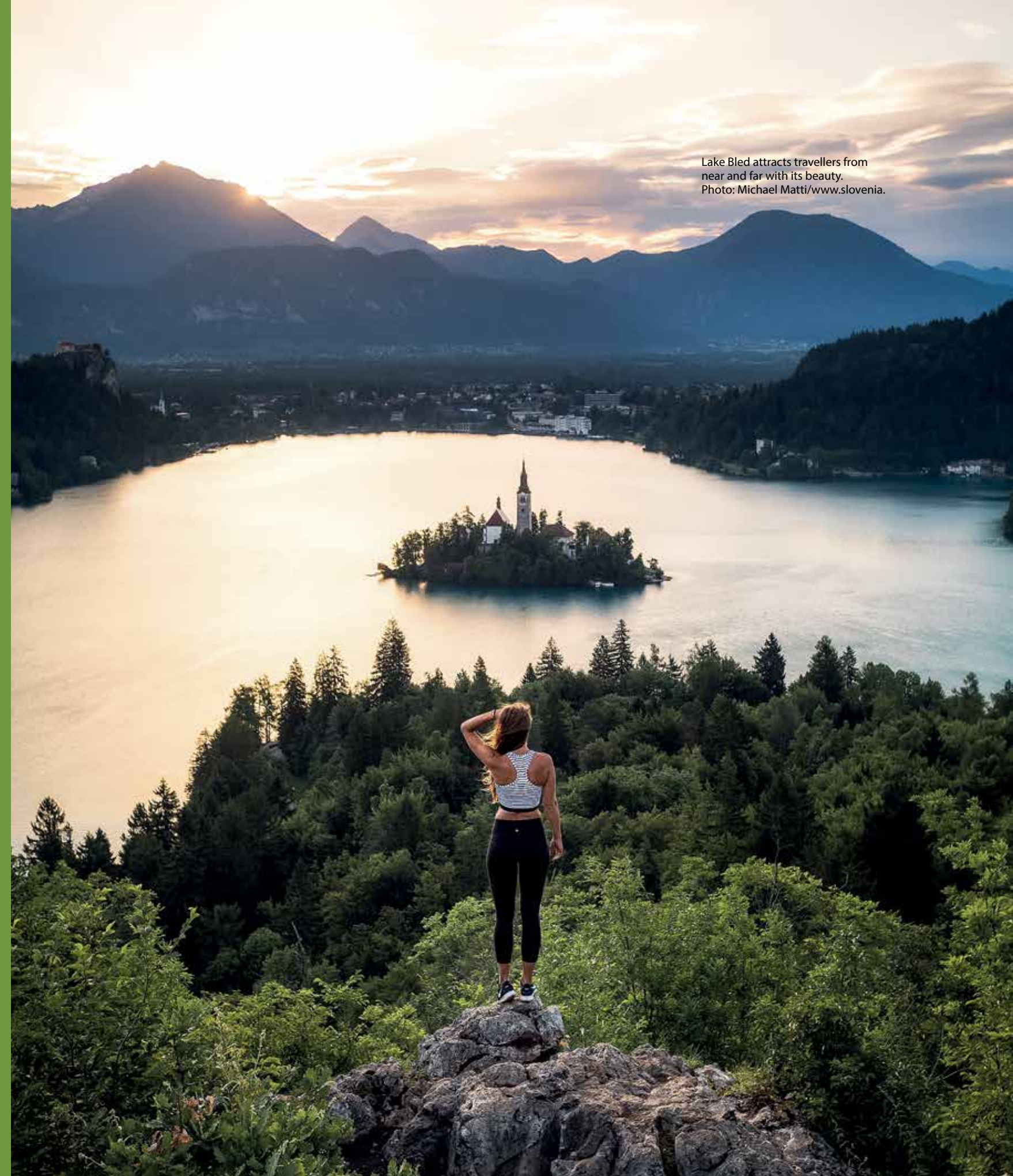
My surname is... Pišem se...

Where are you from? Od kod si? (singular & informal) Od kod ste? (plural & formal)

What do you do? Kaj si po poklicu? (singular & informal) Kaj ste po poklicu? (plural & formal)

ŽIVIJO!

Lake Bled attracts travellers from near and far with its beauty.
Photo: Michael Matti/www.slovenia.



Learn something new about Slovenia!

slovenia.si



HISTORY

World's oldest wheel found in Slovenia



TRADITION

Kurent - Traditional Slovenian Carnival character



LANGUAGE

Dialects enrich the Slovenian language



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Slovenian regions



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Extraordinary Slovenian women



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What are Slovenians like?



ART

Stories from beehive panel



HISTORY

The Neanderthal flute from Divje babe



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Some interesting facts about Slovenia

