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The latest from Slovenia

Slovenia's public spending is too high

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- OUR EXCELLENCE: **Riko** • SPORTS: **Following the path of the hockey superpowers**
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editorial



Vesna Žarkovič, Editor

Balanced Budget

Unfortunately, the Government's austerity measures have also affected our magazine, which from now on will be issued every second month. With various austerity and adjustment measures, the Government plans to save up to 818 million euro, and almost 949 million in 2013. 'Slovenia is not in danger of bankruptcy yet; however, should we fail to show decisiveness and the ability to implement these measures, EU penalties might quickly pose a threat to us. By implementing austerity measures, we would like to avoid that,' cautions Janez Šuštaršič, the Minister of Finance, in this month's interview.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's membership of the United Nations this month, we look back on two decades of Slovenia's success, in which the country has been a model to nations aspiring to build peaceful, democratic and prosperous societies.

In the present harsh times, we are delighted that Riko, a successful Slovenian company, is planning to build a multi-purpose complex in the centre of Minsk, the capital of Belarus: the five-star Kempinski Hotel and 81 apartments and offices. The construction of the hotel is valued at EUR 57 million, while the cost of the entire complex is estimated at over EUR 100 million.

World Cleanup 2012 was the largest volunteer environmental campaign in history. The global initiative started on 24 March in Slovenia and Portugal. More than 270,000 volunteers joined the largest all-Slovenian clean-up campaign, Let's Clean Slovenia, and collected about 5,000 tonnes of waste from 8,000 illegal waste dumps. This was the proof that we can be active citizens and a responsible society.

Slovenian sportsmen also provided some inspiring moments in the last two months, which saw numerous medals and victories. This year, our ski jumpers passed five important milestones: at the World Championship in Vikersund, Robert Kranjec became the first Slovenian World Champion in ski-flying, and the Slovenian team won the bronze medal in ski-flying. The ski jumpers also made history at the Ski Jumping World Cup in the team competition in Oberstdorf, where Prevc, Kranjec, Tepeš and Šinkovec collected a record total of points at the end of season in the Nations Cup, and also won the first Slovenian team victory in Planica at the ski jump constructed by the brothers Vlado and Janez Gorišek. Planica is Slovenia's candidate for the organisation of the Nordic World Ski Championship in 2017. At the World Championship in Ruhpolding, Germany, Slovenian biathlete Jakov Fak won the gold medal in the 20-kilometre race. The sporting news between 15 and 21 April was dominated by the Slovenian hockey aces, that beat all comers at the World Championship Division I Group A, and their appearance among the elite in 2013 was well-deserved.

The first quarter of Maribor's year as the European Capital of Culture has already passed. Everything that is happening in Maribor and its partner cities of Ptuj, Slovenj Gradec, Novo Mesto and Murska Sobota is considerably more than we could have hoped for after all the difficult preparations and given the financial drought caused by the current crisis. However, claims that what is most important to culture is not whether events happen in gleaming new halls or known venues that the organisers used to adapt to the circumstances, are constantly being confirmed. Considering the actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant 'Pri Lojzetu' at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with the latter, they perhaps would not even have been noticed; what is most important is exceptional realisation. Ideas alone are not enough, only the entire concept and its realisation count, and that is what distinguishes such people from the rest.



Anže Logar, Director of the Government Communication Office

NEW GOVERNMENT – BACK TO THE FUTURE

At this moment, Slovenia can take no pride in its economic indicators. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia has stated that the country has lapsed into recession, while the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development has forecast development potential to be at one per cent of annual growth of GDP, with a record 6.4 per cent budget deficit in 2011.

Being aware of the seriousness of the situation, the new Government led by Janez Janša presented the strategic priorities of its actions in the first month of its leadership. They attempted to resolve the crisis gradually; first, by preparing an integrated package of actions to balance public finance. They prepared a draft supplementary budget, which sets the upper limit for the budget deficit to 3 per cent of GDP and anticipates the rationalisation of the public administration, and also an amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia with the addition of the fiscal rule from Article 3 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. Parliament ratified the Treaty on 18 April, making Slovenia the second EU Member State to include it in national legislation.

At the same time, the Government engaged in social dialogue. The discussions began with a verification of the starting points for a new social contract for 2012–2016 under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, which has been preparing the contents and the text of the basic social contract with employers and trade unions.

Despite rigorous measures and iron discipline in the field of

public finance, the new Government will assign 150 million euros for tax relief to improve development potential in 2012, mainly by abolishing superfluous administrative burdens, reducing some taxes, and by relief for investment in research and development. These are key commitments from the coalition agreement which are intended to give a boost to the economy.

Numerous reforms await the Government in the next phase. From labour reform ensuring flexicurity and health reform to keep the health budget sustainable, to pension scheme reform, the purpose of which is to fairly distribute the burden of the aging population.

When the Government took office, they promised to focus on the goals in the coalition agreement. With 12 instead of 18 ministers, the current government is substantially more agile, responsive and unified. Together with the Prime Minister, who distinguished himself with a successful presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2008, the government team has the firm intention of bringing Slovenia back to the path of a growing, development-oriented and real world-oriented economy that is open to foreign investments.

Government meets with trade unions and employers for the first time

At the extended meeting of the Economic and Social Council at Brdo pri Kranju, the social partners have begun negotiations for the conclusion of the Social Contract 2012–2017. The contract is to define the key steps that need to be taken by Slovenia to exit the crisis and implement the structural changes necessary to meet the objectives set – particularly the well-being of the people.





On 27 February 2012 the Government briefed the social partners on the country's macroeconomic and fiscal status. "In the revised national budget, public spending will have to be reduced by approximately EUR 800 million," explained Prime Minister Janez Janša, who also said that he is open to proposals from social and other political partners on issues related to fiscal consolidation and structural changes. The first step will be to define the contents of the social contract for the period up to 2015, which the Government would like to adopt before 20 June 2012. The document will contain the points on which all the social actors agree concerning the key development challenges and anti-crisis measures that need to be taken; going forward, it will also include a decision on the possible course of structural changes. Prime Minister Janša reiterated his invitation to the opposition parties to participate. "The greater the level of consent and the degree of understanding in society, the more successful we will be in resolving the problems we face," said the Prime Minister, adding that "the current economic crisis, which has hit

Slovenia badly, shows no signs of abating – quite the opposite, in fact, as the EU faces recession. In the future we will be confronted with the unenviable task of not only saving our own country, but other countries too, as we are part of the European area."

The Minister of Finance, Janez Šušteršič, presented the bases for the revised budget underlining the fact that, in terms of the country's economic capacity, this year's budget revenue must not exceed EUR 8 billion, while the upper ceiling of budget expenditure will be below EUR 9 billion (EUR 9.4 billion last year). The revised budget is expected to be adopted by the National Assembly in April, and the Minister of Finance will then present the first package of tax measures. The Government intends to exercise fiscal prudence, and Mr Šušteršič believes that savings can be made in material costs and public procurement. Ministers have already begun reviewing their budgets in order to establish whether all the programmes currently being implemented are actually necessary and yielding appropriate results.

"The goals of the contract reflect the values of freedom,

justice, work, responsibility and solidarity," assured the Prime Minister, proposing that a firm fiscal framework be defined and an agreement reached on an effective and efficient public administration and sustainable economic development. Other areas covered by the contract will be the labour market and employment, pay policy and knowledge as the basis for development and a social policy tailored to people's needs.

The Prime Minister also proposed an agreement on the way in which the social contract is formulated. "We want the contents to be agreed upon as soon as possible," he stressed, suggesting that the relationship should be founded on equality from the very start. He further proposed a period of fourteen days during which all social partners will be able to prepare and submit comments and proposals to the contract.

The working party prepared a draft document containing alternative solutions within seven days. The coordination procedures should be completed by no later than 20 June, as the Intervention Act applies only until the end of that month.

EMPLOYERS SHOW MODERATE SATISFACTION, TRADE UNIONS LESS CONVINCED

Milan Lukič – *President of the Association of Employers of Slovenia:* "The proposed contents presented today are mostly in line with those prepared by employers. We cannot but agree with the assessment of the situation prepared by the Government. We would like, however, to highlight the extreme structural discrepancy between the loss of employment in the real sector and the increased number of public servants, retired people and the unemployed. Our association will certainly endorse the postulates and will endeavour to start negotiations with social partners as soon as possible. There will certainly be substantial differences in the approach to the preparation of specific structural measures. The real sector of the economy has already paid the highest price. If we want to resolve the current situation, this will not be possible without touching the public sector, but we propose to do this not just by cutting jobs or salaries, but by looking for professionals who are capable of effectively managing their sectors, much in the same way as in companies. It is vital that the public sector evolves into an efficient service."

Tatjana Čerin – *Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia:* "The proposed contents of the social contract are correct, and the macroeconomic and social picture is realistic. For the past three years we have been asking the Government to act and to implement structural reforms, to no avail; it is now high time that things change. In the same period the budget revisions were mostly intended to calm social tensions; however, I disagree that the crisis only affected workers; let me remind you of how many companies were declared bankrupt and wound up. The fact is that it is necessary to ease the burden on Slovenia's entrepreneurs, create new jobs, generate higher added value and raise productivity."



Dušan Semolič – *President of the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia:* "The road to getting the contract signed will be rough. It is essential to understand who caused the crisis; if not, we will not be able to prevent it from returning. Structural reforms should be implemented in the financial institutions that created the crisis, but the entire burden is instead shouldered by the social state and the workers. I sincerely hope that negotiations will result in the contract being signed. I think that 20 June is a realistic time limit for the adoption of the contract; hopefully the revised budget, which is scheduled for April, will not be decided upon without dialogue".

Semolič argues that wages are not the enemy of the economy, and that without wage increases and strengthening labour rights there can be no exit from the crisis, but only "a downward spiral that will destroy everything".

"In the process of coordinating the budget there are no rapid solutions," he said, highlighting the need to focus on the revenue side of the budget, uncollected taxes, and issues regarding public procurement, the grey economy and poor

payment discipline. He proposes the introduction of a financial transaction tax and an extension of the progressive tax. He believes that restarting the economy is the key solution. "The question is not whether we support the lay-off of workers or lower wages. The real question is what to do to create quality new jobs and stimulate economic growth."

Branimir Štrukelj – *Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions of Slovenia:* "The question as to what will happen to the welfare state in Slovenia has not been adequately answered. We would like to know whether this means a tacit consent for a permanent reduction of the welfare state; if so, it is necessary to define in the social contract the how, the who and the when of the participation in the positive effects, when we are finally out of the abyss. Our confederation will participate in the talks without prejudice and a priori opinions. But we expect the Government to keep its promises. We therefore propose that the proposed contents of the social contract include the statement signed last December by the political parties concerning the agreement on the Intervention Act. We

consider this to be an important guarantee that there will be no unilateral intervention in the status of the employed, the retired and other demographics. Further, let me point out that the number of people employed in the public sector is growing in all developed European countries, while layoffs in this sector were seen mostly in East European countries."

Igor Antauer, *Secretary-General of the Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business of Slovenia* said that the proposed contents of the social contract, in his opinion, did not sufficiently emphasise the role to be played by the rule of law and legal security. Janez Posedi,



President of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovenia (PERGAM) also favoured the inclusion of the judicial branch of power in the contract, and advocated that representatives of agronomy, which is an important part of the Slovenian economy, should be invited to participate in the contract.

At the end of the meeting, Prime Minister Janez Janša replied to the concerns expressed. With regard to the public sector, he pointed out that some European countries which had experienced a similar, or even smaller, reduction in GDP than Slovenia reduced their public sectors by 10%, 15% or even more. He added that the same reduction was also applied to public servant's salaries in some countries. In this respect he quoted the case of Germany, which concluded 2011 with growth of more than 3%, but nevertheless decided to reduce salaries in the public sector by 2.5%. In Slovenia, the number of civil servants grew by 4.4% between 2008 and 2010. He considers it unusual that at the same time the economy lost 50,000 jobs, the public sector increased by 8,000 jobs, while the Government "did not undertake any commitments justifying such increase". The Prime Minister considers the reduction of the public sector to be necessary, as without this step no serious structural adaptation to the situation is feasible, but adds that the Government will try to do it as gently as possible.

Slovenia's membership of the United Nations: Marking two decades of success and looking ahead



As we mark the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's membership of the United Nations this month, we look back on two decades of a country's success, in which Slovenia has been a model to nations aspiring to build peaceful, democratic and prosperous societies. Indeed, it has been a particularly esteemed and respected member of the global community, and a strong and dedicated contributor to advancing the work of the United Nations. This commitment to the United Nations is embodied at the highest level of Government by Slovenia's President Danilo Türk, who was the country's very first Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

More than ever before, the members of the United Nations are faced with challenges that underline the essential relevance of this Organization and the multilateralism it embodies.

The dimensions within our world are changing. Technology has diminished physical distance, moving us more closely together. But the divisions of inequity too have become greater. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro from 20 to 22 June this year, will be a clear testament of the need to work together and an historic opportunity to bring about real change by setting a new development agenda and galvanizing progress towards a sustainable future.

The spectrum of the Organization's roles in promoting international peace and security is expanding. Human Rights today is an integral priority of the United Nations, Peacekeeping, initially not mentioned in the United Nations Charter, is today a flagship activity of the Organization, with an unprecedented

120,000 peacekeepers deployed to help conflict-torn societies around the world today.

As Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna, I am heading one of four United Nations headquarters worldwide—and the one closest to Slovenia—but also a hub of very key parts of the United Nations family that play a central role in the United Nations agenda to secure the global goods of development, peace and security and human rights.

Transnational organized crime and the illicit drug trade undermine security and can evolve into major threats to stability, human rights and development. No government can face these multinational criminal networks without international cooperation.

Energy is central to eliminating poverty and a pivotal role is played by the Vienna-based members of the UN family in this field.

Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, also key components of the United Nations work in Vienna, are not lofty ideals, but central to

achieving international peace and security.

There are also less well-known aspects to the work of the United Nations in Vienna that provide a critical contribution to our global agenda and indeed to our daily lives. These include setting standards that facilitate international trade, or the work of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs that makes the benefits of space technology available to developing nations, for uses including sustainable development, natural resource management, disaster mitigation and communications.

The late UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said: "The UN is not just a product of do-gooders. It is harshly real. The day will come when men will see the UN and what it means clearly... When people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird Picasso abstraction, and see it as a drawing they made themselves".

A central component of promoting public ownership and responsibility for the United Nations is to engage

the young generation. There are more young people in the world today than ever before. Our job is to listen to them and to meet their expectations.

It is therefore particularly encouraging that, to mark the twentieth anniversary of the country's UN membership, the Government of Slovenia has chosen to publish an information resource for teachers and pupils on the work of the United Nations, in cooperation with the United Nations Information Service Vienna, with a corresponding web portal in Slovene language for teachers and young people.

Twenty years from now, both Slovenia and the world will have undergone changes that today are impossible to predict. The past twenty years have confirmed, however, what the country's Government foresaw when it undertook to become a member of the United Nations: that the United Nations is the right vehicle to navigate challenges, so that, over the upcoming two decades, we can leave today's children and young people a world worth living in.

Vesna Žarkovič
Photo: STA

JANEZ ŠUŠTERŠIČ:

SLOVENIA'S PUBLIC SPENDING IS TOO HIGH



“Slovenia has not been threatened with bankruptcy yet, but it is true that – unless we ourselves show determination and ability to take the necessary measures – we may very soon be facing restrictive measures imposed by the EU. We would like to avoid this by introducing aus-

terity measures. The level of public spending in Slovenia is too high. Public spending should immediately be adjusted to real abilities and now is the opportunity to do so through the measures proposed,” stressed the new Government’s Minister of Finance.

There’s a difficult term of office ahead of you. How do you feel in the role of the finance minister in a period of recession?

It is demanding indeed, but the term must be run until its end.

The most important objective in your term of office is...

... a balanced budget.

For this reason, public expenditure is to be reduced by ten percent – this is EUR 800 million. What will the revised budget bring about? How do you plan to make it feasible?

The Ministry of Finance presented a range of measures for balancing the public finances and an explanation to the trade unions that these were the starting points of the Government. This year, the deficit should be reduced by 3% of GDP. In the past years, the deficit was high and it became increasingly difficult to finance it; the results were not satisfactory – neither in the sphere of economic growth nor in the field of employment. Consequently, the Government is sending to the National Assembly a proposal for the revised budget which would reduce the spending by more than one billion euros, thus allowing the reduction of the budget deficit to three percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Expenditure may not exceed EUR 9 billion, which is

approximately EUR 800 million less than the figure for 2011. Of this, a quarter of savings are to be yielded through a linear reduction of public sector wages by 10% as of 1 July, while simultaneously making the third step, which is the elimination of wage disparities.

What do measures in this field include?

The abolishment or merging of public institutions and agencies, the reduction of rates of daily allowance and mileage, the reduction of price standards for medical technical devices, the reduction of transfers to municipalities, the streamlining of public service activities, the postponement of payment to the Slovenian Railways and the reduction of allowance payable to deputies and changes to norms in kindergartens. The public sector savings are expected to amount to EUR 402 million this year, EUR 408 million next year; of this, the reduction of public sector wages should yield EUR 317 million this year, and EUR 262 million next year. As regards investments, subsidies and programmes, the Government expects to save approximately EUR 150 million per year, mainly on account of reducing subsidies to the economic sector. Furthermore, the reduction of an annual grant to pensioners has been envisaged, where the savings are expected to amount to over EUR 60 million per year; the

cost-saving measures will also apply to payments for kindergarten, school meals, subsidies to students for monthly transportation pass, etc. These are, of course, only the starting points, the budget revision is still open to negotiations with the trade unions.

The latest development is the incorporation of the golden fiscal rule into the Constitution. What does it provide for?

The constitutional rule will regulate the balancing of the budget in such a way that all details concerning the steps to be taken during the recession will be laid down in a special law to be adopted by a two-thirds majority vote. The new article in the Constitution should then be swiftly adopted, which should then be followed by the adoption of the law with a clear framework as to how fiscal policy is to be conducted. Our goal will be to reduce the budget deficit to a level of 3% of GDP. If the economic conditions are favourable, the deficit can be eliminated by the end of this term of office. Failing this, the rule allows for a certain deficit during a recession, but not as high as is currently the case.

The trade unions stress that the measures will rigorously shrink the welfare state and have already organised a general strike. The measures are opposed by the opposition

party reproaching the Government for not doing enough to increase budget revenues. They suggest increasing the highest rate of VAT by two percentage points. What stance do you expect the trade unions to take?

We expect them to understand the seriousness of the situation we face and provide their proposals for better solutions, but I certainly do not expect our proposals to be rejected out of hand.

You would like to reduce the burden on the economy by up to EUR 200 million and for budget revenues to decrease to the same extent. Will economic growth be stronger as a result?

It is a relief in the amount of EUR 150 million per year and a set of amendments which should boost the economy: firstly, a 40% increase in tax relief on investments and the lower level to be increased to EUR 60,000; and, secondly, an increase in tax reliefs on research and development investments for commercial companies and sole proprietors. The third measure is designed to reduce the corporate tax rate to 18% and then by one percentage point each year up to 15%, while the objective of the final measure is to shift the lower limit of personal income tax bracket 41 to 1.5 times the average wage. All measures should start to apply during the year. They will have an immediate effect on the economy, invest-



ments and employment or the household consumption. Without doubt, these are stimulating measures for the economy. We do not have estimates of how this will influence the economy, but it is undoubtedly a positive set of measures.

Have you set any limit to which public spending can be reduced?

To the level of revenues if we are to conclude this term of office without a deficit.

Where will you look for investors in NLB? You have pointed out that the recapitalisation of banks through private capital is one of the key measures required to overcome the current crisis.

On the basis of the sectoral strategy adopted, the Government took decisions in two important areas. The first decision refers to the state's stake in NLB, which is to be reduced to 25% and one share, which means that room is given to new investors to recapitalise the bank; the second decision authorises our ministry to form a negotiating team. Thus far, the team has met twice and prepared starting points, which are to be presented to potential investors. Some have already expressed initial interest. The investor who enters as the owner will want to have certain rights, but the state will, of course, look to protect its 25% stake. Some matters also still need to be settled with regard to the bank management system.

You have also announced a better control of the shadow economy. How can this contribute towards increasing tax revenues?

Improved control of the shadow economy could bring savings of between 10–25% of GDP. According to certain calculations, the savings could amount to EUR 200 million, maybe even twice that figure. We will establish a working group which, together with the representatives of the economy, will examine the economic measures proposed; however,

there are no measures that will bring results overnight. The emphasis therefore is on tax simplifications, a more favourable tax environment and better control. We intend to carry out some of the ideas put forward by the previous Government, such as reassigning customs officers who will now be less engaged in the field of shadow economy. I do not expect sweeping changes to happen overnight. It is a process in which the mentality of people has to change. Therefore, I do not count on any additional revenues or some new resources. When this is received, everything will be much easier. If we succeed, in two year's time the level of public spending will be reduced to a lesser extent.

How do you intend to convince the international community that Slovenia is a credible partner for foreign investors?

I know that people living abroad who are interested in Slovenia are well aware of what is happening; they see changes when they take place. NLB will be an important test as to whether we are ready to follow the guidelines announced, and whether we are able to deliver. We will also have to demonstrate our resolve in other areas, and that we will not change our mind. Of course, every country has areas it wants to keep for itself. In our case, this is infrastructure and partial ownership of the financial sector.

Slovenia's credit rating has been downgraded by Moody's three times this year and the EC identified us as one of 12 countries that need to undergo a thorough analysis of its macro-economic situation. What measures will you take?

The credit rating downgrade always hits a larger group of countries; the entire euro area, with the exception of some countries, is dealing with a credibility issue: firstly, because of a low economic growth, and secondly, because some countries in the euro area are heavily indebted and paying high

interest rates. Until the situation stabilises, the credit rating will continue to be downgraded; however, the recent years have shown that, with respect to ratings and interest rates, the investors distinguish among the countries. We expect that Slovenia will successfully implement the policy that we have announced and that we will succeed in reducing the deficit, stop the growth in borrowing, successfully carry out the recapitalisation of banks and, as a result, stop the decline in ratings.

Slovenia does not avail itself sufficiently of the funding opportunities provided by the EIB. Despite fiscal limitations, the Government wants to launch a new investment cycle. To what extent can the EIB help? What financial potential are we talking about?

We have several options; the EIB potential depends on the quality of the projects prepared. We have already established contacts; a meeting is scheduled to be held shortly; we have invited the European Commissioner responsible for regional development so that we can review the drawing on European funds. We are determined to get the wheels in motion. It is about more favourable loans.

The Government, however, postponed structural reforms until next year, but there are warnings issued on a regular basis from the international institutions, recently again from the European Commission, that Slovenia is not ambitious enough with regard to pension reform. In light of this, do you think that we should try with the reform as soon as this year?

We are, of course, aware of the great importance of pension reform; nevertheless, our coalition agreement has left the solutions relatively pending because we need to discuss them with social partners, there is no other way. We would like the negotiations to be constructive. The previous term of office has revealed that the trade unions did not deny the urgency of

the pension reform; the question was how to distribute the burden fairly. We need to talk openly. The Government has assumed its role, we are in a hurry to adopt the revised budget with a view to balancing the budget for this year; and while dealing with it we cannot open the matters that need more time to be peacefully discussed. At Brdo, the trade unions indicated they would be prepared to accept the proposal that was rejected at the referendum as a starting point to discuss acceptable adjustments for both parties. If this is feasible, then matters can be resolved very quickly; otherwise, we will have to start planning the reform all over again, which will take considerably more time. A swift response would undoubtedly send a positive signal abroad. In my opinion, too much attention is paid to the reform; the reform is irrelevant in the short-term; its relevance, however, is essential in the long-term and taken as a signal that we are able to agree on a range of unpalatable measures that are to follow and that it is not the only touchstone in discussions with partners.

You have also announced tax changes.

We still have to regulate the flat-rate taxation of micro enterprises and sole proprietors; there has been no objection to this, but we need to further define the solutions. It is necessary to consider what the most appropriate solution would be with regard to our situation.

You also intended to change the attitude towards the economic sector and the state's role in it.

We need to clearly define responsibilities. As regards legislation, the simplification of the administration will obviously lessen the impact of the state on the economy; as regards the ownership influence, we need to agree on the system where the management will be left to professionals. We need to define what is in the public interest and responsibility for this must be assumed by the Government;

it is also necessary to distinguish between two matters: the achievement of certain public goals through property where this is justifiable and where this is a matter of professional management of shares, and the restructuring of companies, which can be carried out by experts. In Slovenia, there are a number of institutions with different terms of office – here, the system needs to be simplified, which is a task about to be undertaken.

Is the economic situation in Slovenia worse than elsewhere in the EU?

It is worse than in many other countries; until the recession, our economic growth was approximately 2 percentage points

higher than the average; since the recession, it has been lower than the average. This is bad and points to our structural problems. The fact that a 6% deficit did not help also shows that problems lie elsewhere and that they are structural in nature. We are about to address this issue.

The main objective and measures envisaged by the Government to implement the coalition programme are to ensure that, from 2013 onwards, Slovenia will develop at a rate exceeding the EU average and increase employment, thereby improving the standard of living and welfare. In this regard, the three key objectives are fiscal consolidation, the stim-

ulation of economic growth and the creation of new jobs. How are these objectives to be achieved?

Internal measures will contribute to some extent: tax incentives, the simplification of the business environment, procedures for obtaining building permits, the functioning of the rule of law, payment discipline, attracting investment to Slovenia ... the interest is there, but so far, we could not make sufficient efforts, i.e. we have not yet demonstrated sufficient credibility. A part of our tax changes will ease the burden on jobs; in this way, the resulting economic growth will be conducive to increasing the rate of employment.

Are layoffs also planned for the public sector?

This is the easiest way, which does not affect all equally. We need to look for the reserves and consider if all jobs are indispensable and if we can finance them with EUR 9 billion. The cut down on expenses also results in the reduction of programmes, which means that all jobs are no longer necessary. This is a matter of decision left to be made by the ministers individually, there is no common objective. The estimates show that soft layoffs may yield about 1% saving per year.





FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Investment in the South Stream gas pipeline a major opportunity for Slovenia's economy

The companies Plinovodi and Gazprom signed a Supplementary Agreement to the South Stream Slovenia LLC Shareholders Agreement, the final phase before the establishment of a joint project company. The document, which defines the key phases and the scope of the part of the gas pipeline in Slovenia, was signed by Marjan Eberlinc and Alexey Miller, the President of the Board of Plinovodi and the Chairman of the Management Committee of Gazprom, respectively. At the same time, work on the project, which is being carried out by Plinovodi and Gazprom in compliance with the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Cooperation in Construction and Operation of the Gas Pipeline on the Territory of the Republic of Slovenia, is rapidly progressing. Alexey Miller, Chairman of

the Management Committee of Gazprom met with Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša to discuss the South Stream project. The South Stream gas pipeline will enter Slovenia at Lendava, connect to the existing gas network at Kidričevo, and will probably cross the Italian border at Rateče. The pipeline in Slovenia will have a capacity of at least 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, exceeding domestic consumption almost twentyfold. Prime Minister Janša highlighted the important role to be played by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Spatial Planning in the implementation of the project, particularly with regard to its location. Mr Janša and Mr Miller agreed that the one-billion euro investment is a great opportunity for the Slovenian economy, and an important step forward in the efforts for higher economic and employment growth.

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT

Slovenia's economy slips back into recession

In the last quarter of 2011, the gross domestic product (GDP) showed a real term decline of 2.8 % on the same period last year. In comparison to the third quarter, economic activity decreased by 0.7 %, considering seasonal and working day adjustment. The GDP has been decreasing for several consecutive quarters, suggesting that Slovenia's economy is slipping back into recession (defined as a decline in economic activity for two or more consecutive quarters).

In the last quarter of 2011, growth was positively influenced by foreign demand, which is weakening, unfortunately. A comparison of the last quarters of 2001 and 2010 shows a 3 % increase in exports of goods and services, which is considerably less than in the last half of 2010

and the first half of 2011. Domestic consumption has also sharply fallen, and was 4.4 % less than in the same period of the preceding year. This decline is due to smaller household final consumption expenditure (1.8 % less), smaller final consumption expenditure incurred by the state (2.8 % less) and smaller investment expenditure (12.3 % less). In most sectors, the added value also decreased in real terms in the last quarter of 2011. In the manufacturing sector, it decreased by 2.6 % in relation to a year earlier; in the construction industry by 15.5 % less; in trade, transport and catering by 1.5 %; and in technical, scientific and similar sectors by 0.5 %. The overall added value dropped by 2.0 % in comparison with the last quarter of 2010.

OECD

Creating jobs is crucial

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has published its report, 'Economic Policy Reforms: Going for Growth 2012', in which it assesses progress made on structural reforms in the OECD and BRICS countries.

One of the conclusions of the report is that the pace of reforms, measured in relation to the previous issue of 'Going for Growth', was greater overall than before the crisis. According to the OECD and given what has been done in the recent years, priority should be given to policies that can boost jobs in the context of on-going

fiscal consolidation. In countries that experience renewed economic slack, it will be important that economic policy reforms draw on the lessons learned during the economic crisis.

Slovenia is one of the countries assessed in the report. The OECD recommends that Slovenia reduce state ownership in network industries (telecommunication, energy) and boost competition by facilitating the entry of new firms in network industries. It further recommends changes to be introduced in the area of labour and retirement legislation.



BUSINESS AWARDS

GZS Awards for Outstanding Economic and Business Achievements

At its 44th award ceremony, the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GZS) presented awards for outstanding achievements in economy and entrepreneurship. The awards were presented to nine business people who, according to the Chamber's President Samo Hribar Milič, come from companies that have succeeded to maintain growth and develop further, and to be innovative and provide new jobs under the current aggravated economic conditions.

The winners of 'economic Oscars' for 2011 are: Janez Bijol from Bijol (assembly, development and sale of mobile cranes); Franc Frelih from Plastata (production of polyethylene films and bags); Boštjan Gorjup from BSH Hišni Aparati (affiliate of the German producer of household appliances Bosch Siemens); Simona Klugej from

Bartec Varnost (development and production of explosion-protected electric devices); Marko Kobal from Europlakat (advertising); Marko Lotrič from the Lotrič Laboratory of Metrology; Marjan Mačkošek from the Štore Steel plant; Miroslav Pikovnik from the Unija accountancy bureau, and Gregor Pipan from Xlab (IT development).

GZS promotes the development and innovation-supported orientation of Slovenian companies. In selecting the 2011 award winners, the award committee therefore updated the assessment criteria and placed greater emphasis on development cooperation, particularly in R&D, the protection of intellectual property, exports to demanding markets, cooperation in European programmes, and on integration into Slovenian and European development initiatives.

SAVING

'Smart Saving' Project

While drafting the revised budget, the Ministry of Finance has been receiving numerous proposals on how the government should save money. The ministry has decided to collect citizens' opinions and proposals, within the larger debate on saving, in which economists, businessmen and trade union representatives are already participating. The ministry will carefully examine all construc-

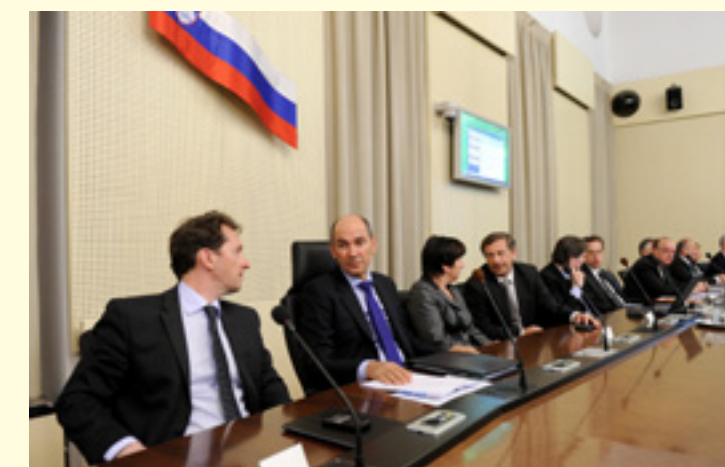
tive proposals by people who are concerned that the government's or their own institution's spending is not prudent enough, but who to date had no means of making this known to the institutions responsible. Proposals may be sent to the email address: mf.varcujmopametno@mf-rs.si. More information is available on the web site of the Ministry of Finance.

ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Annual press conference of the Slovenian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The Slovenian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been following the development of the Slovenian investment environment and the satisfaction of German investors with the location factor since 2006. A great deal of attention has been paid to the promotion of the Slovenian investment environment in Germany. This year's poll is not encouraging. As many as 73% of German

companies believe that the situation is bad, with 55% predicting that things will get worse in the future. The presentation put forward some possible solutions to increase exports and accelerate economic growth: a focus on shortage occupations, reducing the tax burden on enterprises, the acceleration of administrative procedures, transparency in public procurement, labour law flexibility, and legal certainty.



THE ECONOMY

Prime Minister Janez Janša meets business representatives

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, held a working meeting at the beginning of April with members of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the management board of the Manager's Association of Slovenia. During the discussions, the business representatives in attendance expressed their strong support for the Slovenian Government's efforts in preparing measures to achieve fiscal balance, and, especially, in preparing measures to give new impetus to the economy. They highlighted the expectations of the Slovenian economy regarding the functioning of the rule of law (fighting the shadow economy, the transparency of public procurement, the efficiency of judicial administration), the reduction

of tax burdens (labour costs, a contribution cap, excise duties, fees, the price of monopolised resources such as gas, etc), the elimination of administrative burdens, access to finance (the banking sector, foreign investment), the implementation of structural reforms (labour law, health, pension) and the new development strategy. After the meeting, the Prime Minister said it is important for the Government that the measures proposed have the economic sector's support; he also underlined that the incorporation of the golden fiscal rule into the Constitution was of paramount importance, and will also have a positive impact on the economy. He went on to say that the meeting was permeated with a rather high dose of optimism.



Tatjana Šalej Faletič , photo: Posočje Regional centre archives

THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND DEVELOPMENT IN POSOČJE

The story of Posočje Regional Centre (PRC) began in 1999 following the Easter earthquake, which had a lasting effect on the Posočje region. At that time, in order to accelerate the development of the region, three Posočje municipalities – Bovec, Kobarid and Tolmin – founded the PRC.



ITA

At first the PRC offered assistance to entrepreneurs and the unemployed, but in 2002 assumed the role of coordinator in the implementation of the Programme to Foster Development in Posočje 2002–2006, the short form of which is the Soča Development Programme

2006. The earthquake in 2004 resulted in the programme implementation being extended until 2013. “Until then, working on this programme will be a priority for our institute,” stressed its director, Almira Pirih, who is well aware of the fact that the timely and quality



accomplishment of operative tasks regarding the preparation and implementation of public tenders in the aforementioned programme enables the applicants concerned, (i.e. businesses) to draw on as much funds as possible within the envisaged financial scheme limits.

THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND DEVELOPMENT IN THE UPPER POSOČJE AREA

Over the years, the activities carried out by the PRC gradually increased. At present the PRC and its 24 employees constitute the driving force behind development in the Upper Posočje area by running various projects, programmes and activities for the needs of the local population, businesses and local communities. In essence this means that it tries to attract as many EU-financed projects to this part of the country as possible, including the added value regional, cross-border and international importance.

In this way the PRC attempts to encourage the development of the area situated along Slovenia’s western border, which in terms of traffic still seems distant from larger centres at the national and regional level.

PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL AREA

The key programme intended for the Upper Posočje area, as already mentioned, is the Soča Development Programme (first drawn up for the period 2002–2006, but then extended to 2007–2013). This programme’s funds are mostly used to encourage entrepreneurial investment, the education and training of the employed, the creation of new jobs, and youth scholarships.

In addition, the local area development includes informal education programmes aimed at various local population target groups. In the Upper Posočje area, the PRC in fact “substituted” the “people’s universities” operating in major centres via the introduction of practically all informal adult education programmes, which are generally financed from EU funds and made available to the participants free of charge. In this way, it has made a vital contribution to increasing the number of people involved in life-long learning. Each year relevant programmes incorporate different target groups, including the rural population, the unemployed, the elderly, school dropouts, migrants, etc. These programmes are carried out in all three Posočje municipalities with the aim of bringing the PRC closer to the local population.

The printed periodical EPI-center, which has been published by the institute for the past 12 years, is aimed at the local population with a view to raising awareness of its activities, which includes encouraging the development of Posočje. It can also be viewed at www.prc.si.

PRC OPERATION WITHIN THE REGION

Soon after its establishment, the PRC joined up with three other development agencies (the ICRA from Idrija, the RRA from Vrtojba, Northern

Primorska and the ROD from Ajdovščina) to form the Northern Primorska Network Regional Development Agency, which covers an area of 13 municipalities in Northern Primorska (Goriška statistical region); through joint efforts, these ensure the implementation of various regional programmes and projects, thereby providing for the further development of the region through a range of activities (entrepreneurship, human resources development, the environment and spatial planning, rural development and tourism). Naturally, the relevant regional development programmes are prepared by the aforementioned regional development agencies.

In addition to its activities in the development agency network, the PRC is involved in carrying out certain regional tasks. For example, it manages the local action group LAG for development, which provides for rural development in the hilly part of Northern Primorska (an area which comprises seven municipalities). Relevant activities within this context are financed with European money (LEADER funds). Case references abound, since LAG for development has been successful in carrying out over 40 new projects. To mention but a few examples of good practice, we are proud to say that the applicants concerned provided for the following in cooperation with the project partners: the rural-style arrangement of Bovec town centre and the Lace School in Idrija, the organisation of over 100 education and training sessions and workshops attended by some 2,000 participants from the entire area covered by LAG for development. Their activities also included the refurbishment and equipment of two buildings: Zelena hiša (the Green House) in Kobarid and a multi-purpose facility at Levpa; support to almost 50 ethnological events; the publication of a map of "milk producing" mountains in Upper Posočje and a booklet of recipes based on dishes from sheep and goat meat, cottage cheese, whey, etc.

The PRC is the institution responsible for the Regional Scholarship Scheme; this includes employers from throughout the region who mainly require technical job profiles for their further development. Scholarships within the said scheme, which includes participation by some 40 small- and large-sized employers and the majority of municipalities, are paid both from EU and municipal funds. Some 50 to 70 new scholarship recipients are added to the scheme each year, mostly for the needs of Kolektor and Hidria – two large-sized companies from the Idrija-Cerkljansko area.

CROSS-BORDER AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The location and the natural and cultural features of the Upper Posočje area in themselves facilitate and encourage cross-border cooperation through various projects. These bring together the PRC, local communities, businesses, associations and institutions.

The beginnings of cross-border cooperation between Slovenia and Italy within the PHARE CBC programme go back to 1994. In the first three years, the funds were partially intended for the implementation of small-scale projects, which was also beneficial for the PRC. We have recently participated in several large-scale cross-border projects relating to the promotion of informal learning, links between entrepreneurs, and other



Alma Pirih, Director of Posočje Regional Centre

wholly practical projects. One such project is aimed at establishing a circular cycling route to link Posočje and the entire Slovenian border area with the corresponding Italian border area, and at providing visitors with all the information available on this interesting tourist route.

The PRC and other eligible applicants from Upper Posočje are increasingly preparing to participate in international projects within the framework of various territorial cooperation programmes, such as Alpine space, Central Europe and IPA Adriatic. In these projects, PRC has always pursued the aim of considering and providing proper solutions to problems relating to the local communities or businesses originating from Upper Posočje.

One such project seeks to encourage the use of local resources such as wood biomass to heat public buildings; in the second project, we attempt to encourage integration between companies in the Alps and, as

a result, enhance their visibility and competitiveness within the entire EU context.

In this context, one cannot overlook the Bovec airport construction project, which is implemented by the Municipality of Bovec as a lead partner in the IPA Adriatic programme.

Finally, through the quality and professional implementation of its various activities, the PRC attempts to get closer to the needs of the local population. To this end, certain activities (various education programmes, workshops, and similar) are carried out in all three Posočje municipalities, while other projects, including those which are cross-border and international in nature, are to be tackled in cooperation with local environmental institutions; on one hand, this approach contributes to resolving problems at a local level and, on the other hand, helps the aforementioned area become part of cross-border and international integration structures.





H. E. Mrs Rossella Franchini Sherifis, Ambassador of Italy in Ljubljana

Vi aspettiamo a Maribor e a Lubiana!

The month of April in Maribor, European Capital of Culture 2012, featured a rich cultural program coordinated by the Italian Embassy with its cultural and commercial branches, the Italian Institute of Culture and the Italian Trade Commission, in partnership with the Unione italiana, the umbrella organization of the Italian Minority in Slovenia. Our endeavor is to convey an updated and diversified image of Italy, a Country where ancient traditions have spawned creativity, innovation and a unique entrepreneurial spirit throughout the centuries. The program of the Italian Embassy, under the High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Giorgio Napolitano, reflects a comprehensive and articulate approach to culture: we are presenting, alongside the canonical visual and performing arts, a wide range of events, such as the exhibition of high-end manufactured products which certainly represent a distinctive form of Italian culture.

Our participation in the international program of Maribor 2012 is the starting point of a wider project of integrated cultural and commercial promotion on which we are working in close cooperation with Slovene cultural institutions to present to the Slovenian public new insights into contemporary Italy. Our ambition is to engage our Slovene friends with innovative forms of cultural cooperation to match the continuous upgrading of our bilateral relations in the political field. The so-called Spirit of Trieste, fostered by President Napolitano and President Tuerk - together with President Josipović of Croatia - has set a paradigm of deeper understanding, reconciliation and reciprocal trust nurtured by shared values and a common vision on the future of Europe.

In Maribor, the first highlight of the Italian cultural program was the exhibition Missoni, Genius of Color which explores the deep cultural roots of a world-class Italian trademark, heralding excellence in fashion. The exhibition, which is divided into three parts - the Sportsman, the Artist and the Designer - presents the richness of the Italian soul and the fascinating life journey of an emblematic entrepreneur with deep ties in the Eastern shore of the Adriatic, reflected in unique iconographic patterns and color kaleidoscopes.

The exhibition is also meant to be a thread for the following program which offers a new perspective on the upper arch of the Adriatic Sea, together with hints for a non-trivial look on well-known places, such as Ravenna, Aquileia, Trieste, the Istrian coast. The Copies of mosaics of the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna take us back to the Byzantine era: they represent a wonderful synthesis between figurative and artisan culture, a model for the protection of original works and a symbolic bridge between the shores of the Adriatic, in the name of a common artistic and linguistic matrix. The photographic exhibition Imago Trieste has been organized by Università Popolare di Trieste: it displays prints from the Collection "Stelio e Tity Davia", offering a multifaceted image of the Julian city and its surroundings, as well as a striking reconstruction of the historical railway linking Trieste and Vienna. An exhibition on Aquileia, crossroads of the Empire organized by the Association "Pro Aquileia" and the gallery "Spomeniskovarstvenega varstva" will be displayed in Ljubljana at the same time. Istria, very dear to us all, will be portrayed in Istria through time, a multimedia project resulting from the collaboration between Unione italiana and Università Popolare di Trieste, with the support of RTV Koper-Capodistria and the Historical Research Centre of Rovigno: it will present an objective reconstruction of the key events that shaped the history of the Istrian peninsula.

Going back to visual arts, we have chosen to coordinate a second exhibition with the first one, presenting a more 'personal' experience through the digital experimentation of Fabio Fonda, an artist specialized in unique "digital textile printing" and 'quilt' technique. Fonda will also showcase "Digi Art Nouveau", an emblematic example of how digital photography can be used to recover Art Nouveau buildings.

Concerning poetry, Unione italiana, in collaboration with EDIT Fiume, will present the anthology Versi diversi/Drugačni verzi, a cross-section of the contemporary poetic production of the Italian Minority in Slovenia and of the Slovenian Minority in Italy.

The performing arts program combines deeply rooted folk traditions with more



Photo: personal archive

dynamic interpretations, which we hope will be particularly appreciated also by the younger audience. At the beginning of the month we will offer a concert featuring some of the most renowned musicians of the Italian National Community in Slovenia, with the participation of young talents. We shall then present a pianist from Friuli Venezia Giulia, now Moscow-based, Ms Martina Frezzotti, who will perform a Romantic repertoire with a very personal touch. At the conclusion of the program, the major event will be on stage, FolkHistria, a real musical "festa", bringing to life the traditional music of Italy and Slovenia in a multicultural framework, thanks to the commitment of Unione italiana who has assembled an outstanding cast of Slovenian stars.

In parallel, Ljubljana saw additional Italian events, besides the aforementioned exhibition on Aquileia. From 22 March to 6 May, Italian masks from the Museum of San Michele all'Adige (Trentino) were on display at the Ethnographic museum, in the context of the exhibition Carnival, King of Europe II. At the Cankarjev Dom, from 26 March to 30 June, the Slovenian Minority of Italy is organizing the exhibition of Slovenian painters from Trieste (1945-60), featuring artists who were active in the Littoral and in the area bordering Italy. The Italian Cultural Institute presented on 20 March the project for the requalification of the Drava Riverbank of Maribor, by the Italian studio Deli & Sabatini, winner of an international competition, and a conference on The construction of the space, organized in cooperation with the Ljubljana House of Architecture. Last but not least, tourism: on 18 April the Italian Cultural Institute hosted a presentation on the "Antica Contea", featuring historical, cultural and gastronomic itineraries connecting the towns of Gorizia, Cormons and Gradisca.

Vi aspettiamo a Maribor e a Lubiana! Arrivederci!

Iztok Mirošič, Slovenia's Ambassador to Italy

Let us present Slovenia to Italy

This year Slovenia and Italy celebrate the 20th anniversary since establishing mutual inter-governmental and neighbourhood recognition and cooperation. Over this time, they have developed excellent bilateral relations in politics, the economy and culture. Italy is Slovenia's second biggest trading partner and its biggest partner in tourism. Cooperation between the two countries has been further enhanced within the EU and NATO through joint interests in providing support to the implementation of the European perspective for the Western Balkans and their cooperation in peacekeeping operations around the world. The two Mediterranean countries endeavour to use the Mediterranean Sea as a way to ensure close cooperation and not separation. Together they make up the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Macro-region. The two minorities - the Slovenian minority in Italy and the Italian minority in Slovenia - should become promotional centres for inter-governmental and cross-border friendship and cooperation.

Slovenia and Italy are striving to strengthen their future European cooperation and friendship, which should also help to clarify the past. In July 2010 a historic meeting was held in Trieste between the presidents of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, accompanied by a symbolic concert entitled "Route of Friendship" under the baton of Riccardo Muti. Boris Pahor's "Nekropola" was staged in Slovenian at the Verdi Theatre in Trieste. A supreme and symbolic acknowledgement of the improvement in relations between Slovenia and Italy was made by the President of the Republic of Slovenia's first, historic state visit to Rome in January 2011. For the first time in history, the Slovenian national anthem "Zdravljica" was played at Venice Square in Rome and the Slovenian flag flew at the presidential Quirinal Palace. These relations reflect the changes made towards enhancing a spirit

of partnership and understanding. Slovenia is currently expecting the first state visit from the President of Italy.

The history of relations between the Slovenian and Italian nations has not been kind. At times it has been difficult. Prejudices and stereotypes take time to disappear. Slovenia's culture and the presentation of its development powers and potential are the proper antidote to deep-seated historical assumptions. A presentation of culture provides the best understanding of diversity and is also vital for expansion of political, economic and other forms of cooperation. Despite its historical presence, Slovenia, Slovenian culture and its creativity are not sufficiently visible and present in Italy. Slovenia and Italy are neighbouring countries yet Italians know little about Slovenia and the outstanding potential and creativity of its designers.

The extremely successful, important and high-profile cultural, economic and tourist presentation of Slovenia under the slogan "I Feel Slovenia - Feel the Green" in Milan - the European heart of economy, culture and design - surprised the demanding Italian experts in attendance and was a welcome step in the right direction. The exhibition of modern Slovenian design entitled "Silent Revolutions" was held in the renowned La Triennale and featured Slovenia's most exceptional, modern design powers and innovative enterprises; it was extremely well-attended in its first few days, as were the exhibition of Zoran Mušič in Legnano, the concert performed by the Slovenian Chamber Choir, and the opening of the "Slovenia in Us" exhibition of photographs of Lipizzaner horses in the highly regarded L'Auditorium di Milano. At the Slovenian evening event, the crême-de-la-crême of Italian tourism journalists received awards. The residents of Milan were given the opportunity to become acquainted with Slovenia's best industrial

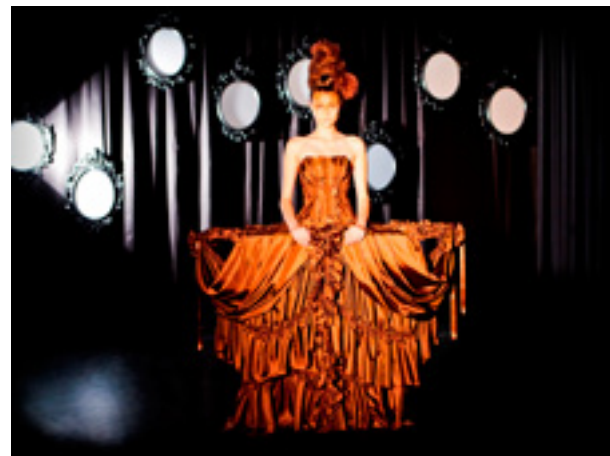


Photo: personal archive

design products, companies, designers and producers, natural beauties, agricultural products, and gastronomic and wine indulgences. They were surprised by the quality on display, with which they were not well acquainted despite Slovenia bordering the country. On the main promenade in front of the magnificent cathedral in the centre of Milan, over 2.5 million visitors attended the photography exhibition on Slovenia and its natural beauties - a major success.

This success in Milan is also a recipe that can be followed for the further systematic enhancement of cultural exchange, and the Slovenian cultural presence and visibility in its large neighbouring country, all of which have been neglected for twenty years. This enhancement should also be expanded to other parts of Italy, particularly Rome - the Italian cultural, administrative and political centre. In Italy, especially Rome, Slovenia's culture and creativity do not feature prominently enough. In this regard, Slovenia should consider setting up a model of a Slovenia House, which should be established with input from the state, the economy, culture, science and technology. Representatives of Slovenia's state, economy, tourism, science, technology and culture should join in the Slovenia House in Rome, Italy. In particular, the representation of culture, which should systematically promote the culture and visibility of Slovenia in Rome, is vital. The premises could also be used by the Slovenian national community in Italy for the promotion of culture and, through this, the enhancement of its presence in the capital where decisions, important for its existence, are made.

Culture is what makes new friends in a town, society and country. Slovenia needs friends in Italy and Rome. Let us now finally present Slovenia to Italy!



Jože Osterman, photo: STA

A good harvest in the first three months

The first quarter of Maribor's year as the European Capital of Culture has already passed. Everything that is happening in Maribor and its partner cities of Ptuj, Slovenj Gradec, Novo Mesto and Murska Sobota is considerably more than we could have hoped for after all the difficult preparations and given the financial drought caused by the current crisis. However, claims that what is most important is not whether events happen in gleaming new halls or known venues that the organisers used to adapt to the circumstances are constantly being confirmed. Considering the actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting a large audience.

The Director-General of the Maribor 2012 Public Institute, Dr Suzana Žilič Fišer, and the Programme Director, Mitja Čander, modestly assessed the events of the first three months. The Director-General was pleased to report that in this period, the cultural project had attracted more than 250 foreign journalists, who had published several excellent reports and photo articles, so Maribor had received more than the routine advertising expected. At the information points in Ljubljana and Maribor, turnout and public interest has been good and is still on the rise, as the monthly turnout of the initial 2,000 visitors in February has now doubled. There were successful promotions in Zagreb, Graz and Trieste, and, further afield, in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London. The project is attracting the attention of both Slovenian and foreign audiences, and with warmer weather, events will move outdoors, which will significantly increase accessibility and give the city a whole new experience that practically every resident will be able to enjoy. The events of the Town Keys programme, which revives the cultural tradition of the place, have really started to come to life, and the Urban Furrows programme – a social cohesion programme aimed at integrating through their everyday work people who are otherwise not included in any other cultural events – will be intensified

in the summer. Vegetable gardening, the arrangement of urban spaces in residential and other areas, new social activities and the discovery of new elements in places where people live might be considered the most innovative parts of this huge project.

Mitja Čander was, of course, most excited about the outstanding artistic achievements, which were probably more numerous in the first three months than Maribor has seen in the previous twenty years. The Director particularly emphasised the splendid concert by the pianist Ivo Pogorelič with the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, the sold-out concert by 2 Cellos, the excellent attendance and high media coverage of New Burlesque Cabaret, and the great opera and theatre productions by Tomaž Pandur and Uroš Lajovic, which are described elsewhere in this magazine. The LifeTouch programme, which re-establishes the role of the Internet, not only as a mediator of events, but as a co-creator, has also closely involved a wide audience through mobile telephone networks. Smartphones already use the Maribor 2012 application, which takes the user virtually to the heart of the cultural events.

Although somewhat unexpectedly, Project Twelve, which brings a leading global intellectual to Maribor each month, has received most attention from the wider Slovenian public. We have seen three so far: the first was the art theorist Boris Groys, followed by the French-Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. All great people! Slovenia could listen to their lectures, and their reflections were even more fully presented in the most important Slovenian newspapers and even on national television, which after a long time have shown that they are able to devote attention to people and events that really matter. In this time of a certain social lethargy, which is most strongly marked by the economic crisis, with prevailing attempts to save neoliberal capitalism on the old, wasted foundations, the insightful reflection of Maribor's guests might be the best thing that has happened to Slovenians recently. And there are still nine more guests to go.



Jože Osterman, photo: STA

Pandur's homecoming

"A great theatre spectacle" are words befitting Tomaž Pandur's dramatisation of Tolstoy's novel War and Peace. In the context of the European Capital of Culture 2012, the premiere in Maribor at the end of January attracted a lot of media attention. Although the play was first staged by its biggest co-producer, the Croatian National Theatre, in Zagreb last November and many theatre critics were not exactly thrilled, director Tomaž Pandur from Maribor cuts a figure that never goes unnoticed. Compared with the performance in Zagreb, the play in Maribor unfolded smoothly down to the smallest detail, it was even more elegant and the acting more harmonious, thus earning itself more enthusiastic applause. It signals the return of a great man, whose unique promotion has left an indelible mark on Maribor theatre and the city of Maribor.

Pandur is often criticised for his poetic expression. For some he is a theatre genius admired first and foremost in Latin America, which craves wonderful illusions of beauty corresponding best to its natural and mental decor, whilst in Europe, which cherishes a more stringent theatrical form and message, his "beautiful, yet empty images" are often sneered at along with him as a person who "creates empty, yet beautiful shows for bored city folk". Tomaž Pandur is nevertheless a creator, always reminding us of Manichaeism and adhering to the principle of stark contrasts – hot and cold – never compromising, never mainstream. This is also reflected in his life story: a young talented secondary school student who at first, by threading aesthetic images, became addicted to fine art but later evolved into a theatre creator who sees the visual aspect of his performances as the very foundation of his work. He delivers a fascinating product: a theatre spectacle of inconceivable images and allusions presented to the audience in a string of colourful and spatial fascinations otherwise experienced only in your wildest dreams.

War and Peace remains faithful to this principle. The stage is transformed into a battlefield, the living room into a time bridge between the past and future, a bridge crossed by staggering generals and soldiers, lovers and friends, winners and losers. They mingle in the images of a mad world where we cannot discern which is the greater evil – a cold raison of peace that can inflict more harm to a human soul than war itself, or war that reduces individuals to their

very existence and reveals their true personalities. The nearly four-hour play was enacted by the entire ensemble of the Croatian National Theatre from Zagreb with the eye-catching roles of the female protagonist Natasha Rostova portrayed by Zrinka Cvitešić, the servant played by Livio Badurina – Tomaž Pandur's colleague of many years and a member of the Croatian National Theatre – and Countess Rostova, depicted by the first lady of the Slovenian theatre, Milena Zupančič. This is her first ever collaboration with Tomaž Pandur, and interestingly enough, in a theatre in a neighbouring country.

Tomaž Pandur's homecoming is an interesting story on the one hand and on the other a far cry from blissful perfection. It all started three years ago when Tomaž Pandur was in charge of the programme for the European Capital of Culture 2012 and paved the way for Maribor to go down in history as a completely different capital. His plans for Maks, a centre for the performing arts, will never see the light of day along with some of his other ideas for a materialised symbolism of culture (e.g. a viewing tower, the banks of the Drava). They survived only as a torso and speak of Maribor's potential yet to be exploited through Pandur's proposals. Glamorous visiting performances by world renowned theatres are nothing but fantasy. It is true, however, that the organisers are doing their best to find substitutes for the glamour of which Maribor was deprived by the financial crisis, and judging from the innovative content coupled with their own creations, they are successful.

In the days following the premiere of War and Peace, Maribor hosted some very interesting, albeit not spectacular projects. Fritz Lang's cult film classic Metropolis was definitely an event that sustained the cultural suspense in this year's European Capital. It was screened with Gottfried Huppertz's original score played live by the Symphony Orchestra of the Slovenian National Theatre in Maribor with Robert Israel, one of the best conductors for silent films. Two days later, the Spanish Embassy, as part of the cultural embassies project, presented a contemporary dance production La Muntanya al teu voltant (The Mountain Around You) in the Grand Hall of Maribor theatre. The work of the famous Gelabert Azzopardi group and its choreographer Cesc Gelabert captivated the audience.



Jože Osterman, photo: STA

Compliments to Metka Krašovec

The fact that Metka Krašovec is the first female painter to have been afforded the opportunity by the Museum of Modern Art to hold a retrospective exhibition of her work to honour her 70th birthday points to the deep furrow she has made in ploughing new ground in Slovenian fine art. Metka Krašovec is one of the most prominent artists from the generation of artists born immediately after the breakthrough that was made in Slovenia by the Ljubljana Graphic Arts School, following the release of social realism's firm grip and the opening of the door to creative freedom of expression. She graduated in 1964 under the renowned Prof. Gabrijel Stupica, under whom she also completed her post-graduate studies in painting. She obtained a master's degree in graphic art under Prof. Riko Debenjak and continued her education in the US and the United Kingdom and in 1977 became one of the youngest professors at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts. As a one-of-a-kind artist, whose paintings are immediately recognisable, Metka Krašovec has created a number of entirely new poetics in fine arts with the red colour first prevailing in her early creative years and, subsequently, with her striking figures predominantly featuring strange heads, a kind of premonition of beings hailing from other galaxies, and then with new explosions of colour, which is characteristic of her third creative cycle. The search for beauty as an absolute ideal we can come close to, but cannot quite reach, is, according to the organisers of her retrospective, the essential thread that runs through her fairly heterogeneous poetry of painting.

The artist explained the diversity of her paintings to the Slovenian media as follows: "Of course people change over time; even if the direction and the idea remain the same, there are various ways of attaining the realisation. I am not afraid to take a new path; perhaps the fear that you follow the same path, even after it has run its course, is even greater." The self-critical concern of finding herself stuck in a rut is thus one of her basic creative premises. "When the path I walk comes to an end or has run its course, I hit a dead end and get a feeling of being walled in... Then it's time to take a hammer and knock down the walls that have surrounded me, so I can escape from captivity and take a step forward towards something

that is beyond me," she told Mladina magazine. This speaks of an artist who firmly and, above all, stands with curiosity in a space, drawing on every moment to inspire new creative challenges. Her constant search for something new is a result of the surprising fact that she has managed to paint continuously for four decades, her creativity facing no longer time gaps during which she would have to struggle to find new challenges.

Also otherwise, in the interviews Metka Krašovec gave on this occasion, she turned out to be extremely interesting and open to the world. Her curiosity – bored, on the one hand, by the natural American icon, Yosemite National Park ("Oh dear, I was terribly bored there, since it looks exactly like Slovenia, only that it is bigger...") and, on the other hand, enthusiastic about the desert-like Death Valley, which opened up to her new spatial and colour perspectives – her close friendship with her colleague Alenka Gerlovič and, last but not least, her life-time partnership with the legendary Slovenian bard, Tomaž Šalamun, point to particular features of this fascinating lady. This reveals her cosmopolitanism which – at a time when it was not easy to break through the narrow confines of her home country – caused her to perceive Slovenia's place in the world in a completely different light.

The retrospective includes 65 large-format paintings and 120 drawings on paper. The show also includes her red paintings from the period between 1970 and 1979; the drawings and paintings on paper from the New Image period in the 1980s; the "Neo-classicist images" of faces since the late 1980s. The exhibition also features her final period, in which her Neo-classicist manner developed in painting and drawing into an iconography of angelic figures in landscapes, labyrinths with cypresses, and Mediterranean groves.

The works were selected and the exhibition designed by the artist and the exhibition curator Martina Vovk; the exhibition will run until the end of April. The exhibits have been loaned from a variety of Slovenian public and private collections. On this occasion a catalogue was published which includes essays by Petja Grafenauer, Miklavž Komelj, Andrej Medved, Tonko Maroevič, and the artist's biography.



Dušan Čater



Mojca Kumerdej

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

Fascinating Fabula

The Fabula World Literature Festival is one of the most recognisable cultural events held in Ljubljana, and has attracted even more attention since 2010, which is when Ljubljana launched the World Book Capital project. This year is no exception: 30 events will be proposed during the two-week festival which runs between 27 February and 10 March 2012.

The main event of the festival, which is the focus of media attention every year, is the award conferred by Dnevnik, the daily newspaper, for the best collection of short stories. This event, which has routinely featured in newspapers' cultural pages, has since become one of the three most important methods for the promotion of the Slovenian literature, together with the Rožanc and the Kresnik awards, and serves as a good barometer for the recent increase in the public's appetite for literature. This year's laureate is Dušan Čater for his collection of short stories entitled Dženehem. This is a collection of six short stories where the author refers to part of the previous story's scenario in the one that follows, so that the first and last story link to make a perfect circle. According to the author, the title Dženehem was not chosen deliberately – it is just the name of the café in Sarajevo where the author spent much of his time writing the book. The stories are about the life of foreigners, people who came to Slovenia in search of work, but who were often pushed to a social and existential margin by life's circumstances. It should be noted that Čater was selected from a prominent group of literary peers, including Miha Mazzini, Mojca Kumerdej, Andrej E. Skubic, Goran Vojnovič and Suzana Tratnik, all of whom are considered to be the most avant-garde writers of the younger generation. Together they have launched a brilliant and socially committed project – a collection of short stories entitled Dan zmage (The Day of Victory).

In line with the festival's tradition, literary readings by prominent authors from Slovenia and the rest of the world are key events at the festival. The most interesting reading was that delivered by the British writer, Hanif Kureishi, known to the Slovenian public for The Buddha of Suburbia and The Black Album; translations of both bestsellers were published in 1999. Kureishi, born in the United

Kingdom to a Pakistani father and English mother, is according to The Times one of "the 50 greatest British writers since 1945". Kureishi writes of immigration, racism, nationalism, all forms of discrimination, but also deals with sexuality, which is one of the areas where discrimination and hatred play a major role. As these are topics that are crucial for understanding the current competitive world, the audience was captivated.

Leena Krohn, a well known Finnish author, numbered among the festival's guests; her novel Valeikkuna (False Window, 2009) has already been translated into Slovenian. She has been awarded several prestigious Finnish literary prizes, including the Finlandia Prize for literature in 1992 for her collection of essays Matemaattisia olioita tai jaettuja unia (Mathematical Beings or Shared Dreams). Valeikkuna is a story about a philosopher who, while coming into contact with various people, contemplates the principles that govern the world. The author argues that people who suffer from various mental disorders, such as depression, may profit greatly from talking with a philosopher about the nature of the world we live in, as a philosopher knows how to find the universal answers to our questions.

Other prominent guest authors at Fabula were Amitav Ghosh, a well-known Indian writer and anthropologist, who presented his work The Hungry Tide, and the Russian author, Mikhail Shishkin, who explores the fate of Russian emigrants in his novel Venerin velos (Maiden's Hair). The authors' literary performances were held in the cosy environment of the Klub Cankarjevega doma. Their books have been published by Študentska založba under the auspices of the Knjiga za vsakogar project (Books-for-everybody), which was established during the Ljubljana World Book Capital event. We can only agree with Uroš Grilc, the man responsible for culture in the Municipality of Ljubljana, that "nothing is how it used to be on the Ljubljana book scene" since it hosted the World Book Capital event. Books are getting the attention they deserve, their authors are welcome guests, the public is all ears and the book remains the focus of the city's attention.

Hana Souček Morača

European cultural ambassador

The Mladinsko Theatre is planning to perform at many prestigious festivals this year. The theatre performance "Damned be the Traitor of his Homeland!" will be the main performance. According to theatre critics, the play presents the personal histories of characters related to Slovenia, the former Yugoslavia and the wider environment, as well as the attitude towards "foreigners" and points of view regarding Serbs and Croats, "the aggressors" and "the victims".

The Mladinsko Theatre was established in Ljubljana in 1955 as the first professional theatre for children and youth in Slovenia. Until the 1980s, the Mladinsko Theatre developed into a centre of theatre research and, to this day, has striven to add thematic substance to the universal paradoxes of civilisation in its performances.

The first international festival to host the Mladinsko Theatre this year was the Kunsten-Festival des Arts in Brussels, beginning on 4 May 2012, with the performance "Damned be the Traitor of his Homeland!" directed by Oliver Frljić. The festival is highly renowned as an event, presenting new theatre works by firmly established authors, and is intended for a theatre audience that is willing to consider its own attitudes towards the world. Flemish and French institutions jointly organise the festival, which is also a communication bridge between the two communities living in Brussels.

At the end of May, the play will be performed at the Festival TransAmériques in Montreal. Provocative and current theatre performances are presented at this festival, which is considered to be the central cultural event in Montreal, and is important to Canada and on an international level. In June, the theatre group will be travelling from Montreal to Braunschweig, Germany, to an important international theatre festival entitled, Festival Theaterformen, to be opened with a performance by the Rimini Protokoll group. The topic of this year's festival, where fifteen theatres from abroad will also be presented, is the attitude of the individual towards society.

The play is also planned to be staged at the important New Plays from Europe festival taking place in Wiesbaden and Mainz from 14 to 24 June. This is the largest international theatre festival dedicated to new plays performed in the original language.

In 2012, the Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre continues on its path of "European cultural ambassador", the title received from the European Commission in 2008. Njegova gostovanja pa so pomemben mednarodni dosežek slovenskega gledališča v letu 2012. The Theatre's visiting performances will be an important international achievement for the Slovenian theatre in 2012.



Lynsey Addario



Ron Haviv



Jure Eržen

Hana Souček Morača

Slovenia press photo 2012

Slovenian photographers and photo-journalists monitor and record a variety of interesting and gripping stories every day. The Slovenia Press Photo 2012 contest is an opportunity to take a look at the best photo-journalist achievements of the past year and is for all professional and skilled amateur photographers who are permanent residents in Slovenia.

The opening of the photography exhibition featuring images of Congolese and Afghan women and hunger in the Horn of Africa, which is organised by the non-profit organisation Art Works Projects, has this year launched the fourth festival of documentary and press photography, held in Cankarjev Dom's grand reception hall.

The second exhibition of this year's festival entitled "The Arab Spring – On Revolution Road" displays the work of the internationally renowned Russian photographer, Yuri Kozzyrev, who is also a member of Noor, the photo agency. The exhibition brought him the prestigious Visa d'Or News award. The festival organisers also invited American photographer Christopher Morris, who is a founding member of the VII Photo Agency and has run a number of campaigns for various fashion brands including Roberto Ca-

valli, Dolce & Gabbana, and Dior. In addition to Morris's photography, the exhibition also features his fashion video recordings.

The festival in Ljubljana displayed photographs by world-renowned photographers and agencies.

The festival ran from 21 February to 31 March 2012 and included a press photography contest for the best press photos.

A jury of distinguished experts from around the world in the field of photojournalism and photography, which consisted of Yuri Kozzyrev (Noor), Moises Saman (Magnum Photos), Paula Bronstein (Getty Images), and Walter Astrada (Reportage by Getty Images), selected the best photos at the close of the contest. At the ceremony, the awards were announced for best photo of 2011, best 2011 news report, the winning photograph of this year's contest and the winning news report in five categories – sports, news, nature and the environment, entertainment and culture, and people. The award for best photo of 2011 was won by Jure Eržen for a photo of some people gathered at the general meeting held within the "Boj-za" (Fight-for) in Ljubljana, while the award for best news report was presented to Matic Zorman for his story on refugee camps in Gaza.



Jože Osterman, photo: STA

The summit of European choral singing in Maribor

We have praised Slovenian choral singing in Sinfo several times before, and expressed the pride we take in the fact that Slovenian choirs are undoubtedly among the best in the world. Vokalna Akademija Ljubljana last year, and APZ Tone Tomšič on two earlier occasions, were named Laureates of the European Choral Grand Prix, which is actually a competition of the best choirs in the world due to long European choral singing tradition.

Slovenia, more precisely Maribor, hosted the finals of this competition for the first time this year. The project was part of the European Capital of Culture, although it had been in the making for several years. The foundations were undoubtedly laid by the excellent Slovenian choirs, who have not only earned respect in international circles, but also won the trust of Slovenian organisers of choir gatherings. For many years now, Maribor has been the centre of the largest such gatherings in Slovenia – Naša Pesem (Our Song) – which was held for the twenty-second time this year. Twenty-two of the best Slovenian adult choirs, some 850 singers, participated in the competition this year. At first, an irrelevant regional event, the competition quickly grew, after Slovenian independence, into a prestigious national competition where it is possible to perform only after undergoing a rigorous selection process via regional competitions; many candidates fail to qualify. Foreign choirs can also participate, since Naša Pesem is one of the festivals which enable choirs to qualify for the final European competition.

One can imagine the strict selection for international choir festivals, whose winners then qualify for the final selection. Other important filters are festivals in Bulgaria (Varna), France (Tours), Italy (Arezzo) and Spain (Tolosa). Maribor has thus hosted choirs from Japan (Vox Gaudiosa), the Philippines (Ateneo de Manila

College Glee Club), Sweden (Sofia Vocalensemble) and Ukraine (Oreya). Their competition was particularly demanding: each choir must prepare four different programmes or more than one hour of music. We were able to hear the powerful unison of voices of a variety of musical cultures, because the choirs came to Maribor from very different places.

Unlike the majority of previous finals, the repertoires were almost exotic, playful and happy. Most choirs want to test themselves with the liturgical texts of medieval and early Renaissance music classics, but this time, their artistic directors took a different approach. Union Hall Maribor was full, and the audience was able to enjoy modern pieces and rhythms that were especially enticing to an audience that is unaccustomed to the most demanding choral concerts. In spite of the somewhat relaxed atmosphere, the strict jury, composed of the best Slovenian choir conductors, Martina Batič, Karmina Šilec and Andraž Hauptman, joined by Enrique Azurza from Spain and Wilma ten Wolde from the Netherlands, was not even for a moment taken in by the flirtation with the audience which sometimes wins additional points, but it judged objectively and reasonably. The winner of the Naša Pesem festival was the Megaron choir from Ljubljana led by conductor Damjan Močnik, while the winner of the European Choral Grand Prix was the Sofia Vocalensemble from Stockholm led by Bengt Ollén, who founded the choir in 1995. Its singers inspired the audience with their warm lyrical sound, which is traditionally mastered by Swedish choirs.

The finale was sponsored by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport.



OUR EXCELLENCE

Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Riko archives

Riko to build a EUR 100 million complex in Belarus

The Slovenian company Riko will build a multi-purpose complex featuring a five-star Kempinski Hotel and 81 apartments and offices in the centre of the Belarus capital, Minsk. The construction of the Kempinski hotel is valued at EUR 57 million, while the cost of the entire complex is estimated at over EUR 100 million.



The construction of the complex in Minsk, entrusted to Riko, will contribute to the further development of the highest standard hotel facilities and provide new impetus to tourism activities associated with this business hotel, the highest rated to date in Minsk and Belarus. The Kempinski Hotel will have approximately 22,000 m² of floor space, while the residential units and offices will stretch over 14,000 m² and 15,000 m² respectively. The complex will also include parking and support facilities covering 23,000 m².

Riko, which has been present on the Belarusian market for a decade now, gained investors' confidence with its competitive bid, flexible business structure and its numerous references, particularly the construction of the hotel Peter I in the centre of Moscow and that of the transformer stations in Minsk. The company will involve Slovenian partners to participate in the construction phase and in the supply of equipment. Contracts will be offered to façade companies, to craft, installation works and air conditioning system contractors, and to sub-contractors and suppliers of building fittings and interior furnishings. Riko has signed a turn-key contract for the Kempinski Hotel, while the contract for other projects includes construction up to the third phase.

The investor in the project is the company Elite Estate JLCC, with the architectural solution being provided by Moscow's architecture bureau SPEECH LLC. The deadline for the construction of the hotel is the end of 2013, while the construction of the residential and commercial complex is to be completed before the end of 2014.

The investor will secure more than half of the money from its own resources, while the rest will be funded by a loan taken with a consortium of international banks with credit risk insurance from SID Bank as the agent of the Slovenian state. Slovenian banks will also participate in this business venture: a consortium of Slovenian and foreign banks headed by the Slovenian bank NLB will extend a EUR 48 million loan to Sberbank in Belarus.

Slovenian companies will be awarded 40% of the business regarding the construction of the hotel, 15% will go to Belarus companies and the rest to companies from other countries.

JANEZ ŠKRABEC, RIKO'S OWNER AND DIRECTOR

While independent Slovenia was bidding farewell to communism twenty years ago, Janez Škrabec was establishing a new Riko with a view to doing business in Russia. This decision was supported by the reputation that Riko, and Slovenian goods in general, enjoyed on the markets of the former Soviet Union; Riko's transformation into a modern international engineering company started. Riko is the largest civil engineering company in Slovenia. Most of the credit for this goes to its

director. As he says himself, he is in general very satisfied with Slovenia and its macro environment. 'I am not saying that there are no improvements to be made, but viewed from a general perspective, Slovenia is well off and if any, we should follow the path of Scandinavian countries. They have regulated social rights in a model way and I would wish for such a country. I recently came across some data on social equality, according to which Slovenia is ranked immediately after Denmark. There are no very rich people in our country, no fat cats, because our privatisation went fairly easy





and in a rather just and equitable way. It is, however, interesting that the perception Slovenians have of this social equality is far from a reflection of the truth. We largely believe that we are ranked towards the bottom. We have to become aware that social innovations are a true driving force of society. I believe that it is innovative leadership that has made Riko a successful company. The management style is very democratic, while the structure is lean and allows a lot of autonomy. Anyway, all I think about is how to make life easier for my staff so that they can be as industrious as possible. I see to it that they have company cars at their disposal, travel and participate in education and training, learn foreign languages, and so on.'

Škrabec considers the company's orientation to sustainability very important and believes company culture to be equally vital in the long run. 'I like to think that Riko is managed in a very innovative way. I can say that my formula for success is: a moment of inspiration and then continue without pause. Success is not necessarily created by great innovations. Ordinary things must be done in a somewhat better way.' He adds that only those companies that are constantly alarmed have a chance to succeed. He says that he experienced the feeling of being in crisis even in boom times and acted accordingly.

He often says that he relies on nobody and does not hold out hope that anyone will do anything for him. 'We must know that Slovenia cannot compete with China. We cannot compete with low wages; what we have to do is change the quality of our lives, democracy, liberalism, our still-existing social homogeneity, fairly low polarisation and diversification to our benefit. All these represent the foundation for the knowledge- and creativity-based society we aspire to attain.'

Riko's strongest activity is industrial engineering, primarily the sale of technology for the automotive industry to the countries of the former Soviet Union. The company's long standing partners in Russia include Avtovaz and Gaz, and Maz, MTZ, Belaz and MTZ in Belarus. A high percentage of the company's revenue is generated in the ecology and energy sector.

RIKO HOUSES

Riko Houses is a company that manufactures and markets ecological and energy-saving wooden buildings. The innovative living space solutions designed in Riko Houses are prefabricated in the production facilities in Ribnica using the company's own patent. The company takes care of the entire project, from the birth of the idea to the construction of the building and the design of the façade.

Ever since 1997, when Riko Houses started manufacturing massive wooden elements for a foreign partner, the company has continued the valuable heritage of building with wood. Two years later, the company took over the system patent for the production of massive wood-

en houses, marking the beginning of its promising growth and the story of its success. To date, Riko Houses has developed into an internationally recognised and successful company, while the many Slovene and foreign certificates it has earned, as well as design and architecture awards are a testament to the quality of Riko wooden constructions.

In the course of its activity, Riko Houses has become a setter of standards for ecological high-quality prefabricated wooden buildings, joining excellent business results with social responsibility. By using wood as a renewable source in construction, the company highlights to the value of ecological materials, healthy accommodation and economical and environment-friendly construction.



ROOTS

The roots of Riko reach back to the 19th century, when a sports and medical equipment factory was established under the name of JOR in the town of Ribnica, the cradle of Slovenian entrepreneurship. The company Riko, a Slovene acronym standing for 'Ribnica metal processing factory', was built on its very foundations. From that time onwards and until 1990, its production programs gradually developed to include agricultural mechanisations, tractor trailers, aircraft, municipal equipment and waste management equipment, as well as highly sophisticated flexible systems.

In the 1990s, Riko shifted its focus from pure manufacturing to engineering, and began producing prefabricated Riko wooden buildings.

The Riko company and Riko Houses owe their development and growth to the long entrepreneurial tradition of the Ribnica valley. Craft and small business began to flourish in 1492, when the Austro-Hungarian emperor granted an imperial patent to the people of Ribnica, allowing them to sell whatever they produced themselves. This heritage is imprinted in Riko's genes.

Riko has cradled love for working and shaping wood. Wooden products, namely wooden household items, became a selling hit of the peddlers from Ribnica, after Friedrich II granted them a patent. Riko Houses has built on these skills in woodworking and on a love of wood inherited from ancestors, and transformed them into a unique system of wooden constructions. Based on 500 years of tradition, Riko Houses has developed into a company recognised and successful throughout Europe.

Polonca Štritof, photo: STA and archives

Let's clean Slovenia to make a nicer world

ON THE PROJECT LET'S CLEAN SLOVENIA 2012



The main event of the project Let's Clean Slovenia 2012 was a clean-up action which took place in 207 Slovenian municipalities between 23 and 24 March 2012.

Experts say that there are about 50,000 illegal waste dumps in Slovenia, containing almost 2 million cubic metres of waste. In 2010, this situation encouraged members of the Ecologists Without Borders Association to organise the project Let's clean Slovenia in one day! because waste not only spoils the beauty of nature, but also compromises the quality of drinking water, air, soil and the habitat in general. In 2010, the initiators of the project were supported by 270,000 volunteers from all municipalities in the country. Of course, they were unable to clean the entire country in one day; nevertheless, the campaign has undoubtedly contributed to the fact that illegal dumping is becoming increasingly unacceptable in society. The project has exceptionally powerful energy and carries the message that civil society in Slovenia is alive and well, and that when faced with a cancerous wound in nature, it does not look away, but takes decisive and quick action.

Among all the countries where the one-day voluntary clean-up campaign was implemented, Slovenia recorded the highest participation of citizens - almost 14 per cent. Since 2008, the campaign has been implemented in 16 countries and involved over 2.4 million volunteers. During this time, the initiative Let's Do It World has grown into a movement, and in 2010, it was decided that the campaign would include the entire world in 2012. Slovenia, together with the Ecologists Without Borders Association, decided to join this global clean-up. The project was revived again this year under the title Let's Clean Slovenia 2012.

As mentioned above, the project Let's Clean Slovenia 2012 was part of the global initiative World Cleanup 2012, which between 24 March and 25 September is uniting people who think alike all around the world. The main goals of this global project are to unite 300 million volunteers in one hundred countries, to prepare a global register of illegal waste dumps, and to remove illegally dumped waste from the natural environment. The project also aims to raise awareness and to unite people in their fight for a common goal - a cleaner environment. The preparations for the clean-up are currently taking place in 85 countries.

The main event of the project Let's Clean Slovenia 2012 was a clean-up action which took place in 207 Slovenian municipalities between 23 and 24 March 2012. The action was divided into two parts. Groups of volunteers from educational institutions and several organisations cleaned the surroundings of schools, kindergartens, residential areas and walkways on 23 March, and on 24 March, the volunteers

focused on cleaning illegal waste dumps. The preparations for the clean-up began a year before the all-Slovenian clean-up action, when the Ecologists Without Borders Association first invited municipalities and municipal companies to participate in the project in order to ensure funds for the removal and disposal of waste. Since 2010, volunteers have regularly updated and developed the digital register of illegal waste dumps which was created in 2010. With time, the register has become more user-friendly; users can now register with their mobile telephones. Before the beginning of the clean-up action, a digital map on the website www.geopedia.si displayed about 16,000 illegal waste dumps.

During the preparations, the project Let's Clean Slovenia 2012 used various activities to raise awareness among Slovenians of the importance of an environment-friendly life. Observing trends in Slovenian society, we can see that people's attitudes are slowly but constantly changing for the benefit of environment-responsible conduct. How much awareness raising activity will be needed in Slovenia in order for the environment to be clean has yet to be seen.

A great deal of effort was required to implement the project, but in the end, the high level of participation in the clean-up action and other activities compensated for the endeavours. All the project goals were achieved.

According to our present information, about 270,000 volunteers participated in the clean-up action in Slovenia; the organisers expect additional information from five municipalities which are implementing their actions later. 207 municipalities were actively involved in the clean-up. Average participation amounted to 15 per cent; the highest recorded involvement was in the municipalities of Radenci (48%) and Naklo (47%).

In addition to the fact that there is less municipal waste in nature than in 2010, it is also encouraging to know that about 107,000 children and young people participated in the clean-up this year, as they are the ones who will be leading society in the future. This raises hope that things are improving and that Slovenia has again shown that with good intentions and a lot of goodwill, it is possible to create a Slovenia without waste.

This was the last clean-up activity of this scope in Slovenia. According to the organisers, one of the purposes of the project was to demand from decision-makers a sustainable and systemic solution to the problem of illegal waste dumps.



Hana Souček Morača, photo: Dorian Španzel

THE ŠPANZEL FAMILY

CREATIVE TOTALITY AND EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUALS

A narrow and tall building dating to 1530, with gold curtains and a particular scent, houses various types of art. The old centre of Ljubljana is the home of three people who live among paintings and unfinished canvases. The paved streets with rich historical memories echo with the name of the Španzel family. The surname symbolises aesthetics, warmth of love, paintbrushes and sun-coloured hair. Biljana is relaxed, full of optimism and light; Rudolf is strong, precise and thoughtful; and Dorian is theirs and an all-round creative type.

Rudolf Španzel is one of the most interesting modern Slovenian painters, and one of the most sought-after portrait painters. His oil paintings are almost better known in foreign galleries than at home, and his paintings have been sold all around the world. He has had over forty exhibitions in Europe and elsewhere. His work is mentioned in various weighty anthologies, which already makes him one of the classic artists of the 20th century. He received the Prešeren Fund Award for artistic achievements in figurative art in 1985. In recent years, he has distinguished himself by portraying the Counts of Celje on the basis of anatomical studies of their skulls, portraying Cardinal Franc Rode - the painting hangs in the Cardinal's premises in the Vatican - and by Vojna, Evropa in Slovenija (War, Europe and Slovenia), a triptych dedicated to the Slovenian presidency of the European Union which decorates the protocol residence at Brdo pri Kranju. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, where he also completed two specialisations.

Biljana Unkovska, a Macedonian-born artist, has been living and creating in Ljubljana for forty years. Most people know her as an excellent graphic artist. Experts say that she has accomplished almost everything that can be achieved in this medium. Her paintings mainly depict women and animals. She is also involved in design. She designs sets and costumes for theatre and opera. Her work has been exhibited in London, Boston, Laguna Beach, New York, and Garden Grove in California. She personifies all that we recognise as the other aspect of reality - by returning to nature, travelling to fantasy places and rediscovering ancient myths. Her studies at the Acad-

emy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana proved a turning point for Biljana. In those years, she acquired valuable knowledge from the teachers, and met an artist who later became her lifelong companion.

THEIR STORY

At the beginning of the 1970s, Biljana left her home town of Skopje and came to Ljubljana to study. (Her brother is also a prominent artist - the director Slobodan Unkovski). 'I am happy to have had parents who were very understanding, loving and who never imposed their own wishes on me.' She says that she and her brother grew up in a cultured environment: 'We went to the theatre, opera, and also to see exhibitions. On various occasions, my mother organised performances for children. My father was a representative of the Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce in Istanbul for eight years.' For many years, she went on holiday and became acquainted with the colourful images of the world from The Thousand and One Nights - she was so taken by them that they have become permanently interwoven in her rich, meaningful and multi-layered art. There was no art school in Skopje, she explains. At that time, she could have chosen Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo or Ljubljana. 'I was not interested in Belgrade; I knew a little about Zagreb; but Ljubljana was a complete enigma, and it represented a new challenge. I thought that the whole world was waiting for me; that they could not wait for me to arrive there', she jokes.

Rudolf comes from the mining village of Zabukovica near Žalec; his parents anticipated a different profession for him than he chose for himself: 'My mother wanted her son to work on the railways.

My father had been a prisoner of war, and he wanted me to become a dentist. He claimed that even the enemy can get toothache, and that dentists always have enough butter and chocolate.' They were both talented at art, he says, and stresses that parents always want what is best for their children, but that children still have to follow their own paths in life.

'I was interested in finding out who the old man who painted so well was'

As a first-year student, Biljana enchanted Rudolf: 'When I noticed her, she immediately reminded me of the Byzantine icon of the Virgin Mary.' They met at the Academy library, and soon after the first meeting, their life together began. 'At the time, I lived on campus and slept in a small room which I shared with more than ten other girls', says Biljana. 'There was no peace to work in the evenings, so I always went to the library after lectures at the Academy.' Rudolf was also a regular visitor to the library shelves: 'I regularly went there before, because I am a 'systematic' person and I became minutely acquainted with our library in the four years. I read everything - from the first to the last book. I kept a notebook, and from each book, I copied what I liked by a certain artist.'

Biljana first fell in love with his paintings. She explains that their studio was next to the studio of students doing specialised studies. She once saw a canvas she liked and said that she would like to meet the painter. She thought that the painting had been done by an older gentleman: 'I found it unbelievable that a young person could paint with such seriousness and accuracy. But I was wrong,' she laughs. And as Rudolf explains, Biljana was the ideal woman for him, and the first who truly understood his painting.



As painters and graphic artists, Biljana and Rudolf could not be more different from each other, and yet, they influence one another creatively. 'I have to admit that some of my painting were the creations of her thoughts, and to be fair, I should have signed her name on the painting as well.'

It is known that Rudolf created the portraits on the Slovenian tolar, the currency which was used for fifteen years. It was done with great enthusiasm, says the artist: 'Participating in that project was a great honour for me. I was given the opportunity to make portraits of prominent people from the past.' But only a few people know that Biljana was responsible for the design of the Macedonian currency. In 1994, together with architect Matjaž Accetto, she won the Macedonian government competition to design the currency of the new country. According to Biljana, participation in creating the image of the money of a new country is a great challenge for a painter.

**DESTINED TO BECOME AN ARTIST
ALREADY IN THE CRADLE**

He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice; he is finishing his master's degree at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, and he is this year's recipient of the Student Prešeren Award - this is Dorian Španzel. Already at first sight, he is a combination of both seriousness and impetuous ease, with immense vivacity. He is a chip off the old block. 'It would be strange if I were to become an economist,' he jokes. 'As a child and teenager, I had many ideas about what I wanted to become, but when it is time to decide, things become clear very quickly. When I enrolled in the Secondary School for Design and Photography, I realised what I wanted to become. That is - a creative person.'

What is life like in Venice? I ask. 'It is full of splendour, history, art, romance, but when the sun sets and the tourists leave, there are only tired caterers, sleepless students, and an odd policeman left on the streets. I do not regret spending almost five years of my life there. I became a better person than I would have done had I stayed in Ljubljana.' When comparing the educational systems in Italy and Slovenia, he stresses the approach of the teachers. They are more relaxed and open there, he says; establishing a connection with a student is important to them, and

they always offer support. 'It could also be said that they are sometimes typically slow in their Italian way. I have been waiting for the original copy of my diploma since 2008, and the main officer at the student office always says to me 'Calma, carino' (Take it easy, my dear).

**INDISPENSABLE RESIDENTS OF A
PICTURESQUE PART OF TOWN**

The end of 2011 was happy for Biljana. After ten years, she finally managed to organise a charity exhibition. The visitors participated at an auction of her



works for the benefit of Obalno društvo proti mučenju živali (The Coastal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). Rudolf has been opening painting schools. He is introducing the basics of drawing, human anatomy, linocut, woodcut and etching techniques. The opening of the Chiaroscuro international school in Žalec was followed by the opening of a school in Slovenska Bistrica. The artist says that the response has been incredible. 'They asked me whether I could teach every weekend. Dorian is a great help to me, and I have also asked Biljana to cooperate.'

It seems that Dorian is always running against the clock. He was late for our interview, because he had been at a meeting with a representative of a well-known company about the redesign of their corporate design. He now faces a different kind of challenge: getting up at half past six every morning. A new test has been set for him - teaching at the Secondary School for Design and Photography. Dorian cannot be defined: 'My work is mainly based on graphic design, but there are also modern art, multimedia and photography.' For about six months, he was a designer for Gorenje, a leading Slovenian company, and he has been managing advertising for the Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana: 'I do not want to limit myself to only one thing; I crave various media of expression.' According to him, a person is challenged throughout their life, and he is on his way to becoming 'uomo universale' (a universal man).

With a piece of cake on my plate, and a tape recorder running, I remained seated in their affectionate proximity. I have been in Venice today, I reflect. Not in the Italian coastal town of canals, bridges, St. Mark's Basilica and the muddled mass of tourists, but in a home with the same touch of grandeur - full of antiques, beauty and a view of the embankment of the River Ljubljanica, or as Rudolf likes to say in jest, 'the Grand Canal'. He and his wife are full of spirit and they have plans for the future. I ask them about creativity - do they need privacy at work. Rudolf laughs and says: 'We have separate studios.' They are not among those artists who constantly lament and suffer when they create. They work a lot, but they also know how to enjoy themselves. They complement each other. 'Biljana loosened up my systematic working methods and brought happiness into my life.' They are looking forward to the times ahead.

GOOD FOR MEDALS

“SLOVENIAN” SKI JUMPING HILLS IN NORWAY AND TURKEY

Slovenian ski jumper, Robert Kranjec, wins gold in FIS Ski Flying World Championships in Vikersund



Slovenian ski jumping reached a new peak in Vikersund. Never before in history has a Slovenian competitor won a gold medal at a ski flying championship, until today, when Robert Kranjec stood on the highest step of the winners' podium, thus surpassing the achievement of Primož Ulaga who won a silver medal in 1988 in Oberstdorf.

The “Slovenian” ski jumping hill in Norway has bestowed the title of world champion on Robert Kranjec of Kranj. Being among the best in the world for a number of years, this thirty-year old ski jumper, in his most important jump in the final round, landed at the 244 metre mark, a new Slovenian record and the third longest in history. This Saturday evening was truly something exceptional, and the Slovenian national anthem reverberated in Vikersund. The mayor of this village, Terje Braathen, also learned a line from the Slovenian anthem. After Janez Gorišek, whom the people of Vikersund in the Modum Region consider an extremely important person, Norwegian ski jumping fans have a new hero: Robert Kranjec. The

joy of the Slovenian national team was indescribable. The next day, however, the Slovenian team, with Jernej Damjan, Jure Šinkovec, Jurij Tepeš and Robert Kranjec, unexpectedly won the bronze medal in the team ski jumping competition, another medal at a major event.

The euphoria of the Slovenian team had hardly subsided when even more surprising news came from Turkey, from the town of Erzurum, which hosted the FIS Nordic Combined Junior and U23 World Ski Championship. Slovenian ski jumpers, Nejc Dežman and Jaka Hvala, won gold and silver medals, respectively in the men's individual event (Dežman was the first Slovenian competitor to win gold at a world junior championship), while the Slovenian women took third place in the team competition. But why should the Erzurum ski jumping hill be considered “Slovenian”? The answer is simple: because this sports facility was also designed by Janez Gorišek. In only one week, an unbelievable set of coincidental circumstances brought complete supremacy in ski jumping to

Slovenian sport. In addition to the medals won by male and female ski jumpers, Slovenian cross country skiers won three medals – gold, silver and bronze – at the FIS Nordic Junior Cross-Country World Ski Championships.

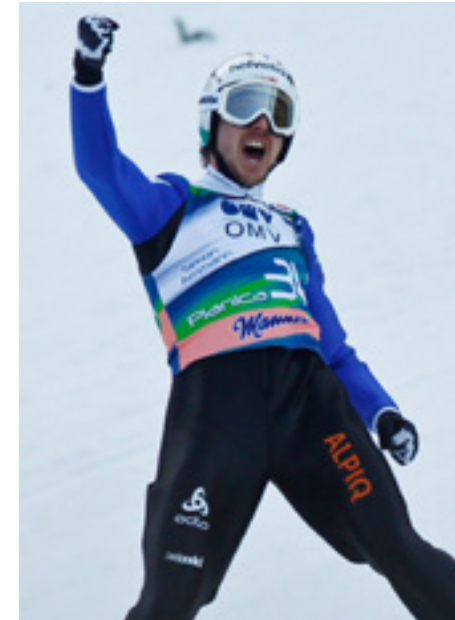
In 1969, Slovenian civil engineer, Janez Gorišek, together with his brother Lado, designed the biggest ski jumping hill to date in Planica. At the first competition on the new “mammoth” facility, Manfred Wolf of the former German Democratic Republic flew 165 metres, which set a new world record. From then onwards, the ski jumping hills in Kulm (Austria), Harrachov (Czech Republic), Oberstdorf (Germany) and Planica in Slovenia alternated in recording the longest flights made by man on skies.

Last year was a turning point. After seventeen years and nineteen successive distance records, Planica surrendered its supremacy to Vikersund, Norway. The ski jumping hill in the small village by Tyriřjord in southern Norway was also designed by Janez Gorišek. The 246.5 meter ski jump of Johan Remen Evensen of Norway was truly unbelievable. At the 22nd Ski Flying World Championships, all fans of this sport expected a new record jump. Although this did not happen, the “Slovenian” ski jumping hill in Norway nevertheless ensured Robert Kranjec the title of world champion.

The Slovenian capital Ljubljana organised a grand reception for our competitors. More than 10,000 fans of ski jumping and cross country skiing, among them several representatives of the Slovenian Government, the National Assembly and the City of Ljubljana, attended this event on Congress Square. The Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Žiga Turk, promised Goran Janus, the head coach of the Slovenian ski jumping team, all means of assistance in the season ahead and in future competitions.

SLOVENIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM HEARD TWICE UNDER PONCA MOUNTAINS – THANKS TO ROBERT KRANJEC

Thanks to Robert Kranjec, the Slovenian anthem thundered out twice under the Ponca Mountains at the 2011/2012 World Cup Ski Jumping Finals held in mid-March in Planica. He first triumphed in the individual competition and, after coming third in the last competition of the season, won the coveted small crystal globe in ski flying.



Kranjec collected 355 points and won the small crystal globe for the second time in his career, the first being in 2010. “This was a great weekend – I won, came fourth with the team, third today, and won the coveted small crystal globe, which was my goal for Planica. It was a mentally exhausting weekend because everybody expected this and so it was hard for me. I was afraid of making a mistake, but I didn't – so I am really happy,” explained

Kranjec, Slovenia's best jumper.

World Cup points for the last race of an extremely successful season were also collected by three Slovenians: Jurij Tepeš came eighth, Jure Šinkovec finished in eighteenth, and junior Jaka Hvala placed twenty-eighth. “Our achievements in Planica were not just good, but excellent. We witnessed the first ever Slovenian ski flying win for Slovenia. On Saturday, at the team competition where there was a real fight between the super powers, we came fourth and at the end, the crème de la crème was Robi's small crystal globe. A dream season – the most successful so far – concluded for the Slovenian team in ski-jumping in Planica. Under the leadership of the head coach, Goran Janus, and his staff, the Slovenian team – with its ski-flying world champion and ski-flying crystal globe winner, Robert Kranjec – achieved a number of milestones for Slovenian ski jumping this winter.

The former B-team coach, Janus, who led the team with aplomb last season by helping it to the winner's podium 32 times, took charge of the A-team prior to the season just gone after the resignation and departure of Matjaž Zupan. It turned out that the A-team's change of coaching staff was the right move, since it is Janus and his staff who are “to be blamed” for this dream

season and the rebirth of ski jumping in Slovenia.

This has been Slovenia's most successful season since it placed fourth in the Cup of Nations with 3,412 points – 1,744 points more than the year before; however, the Slovenian ski jumpers also collected 1,000 points more than in 2002/03 – Zupan's most successful season (2,259 points).

This year, Slovenia's ski jumpers have achieved five great milestones. At the Ski Flying World Championship in Vikersund, Kranjec became the first Slovenian ski flying world champion, the team won a ski-flying medal and Slovenia's first ever team victory in the men's World Cup Team Ski Flying event when Prevc, Kranjec, Tepeš and Šinkovec celebrated victory in Oberstdorf with a record points haul at the end of the season in the Cup of Nations; they also claimed the first Slovenian victory on Letalnica Bratov Gorišek (the Gorišek brothers' ski-flying hill) in Planica.

Slovenia has applied to host the 2017 FIS Nordic World Ski Championship in Planica. Its competitors for the honour are Germany's Oberstdorf, Finland's Lahti and Poland's Zakopane; however, the host of the Alpine Ski World Championship will be decided by the International Ski Federation at the FIS Congress to be held in South Korea on 31 May 2012.

JAKOV FAK – 20 km BIATHLON WORLD CHAMPION



The Slovenian biathlete Jakov Fak won gold in the 20 km individual at the World Biathlon Championship in Ruhpolding, Germany. Fak missed only one of the targets and edged France's Simon Fourcade into second place by seven seconds. Slovenia's success was rounded off by Klemen Bauer who also missed one target and finished fifth (+16.6).

The Czech Republic's Jaroslav Soukup (+12.3; 1) placed third. The third Slovenian biathlete, Janez Marič, finished in 34th place with three missed targets (+3:33). Peter Dokl (+7:29.1) came 84th.

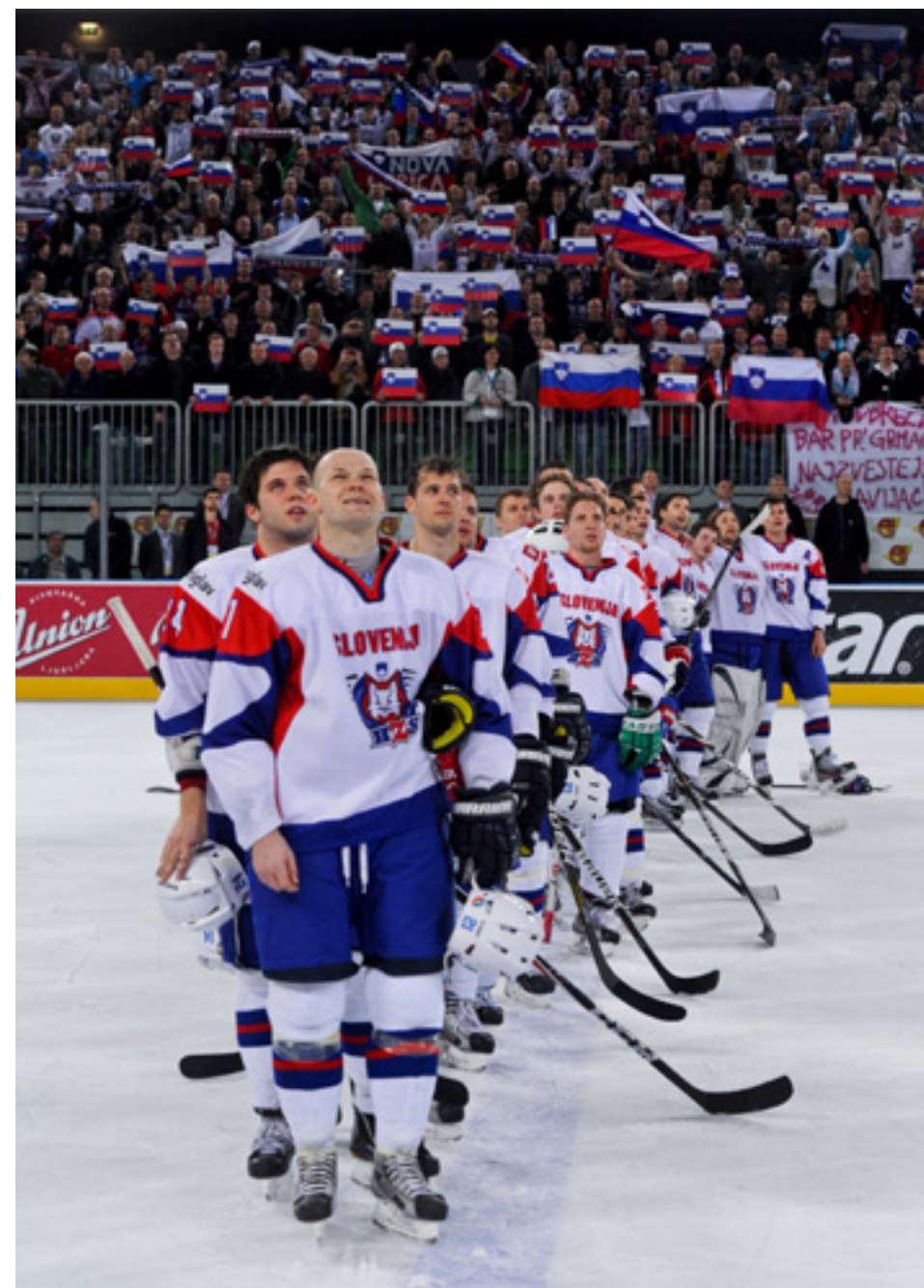
The Slovenian biathletes' performances during the week in Ruhpolding had promised great success. “The feelings are

the same as before. It is rare to become a world champion. Some, during their entire career, never know what it means to overcome everything. This is really something exceptional – a great success for Slovenian biathlon and me personally,” Fak explained, still glowing with success two hours after the race – he was on his way to the award ceremony in the centre of Ruhpolding – and then explained the tactics that brought him victory. “I paced myself very well in all loops and this resulted in victory at the end,” added Slovenia's best biathlete, who then explained that the tactics he had planned with his coach Uroš Velepec on the evening before the race had come to fruition.

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF THE HOCKEY SUPERPOWERS

The Lynx to the World Championships

The sporting news between 15 and 21 April was dominated by the Slovenian hockey aces, who beat all comers at the World Championship Division I Group A, and their appearance among the elite in 2013 was well-deserved. Thus the Stožice Centre in Ljubljana, where our hockey players were cheered on by a crowd of enthusiastic fans, opened the door to the World Championship for our team, the Lynx, and ensured them a place in a great competition in Finland and Sweden.



The aim of reaching the World Championships, so boldly set by the Ice Hockey Federation of Slovenia, has been achieved: the Slovenian team, eliminated from the World Championships in Bratislava last year, returned to the elite group, which was also undoubtedly to the credit of the new hockey arena in the multipurpose Stožice Centre in Ljubljana, which became a real fan's arena with 10,000 spectators, after they had overcome their initial reservations. With the match against Austria, seen by 10,500 enthusiastic fans, Stožice Centre also registered a hockey record with the number of fans.

The result of the outstanding preparedness of our team was a splendid competitive success, which was achieved after three matches and three victories, and the team confirmed its excellent readiness with their success in the fourth match. The competition reached its

peak in the fifth and final match against neighbouring Austria, when the Slovenian team achieved their fifth victory in the prestigious match with the northern neighbour. Thus Slovenia ended the World Championships undefeated, and qualified for the elite group, with Austria, with all 15 points.

That the team was well prepared and very fit, and that the narrow victories were hard-earned was the opinion of both the spectators and players. The selector Matjaž Kopitar summed up the entire World Championships in a few words: "The whole tournament was very close. We were winning by a goal, but it turned out that that goal was decisive. I'm also pleased with the narrow victories, because they were hard-earned."

If some inconsistency and slight hesitation with handovers could be noticed at the beginning of the Championship,

their moves became more confident, harmonious and even daring with every match. The initial restraint became a more synchronised game each time. It was obvious that they were a close-knit team, that there was excellent positive chemistry between them, and that they were driven by the desire to win. The Slovenian team did not show the best of form in the first two matches, against Great Britain and Japan, but still won both, thus laying the foundations for further success. The key match was against Hungary, which the Slovenians won with the greatest goal difference in the Championships (4:1), but they gave their best at a special match against Ukraine. Perhaps coincidence was on the side of the Lynx, as well, because the team had already qualified for the Championship of the elite group due to the result of the match between Hungary and Austria, which was also reflected in the match itself, where the competitors played much better.

A real treat for all sports fans, and especially hockey fans, was the match against Austria: it was full of great hockey, beautiful moves, good defence by both goalkeepers, and the magnificent work of individual players. The gold medals were well-deserved; the crowd chanted proudly about their victory and also to encourage the players to perform even better next year.

The selector Matjaž Kopitar has done a great job and laid the basis for further work. In July, he is preparing the first training camp for young players, while in May he is going with expert staff to look for strong competition for training matches at the IIHF session in Sweden. At the end of the year, qualifications for the goal that Slovenian hockey has not yet achieved, to be represented at the Olympics, are awaiting the team. We hope that the Slovenian team next year will be even stronger, with the currently injured Jan Urbas and Edo Terjav, and perhaps with a player from NHL, and we believe that the silent wish of the Slovenians to play among the 16 best teams in the world will become a reality. Perhaps it will be a time when we live to see yet another, new fairy tale.





Polona Prešeren, photo: Iztok Dimc

Manor of Culinary Creativity

Towards the middle of the windswept Vipava Valley, Zemono Manor sits atop a little hill. The charming, almost fairytale setting of Zemono, where the cold breeze from Nanos mixes with the smell of the sea hidden somewhere beyond the Kras, is actually famous for its Gostilna pri Lojzetu, a restaurant managed by an exceptional host, Tomaž Kavčič.



As a member of the fourth generation of restaurant owners, Tomaž was born with a wooden spoon in his hand. Instead of learning from great chefs in the world, he perfected his cooking skills in the family kitchen, which, most probably, made him the master chef he is today. His infinite creativity and abundance of ideas are the main ingredients in his culinary masterpieces.

When I visited him at Zemono, we were seated at a table with a wonderful vine arrangement. This welcome included a crisp Barbera (we are, after all, in the Vipava Valley, the home of Barbera grapes and yes, Barbera was crispy fried), salmon bonbon (as a gift of the house), smoked popcorn (this winter the Vipava valley even saw some snow) and liquid porcini mushrooms (spring and the mushroom season are just around the corner). Everything was selected with great care and fitted well with the overall concept. Everything was prepared with an eye for detail, including a heart made of Nanoški sir (Nanos cheese), pumpkin seed and radicchio. Nice, I thought to myself. It made me feel even more welcome.

Tomaž has received many accolades – only recently, the Dining Guide presented him with an award for best restaurant in Central and Eastern Europe; it took him by surprise, but he had a hunch that something was afoot when the organisers insisted that he attended the Food Show in Budapest in person. In his view, such achievements confirm that you are on the right track and provide inspiration for the future. They motivate every team member and further encourage creativity. Before being proclaimed the winner in January 2012, Gostilna pri Lojzetu had been shortlisted as one of the finalists from ten countries.

Tomi, as he is called by his friends, is very pleasant to talk to and speaks about the hospitality business with the great enthusiasm and modesty that is characteristic of the best in any pro-

fession. “Guests often ask why we didn’t change the name from gostilna (a pub or a restaurant in Slovenian) to the more sophisticated restavracija, which is foreign in origin. For me, gostilna entails something special. The Slovenian language has one of the most beautiful terms for a restaurant (gostilna) because the root of the word is gost or guest in English and gostiti means ‘to host’. This connection between the words tells you everything. It conveys the essence of culinary science. Neither Italians nor the French – two great culinary nations – can boast such terminology. I will stick to this and will not change the name of my Gostilna pri Lojzetu (Gostilna chez Lojze).”

WHAT KIND OF FOOD IS PREPARED?

Slovenian dishes hold sway. Slovenia’s culinary delights encompass a rich variety of food. Different cultural influences have intermingled in our region for centuries, which is reflected in our culinary heritage. In a way, this mix of cultures gives us privilege since the best things have always remained with us. Most of the ingredients used by Tomaž come from the region.

“I make sure that I do not use much food of foreign origin in my kitchen. I prefer food that is traditionally ‘part of us’ and then I adjust it to modern tastes. My grandmother baked bread with pork lard; back then, this was, of course, required for the hard work to be done in the vineyards. These days, such a rich diet is not necessary,” explains Tomaž, who has a very good understanding of the needs of modern guests.

The restaurant at Zemono is best described as the cuisine of ideas. What Tomaž does and cooks is actually original cuisine. “Cuisine is the basic ingredient. I am always careful not to spoil it. We care for what we do and we serve food to guests so that they can see and feel our attitude. I would like them to see and feel that somebody did something especially for them. I choose different techniques, but I am faithful to those that do not change the primary taste of food. This is the very concept of my cuisine.”

A cuisine of ideas and techniques that do not change taste – the taste that only comes from the best of ingredients. This is why Tomaž still shops for food himself. He believes that a meal in a restaurant must outshine food prepared at home. The reason for this is very simple – a housewife usually does not have the time to look for quality ingredients. She is busy and cannot travel to the Bay of Kvarner to buy shrimps or to Prlekija for goose liver. A guest comes to a restaurant to experience something better. “I see this as my duty.”

WHEN YOU LET GO ...

You won’t find many guests at Zemono engrossed in the menu before they order. They trust the choice of the chef. That could be the reason why he has so many regulars, while new guests mostly come upon recommendation. “This may sound simple to some, but it poses a challenge. In time you develop a sixth sense. Well, you either have it or you don’t.”

“When I serve dishes, my guests often ask me what to eat first. Whatever we do, we have to abide by so many rules; therefore, in my restaurant I advise them to relax and do as they please. I would recommend that salty or spicy food is eaten at the end. I always do my best so that every guest feels comfortable.” He has also noticed that people either visit restaurants frequently or prefer to visit them only on special occasions. The latter need more attention to relax and properly enjoy fine dining. “In our restaurant we help guests to breath easily, instead of breathing down their necks.”

Slovenians, Italians, and many other foodies from near and far, number among the guests at Zemono. Some travel across the world to taste what they have heard and read about, which in a way cre-





ates a sense of obligation to continuously provide high quality food and service. Furthermore, his guests are spoiled since he is always there for them.

Tomaž believes that his business – or his entire concept – starts with the words of welcome to the guests and ends when he bids them farewell. This is not just a job but also a lifestyle. Only on very rare occasions will you not find him in the restaurant; like a captain, he only abandons his ship with extreme reluctance. The restaurant has become part of my life, comments Tomaž, when he shows me his schedule for the next few days. I find it remarkable; what you can do if you put your heart into it. “My work fulfils me – everything I do, I do for my guests.”

He also appreciates and accepts the ideas of his co-workers. He has an excellent team that he trusts and they develop dishes together, which means that he does not have to spend every minute of the day in the kitchen. He does not describe his relationship with his staff as traditional. He is first to arrive and last to leave.

MANOR OF CULINARY INNOVATION

Tomaž is the fourth generation of restaurant owners in his family. Even as a child he had his place and chores in the kitchen. This may be the reason why he never went to learn from the great masters in the culinary world. Despite regretting this a few years ago, he has now realised that this enabled him to develop the unique style that has brought him recognition and fame. His ideas are centred around his guests. “I fuss over food in the kitchen, but what I put on a plate for the guest always breathes with relaxation.”

His ideas very often surpassed his knowledge and so he decided to go to Spain to hone his skills and acquire new techniques. As a young boy he rode motocross, where he learned to work hard, persevere and act responsibly. He describes it as a positive experience, a balance for being privileged as a son of a restaurant owner.

Tomaž considers the ratio between quality and price to be of great significance. How much will you pay for a meal at Zemono? A masterpiece of culinary delight with assorted wines will cost you between €50 and €70. His constant care for quality paid off. His business has not been affected by the current crisis, which he believes made people return to the grassroots, they are rediscovering what has been long forgotten. Human values are at the forefront again and people are thrifty.

Zemono is also the cradle of Slovenian slow food. According to Tomaž, Slovenian restaurants made the mistake at first of serving many different courses with different wines. The essence of slow food was thus tainted and had snob appeal. It is true, however, that despite this unfortunate beginning, the credit for the great leap in the development of dining culture and wine tasting goes to the slow food movement. “The main idea is still to preserve traditional dishes, for example jota (bean and pickled turnip soup) that we saved from extinction. Slow food dinner can also be made of one course when a particular dish would otherwise vanish from menus. I want to make it crystal clear that slow food does not mean ten different courses with ten different wines. Such eating habits are simply not in man’s nature.”

The regions beyond Slovenia’s borders are a frequent source of inspiration for his work, but he never forgets his roots. “The Vipava Valley has a charm of its own because it is my home.” Tomaž lectures at seminars on techniques of original cuisine. In recent years, he has met several outstanding experts in his line of work. By exchanging views and advice, he keeps abreast of the trends in his profession. His trump card is local ingredients and Slovenian wines. He has developed extensive cooperation with Slovenian wine producers, yet he also serves wines from around the world. He always aspires for diversity.



There are exceptional people with exceptional ideas. Being exceptional and having exceptional ideas, however, will not make you stand out. The bottom line is how your ideas come to fruition. What matters is the overall concept and its implementation. It distinguishes exceptional people from average performers. This is definitely true of Tomaž who excels at what he does in his kitchen and says, “It pleases me to see a completely satisfied guest.”

ABOUT MICHELIN STARS

“There are several restaurants in Slovenia that, in my opinion, deserve at least one Michelin star. I am not saying that those still without a star have been wronged but, simply, that’s the way it is in our business. Michelin is not expanding in this time of crisis. I know that Slovenians came very close and the future looks hopeful. Moreover, I am convinced that this is the wish of every serious chef.”



Jože Osterman, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

Third generation homes

EUROPEAN YEAR FOR ACTIVE AGEING AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Many countries, most notably highly developed countries where the standard of living is higher, have experienced a rapid increase in the average age of the population. This people-friendly experience can largely be attributed to substantially higher level of health-care services and medical advancements. Who would not want to live a long, healthy life? Over the previous two decades, the average lifespan has rapidly increased. The data of the national statistical office show that in 2010, 16.5 % of the Slovenian population was older than 65; of this group, no less than 27.7 % were living alone.

Older age also brings about many problems. In competitive capitalism, notably created and even now supported by the materially richest countries, such demographic trends of course represent a certain problem, one that is severely testing their inner ethics. On the one hand, the vision of a highly-productive society and the prevailing values favour drive, extreme performance, success and good looks – attributes found in abundance among young people. On the other hand, one can observe the ageing population being left at the margin and no longer capable of contributing adequately to the undisturbed dissemination of the anticipated values. Long life also mercilessly expands the time span in which various generations (today, almost four!) live together – a fact that probably makes the perceived gap between the oldest and the youngest even more noticeable. Such contradictions are increasingly affecting a human value we consider universal: intergenerational solidarity and coexistence.

Therefore, the European Union has declared 2012 the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Gen-

erations. In this context, several introductory events took place in January and February that promise that the activities throughout the rest of the year will not be taken as a mere routine. They are expected to peak within the traditional Third Age Festival, which will take place at the beginning of autumn in Ljubljana.

It seems that this year will be marked by a deeper reflection about the general social attitude towards the elderly, people who are more vulnerable and weaker than much of the rest of society, and – in a way – comparable to children, who must, for the sake of their future, enjoy the best possible protection. As for the elderly, the future is no longer their ally.

Such reflections will have to be built into all those principles we observe as a society in providing assistance and support to our senior citizens. In this context, residential homes for the elderly are of particular importance. These residential facilities ensure relatively good living conditions by providing a safe building and internal programmes, and to a large extent apparently look after the elderly and usually already dependent people well; nevertheless, there are some serious reasons for concern.

At the beginning of 2010 there were 19 087 places available in 94 homes and special institutions at 112 different locations. Thereof, public homes for the elderly supplied 13 706 places in 55 institutions at 73 different locations, while private homes for the elderly ensured 3 865 places made available by 34 providers with a concession at 34 different locations. In addition, special institutions for adults ensured 1 516 places in five institutions at five locations. If this information is expressed in percentages, and given the fact that a few additional homes have been opened in 2012, we may conclude that the care in homes for the elderly home covered no less than 6.5 % of people older than 65 years. This is a very high percentage, which exceeds the relevant strategic guidelines calling for a 5 % share of people included in such care. While this information seems positive at first glance, the situation is already a matter of serious concern for the healthcare budget, which is supposed to finance the basic healthcare services for the residents of homes for the elderly. In 2012, it is obviously not capable of doing this any longer, because the authorised





insurance company has already started to refuse to sign the relevant contracts.

Therefore, the Association of Social Institutes of Slovenia, which incorporates the majority of homes for the elderly, has warned all stakeholders involved that a national system that is only based on homes for the elderly is heading for some major problems. While it is true that once they have agreed to move to a senior residential home, a great majority of elderly people want to live in a single room (a wish that can in most cases not be fulfilled due to their financial situation), it is nevertheless also a fact that while still capable of taking care of themselves, most elderly people would like to remain in their own home until the last possible moment. These wishes, however, are from the very outset frustrated by the fact that in our country, home care is still poorly developed and unreasonably expensive compared to institutional care. Given the fact that Slovenia has to date also failed to develop a special system of providing long-term care for people who fully depend on the help of others, the homes for the elderly have become a kind of nursing hospitals where the pleasant social life for which these institutions otherwise strive is hardly a reality. To put it otherwise, it remains at the level it was 30 years ago.

Moreover, if one considers the problem of an uneven coverage of needs, meaning that the demand still exceeds the supply only in the central region, while in the marginal areas, homes for the elderly increasingly remain empty, it becomes clear that behind nice buildings of which we can truly be proud, there are many hidden traps for which we would have to find adequate solutions as soon as possible, perhaps during this year of deep reflection. Balancing the existing elderly care systems and simultaneously introducing proper competitiveness between various providers, which could open new opportunities for a high-quality implementation of the necessary programmes, is undoubtedly a path we should follow in order to facilitate the resolution of a great deal of problems faced by a stagnating system, waning in strength.

To summarise: The first segment we touched upon in this paper gives a much better image of the situation than it is in reality. This shows how important it is that rather than for fine, yet empty celebrations, the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations be used for hard analytical work.

VALENTIN VODNIK KUHARSKE BUKVE



JANEZ BOGATAJ

FAKSIMILE S PREVODOM
V SODOBNO SLOVENŠČINO
IN BARVNO PRILOGO

* HERITAGE *

VODNIK'S COOKBOOK

Polona Prešeren, photo: STA

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Kuharske bukve (Cookbooks) written and published in 1799 by Valentin Vodnik, originally a poet, is the first cookbook in the Slovenian language. It was recently published in a modernised edition by the publishing house Celjska Mohorjeva družba. The introduction to the book was written by the ethnologist Dr Janez Bogataj.

Vodnik was a man of the Enlightenment and the first in many fields in Slovenia - he was a teacher, linguist, translator, journalist, archaeologist, coin collector and priest. He was also the editor of the first Slovenian newspaper, *Lublanske novice*. He constantly expressed great concern for the Slovenian language and planned to write a German-Slovenian dictionary, for which he collected some thirty thousand words.

Vodnik was the author of the first Slovenian cookbook, which is quite special and reflects the period at the end of the 18th century. People at that time were already familiar with basic culinary and gastronomic terms in the Slovenian language. The cookbook is unique because it does not provide recipes for Slovenian traditional dishes or describe what people ate, but keeps to the guidelines on what people should eat. As a true man of the Enlightenment, Vodnik offered the guidelines and dishes which were then only being introduced into the kitchens of the period. His introduction, which includes instructions for correct and, particularly, healthy cooking, is of considerable historical importance.

The population in Europe grew in the 18th century and there was a food shortage. However, agriculture was advancing due to new technologies and crops. The cookbooks began to emerge, with Vodnik's being the first in the Slovenian language. According to Dr Bogataj, the dietary habits and meals of Slovenians in the 18th century were a result of the country's geographical position between the Mediterranean, the Alps and the Pannonian Plain; the strongest influences came from the Central and South-Eastern Europe and were particularly noticeable in the cuisine of the urban population (the cooking of the middle and upper classes). In those days, pork was quite a frequent ingredient, because the conditions for pig production were excellent, which was also the reason for the excessive use of lard. In his introduction to the cookbook, Vodnik warned against the excessive use of lard, fat, bacon and pork.

Buckwheat, rye and millet were still very important in the diet of Slovenians, while maize and the potato were quite new. And while beef was mostly consumed in towns, people in the country mainly ate mutton and goat meat, according to Dr Bogataj's introduction to this year's edition of *Kuharske bukve*.

Vodnik initially explains that the kitchen was primarily the women's domain. Dr Bogataj divides Vodnik's introductory thoughts into three topics: understanding of cookery, healthy diet (in the spirit of the second half of the 18th century), and Slovenian culinary terminology. Vodnik advises the cooks that rancid food should be thrown away and not eaten, and that iron rather than clay pots should be used for cooking. He points to the hazards that cooking may cause, gives instructions on the use of fire, water, salt and yeast, and also advises on proper hygiene. It has to be emphasised that in writing his book, Vodnik sought suitable expressions in the Slovenian language. In the conclusion, he asks the readers to pardon his terminology and correct his attempts, because only this way can Slovenian cookery be put 'in order'.

The general introduction is followed by recipes which can challenge even modern culinary enthusiasts. Interestingly, the recipes do not include quantities, but only ingredients. To present how Slovenians cooked at the end of the 18th century according to Vodnik, we suggest two recipes from the reprint of his book.

APPLE ICE-CREAM

Peel *Steirischer Maschanzker* apples (an old variety) and cut them into quarters, then boil them in water in a brass kettle. Add one cinnamon stick and lemon rind; cook until soft, then sift through a cloth. Add one ounce of sugar per 3.5 dl of apple juice, and cook until a drop of mixture turns to jelly when poured onto a tin plate and cooled. Cool the entire mixture and let it freeze.

A GOOD DISH CALLED 'POOR MAN'

Take a goblet of milk per one piece of white bread; soak the bread in the milk; crack in nine eggs; add three spoons of flour; mix all together. Slice half a pound (libra) of bacon into thin strips, plus one pound of fruit or apples, also sliced into strips; grease the baking tin with butter, put bacon in the bottom, then apples, then another layer of bacon, and a layer of apples, until all the ingredients are used. Then pour over the top the mixture of milk, bread, eggs and flour, after first having well stirred and whipped the mixture. Put a piece of butter on top here and there. Finally, cook in a baking tin in the oven where bread is baked.

DR JANEZ BOGATAJ ON THE IMPORTANCE OF VODNIK'S KUHARSKE BUKVE:

'Vodnik's cookbook is significant in three ways. It was the first cookbook in the Slovenian language. Secondly, the recipes provide a concrete insight into the dietary habits of 18th century Slovenians, which had not been described before. As a man of the Enlightenment, Vodnik tried to educate cooks and demonstrate healthy cooking (e.g. the introduction is written in a manner as a modern nutritionist would use). And thirdly, Vodnik's book is a proof that Slovenians at the end of the 18th century could be compared on an equal basis to others - today, well-developed culinary environments in Europe - as Vodnik was able to express all the culinary and gastronomic terms of that period in the Slovenian language, which, given today's globalisation and the use of English words, is no longer possible.'



**I FEEL
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