

# Sinfo 05

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# Committed to reform

- INTERVIEW: **Dr Ivan Svetlik** • PEOPLE: **Professor Josip Miloš Turk, MD**
- SPORTS: **A farewell to skiing giants** • ART & CULTURE: **In harmony with the Earth**
- SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS: **Easter dishes**



# contents



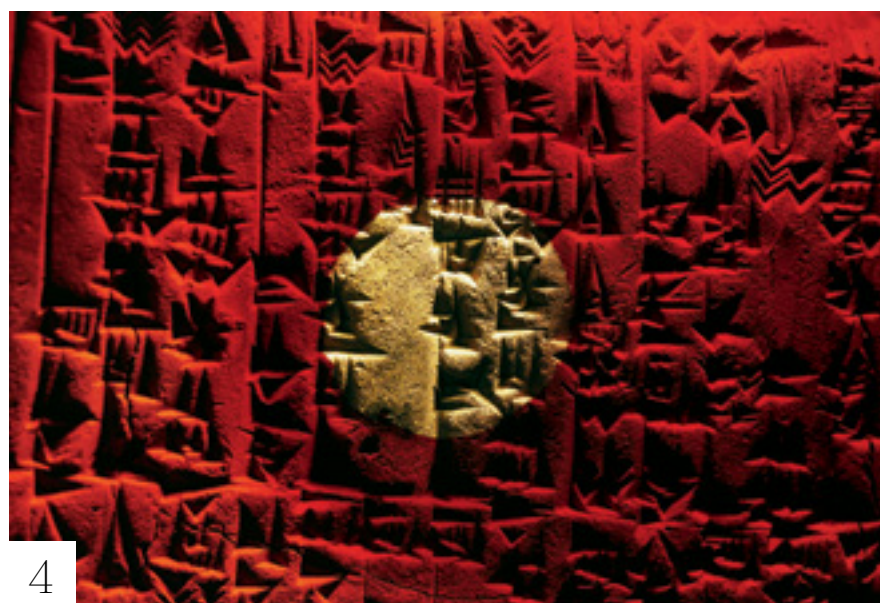
1



2



3



4



5



6

**1 In focus** 6  
The elderly are getting younger

**2 Interview** 10  
Dr Ivan Svetlik

**3 Before and after** 16  
20 years of Slovenia in numbers

**4 Art & culture** 27  
In harmony with the Earth

**5 Green corner** 32  
Let's Clean the Balkans In One Day!

**6 Natural trails** 48  
Easter Sunday Customs

**MONTHLY COMMENTARY** 4  
Pact for the Euro: dependent on pensions

**BUSINESS** 14  
Rather than taking care of development, moving production abroad

**A LETTER** 20  
Chinatsu Nakajima, Klemen Zavodnik

**ART & CULTURE** 22  
European Capital of Culture and its international dimensions  
Slovenian Advertising Festival  
Ljubljana gains a Tobacco Museum  
Spring Forward

**OUR EXCELLENCE** 28  
The rebirth of the Rimske Terme thermal spa

**PEOPLE** 34  
Professor JOSIP MILOŠ TURK, MD

**SPORTS** 40  
A farewell to skiing giants

**SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS** 40  
Easter dishes

**CULTURAL TRAILS** 44  
The Smell of Books

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# editorial



Vesna Žarkovič, Editor

## COMMITTED TO REFORM

The idea of a combined Franco-German train has been circulating in public for quite some time. It found more precise form in a fairly binding European document called A Pact for the Euro, which lays down in detail the criteria for "membership" in this elite euro club. Admission will only be allowed to those countries that demonstrate strict compliance with criteria that the two main proposers of the pact, Berlin and Paris, consider to be a precondition for the stability and sustainability of the common European currency – the euro.

In order to "catch" the Franco-German train, Slovenia will have to adopt structural reforms, including pension reform. This Government will remain committed to reform. If Slovenia adopts the reforms envisaged in this and the following year, it will run alongside Germany and France, otherwise it will find itself in the same position as Ireland and Portugal. Unless people realise that reforms are necessary, each individual will have to assume responsibility for themselves, cautions the Minister of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, Dr Ivan Svetlik.

In addition to the economic crisis and growing unemployment, the developed world faces two key issues: a drop in fertility levels and increasing life expectancy. Consequently, everywhere, with greater or lesser levels of resistance, the pension qualifying period is being extended and the retirement age increased. Economists, namely, envisage that pension funds will be exhausted within a few decades if the employment period is not extended. It is interesting that the EU has no common pension legislation laying down the retirement age. All countries of the old continent are striving more or less successfully gradually to raise the retirement age and, at the same time, to extend the employment period. Men and women in most European countries and in the USA retire at the age of 65. People retire at this age in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands etc. In Germany, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, the retirement age is gradually rising to 67 years.

Just before the beginning of summer, Slovenia's 15 successful thermal spas and health resorts will be joined by one more – Rimske Terme. With its stylish, well-considered and tasteful design, reflecting architectural sensitivity to its historical heritage, the modern resort and thermal spa in Rimske Toplice, located on the right bank of the Savinja River between Laško and Zidani Most, wishes to attract the most demanding guests, such as those who have visited the spa in the past. Rimske Terme spa was once known all over the world and was even visited by royalty. Completely renovated, the spa is about to embark on a new beginning and to achieve new fame.

Some parts of Slovenia and the neighbouring regions are known for their great variety of Easter dishes. Many of these are common to all these regions but some are special, typical of a particular region and its cultural features, or even of a particular town or village. No other holiday boasts such a variety of popular traditional dishes, including dishes covered by the famous žegen (the blessing of Easter baskets – a custom that differs slightly from one place to another), various Easter buns, potica (rolled yeast dough with filling), flat cakes, štruklji (rolled dumplings), Easter eggs, meat dishes and the like, and dishes served for Easter Sunday lunch, traditionally enriched with interesting and unique Easter specialities. The length of the Easter holiday period, the upcoming spring season, and the first crops that come with it, all add to the abundance of Easter dishes. In no other season are folk customs so intertwined with church liturgy as they are during the Easter season, which is why they have remained very much alive and popular until the present day.

Two giants of Slovenian sport – Slovenia's best ever cross-country skier, Petra Majdič, and Slovenia's best ski jumper of all time, Primož Peterka – have retired from professional sport. Slovenian sport has produced a number of world-class sportsmen and women. From the legendary Leon Štukelj (a triple Olympic champion in gymnastics), Miroslav Cerar (a two-time Olympic champion in gymnastics), Ivo Daneu (one of the world's best basketball players at the end of the sixties), Iztok Čop (a rowing champion), Mateja Svet (an Alpine skiing champion) to Brane Oblak (one of the world's best football players in the seventies) and the list goes on.

The Fabula literary festival, which started in April 2010, marks the end of the period in which Ljubljana held the title of World Book Capital, thus rounding off a series of magnificent cultural events in Slovenia. It is not an overstatement to say that some of the programming and social approaches applied during this period, should be used as a model in organising other events in the future.





Darijan Košir

# Pact for the Euro: dependent on pensions

Exactly two decades after independence and seven years since its accession to the European Union, the Slovenian Government is faced with a new historical decision. At a referendum or, to put it better, plebiscite, its citizens will vote on pension reform and to decide on what part of the European Union Slovenia will belong to in development terms. To paraphrase Borut Pahor, the Slovenian Prime Minister, the choice looks simple: our decision will be about whether in development terms we wish to be on the Franco-German train, that is the one powered by the strongest European economic engine, or on the Irish-Portuguese train, symbolic of countries in financial difficulties, which are no longer able to sustain their own development, but are crucially dependent on the help and assistance of other members of the eurozone.

The idea of a combined Franco-German train has been circulating in public for quite some time. It found its form in a fairly binding European document called A Pact for the Euro, which lays down in detail the criteria for “membership” in this elite euro club. Admission will be only allowed to those countries that demonstrate strict compliance with the criteria, which the two main proposers of the pact, Berlin and Paris, consider to be a precondition for the stability and adequate functioning of the common European monetary unit – the euro. In other words and quite openly: apparently, Europe and the eurozone, in particular, are being divided into two concentric circles, that is

in a zone with binding commitments to the euro and a zone tied more loosely to the euro. This is what used to be referred to as the “two-speed euro” or more accurately, a dual-power euro policy. The ‘sound’ eurozone would thus include countries that can sustain their own development and help out those less capable; on the other hand, the looser eurozone will include the countries whose development will be essentially dependent on foreign financial aid and loans given by the countries with a strong euro. Ever since the introduction of euro in 1999, the question has remained as to when this monetary area formed of countries with such different evolutionary and structural characteristics

would split in two. The adoption of A Pact for the Euro has made the institutionalisation of such a split a possibility.

It is in the Slovenian national and development interests to be member of the sound euro club. This is vital, not only for the sake of our historic and cultural ties with the area under German influence, but also given that more than half of Slovenia’s foreign trade and investments is created through cooperation with the countries in this area (Germany, Austria, France). Put simply, not entering this club would mean severing economic ties on which we are vitally dependent. Although we are partly linked with the Mediterranean and the insular parts of Europe, which are currently experiencing major economic difficulties (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and, potentially, Italy and Cyprus), our dependence on their markets – with the exception of Italy – is not a crucial one. In principle, Slovenian politics and Slovenia’s citizens have no doubts as to what part of the eurozone they want and have to join. The only question in this context is whether we are ready to do everything that the ‘owners’ of this club expect or demand from us. And at this point we are confronted with a major stumbling-block which may become a fatal threat to Slovenia’s economic prospects, the willingness of the Slovenian population (and of a part of the political sphere) to undergo the reforms required seems to be rather limited. And it will be a surprise, if that state of affairs looks different in a few months’ time.

The Pact for the Euro has summarised the measures required to board the Franco-German train in four key areas. These include: 1) fostering competitiveness; 2) fostering employment; 3) contributing further to the sustainability of public finances, and 4) reinforcing financial stability. These four measures cover 13 objectives which are essential for their implementation. These are: restricting the growth of labour costs; encouraging internationalisation and foreign direct investments; agreements with social partners on key commitments for encouragement of growth; improving the business environment; promoting R&D and more efficient higher education; promoting flexicurity and employment growth; restricting informal forms of labour; consistent implementation of the national reform programme and the stability pact; long-term sustainability of the pension system; more consistent targeting of social benefits with regard to employment; improving conditions for growth through adequate corporate financing; improving the stability of Slovenia’s largest banks; and restructuring of bank portfolios.

If we exclude from the objectives those popular with the people (for example, both objectives regarding the regulation of the banking system) and those urgent for business (foreign investments, corporate financing, better business environment, R&D and social benefits), we are left with measures which affect the very essence of the social state, the acquired rights of employees and pensioners, in short, the rights of the active and of the dependent employees (restrictions on labour

costs, flexicurity, restricting informal forms of labour and sustainability of the pension system). In other words, the Pact for the Euro requires the Slovenian Government to regulate every sector of the labour market. However, in circumstances when the Slovenian legislation continually disables the national parliament’s role in adopting legislation by transferring all final decision-making power to the voters in referendums, it may well look like a rope around the neck of any government, and not just the present one.

The April referendum on the Mini Jobs Act, which was rejected by 80% of the voters, revealed people’s unwillingness to regulate one of the labour market areas covered by the Pact for the Euro, the restrictions on informal forms of labour, which unregulated student work is certainly part of. In their first reaction to the referendum rejecting the Mini Jobs Act, Government representatives said that this probably did not represent a crucial or unsolvable problem, since several other alternatives were still available to address the issue. A much more difficult problem is to be expected since a referendum is called on the Pension Reform Act (approved twice by the national parliament, by a simple and a qualified majority), if that act were to be rejected.

**No alternative would be possible in that case: given demographic trends (ageing population) and the fact that fewer and fewer employees have to maintain an ever increasing number of the retired persons, including the resulting financial consequences, the Government simply has no other choice than to implement the reform as proposed (retirement age set at 65 years) or in an even more austere version. There is no third possibility – all “more favourable” options mean failing to carry out a pension reform and, consequently, giving up the Pact for the Euro.**

In that case, sanctions of the markets and the EU against Slovenia would be inevitable and immediate. The Government has no intention to frighten anybody in this respect, but the case of Portugal and its outcome are highly instructive. By the adopted pension reform, Spain saved itself from the most severe debt crisis; while Portugal paid a high price for its refusal to reform. From a technical point of view, the choice for the voters is clear, however, the political outcome of the referendum may not necessarily be so. The Government will use all the arguments available to try to convince the voters it is right, but if it succeeds remains to be seen. In fact, Slovenia is the only country in Europe where an issue as complex as pension reform can be decided by a referendum. There are no examples to be followed in this context.



## The self-image of grey panthers

# THE ELDERLY ARE GETTING YOUNGER

In addition to the economic crisis and growing unemployment, the developed world faces two key issues: fertility is declining and life expectancy is going up. Consequently, everywhere with greater and lesser levels of resistance the pension qualifying period is increasing and, in particular, the age at which a person can retire is rising. However, economists envisage that pension funds will be exhausted within a few decades if the active period of employment is not prolonged.

It is interesting that the EU has no common pension legislation defining the retirement age. All countries of the old continent are striving more or less successfully to gradually raise the retirement age and, at the same time, to extend the employment period. Men and women in most European countries and in the USA already retire at the age of 65. People retire at this age in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands etc. In Germany, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, the full retirement age is gradually rising to 67 years.

### Old age and old age

We should not forget that, on average, people in the Middle Ages lived for just 30 years.

In the first years of the twentieth century, life expectancy was about 50 years.

At the beginning of the third millennium, people in some parts of the developed world are reaching an average of 85 years or more.

At the same time, the age limit at which we consider somebody to be old is rising.

Early in the twentieth century, people were talking about

40-year-old elderly men and women, yet today older people are becoming ever younger and they also feel that way.

The fact that elderly people are getting younger is actually the most important cognition of the third millennium when the baby boomer or hippy generation is growing old. Already in its youth, it broke taboos and, despite the Cold War, it propagated peace and non-violence and freedom of love and sex.

The people of this generation are again breaking taboos. At the age of 60, 70 or even 80, they do not want to be considered old.

The age is, however, younger and those who are considered old are actually getting older. Is that not true? Certainly it is, but only a few notice this. Not long ago, the average age in Slovenian homes was 70 for elderly people and now it is 84 or even more!

The fact is that the younger older population requires a new perspective on ageing.

For a growing number of individuals, the third age no longer means staying at home and being supported by children, but is an active period in which people work, educate, travel, deal with art, take up sports, have fun, while many of them even open up businesses.

I am afraid that this fact of el-

derly people become younger and feeling like that has not been noticed by the mass media as a mirror of society. Ever more frequently, they present generally beautiful, handsome, young, healthy as well as successful and rich individuals. Less beautiful, unsuccessful, poor, sick, disabled, especially older people, are not in fashion! Wrinkles, sagging skin and hints of grey are even a sign of failure?!

At the same time, journalists and moderators, especially women journalists and moderators are not desired on TV after they have reached 40 years of age?! Shops are increasingly offering clothes for anorexic teenagers as if they were unaware of the fact that other people also wear bigger clothes: not only older but also younger people. Finally, they organise dances for the young, cars and hi-fi equipment are offered to younger people as if older people don't need or buy them etc.

### Preparation for retirement

Around 500,000 retired people live in our country and the third age lasting from the age of 65 to the end of our life is not so short, is it? Usually, it lasts at least 20 years, very

often even 30 or more. Although the number of elderly people is rising, it seems that nobody in our country knows what these people want and what they need. The fact is that most of them, after they retire (one-quarter of Slovenians have retired), simply disappear into thousands of private addresses and never gather in a group again. Therefore, retired people are considered the most excluded section of the population.

Most of them find it difficult getting used to the retirement they have been waiting for so eagerly. The worst emotional crisis crops up three to four months after retiring. Retired people often feel inferior and written-off. They feel they are excluded from society and pushed to the margins. Further, they feel their world has been restricted to their home environment and that they have no right to take decisions any more. Gradually, they feel discomfort if they appear in public and therefore many withdraw into solitude.

Some of them experience a crisis they cannot resolve, they reach for alcohol and even commit suicide etc. However, everything happening to them is more or less hidden from public eyes. The media does not write about this.



Changes brought by old age are not an illness; they are part of human development from birth to death. And it is also possible to walk with a walker.





Everyone has a considerable effect on how to grow old. Taking up sports, active participation in life activities, cultivating friendship and sociability are the most important fountains of youth in addition to safe and moderate food. Planning is also very important.

People who retire overnight lose their social position that had been defined in terms of their profession and employment. They lose their position as soon as it is known in their environment that they are preparing for retirement and, at the same time, they lose their profession, namely they are no longer teachers, journalists, actors etc. In all forms and columns they are simply retired persons. This issue could be easily solved. They could write: teacher, journalist, actor in retirement etc. This would not cost anything, yet the feeling of the retired person involved would improve because part of their already achieved professional personal identification would thus be maintained. It is welcomed if people know what you are by profession and not only who you are.

## Stereotypes

Many social groups (e.g. women, especially blondes, other races, particularly Roma, mentally ill persons, homosexuals) etc. suffer prejudice. Stereotypes of elderly people are especially persistent. The majority (from children to intellectuals) consider them annoying, preaching, continuously ill, but also deliberate and taciturn who mainly rest

and recall distant memories. At the same time, older people are subjected to negative emotions, such as forgetfulness, the inability to learn new things, passivity and inactivity. Grey panthers also reveal this »boredom« on the outside: their clothes are quite boring: in grey, black, dark blue, or brown colours. Are vivid colours like yellow and red unsuitable for them?! Should they only listen to popular folk music!?

It is known in particular that an experience gained by caring for sick and physically infirm elderly people, even though they actually make up only five percent, results in the fact that we consider elderly people helpless older people. Western politicians, including Slovenian ones, consider homes for the elderly as a synonym for the elderly and talk about dependence, social care and support etc. This strongly discriminates against active and healthy elderly people. The fact is that elderly people do not play an active social role any more. But they should! In particular, because elderly people today are physically and mentally fitter than decades ago. In work and social terms, they are more active and demanding towards their environment but are almost without political and social power.

Politicians and those who decide on the future of the country, i.e. also about the elderly, are not noticing that the number of retired persons starting their second career in the third age is increasing. They set long-term goals for life in retirement. They very often start dealing with something new since they are aware they still have some 20 to 30 years of life ahead. In this way, a former teacher dedicates him/herself to entrepreneurship, a salesperson to painting; a former textile worker gets involved in offering care at home for dangerously ill people etc. Many of them go to the University of the Third Age that was established in Slovenia in 1984 and educates retired people and in particular retired women all over the country.

## Reduced physical ability

Many people who are growing old are affected by the realisation that their physical strength is decreasing over time and that the time will come when they are no longer capable of physically performing like they easily used to. This concerns, in particular, those who depended on their physical abilities in their everyday activities or whose good physical condition filled them with satisfaction (e.g. sports). Fortunately, physical abilities diminish gradually and therefore adaptability to one's reduced physical strength is easier. The more an individual, with his/her imagination and inventiveness, knows how to find other activities adapted to his/her physical condition, the easier is their gradual transition to physically less strenuous work and activities. Running may be replaced by walking; the latter enables greater contact with nature, the environment and the people with whom we are going for a walk. The ability to adjust to activities which are adapted to one's physical condition is greater if

people accept changes in a reasonable way and as a natural process brought about by the years. This is again generally not a topic our media writes about.

## Poorer health

Health does not improve with ageing. However, healthy habits and lifestyles can reduce a number of health problems or postpone them. Taking responsibility for your own health and enhancing your health can never start too early. Old age changes are not an illness; they are part of human development from birth to death. The changes in appearance which characterise old age especially affect those who had emphasised the importance of external appearance in earlier stages of their life and neglected other values which lead to self-satisfaction. Fortunately, mature elderly people live in greater harmony with themselves and their bodies than they used to live in their early years and this involves much greater harmony than young people imagine. In any case, old age is not a period in which youth can turn directly into old age. However, it is true that all previous life stages are reflected in old age. Everything that took place earlier also affects the human self-image in one's advanced years. Moreover, research shows that elderly people are much more satisfied with their lives than they had expected a few years before or imagined by the young. In any case, the rate of satisfaction with your life also relates to the fact that in this period you do not feel a lack of material means and that you still play an active economic role. It is vital that the social and natural environment is favourable and acceptable to elderly people in that it helps foster self-respect, courage and dignity and allows them to continue their lives to the best of their abilities and personal initiatives.



## The younger and in particular the elderly should:

- eat moderate amounts of safe food (a lot of fruit and vegetables, milk and milk products, as little sweet, fried and fatty food as possible);
- continue to be mentally active (read, write, solve crosswords and Sudoku puzzles, play chess etc.);
- have close contact with families and friends;
- be physically active everyday including: gymnastics, fitness, walking, running, swimming etc.; and
- think positively and laugh as much as possible, including at themselves.

**Third-age priorities:** greater personal freedom, more opportunities to listen to themselves, vital rhythm is adjusted to themselves, realising unfulfilled wishes, rich experiences, strengthening relationships, revived interests in culture etc.

Retirement-age transition problems may occur if people: stop fighting to achieve goals, do not set new goals, withdraw into passivity, do not assert their personality, are subjected to environmental pressures and take a subordinate position, abandon their capabilities and interests etc..

- In approximately 40 years, for the first time in history the share of people older than 60 years will be bigger than the share of children aged less than 15.
- Ageing is a victory of our time; it is the result of a better quality of life and improved public health care and development.





# Committed to reform

## Dr Ivan Svetlik

**In order for Slovenia to “catch up” with the German-French train, it will have to adopt structural reforms, as well as pension reforms. This Government intends to remain committed to reform. If Slovenia adopts the reforms envisaged in this and in the following year, it will run alongside Germany and France, otherwise, it will find itself in the same position as Ireland and Portugal. Until people realise the necessity of reform, each individual will have to assume responsibility for themselves, cautions the Minister of Labour, Family and Social Affairs.**

**Voters overwhelmingly rejected the Mini Jobs Act in the referendum held on 10 April. Both advocates and opponents of the Act agree that the outcome also expresses the low level of regard voters have for the Government, which represents a poor base for continued governmental reforms, including pension reforms. How will the Government then, in light of such forecasts, approach reforms in the future?**

The outcome of the latest referendum certainly does not represent a good starting point; however, we will not cease convincing people that reforms are of paramount importance to all of us, and most of all, to the future of our young people. If we fail to support reforms, the development train will take off, and only the train running towards the southeast will remain. In this case, each of us will have to assume his or her part of the responsibility. The sooner we see things as they really are, the better off we will be! People will have to realize the circumstances we are living in and stop deluding themselves. If reality does not set in soon, we will all shortly feel its pain in the future.

**In what way?**

Through the termination of social transfers, reductions in income, increased costs, more expensive loans, lower pensions, etc. If this occurs, which

we hope it won't, we will find ourselves on a dangerous path. This is my way of cautioning that if the proposed governmental reforms are not adopted, the likelihood of a prosperous society will continue to decrease.

**What does the failure of the referendum on mini jobs mean for the fate of pension reforms?**

A positive side of the referendum on mini jobs was that it mobilized a greater number of citizens than past referendums. This is a good sign. People have become more attentive to open questions and desire solutions offered by the law. The outcome was of course extremely unfavourable, one reason being that we failed to sufficiently explain to voters in a clear enough manner what the new law would have accomplished, but it is also true that people are not prepared to step determinedly in the direction of reform, in the direction of change which could result in a different outcome for each person. Changes can also result in victims, although this law did not produce victims, but offered new rights and opportunities for work. We can of course talk about the Government's low level of popularity, so all in all, I believe that the poor result was a combination of all these factors. In the future, it will be important to convince people of the necessity of reform and

that the proposed solutions are suitable and appropriate for a healthy development of our society.

**Would you agree with the statement that the negative outcome of the referendum expressed voters' attitudes towards politics as a whole?**

Sure, of course. The problem the Government has is that it may not in any case implement demagoguery or mislead their people. The Government must always be honest with its citizens. Others, on the other hand can of course use different methods, against which it is difficult to fight, nevertheless I do not believe that reforms can be implemented through referendums. No country has ever succeeded in this endeavour. Additionally, barriers to reform exist in our institutional system, in which any interest group unsatisfied with a solution can collect voters' signatures thereby rejecting necessary changes which appear unpopular and bring renouncement.

**How can this then be countered?**

One possibility lies in a parliamentary consensus that referendums may not be used for every opposition, which would be the most typical measure. Namely, the voters have nowhere yet voted with regard to the entire pension scheme at a referendum. This would

be the best method; however we would require the consent of the opposition for this. Our only hope lies in convincing the public, or calling on them, to stop pushing us into a state of collective insanity where we are all fighting each other, a situation in which, unfortunately, all of us will radically lose. I hope that people will eventually comprehend this, otherwise the Portuguese scenario will follow, a scenario which no one desires.

**The opponents of the Mini Jobs Act are calling on the Government to begin new negotiations. How will you respond?**

We have never found it difficult to negotiate, we have done so thus far, and even more so if an opportunity to achieve something exists. We have been carrying out negotiations with social partners regarding the Mini Jobs Act for quite some time, requesting that they submit their recommendations, and we have never received any to date. The Government naturally assumes responsibility for system solutions; it cannot delegate this responsibility to others; however, this case involved opposition to the system's starting points with students no longer prepared to negotiate about anything. We will thus urgently have to resolve the problems that have arisen from the rejection of this law and seek other possibilities. And we welcome any recommendations our opponents may have regarding this law.

**...nevertheless, problems regarding student work and unemployment remain...**

..I am currently carrying out discussions with the team that worked on this. We have to assess how to forge ahead since we cannot propose a similar law within a period of one year, and it will be necessary to take measures as soon as possible. We will seek solutions involving amendments to the existing legislation with regard to the most sensitive points such as taxation, different status for labour recruiters, etc.;





these will be minor changes. It is difficult to imagine what we should offer retired persons now that the Mini Job Act has been rejected. Retired persons themselves were the initiators of the Act, which would have enabled them access to work, which had previously been illegal. You see, this does not involve the forcing of additional work on people in order to improve their financial status, if they themselves do not wish it. We also in this way wish to encourage active aging, something which is extremely important for the older population. It will become increasingly more difficult to care for them if they themselves do not maintain their strength.

**What are the Government's expectations regarding the adoption of the pension reform?**

The reform has been prepared and the law endorsed, with the Government and the National Assembly having done their work. Now it is the trade unions' turn. They still have the

option of not filing signatures to request a referendum\*. If they do submit the signatures, which means that another referendum will be held, we will attempt to convince our citizens that the reform is necessary. This is not a choice, and there is no time to resolve this problem through an amendment to the legislation regulating the question of referendum, which also applies to the other referendums planned for the period up to the summer. One of these is also the referendum on the prevention of undeclared work. I believe this referendum is political insanity for no country has ever opted to allow illegal labour.

**Are there any differences between the pension scheme models of the EU and Slovenia?**

There are many pension scheme models. Some nations have adopted even more radical changes with regard to pension reforms. We are staying with the classic solution, emphasizing the first pillar of the pay-as-

you-go system which is of key importance. The second pillar comprising of supplementary collective insurances was set up during the previous reform in 2000, with half of the population included in this pillar with small payments, so that it plays a less important compensatory role. Several nations have considerably fortified this pillar, whereby they emphasize that in the future each person individually will have to opt for long-term investments with the aid of the pension scheme, which is managed and guaranteed by the State. Through the new law, we wish to strengthen this pillar as well, but that will be a gradual process. Some nations have a very long tradition of such investment systems, which are no longer pay-as-you-go systems but rather investment systems. It is important how the fund managers manage these funds. The economic crisis has proven that what we had in recent years was good, as the value of investments did not significantly decline. This is the result

of a conservative management of assets, therefore in the new proposal, we decided for the life-cycle principle, meaning that in youth when someone invest into the second pillar, he will be investing in riskier investments with correspondingly higher returns, giving him enough time to compensate for possible losses through a renewed growth in share value. In the mature period, people will select safer forms of investments, where the risks diminish, but so do the returns. More contemporary solutions for the pension scheme as introduced in Sweden also exist, which Slovenia will also begin designing in the second phase for the period after 2025, when we will have to repair the existing scheme, since the ratio between the active and the passive population will have changed considerably and today's solutions will no longer be sustainable.

**What are the comparisons regarding unemployment?**

As regards unemployment in Slovenia, I can say that it is noticeably under the European average; it is the ninth lowest in the EU and the number of unemployed youth is the fourth lowest. The view of this in Slovenia is sometimes biased, for all countries have a problem with unemployment. I can say that we have managed to successfully resolve the unemployment problem with the unemployment figures being favourable. In 2005, there were 16,000 unemployed persons under the age of 25; today this figure has dropped to 11,000. In the 25-30 age group, unemployment has remained the same and comprises around 16,000 people. The waiting time for employment has decreased for the youth.

\*On 21 April, the trade unions filed signatures to request a referendum. The referendum will be held on 5 June.

**We have been seeing a significantly greater number of referendums in Slovenia than in other European countries. What is your explanation for this?**

Following Slovenia's independence twenty years ago, the country went through a romantic period of renewed entry into capitalism and democracy. The current institutions were being established in this period alongside the unrealistic expectation that they could operate ideally, without taking into consideration the fact that the Slovenian cultural matrix differed from that in other places. This has led to solutions which provide different consequences, which is best seen in tycoonism and wild privatization. A similar thing occurred in the regulating of decision-making at the state level, where decision-making through referendums was presumed as the climax of democratic decision-making without realizing what this could mean for an effective system of leadership. Namely, the Government must also adopt unpopular measures, which in the long-term bring positive and urgently necessary effects. Thus citizens make too many short-term decisions and fail to envisage long-term situations, which we should understand in light of the idealistic expectations, which were responsible for the state of things at that time.

The crisis which began in 2008 and was at first financial, and afterwards economical is slowly and persistently creeping into the minds of individuals. It is entering a phase of social anomony with regard to values and thinking, where one no longer knows what is right and wrong, and which principles to keep. In short, we are in a critical phase where we are all fighting each other, with the State being in the role of the scapegoat, and everyone expecting it to solve problems, regardless of its competence. A typical example is the blockades and protests of craftsmen who established their busi-

nesses on their own initiatives and who now blame the State for their problems.

Until everyone comes to the cognizance that each must assume responsibility for their decisions, a way out is highly unlikely. We are in a situation where we are passing the buck to each other. This can also be seen in the decisions of the Constitutional Court regarding the pension reform referendum which could have opted to correct deficiencies in the decision-making system, but chose not to do so. And this also applies to an entire range of other groups and institutions.

**...even the trade unions who among other things complain that they were not equal partners in the dialogue.**

Let me say that our trade unions are proposing solutions which are not always suitable for today's circumstances, they are simply obsolete, and instead of encouraging development, they impede it. In general, they are endeavouring to further mitigate specified conditions for retirement, something which is unacceptable. They must realise the responsibility they are taking upon themselves in the event of a rejection of the pension reform, the consequences of which would be great and to a certain extent, also difficult to forecast. The trade unions need to know that they not only hold the fates of all their members in their hands, but are also bringing into question the fate of the entire country, and in this way may plunge it into an even deeper crisis than it is in today. The Government has been debating with the trade unions about the pension reform for three years. Their standpoint was that they did not accept the retirement age of 65 which is the standard in the EU. The Government's responsibility is not to contribute to collective self-deception, to implement a reform which does not resolve the problem, to implement the reform for its own sake, in short, that we change the form but not the contents. The essence of the pension reform

lies precisely in the fact that the people's working lives need to be extended due to the fact that the lifespan and psycho-physical fitness of the population has also increased. Only in this way, can we halt the pension decline. Of course, this is something that is occurring all over Europe. If the trade unions do not realize this and opt to continue turning a blind eye to reality, it will be difficult to find common ground. By offering softer solutions in the proposed text, we were forced to take two steps back. Critics maintain that the current law is not strict enough. If the social partners are not mature enough to also take into consideration other interests besides their own in these discussions, it is impossible to achieve a favourable solution.

**You thus feel that a social consensus is not possible due to a lack of maturity?**

Yes, this is true, we lack maturity. In many ways, we are no longer an independent country, we are a part of the global world. We can no longer afford

to play around with a monetary policy, which would protect the interests of domestic manufacturers. Conditions exist in all areas and they should be considered. If there are no comparable opportunities for employers, then there is no possibility that our companies will succeed and create new jobs. We have heard several positions regarding the global capital conspiracy and that the tycoons should be caught. Of course, it is understandable that they should be punished. There were never so many illegal privatization cases in court as there are now, but regardless of this, we are in a different situation and cannot refer to the excess cases, which bother everyone. I assert that even without these cases, we would find ourselves in a similar position regarding pension legislation, because we as a society are aging, which is something the trade unions choose not to notice. On one hand we are happy to be living longer, on the other we are not prepared to finance it...







## Rather than taking care of development, moving production abroad



During the visit of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to Slovenia, Alexei Miller, CEO of Gazprom, and the Slovenian Geoplin company signed a joint venture to construct a gas pipeline through Slovenia.

After the 1.2% economic growth in 2010 and, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, a 0.8% deflation rate with zero growth in consumer prices in February 2011, in March, inflation finally escalated to 1.6%. A monthly inflation rate at this level has not previously been noted in Slovenia for a decade, or, more precisely, since 2002. Statistics attributed this growth to new and more expensive collections of clothing and footwear, which is typical of every March, but which has never before entailed such an inflation rate. Also, regular subscription to radio and television services, which decreased in January, could hardly exert such an influence on this rather mysterious increase in the inflation rate. Due to more favourable price movements in the first two months, Slovenia's 0.7% inflation rate in the first quarter has been at the acceptable level. There is a danger, however, that it will increase due to the effect of higher prices of food imports on the one hand, and the increase in oil prices on the other.

Despite the relatively high level of imports of food, which is due to Slovenia's own insufficient production in this area, an intensive campaign has recently been underway to promote the consumption of domestic food products, which are believed to be trustworthy and of high quality. It seems, however, that these appeals should be targeted at merchants rather than consumers, since the former group decides on the selection of items offered on their shelves, and are often paid for keeping these items on their shelves. The National Statistical Office predicted that the second quarter would be much more favourable than the first quarter, and that the level of unemployment, which has already reached 115,000, should not increase any further. However, it seems that this confidence was misplaced. After the collapse of the giant construction company Vegrad and the similar difficulties that befell the SCT company, another major construction company,

GPG, is going bankrupt, which poses further severe problems for subcontractors working for these companies, as well as home-buyers that are burdened by the contractor's mortgage on their apartments. In view of the persistent difficulties in the construction industry in Slovenia, experts believe that another 10,000 people working in this and allied sectors will lose jobs, which is partly also due to the over-expanded construction industry in the country. In recent years, however, all those who have faced business problems have tended to ascribe them to the crisis, which is not entirely credible. In view of the fact that small and micro enterprises along with sole entrepreneurs amount to over 90% of Slovenian companies, though not by employment criteria, the relatively higher number of bankruptcies among them is not surprising. According to data from the Agency for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES), 6,500 companies and cooperatives,

along with nearly 22,000 sole entrepreneurs were deleted from the commercial register in the last two years. Bankruptcy proceedings usually taking rather long, it can be suspected that these bankruptcies and deletions are actually the result of poor operations in the boom period. Therefore, the situation is attributable to poor business operations rather than to the crisis and the higher levels of payment indiscipline. On the other hand, the competitiveness of the economy has become a serious problem, which actors in the economy are trying to overcome in different ways, including moving production to countries with cheaper labour. In the past, companies established business units in Asia, but, more recently, moving production abroad has become more frequent. Thus, the Gorenje company moved its production of boilers to Serbia, and as it plans further transfers, the number of unemployed people is expected to increase. The Seaway Group in Italy is a world-renowned

manufacturer of boats and ships and is moving some production abroad. The Pipistrel company from Ajdovščina, known for its ultra-light aircrafts, for which it received a NASA award, is also reported to be planning to move. However, since Slovenia does not have a suitable agreement with the USA, Pipistrel could not sell its products outside Europe from Slovenia, although there was demand for these aircraft there. Likewise, the Akrapovič company from Ivančna Gorica, a manufacturer of filters for Formula 1 cars, will presumably also move abroad, to be closer to its customers. Recently, the former Danfoss Compressors company – the current Secop Kompresorji company of Črnomelj – is under threat of closing down and relocating to Slovakia. The main reason for moving the production from Slovenia is allegedly excessive wages, which is not entirely believable, because workers in labour-intensive workplaces, in particular, are extremely underpaid. Besides, an ever-increasing number of employees are receiving the minimum wage of EUR 572. Employers are strongly opposed to any increase in the minimum wage, in which Slovenia ranks ninth within the European Union. The fact is that in the Slovenian economic structure there are too many plants and companies creating extremely low added value per employee, which in certain cases hardly exceeds EUR 20,000, and may be even lower due to widespread finishing works that bring very little revenue. However, this is not the fault of the employees but rather of their respective managements, who do not care to think about



The Krka pharmaceutical company of Novo Mesto ranked third with export revenues of 855 million euros.

development and their own trademarks. Nevertheless, the decision to relocate abroad is a serious warning to the Slovenian Government, which, particularly in 2011, has committed itself to increasing the competitiveness of Slovenia's economy. It is questionable, however, whether the Government can afford to do without certain taxes to disburden the economy. The Government also faces problems with adopting and particularly enforcing structural changes, as decisions on practically all of these will be made by citizens at referendum. The Constitutional Court has concluded that the pension reform too may be subject to referendum, although the National Assembly has already adopted it. A referendum also decided on the Mini Jobs Act, which is aimed at regularising the area of student work, the latter being a source of exorbitant profit for certain student-employment services, which have spent these funds on real estate and yachts. But students fear that unemployed and retired people, who could take on work through the mini-job system, could diminish their earning potential. The Prevention of Illegal Work and Employment Act, meanwhile, was also met with considerable criticism, on the grounds that it would allegedly prevent neighbourhood assistance, which is a well-developed form of solidarity in Slovenia. Likewise, the so-called insolvency law, aimed at improving payment discipline, was met with an equal degree of scepticism. Although deteriorating payment discipline has posed a serious problem for economic operators, there is a clash of interests between two institutions, i.e. the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Slovenia, without compulsory membership, and the Chamber of Crafts, in which membership is compulsory. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry believes that the adopted insolvency law favours the craft sector, whose demands were enforced by a number of forms



The largest exports were achieved by Revoz of Novo mesto.

of civil disobedience. Other branches of the economy have felt threatened in export terms. The situation is somewhat better as regards the South Stream gas pipeline. During the visit of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to Slovenia, Alexei Miller, CEO of Gazprom, and the Slovenian Geoplin company signed a joint venture to construct a gas pipeline through Slovenia, and a similar agreement was later also signed with Serbia. Although the pipeline intended to supply Europe with Russian gas circumventing Ukraine is expected to be built by the end of 2015, Russia still needs the consent of Turkey to be able to pull the pipeline under the Black Sea. On the other hand, the Slovenian power-plant company Holding Slovenske elektrarne – with the changing environment due to the problems at the Japanese Fukushima nuclear power plant – has better prospects for constructing Unit 6 at Šoštanj Thermal Power Plant; though this project is still regarded as highly controversial, there is little doubt that it will be built, as its justification and the sufficiency of the coal reserves have been confirmed by an additional foreign study. Nevertheless, the Slovenian economy, despite its current difficulties, is gradually emerging from the crisis, this being particularly true of the exporters that have become the harbingers of economic growth. In 2010, the largest exports were achieved by Revoz of Novo mesto and Gorenje Velenje

group, whose export revenues amounted to over a billion euros; the Krka pharmaceutical company of Novo Mesto ranked third with export revenues of 855 million euros, followed by SIJ (Slovenian Steel Group) and Holding Slovenske elektrarne with slightly less than half a billion euros of exports in 2010. The Gorenje Group plans to be the largest exporter in 2011, and if their plans come to fruition it may take the top ranking among the greatest Slovenian exporters the list of which was published in "Posel & Denar", the annex to daily newspaper Delo at the beginning of April. Analysis of Slovenian exports has shown that a number of Slovenian companies had already reached the pre-crisis level of exports last year, while several companies are expected to achieve this goal in 2011. In particular it is worth noting that in the last year the Štore Steel company increased its export by 178%, the Gea oil works of Slovenska Bistrica by 154%, Livar of Ivančna Gorica by 148%, and LPKF – a laser technology company based in Naklo – increased its exports by 109%. Nevertheless, exporters are rather cautious in their plans for 2011, as their joint announcement for export growth mentions a value slightly below 2%. This means that an increasing burden of economic growth should gradually be taken over by the domestic demand, i.e. the state, population and gross capital formation, in particular.



Mateja Malnar Štembal, Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia

# 20 years of Slovenia in numbers

When statistics are mentioned, people often call to mind a dull set of numbers that can only be interpreted by statisticians and mean nothing to ordinary people. But this is not true, especially if we take figures over a period of several years when comparing statistics. Let alone a period of 20 years. Comparison like that often reveals a true picture and clear trends, and sometimes even led to people wanting to change or improve our situation.



Some numbers remain constant, while others change. In geographic terms, we cannot expect the number of square kilometres that Slovenia covers to increase, so this is one of the numbers that has not changed in the past 20 years. After all these years, Slovenia still covers an area of exactly 20,273 km<sup>2</sup> and has 46.6 kilometres of coast, 1370 kilometres of state borders, and, of course, Triglav, remains its highest mountain at 2,864 metres.

As a country famed for its green landscapes, Slovenia may be pleased with the fact that its forest cover has slightly increased (from 56.5% in 1993 to 58.5% in 2009). The first statistical change to be mentioned looking at the past 20 years is the change in population size. While in 1991 some Slovenians were worried about the fact that their number was less than two million (the actual number was 1,998,912), the population of

Slovenia today is 2,046,976. In the past 20 years, the number of newborn babies per year has also slightly increased (from 21,583 babies in 1991 to 21,856 babies in 2009). In Slovenia, as elsewhere in Europe, women tend to have their first child later in life. Names given to babies at birth are now quite different than before. In 1991 the most popular names for boys were Matej, Marko, Gregor, Rok and Andrej, and for girls Maja, Nina,

Mateja, Petra and Anja. Today, the most popular names for boys are Luka, Nik, Žan, Jakob and Nejc, and for girls Lana, Eva, Sara, Nika and Zala. We can also be pleased with statistical data regarding schools, education and culture. Although there are now fewer libraries in Slovenia than there were 20 years ago (1,521 libraries in 1989 and 903 libraries in 2007), people are still very happy to borrow books from librar-



ies (7,366 books borrowed in 1989; 25,644 books borrowed in 2007).

Slovenians are also all the more encouraged to write and create. As many as 1,400 books and brochures written by Slovenian authors were issued in 1989, while this number had increased to 6,358 in 2009.

We often hear that Slovenia is a country of young people, and this is also borne out by statistics on the number of students in higher education institutions and universities (this number was 34,228 in 1989, increasing to 114,873 in 2009). Over the past 20 years, the number of graduate and postgraduate university students has increased as well (in 1991 this number was 6043; in 2009 it increased to 18,103). Today, as many as 22.6% of adults, aged from 25 to 64 years, have completed higher or university education (in 1991, this percentage was 11.7%).



Life expectancy has also risen significantly in the past 20 years. In 1991 life expectancy was 69.5 years for men and 77.4 years for women; in 2009 it stood at 75.8 years for men and 82.3 years for women.

### Space for new growth

For much of the past 20 years, until the economic and financial crisis hit, economic indicators suggested favourable economic conditions. GDP and purchasing power were rising consistently until 2009, and further growth is expected in the coming year or two.

In 1989 GDP per capita stood around EUR 5,417, but by 2009, it had risen to EUR 17,000.

Although the number of people registered unemployed in Slovenia has increased recently (today this number stands at 114,000 compared to 75,079 in 1991), with an unemployment rate at 7.2% (ILO method), Slovenia still ranks among the EU countries with the lowest unemployment rate.

Statistics on areas such as infrastructure development and mobility also reveal much about the path the country has travelled.

In the past 20 years, Slovenia has made considerable 'progress' in terms of the number of cars. There were 554,592 cars on the roads in 1989, with this number increasing to 1,058,858 by 2009.

Slovenia has also built more motorways (the length of motorways was 229 km in 1989 and 1,228 km in 2009), but has been somewhat lagging behind in building the railway infrastructure (the total length of national railway lines was 1,196 km in 1989 and 1,228 km in 2009).

Slovenians also make more telephone calls than they did 20 years ago. There were 630,039 phones in use in 1989, and 925,258 in 2009 (in 2008, this number stood at 879,257).



	GDP (current prices)		GDP (constant prices)		GDP per capita at purchasing power parity EU27=100
	Annual growth in %	1991=100	Annual growth in %	1991=100	
1991	77.6	100.0	-8.9	100.0	
1992	191.3	291.3	-5.5	94.5	
1993	41.0	410.7	2.8	97.2	
1994	29.1	530.3	5.3	102.4	
1995	29.8	688.2	4.1	106.6	74
1996	15.3	793.3	3.6	110.4	76
1997	13.8	903.1	4.9	115.8	78
1998	10.8	1000.7	3.6	120.0	79
1999	12.3	1123.6	5.4	126.4	81
2000	10.0	1235.5	4.4	132.0	80
2001	11.8	1380.8	2.8	135.7	80
2002	12.0	1546.2	4.0	141.1	82
2003	8.6	1678.9	2.8	145.1	83
2004	7.8	1809.9	4.3	151.3	86
2005	6.2	1921.9	4.5	158.1	87
2006	8.0	2075.8	5.9	167.4	88
2007	11.3	2310.9	6.9	178.9	88
2008	7.9	2493.9	3.7	185.6	91
2009	-5.1	2365.5	-8.1	170.5	88

SOURCE: STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA



LOOKING AT ALL THESE FIGURES, IT IS CLEAR THAT STATISTICS IS ANYTHING BUT BORING. TO PROVE THIS STATEMENT RIGHT, MORE INTERESTING EXAMPLES ARE GIVEN IN THE COMPARISON CHART BELOW.

AVERAGE RETAIL PRICES			
1989 (in ECU <sup>1</sup> )		2009 (in EUR)	
dark bread	0.66	dark bread	1.91
white flour	0.44	white flour	0.95
beef	2.98	beef	7.84
apples	0.60	apples	1.12
potato	0.29	potato	0,54
AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY			
1989 (in ECU <sup>1</sup> )		2009 (in EUR)	
1,180.64		1,438.96	
HOUSEHOLD SPENDING			
1989 (in ECU <sup>1</sup> )		2009 (in EUR)	
24,171.3		20,753	

<sup>1</sup> A PRECURSOR TO THE EURO.





**Chinatsu Nakajima**, Japanese Tourist Guide



Photo: Izlok Dimc



**Klemen Zavodnik**, The Head of the Information Office of Slovenian Tourist Board in Tokyo



Photo: archive

The first news about the earthquake did not take me by surprise, since earthquakes in Japan happen daily, and I thought that this again was one of the “usual ones”. A couple of hours later, I reread the news reports of a tsunami and the number of victims expected. Then, the number was between 200 and 300. At that moment, I dialled the phone numbers of my dearest ones who live in Japan. My relatives live 450 km south from the site of the disaster, at the foot of holy Mount Fuji. There, too, the earth shook vigorously. “I have never experienced an earthquake like this!” said my shocked mother.

I have been living in Ljubljana for almost ten years. I work as a tourist guide, presenting the beauties of Slovenia and the rest of former Yugoslavia to my countrymen. My work is seasonal. In winter, I usually spend my time travelling around, staying in the company of my family and meeting friends. This winter, I travelled across Taiwan and Japan and, for the first time visited the city of Sendai, which had one million inhabitants, but is now devastated. When I returned back from my home country, the days in Slovenia were beautiful. I could admire the awakening of spring, the blossoming of spring flowers such as Lenten roses, crocuses, snowdrops... but at this time of year, it is still too early for the tourist season to begin. As a result, I spent most of my time in front of my PC. Of course, I browsed for news concerning the earthquake, the tsunami and the resulting accident in the Fukushima power plant. Every day, I watched new scenes of people and towns hit by the earthquake, and it was very hard for me to comprehend that what I saw had actually happened to my country. Only two months had passed since I was there, right on the spot, but then everything was fine, modern and lively. When the earthquake struck, everything turned into total devastation. Now, there are daily media reports of damage and of people living in shelters, as well as all the tragic stories of different people. For example, the baby who was born on the evening after the earthquake. Or about a pregnant young woman kissing the forehead of her husband, who would never see his baby. About a boy walking alone around makeshift shelters in search of his lost family. And about the boy and his grandfather who, after several days of searching, finally found their dead mother/daughter. Many people lost their lives, their family, a house, their job. The words of a man who went to help his stricken friend: “The town looked like the aftermath of a war. No, more accurately, like the aftermath of the atom bomb.”

This is an incredible tragedy caused by the most powerful earthquake in living memory in Japan. The whole country and the whole world sympathise with those hit by the earthquake. But all is not grief; there is also courage, encouragement and respect. People affected by the disaster became socially disadvantaged, but life goes on and they have to rebuild their lives. They need help and all of us want to help

as best as we can. Everyone can think about what he or she is able to do for these people, either elsewhere in the country or in the world. As for myself, I was interviewed for TV and magazines, although I had decided not to appear in the Slovenian media anymore. Later, I changed my mind. I somehow tried to transmit my most sincere wish to the Slovenian public, which was – let us help these disaster-stricken people! That was the most I could do here at that very moment. I am very pleased and grateful to everybody who, as a result of my interviews and articles, decided to make a donation or to offer any other kind of help to my countrymen.

In the meantime, I received a great deal of encouragement and support from all parts of Slovenia. Immediately after the earthquake, I received several SMS messages from my friends who remembered me and my family. To date, the number of such messages and calls has been at least fifty. They told me that I was not alone in Slovenia. A thought went through me about how many people thought of me in this small country. I was also cheered by the decision of the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After the shocking news of a nuclear accident, many countries moved their citizens out of Japan or moved their embassies and consulates to locations outside Tokyo or even temporarily closed them. Slovenia, however, maintained its embassy in Japan’s capital. The Japanese people refrained from commenting aloud on the decision of those countries. However, my mother’s words contained what all Japanese people had on the tip of their tongue: “We cannot blame them, since this is their decision to make. But it makes me feel like they are leaving us for good.” I can only try to imagine such feelings. Feelings when a good friend leaves you alone in the middle of a deep forest, ocean or desert. In ten years of living in Slovenia, I have been through many things. On several occasions, due to various problems and differences, I thought of going back to Japan, but never did, because I am proud to live in Slovenia.

Now, I’m in Japan for a short stay. TV channels keep bringing the news from the stricken area. Power cuts lasting several hours are happening daily. Vegetable and fuel prices have gone up considerably. The economic blow caused by the earthquake is spreading across the country. In spite of this, we are all aware that everyone can contribute to the reconstruction of the economy. Instead of cars, people are more often using trains and buses. Unnecessary lights are being turned off. Coins are being collected for charitable purposes. One man’s work may be small, but the work done by many is important. People have faith in themselves. They believe that they can overcome this difficult period and that they will never give up. I am convinced that Japan will be back as it was only a month ago, or perhaps even more courageous and stout-hearted.

The disastrous earthquake in the Northern Japanese region of Tohoku strongly shook and swayed the Tokyo buildings; however, no major visible consequences were caused by the earthquake in the city. Most Tokyo people really only became aware of the true dimensions of the earthquake and of the tsunami on hearing the first news and television reports. The most urgent problem for the people of Tokyo that day was how to get home, since the trains had stopped and some parts of the country were left without electricity. On the day when the earthquake struck, many people simply went home on foot and so did I. The sight of a multitude of people leaving downtown in the direction of the outskirts on foot was a telling one. Particularly during the first days after the earthquake, in fear of new aftershocks, we followed the news concerning the situation in Fukushima power plant; for quite some time, the news was very worrying. Many foreigners, as well as some Japanese, decided to move temporarily toward Japan’s south or even leave the country. The queue in front of the office where re-entry permits were being delivered was 3 km long. The first two weeks following the quake were very difficult: we constantly followed the news, which was not good, we were constantly sent information on possible interruptions of electricity, we were shaken by three to four earthquake aftershocks on an hourly basis, the trains were not operating as normal, and shops began to run out of certain items of food. Due to exaggerated reports in the foreign media, much pressure was felt from home. The question “aren’t you home yet?” always makes one feel in doubt whether the decision to stay was right or wrong. Similarly, any departure of a foreign person or a Japanese person out of Tokyo somehow made one feel anxious. However, things slowly normalised and life started to get back on the old track, but with some changes. We are all aware that the issue of radiation will be here for a long time, and that we will have to accept living with it, although its true dimension will become visible only with the perspective of time. Initial concerns have transformed into a state of being reconciled with the situation; life in constant fear is not possible.

Tokyo is a very comfortable place to live: everything is in reach, anything can be obtained, whenever and whatever you like. This is probably the reason why the change has been so strongly felt. In fact, nobody imagined that Tokyo could be left without electricity, that there would be no water to buy or that because of the lack of electricity, the

closing time of a big market in the vicinity would be changed from 1 am to 5 pm, and that Shibuya, exuberant with all kinds of neon lights, would lose much of its brightly lit splendour.

The situation also depends on the region. I only saw how things were in Tokyo, but I can easily imagine that the situation in the north of Honshu island is still very difficult. Yesterday, another major earthquake struck; the air temperature is also very low for this time of year. Provision of help and rescue operations are hindered as the main road north crosses a region with high radiation. On the other hand, my friends say that life in the southern and western parts of the country goes on more or less undisturbed; as they have not been personally affected by the impact of the disaster, they just follow the news and find the events rather distant.

For myself, I never thought much about leaving Japan or Tokyo because I did not find the situation so serious and neither did I deem it appropriate that I should leave Tokyo. The Japanese, of course, can understand why so many foreigners have left Japan, but this has badly hurt them. All this time, I considered it important that the Slovenian Tourist Board Office in Tokyo, which is my working place, should keep on working uninterruptedly to show support to Japan. Along with the earthquake, the tsunami and the radiation crisis, Japan has to cope with the economic crisis. This week, the Japanese government started campaigns aimed at encouraging the population to spend on consumer products; likewise, the Japanese tourism industry has responded inviting people to spend on travel. Among other national tourist organisations, the Slovenian Tourist Board was the first to make its presentation for the media on 7 April. Strong gratitude was felt for our staying and working in Japan; in a certain way, this has been seen as a way of helping Japan. The fact that the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovenian Tourist Board decided to stay in Tokyo has been very much appreciated, and the positive impact of this decision can be expected to be felt in the future. There are few countries in the world that suffer as many natural disasters as Japan; as a rule, the Japanese are used to facing such disasters and their consequences. For this reason, I have no doubts about Japan’s recovery. This will surely be much faster than would be the case with many other countries.



Hana Souček Morača, photo: Mare Mutić and Žiga Koritnik

## SLOVENIAN DRAMA WEEK



For 41 years, one of the oldest Slovenian theatre festivals has been taking place every second half of March in Kranj. According to the Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, this event is a treasure of Slovenian culture. The festival is an opportunity to present the productions of all Slovenian professional theatres. According to the selector and director Marko Sosič, “it opens discourse and the problematisation of the present moment and its social structure.”

This year, the candidates for awards within Slovenian Drama Week were seven performances in the competition programme, three from the accompanying programme and two from the international programme, and four scripts. The Slavko Grum Award for the most original theatre text has long been encouraging drama writing. A decade ago, a competition programme for the festival was introduced together with an award for best performance, named after the dramatist Rudi Šeligo, while the Audience Award was introduced most recently. Thus, the Slovenian Drama Week brings peaks of theatre that frequently represent the most original thinking and new theatre productions of the classics of Slovenian drama.

Forty-three plays were submitted to compete for the Slavko Grum Award within the 41st Slovenian Drama Week. Four plays won nomination: *Shocking Shopping* by Matjaž Zupančič, *Spalnica ali Sveti Jurij ubije zmaja* by Vinko Möderndorfer, *Stolp* by Ivan Svetina and *Vaje iz tesnobe* by Milan Kac.

The jury, consisting of Sebastijan Horvat, Primož Jesenko, Tea Rogelj, Vesna Slapar and Rok Vevar, awarded the prize for the best theatre text to Matjaž Zupančič. Zupančič has been playwriting for 25 years already, and therefore was not particularly surprised to receive the award. He hopes, however, that Slovenian drama will continue to

pursue the path of recent years, when its performances have become recognised worldwide.

The Grün-Filipič recognition for achievements in Slovenian dramaturgy was awarded to the dramatist Eda Čufer. The recipient of the Šeligo award for best performance at this year's festival was selected by an international jury composed of Amelia Kraigher, Jasen Boko and Dušan Rogelj. The following performances competed for the award: *Nekropola*, *Totenbirt*, *Hlapci* (annotated edition), *Žabe*, *Preklet naj bo izdajalec svoje domovine!*, *Zaljubljeni v smrt* and *Jakob Ruda*. Among the competing performances, the prize was awarded to the play *Hlapci* (annotated edition) by Ivan Cankar, directed by Matjaž Berger and performed by Anton Podbevšek of Novo mesto Theatre and Prešeren Theatre Kranj.

The performances were accompanied by reading performances presented by the Drama Department of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, and the Drama Club of the students of the Department of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts. A playwriting workshop was held, in which participants could learn about the creative potential of psychodrama. They could also attend the international round-table discussion entitled “Playwriting during a time of crisis” organised in partnership with the International Theatre Institute (ITI) to mark World Theatre Day.

For several years, the festival has been moving beyond the national scene with the participation of international theatres with performances of Slovenian authors. Two groups were presented this year: Ljuban Grojs Theatre Academy from Sofia, and the Lunar Eclipse Theatre from Tokyo.

Jože Osterman, photo: EPK archive and STA

## EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE AND ITS INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS



March was a very busy week for the organisers of the “European Capital of Culture 2012” project in Maribor and its five partner cities: Ptuj, Murska Sobota, Novo mesto, Slovenj Gradec and Velenje. Finally, all of the members of the team taking part in preparations for this huge project are known, and with the appointment of the director-general of the Maribor 2012 Public Institute, the organisation structure is complete. Leaders of individual parts of the programme and their colleagues are very active and the programme is being developed on the basis of extensive public calls for tenders, through which the organisers in Maribor intended to attract, in a democratic way, everyone able to contribute by presenting or producing as part of the European Capital of Culture programme. The Open Doors Day, as the organisers called the public call for tenders, as part of which approximately 500 tenders from different cultural providers arrived, was closed in mid-March and the drawing up of the programme structure, with its individual parts, was started on this basis. Although the whole programme is still far from complete, as concrete plans have only just started to develop, the organisers have promised that the first draft will be presented by the end of April, while all details will have been outlined by mid-September. The young team is having to deal with the consequences of the rather late setting up of the organisational team. Now, at the beginning of April, the majority of the programme leaders and their colleagues have been working for no more than two months.

Infrastructure investments in Maribor for the implementation of the project still represent the greatest unknown. While all other par-

ticipating cities have resolved the relevant financial issues, for Maribor the most challenging investment issue remains unresolved, i.e. the construction of the Maribor Art Gallery and Maks, the centre for performing arts activities, where some of the most demanding projects are planned. As the current economic situation is not at all suited to major investment projects, Maribor needs to strictly match its plans to the actual possibilities. One proposal is that both major investments be merged to one location and one facility, which would undoubtedly contribute to some savings. However, problems have arisen in connection to the co-financing of such a new project, and in the already adopted projects, where this possibility has, of course, not been considered.

However, a clearer picture can be obtained from the programmes of international cooperation related to long-term arrangements with providers. In this respect, the organisers in Maribor have been very adept in finding levers to develop intensive cooperation with other countries without causing excessive costs, since they have tried to involve every entity acting mainly within the European Union, enabling Slovenia to establish close contacts with numerous partners and a favourable relationship with countries connected to the European Union. One result of this is the excellent Cultural Embassy project, in which a new country will present its cultural achievements every month at Vetrinjski dvorec in the centre of Maribor. This part of the programme is based on the existing cultural centres of foreign countries active in Slovenia, which will transfer the core of their work to a greater extent to Maribor next year. The project will





highlight not only EU Member States, but also some other countries. Maribor also plans frequent visits by European officials and leading figures who will support the project's promotion. According to the organisers' plans, some events within the traditional programme usually presented in Ljubljana by the EU Representation to Slovenia will be transferred to Maribor for 2012. One of the events receiving considerable attention is the presentation of 10 films that are candidates for the Award for Best European Film. Within these efforts, Maribor is certainly counting on the support of Slovenian diplomatic missions abroad, and in particular in countries that due to their location are most interested in the success of the European Capital of Culture project. The target countries are in particular Germany, Austria, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Belgium, France, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, Poland and the United Kingdom, where the combination of established tourism, traditional cultural connections and a geographically favourable position is at the highest level.

Moreover, Maribor and the Portuguese city Guimarães, selected as the second European Capital of Culture in 2012, have been devoting special attention to each other, leading to contacts being established in such an intensive form for the first time. By intertwining their projects, the two cities intend to strengthen their internal cohesion and identity, which may become one of the most interesting parts of the programme. Both wish to focus on issues of integration of citizens, encouraging critical thinking related to their own environment, their common future and diversity, i.e. to matters through which all of Europe should experience mutual interaction. This was the basis for development of the exchange programme for young citizens of the two cities ("Feel the Future of Europe"), a programme encouraging literary creativity in young people ("World Letters") that has already been carried out in primary and secondary schools in Portugal, an exchange involving a Slovenian week in Guimarães and a Portuguese week in Maribor, as well as the publication of an anthology of Slovenian and Portuguese poets of the 20th century. Since both cities are also famous for football (NK Maribor football club, for example, are the most successful Slovenian football team), the culture of football – connecting local and international football – will also be subject to intensive analysis by experts from both cities, and of course, football matches between the teams of the two cities will also take place.



Suzana Žilič Fišer, general manager



Janez Rakušček

Polona Prešeren, photo: archive

## SLOVENIAN ADVERTISING FESTIVAL

This year, Slovenia is celebrating a series of anniversaries – the spotlight is focussed on two decades. The Slovenian State and the Slovenian Advertising Festival are both celebrating their twentieth anniversary. This marks the end of a period that differs significantly from present-day life and the future. This year's turnout shows that the advertising festival, held at the end of March in Portorož, is abreast of the time.

Anniversaries call for far-reaching actions or at least solemn promises, says the festival's director, Špela Levičnik Oblak. Through the pioneer days, times of genuine enthusiasm, a period of endeavouring for something new, common and ours, the festival has progressed and found its mission. This year's theme was dedicated to brands and attracted a substantial number of participants, showing that the festival is headed in the right direction. The organisers were thrilled to establish they had found a topic of interest to advertisers as the lectures and workshops were very well attended. Such events should draw our attention to the fact that the contemporary consumer is characterised by a social and cultural context that is different from that of the past, and to the substantial changes which have occurred in the media, communication and lifestyles.

The Slovenian Advertising Festival features awards for achievements in advertising. For the first time, the festival jury presented the Brand of the Year award. As they say, there is no room left for pretence and the leading positions were taken by those brands that knew how to make full use of their creative potential. This year the jury noted that the interactive dimensions of advertising are gaining in importance. Besides awards for advertisements in several categories, the festival jury presented the Advertiser of the Year award and the award for Advertising Personality of the Year. Futura DDB was named Best Agency of the Year, while Si.mobil's Orto was named Best Brand of the Year.

The Advertising Personality of the Year is a professional award presented by the administrative board of the Slovenian Advertising Chamber for an outstanding achievement marking the advertising field in the previous year, or for a continuous contribution to the development of the Slovenian advertising profession. This year, the Advertising Personality of the Year award was presented to Janez Rakušček. The accompanying explanation describes him as an exceptionally creative personality with strategic knowledge and insight into the immediate and wider social and cultural context, as a member of several juries and holder of numerous awards and nominations at Slovenian and foreign advertising festivals (Cannes, Epica, Sof, Golden Drum, Scream, Effie etc.). Due to his long-standing experience in advertising, broad knowledge, awareness of the effect of a message in any media and his commitment to socially responsible and mindful communication, all of his works bear his distinct imprint.

Polona Prešeren, photo: Matevž Paternoster/MGML

## LJUBLJANA GAINS A TOBACCO MUSEUM

Ljubljana has been enriched by yet another cultural development – the doors to the renovated Tobacco Museum, which hosts the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana and Tobačna Ljubljana's museum collection, have opened at the Tobačna 001 Cultural Centre. Ljubljana has in this way been rewarded with an updated review of its rich industrial heritage. The new museum will function within the City Museum Ljubljana.

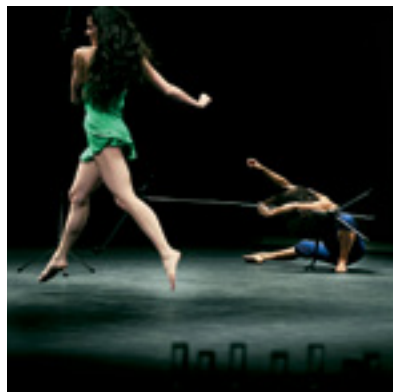
Ljubljana's tobacco factory was founded on 19 January 1871 and represents a significant part of the industrial heritage of the city. To mark the 140th anniversary of its operation, the company made a commitment to renovate the Tobacco Museum, and, 20 years after its establishment, the renovated collection has now moved to new premises at the Tobačna 001 Cultural Centre. Through its donations, Tobačna Ljubljana has supported the entire gallery programme for the centre for 2011. The Director General of Tobačna Ljubljana, Pia Barborič Jurjašević, stressed that in this way, the company has demonstrated its commitment to the local community, continuing its decades-long support for cultural, social, environmental and industrial projects in Ljubljana and elsewhere, as a longstanding partner to culture in Ljubljana.

In developing the identity of the Tobacco Museum and Tobačna 001 Cultural Centre, its designer Boris Balant relied on the industrial heritage of Tobačna Ljubljana and on specific features of the location and materials. In his words: "We tried to capture the atmosphere of the factory's past and present the occurrences of the time in a transparent, simple and, at the same time, modern way."

Besides the Tobacco Museum, the Tobačna 001 Cultural Centre is also intended for gallery activities and houses the Galerija 001, the second gallery of the City Art Museum Ljubljana. The programme opened with an exhibition of international artist Jan Fabre.







Jože Osterman, photo: En-Knap Institute archive

## SPRING FORWARD

Besides being World Book Capital for almost a year, Ljubljana also became a centre of European modern dance in March. Over the last three decades, this type of dance has virtually taken hold of Slovenia by attracting numerous young artists and reviving dance theory, and has called for an event such as the Aerowaves cross-border dance performance network festival, which also brings a new quality to the field of organising major dance events. On the part of Slovenia, the festival was organised by the En-Knap Institute, which is headed by a member of a network that links thirty-four members and six associate partners from European countries. This festival provides a stage for works entered for a special competition and selected for a presentation held each year in a different city. In addition to staging a number of productions for the audience, the festival's purpose is to provide opportunities for programme managers, theatre directors, dance critics and theoreticians to meet and exchange experiences, and to enable dancers and audiences to meet, an opportunity usually not available because of lack of time. All festival participants – a total of 83 with 22 dance performances – stressed that this social dimension, which has contributed towards exchanging experience and mutual acquaintance, is the most important feature distinguishing this festival from others held throughout Europe.

Out of 582 works entered in the competition last year, members of the Aerowaves network followed a complicated procedure and selected 30 works (22 were staged at Spring Forward). Slovenia was represented with Duet 012 by Rosana Hribar and Gregor Luštek, a winner of the Gibanica Festival, which closed a few days before. Why was there only one Slovenian performance? Aerowaves head, John Ashford, said that there were fifteen entries from Slovenia, but only four met the competition requirements. There were problems with the expected performance duration of fifteen to forty minutes and the mundane reason that some of the entered media carriers were malfunctioning (DVD or other recordings).

Anyway, the three-day festival met most of the expectations, was very well organised, as usual when En-Knap and Iztok Kovač are

involved, and succeeded in directing the spotlight on some young artists who have just started gaining recognition in their own countries. A strict but competent critic from Delo magazine, Mojca Kumerdej, voiced her critical view of some performances, describing them as almost amateur, but commending some excellent ones. Among them she listed the previously mentioned, perfectly performed and structured, Duet 012, a duet Ven (Come) performed by Spanish tandem La Macana, and a solo performance Allege by Clément Layes, who uses simple stage elements with imagination, ingeniously enhancing them with words. Kumerdej believes that the two boldest performances were the Dutch-Finnish dynamic and multilayered performance Hi! My name is ... by the choreographer Cecilia Moisio and the Israeli performance 4 Men, Alice, Bach and the Deer, in which the choreographers Yossi Berg and Oded Graf tackle the issue of the macho slaughter of a helpless victim.

The festival was welcomed at a very high level – in addition to speeches delivered by a representative of the city and Iztok Kovač at the opening ceremony at Španski borci Cultural Centre, the packed audience was addressed by the minister for culture and minister for foreign affairs – and it also conveyed some other pleasant messages. Aerowaves Director Ashford organised the event in a way that provided for common residence and dining and enabled constant communication among participants; the 4-kilometre distance between the stages and the hotel where they resided was always covered on foot. In this way, the festival became a sort of campus and this added a special charm to it. Next year, the Spring Forward will be held in Bari, Italy, but industrious Iztok Kovač has already started to prepare a review of some productions, with a view to again bringing a substantial portion of young European dance to Ljubljana. The main dance performance season in Ljubljana is not over yet. The end of April will see the opening of Exodos, a traditional international dance festival, which was the first to put our capital on the modern European dance map.

Hana Souček Morača, photo: Marko Modic

## IN HARMONY WITH THE EARTH

To support the conservation of farmland for local food production, the photographer Marko Modic exhibited 120 jumbo photographs and photo-montages in Tivoli Park, Ljubljana, representing agricultural products, samples and textures of soil, food, images of landscapes and events on the farm.

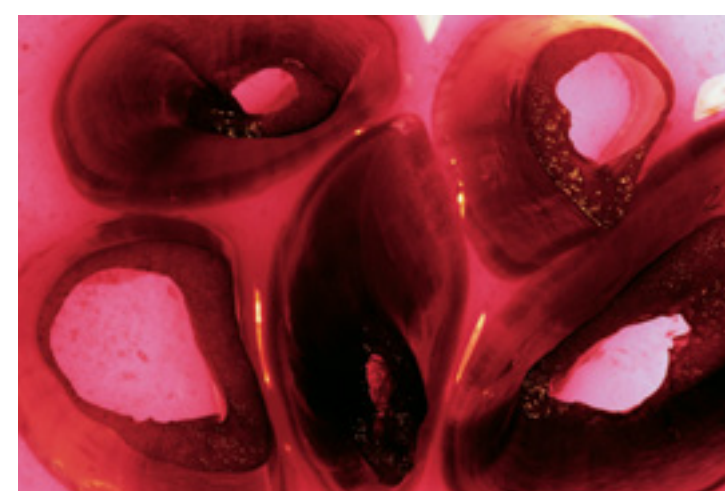
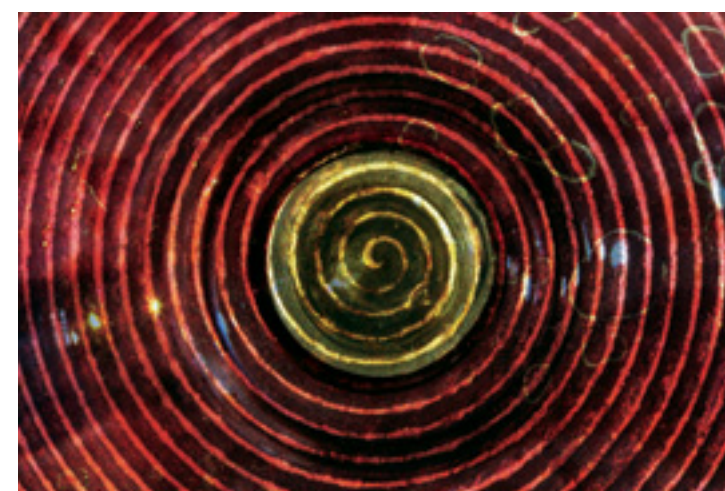
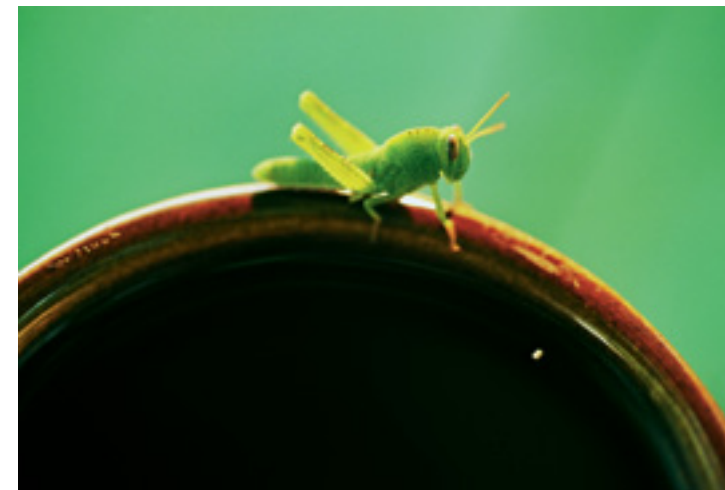
The exhibition, set up to mark World Wetlands Day on Jakopič Promenade, and organised by the Biotechnical Faculty, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry and the Municipality of Ljubljana, highlights the importance of cultural landscapes in the local environment, which – in addition to food production and a wealth of natural resources – also offers people quality of life.

Marko Modic's first solo exhibition in 1984 in Cankarjev dom cultural centre was later on followed later by many others in Slovenia and abroad. He has exhibited in Italy, Scotland and Germany, and has become familiarised with many different concepts. This time he focused on earth, which is visualised in the present exhibition as fertile soil. It serves people not only for food production, but also for intangible benefits, such as maintaining biodiversity, ecosystem benefits associated with the containment and purification of water, and enjoyment of the cultural landscape.

The idea for the exhibition, which will travel through Slovenian and European cities, was hatched at the Biotechnical Faculty, which noted that not enough has been done in Slovenia on the issue of agricultural land and its rapid deterioration. The event offered the opportunity to alert the largest possible circle of people to careful management of agricultural land. As explained by the organizers, not just individuals but all of society needs agricultural land. In Slovenia, we have just 866 m<sup>2</sup> of arable land per capita, thereby ranking second to last in Europe. The draft of the Agricultural Land Act, which was created in cooperation with the agricultural and planning profession and is in the process of being adopted, will improve the current situation, but awareness of the importance of land, agricultural land and the cultural landscape should be increased in the wider public.

At the opening of the exhibition, under the conceptual leadership of Prof Marina Pintar, Ph.D. from the Biotechnical Faculty, the participants were first addressed by the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning, Dr Roko Žarnič, who stressed the great importance of the unique link between art and agriculture and the conservation of arable land, which decisively marks the landscape and is of national importance. The State Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Tanja Strniša, pointed out that the newly adopted Agricultural Land Act promotes the cultivation and protection of agricultural land, which indicates that the attitude of the state and citizens to agriculture has been changing. The Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Jankovič, said that the municipality is strongly committed to being able to provide enough food for its citizens on its own land.

Agriculture is an activity that influences the formation of cultural landscapes, since we all need agricultural land with its multipurpose character. The agricultural landscape, which includes large fields, lowland woods, vineyards, pastures and orchards, as well as forests on steeper intervening sections, not only satisfies us with its crops but can also be enjoyed for its beauty. The exhibition "In Harmony with the Earth", set in one of the most beautiful outdoor exhibition venues, invites visitors to get closer to the soil while at the same time it underlines the importance of our direct relationship with it.







Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

# The rebirth of the Rimske Terme thermal spa

With the motto “The wealth of the past for the challenges of the present”, the oldest thermal spa in Slovenia invites us to its completely renovated premises as it re-opens its doors after 65 years. The numerous quotes in Latin by the sages and philosophers of ancient Rome in the corridors and in the rooms of the spa are an eternal reminder to us of the need to constantly restore the integrity and inner harmony of the human body, mind and soul. And at the Rimske Terme thermal spa particular attention and concern are devoted to this very purpose.



Two thousand years ago, the ancient Romans designed baths as places for bathing, physical training exercises and social life, for treatment and alleviation of health problems as well as for the accumulation of spiritual and physical powers. Not much has changed since then. More than ever, modern man needs this very power and is searching for it in himself. In the thermal spa, guests will find it in abundance. Just before the beginning of summer, Slovenia's 15 successful thermal spas and health resorts will thus be joined by one more – Rimske Terme.

With its sophisticated, thoughtful and tasteful design, reflecting an architectural sensitivity to its historical heritage, the modern resort and thermal spa in Rimske Toplice, located along the right bank of the Savinja River between Laško and Zidani Most, wishes to attract the most discerning guests, like those who used to visit the spa in the past. The reputation of Rimske Terme reaches far into the past and far beyond Slovenia's borders. In the past, the spa was even visited by royalty. In the 19th century it was widely known for its beautiful surrounding area and nature. Today, completely renovated, it is waiting to be reborn and regain its reputation. Currently, final construction work is being carried out, and by the end of May the spa will be open to the general public.

“Like every birth, the reconstruction of the spa has not passed without pain”, says Director Marjana Novak, who took over the company six months ago. “We were born in agony like a baby and on the way to see the light we were accompanied by great difficulties and endless problems. This is of no surprise, considering that currently the Rimske Terme is the most demanding and largest project in domestic tourism. We were faced with numerous problems, ranging from the definition of the proper concept of the health resort, overly expensive renovation, the unsuitability of facilities for categorisation, an unexpected landslide behind the building, which additionally increased the reconstruction costs, the hiring of a contractor, the dismissal of the overpaid construction company Vegrad from the building site, calling on the guarantee of the construction company SCT to the search for new contractors and six months of tough negotiations with the banks for a loan.”

The reconstruction of the thermal spa is a “story” created by six governments and several ministries; however, it has finally and successfully been brought to an end.



Moreover, the project implementation was so precise and in compliance with all the required rules that the spa could easily obtain ISO certification. “However, the development of such a broad-based range of facilities and services that could really satisfy our guests requires time. It also requires a lot of fine tuning, much patience, experience, wide knowledge and last but not least courage. The result of such a process is always uncertain,” emphasises Ms. Novak. “We wish to provide a service level that would attract demanding guests – guests who are used to high quality standards in tourism and the health resort sector.”

In addition to the basic education and training of its employees, the spa will invest much time and efforts in the professional training of its staff. “We wish to provide highly qualified staff who could satisfy our guests and fulfil all their expectations. To this end, we started to employ people prior to the opening of the spa, because we know that smooth and well-performed work requires several weeks of preparations.”

For Rimske Terme, the year 2011 will definitely be a turning point full of challenges and hard work. With the assistance of domestic and foreign experts, the spa's management is about to complete





the programme to be offered – a spectrum of services providing for the distinction between their services and facilities and those of other health resorts, and also presenting the competitive advantage of the thermal spa Rimske Terme in the tourism and business market as well as in the health and wellness market.

In the amended investment programme, the tourist programme, an overall and comprehensive wellness programme and the health programme have been preserved in their entirety, while a special medical and hospital programme has been withdrawn and replaced by increased hotel accommodation facilities. The spa also offers a full catering service, seminar rooms and convention halls. Moreover, it plans to arrange 100 parking places for employees and daily visitors and a park covering the area below the central building to the Laško-Zidani Most main road.

The Rimske Terme spa, with a total interior surface area of 300 000 m<sup>2</sup> comprises 190 rooms with 357 beds, a business and convention centre, rehabilitation premises, baths and pools in the 4-star Sofiin Dvor and Rimski Dvor hotels and in the 3-star Zdraviliški Dvor hotel, as well as large wellness premises and a thermal section. The costs of the reconstruction of the thermal spa carried out by the company, Rimske terme d.o.o., owned by a consortium of eight companies and the state, amount to €48.5 million, containing €7 million in EU grants.



## Rimske Terme put emphasis on business, wellness and spa services

The Rimske Terme spa is a newly established tourist destination with an emphasis on business, wellness and spa programmes. “We wish to attract guests from the upper middle class and the lower upper class. We definitely do not want to attract just anyone. The health programme will cover 15% of the entire programme, while the remaining services should consist of business and wellness programmes. Business guests have at their disposal an excellent conference centre with a capacity for up to 200 participants. In this context, we would like to highlight that Rimske Terme offers a peaceful environment for business with no disruptions by external factors. Its advantages are thus the location and technological equipment, as all premises have wireless internet and each room has its own internet connection.”

The staff put also great emphasis on the comfort of the business guests. In comparison to other health resorts, the wellness service provides for a better connection between health services and wellness. The Laško Health Resort, for example, has a strong health service offer and a broad wellness programme, while in the newly reopened Rimske Terme spa the health service offer will not be so extensive. “We have no intention of developing mass and family tourism, but do offer services for couples without children who wish to relax and have a rest. With the motto “the wealth of the past for the challenges of the present” we wish to help people to be in good physical shape, to strengthen their power and spirits and to learn how to live healthy lives. “ For this purpose, Rimske Terme will also organise cooking courses for people who need special food.

A wellness programme combining several therapies will also be introduced. “By the time of the opening, we will prepare a programme called ‘Via Sanum Romanum – the Roman road of health’. The idea is that a couple joins the same programme and undergoes a two-hour treatment involving seven events, including aroma therapy, steam bath, salt inhalation, massage, fango therapy and others. This is a special offer that will be unique. Our specialty is also a pool, the inside of which is modelled after Roman baths, it has displays in the relaxation area and there are also three jacuzzis intended for water massage. By



resting in a quiet atmosphere, without any crowds in the pool, visitors will restore their physical and spiritual integrity.” The health programme thus covers the entire rehabilitation programme, all health services, with the exception of gastronomy, water treatment with healing benefits, and a complete therapy programme in the rehabilitation centre. The thermal spa closely cooperates with the town of Rimske Toplice and appeals to the inhabitants who wish to contribute to the thermal spa’s services to join them and strengthen the authenticity of the resort.

To the question what business results they expect now, entering the free market, Ms. Novak replies that they are looking for a strategic partner, an investor, since

income would grow too slowly through pure dependence on the market. “Profit must be generated quickly and a strategic investor could therefore offer the right solution since he would bring added value and shorten the time to earn optimal income.” If they find a strategic partner, the present 55 employees will be joined by another 20 to 30 new employees needed in the labour-intensive tourist and hospitality industry.

On its rebirth, we wish the Rimske Terme spa every success in satisfying the needs of its guests, balancing their physical, mental and spiritual health, thereby strengthening their inner power for a more successful tomorrow.



Polonca Štritof, photo: Tanja Ristič

# Let's Clean the Balkans In One Day!

From 15 to 17 April 2011, the Ecologists Without Borders Association organized the Let's Clean the Balkans In One Day! regional conference that took place in Rimske toplice and was attended by 61 representatives from 11 countries who will be in charge of organising and implementing the large-scale volunteer campaign in their country next year. The main goal of the conference was to bring together volunteers from Balkan countries, enable the transfer of knowledge and experience in the organisation of mass action volunteer campaigns, and to establish task groups for the successful implementation of the global cleanup in 2012 in each of the participating countries.



The international team of the World Cleanup 2012! initiative presented the conference and announced a global cleanup campaign that will take place on 24 March 2012. The conference was attended by volunteers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Austria and Latvia. Seven workshops and lectures were moderated and presented by renowned experts from the fields of logistics, project management, fundraising, conceptual thinking and communication together with the members of the Slovenian team that lead last year's campaign. Participants were addressed by Dr Janez Potočnik and the Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Dr Roko Žarnič.

In his address to the participants of the conference on Friday, the European Commissioner for the Environment, Janez Potočnik expressed full support of the European Commission to the Let's Do It, World! movement and emphasised that the civil society has the power that politics and legislators do not. By setting an example, it can affect change in the habits and thinking of the entire society. He further said that the Let's do it, World! movement is faced with a challenge. It needs to bolster its numbers as it is essential for as many partners as possible from the fields of non-governmental volunteer and environmental organisations, associations and networks to join in. Another aspect of key importance is to achieve the inclusion of local and regional authorities at the level of the EU and beyond.

The Minister for the Environment and Spatial Planning, Roko Žarnič welcomed the international association of environmental activists. He said that the last year's Let's Clean Slovenia In One Day! campaign was not only important for having brought together more than 270,000 Slovenians on 17 April 2010 but also because of other positive things that followed. In his opinion, a great deal of attention is being devoted to the building of awareness of youth and children who will carry on and develop our heritage. He promised to the participants from Balkan countries to provide support in convincing decision-makers in individual countries.

"Let's Clean Slovenia In One Day! campaign was extraordinary. More than 270,000 of us came together, assuming responsibility for our respective localities and proving how successful we can be when we all fight for the same goal. It is time to try and unite the world in a similar endeavour. The date has already been set – 24 March 2012, when millions of people will be part of the largest environmental campaign in the history of mankind. The preparations for the campaign are already underway in Slovenia and it is an honour for us to be able to coordinate the Balkans region," said president of the Ecologists Without Borders Association,

Petra Matos, and concluded with the words of Victor Hugo: "Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come."

Tiina Urm, spokeswoman of the World Cleanup 2012 movement and member of the original team from Estonia, said that the idea has grown into a movement. "The Let's Do It! movement started on 3 May 2008 in Estonia when 50,000 volunteers around the country were able to gather 10,000 tons of waste in merely 5 hours. Since then, the project grew and has to-date been successfully implemented in Latvia, Lithuania, India, Portugal, Slovenia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria where a total of 1.3 million people took part in one-day volunteer cleanup campaigns. Recently, people were cleaning up Ukraine, Moldova and Lithuania. On 24 March 2012, a wave of local and regional cleanup campaigns will sweep over the world. Our goal is for volunteer teams to organise one-day cleanups in at least 100 countries of the world and for these campaigns to be attended by at least 300 million volunteers by the end of 2012," added Tiina Urm and explained that anyone can already join the project on the website ([www.letsdoitworld.org](http://www.letsdoitworld.org)) or through local teams in their country. This year, 18 regional conferences similar to the Let's Clean the Balkans In One Day! conference will take place around the world, 8 of which will be organised in the EU.

Nara Petrovič of the Ecologists Without Borders Association added that the representatives of the World Cleanup 2012 project recently visited the European Parliament in Strasbourg where a campaign is underway to support the global cleanup initiative. They succeeded in convincing the majority of the members of Parliament to sign the declaration and need only 32 more signatures to reach the necessary quorum of 389 votes. The declaration of support has already been signed by all Slovenian Members of the European Parliament thus showing that Slovenia can stand united when it comes to vital issues affecting all citizens of the world.

The conference with a wide-ranging and diverse programme was held in English. In cooperation with the representatives of the Slovenian Let's Clean Slovenia in One Day!, the workshops were moderated by the only trainer licensed to apply the de Bono Thinking System methods in Slovenia Nastja Mulej, one of the most successful Slovenian managers and Director of Studio Moderna Sandi Češko, PR expert and consultant Nada Serajnik Sraka, freelance consultant in sponsorship activation Vesna Stanič, manager of media research and analyses Brigita Femeč and marketing manager of Kliping Jure Habjanič. The event concluded with the lecture on the world consumption of natural resources by Lučka Kajfež Bogataj Ph. D.

Janez Potočnik's speech: <http://youtu.be/msgWnM5qOpM>







Hana Souček Morača, photo: Mateja J. Potočnik

# Professor JOSIP TURK, MD

*ONE CANNOT PUT A STOP TO THE PROFESSION OF A DOCTOR*

We found a long-standing Ljubljana University Medical Centre cardiologist and a qualified university teacher at the Faculty of Medicine at his home. At a city centre apartment located at the site of his place of birth, he recollected his past and reflected upon his pending work. Despite his ripe old age, he finds no time for idleness and says that “one should keep a positive frame of mind”, something in abundance with Dr Turk.

He was born into a family engaged in business, but he followed the path of medicine. As a child, he admired his mother who worked as a nurse during the First World War; he was also impressed by his younger brother who was a young Red Cross member and a proud bearer of a first aid bag. The decision to become a physician was neither easy nor sudden. Being the oldest son, he was supposed to succeed his father and so enrolled in and graduated from a business college. After graduating, he was

employed by the company Slovenijales and gradually became aware of his ambition to be more than just a manager. “Mother told me not to enrol in medical studies because of they took a long time. ‘You are an eater and should study agronomy so that you’ll never be hungry.’” After having completed the first year of studies in the Faculty of Agronomy, he discovered that he was eager to do something more and, after some consideration, chose medicine.

#### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN BE EXERCISED BY THE WAY

“Despite the tradition of the time, my mother used to use oil instead of lard when cooking and if anyone would salt a prepared dish, she would be annoyed,” remembers Dr Turk and says that he has always stuck to the principle “some only have legs to move, others to walk”. Love of sports and a healthy lifestyle fulfils and strengthens a person. He swam, run, cycled and skied a lot. Team sports were

never his cup of tea; he enjoyed running. He was a faithful cyclist and loved swimming even when he was a student. Going for a run was the first thing he did after finishing his duty shift at the intensive care unit.

“Stress and relatively high mortality among patients made it impossible for me to fall asleep, even if I would want to. I would think about my job and my decisions.” While running, he relaxed physically and mentally. He took part in long-distance swimming competitions and triathlons. He prides himself on participating in numerous summer and winter sport competitions. In the summertime, he had a key to the Kodeljevo swimming pool so that he could arrive there before the staff and swim 1,500 metres; then, he would mount his bicycle and start his shift at the hospital before 8 a.m.

“Sometimes, I was chilled to the bone and my lips turned blue. People would ask me why my hands were so cold and wondered if I was ill. I was perfectly fine; it was the water of the pool – where I had already done a day’s worth of activity – that was cold.”

During his employment in Kranjska Gora, he often used his lunch break to go skiing. He was actively engaged in sports until he reached the age of 75 years, “It was at that age that I undertook my last bold venture: a bicycle marathon of friendship between Croatia and Slovenia. From Vukovar to Ljubljana in three days and 600 kilometres.”

#### A CARDIOVASCULAR SPECIALIST

His work experience led him to believe that it was more sensible to prevent a disease than to treat it. “Prevention is the basis of modern medicine.” His work was distinguished by his approach; he laid great emphasis on personal contacts with patients. He worked at the Department of Internal Medicine, University Medical Centre Ljubljana for forty years. Among other assignments, he headed the Emergency Internal Medicine Service for three years and after that the cardiology clinics. At the beginning of his career, soon after receiving his medical degree, he found his first employment in Kranjska Gora. “As a general practitioner I was interested in internal medicine.” He concluded his

specialist training at the internal medicine clinic in Ljubljana. He was engaged in cardiology, gained experience in the intensive care unit, where patients with myocardial infarction and other serious diseases are treated, and also pursued advanced study at the intensive care unit in Lyon.

After having served with the armed forces and completed his internship, he fulfilled the requirements for independent work and left for Kranjska Gora as a young doctor. “I had a lot of offers but chose this place because I loved the Alpine environment and skiing. I gathered vast practical experience over my six years in Kranjska Gora.” His being the only medical practitioner for five thousand inhabitants brought him a lot of work and extensive experience.

In 1980, he obtained his doctoral degree and became an assistant professor. He conducted internships for medical students, lectured on cardiac rhythm to post graduate students and was constantly emphasising the importance of personal communication with patients and of the basic good manners expected from a per-





son, especially a doctor. He underlined that to be a good doctor one must first be a good, moral person with a proper attitude towards patients. "A patient must know who his/her doctor is, and what his/her name is. I disliked anonymity."

He lectured at various congresses and professional meetings and published more than 200 professional and popular articles in national and foreign journals. He is the author, co-author or editor of the several books, including *Vse o srcu in žilah* ('All about Heart and Veins') and *Prehrana vir zdravja* ('Nutrition as a Source of Health'). "I decided to engage in prevention, because we had noticed that the lifestyle of our follow-up patients, who were treated for myocardial infarction, angina pectoris, stroke and clogged arteries had significantly contributed to their disease." But it was also true that in many cases hereditary factors were to be blamed. By getting acquainted with his patients, Dr Turk was able to determine what contributed to their disease. Often, they were caused by harmful habits. "I thought that people should be educated in a different manner."

#### FOUNDER

Cardiovascular diseases are among the most common causes of death in developed countries, including Slovenia. Twenty years ago, a group of enthusiasts founded the organisation Slovenian Society for Cardiovascular Health. They were motivated by the fact that medicine alone cannot succeed in combating cardiovascular diseases. The society's aim of fostering education in the field of disease prevention is pursued through the promotion of healthy lifestyle, which includes preventative nutrition, non-smoking, appropriate physical activity and health status checks including blood pressure, blood cholesterol and sugar level monitoring.

"We have contributed to the general awareness through measures, lectures, articles, editing of books and pointing to the issues of physical activity, nutrition, youth, reflection on the old age and medicinal products."

It takes seven years to change bad habits into good ones and integrate them into a lifestyle. In doing so, the society can be of assistance. Our society is a member of the European Heart Network and the European Congenital Heart Disease Organisation. It participated in the purchase of diagnostic and therapeutic equipment

and was engaged in Slovenian campaign to put defibrillators in public places. The society also devised a Health Beneficial logo, which is awarded to selected food products, which are low in fat, unsaturated fatty acids, cholesterol, salt, sugar and energy density but rich in fibre.

In Slovenia, the society has been very successful in this field. It has 8,000 members, ten branches and seven heart counselling clinics. It also carries out almost 100,000 preventive blood pressure, cholesterol and sugar level measurements per year. It organises approximately 100 lectures and workshops, events marking World Heart Day, and participates in several international research projects.

#### RECOGNITION OF HIS WORK

Undoubtedly, the biggest reward is cured patients. On 14 February 2011, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Slovenian Society for Cardiovascular Health, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk, presented the founder of the society, Dr Josip Miloš Turk, with an award for his tireless work in raising the awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle for the prevention of health problems and diseases. The Preventive Cardiology and Rehabilitation Institute in Portorož was named after Dr Turk. The institute's activities have followed the example of its teachers, including Dr Turk. He was an Honorary President of the Slovenian Society for Cardiovascular Health for sixteen years. In that period, he was named senior advisor by the then Minister of Health, Božidar Voljč.

"I have cultivated a friendship with many patients with whom I established a personal relationship." The profession of a doctor never ends, "...you think about what you did and about mistakes you made." A medical error occurs quickly and is not necessarily caused by ignorance or neglect. It is not personal and not to be condemned easily, it happens unwillingly. "When a decision must be made within a very short time period, it may be wrong despite all the knowledge."

After forty years of service, Dr Turk retired but did not withdraw from active life. He is still active and writes articles, mostly for *Za srce* magazine, but also for others. He is keen to take up invitations to lecture and might even write his biography. His memories reach far back and are, as he says, abundant.





Andrej Stare, photo: STA

# A FAREWELL TO SKIING GIANTS

Slovenian sport has produced a number of athletes ranked amongst the best in the world. Starting with the legendary Leon Štukelj (three-time Olympic champion in gymnastics), Miroslav Cerar (twice Olympic champion in gymnastics), Ivo Daneu (the best basketball player in the world at the end of the 1960s), Iztok Čop (rowing), Mateja Svet (Alpine skiing), Brane Oblak (one of the best football players in the world in the 1970s) and the list goes on. The second last weekend of March marked a farewell to two Slovenian sports giants: ski runner Petra Majdič and ski jumper Primož Peterka bade farewell to profession competition within less than 24 hours of each other.

At the age of 16, Primož Peterka made an excellent debut in ski jumping. He was a medal winner three years in a row from 1996 to 1998. The growing up was a new challenge for him and after a five-year break Peterka re-appeared at the very top of world ski jumping. At the end of November 2002, in the north of Finland at -31°C, he defeated the world's ski jumping elite and won the medal. His victory in Kuusamo was an amazing comeback of a champion, two-time winner of the total score in the ski jumping world cup.

"Luck... coincidence" commented experts, but Peterka won once more. On New Year's Day 2003, he won the ski-jumping contest traditionally held in Garmisch Partenkirchen and scored his 15th victory at the world cup championship.

Peterka strived again, wanting to return to the top for the third time; he did not succeed. Peterka's last "big" success was the World Championship in Oberstdorf in 2005 when he, together with national team colleagues, Jure Bogataj, Jernej Damjan in Rok Benkovič, won another bronze team medal. He bade a farewell to ski jumping at the age of 33, leaving behind an outstanding career – first as a teenager and then a mature well-trained jumper with 15 major victories, two world cup medals, the world cup in ski jumping and the victory at the New Year's contest, which was also the most important for him. "Ski jumping gave me everything, joy, pleasure, friends; I have a family with three children; in the future, I will raise my children to become new Peterkas".

## PRIMOŽ PETERKA

Born: 28 February 1979  
 Club: SK Triglav Kranj  
 World Cup: 15 victories, 10 second places, 7 third places  
 Total score: 1st place in 1997, 1998  
 Olympic Games: a bronze team medal, 2002, Salt Lake City  
 World Championships: a bronze team medal, Oberstdorf, 2005  
 Personal record in ski jumping: 212 m  
 The best 'Male Athlete of the Year' in Slovenia: 1997, 1998



The Slovenian Queen of Nordic Skiing, Petra Majdič, bade a farewell nearly 24 hours after Primož Peterka. The athlete who dominated the Slovenian and world cross-country skiing built her career as a "one woman band", together with her coach, and competed with the world's elite.

Her results are outstanding since, besides her successes, she is undoubtedly the best ever competitor in the sprint and in the youngest cross-country discipline.

In the previous season, Majdič won the World Cup title for sprints, which was the third time after 2008 and 2009. Last year, she did not finish the World Cup competition due to a bad fall at the Olympic Games. Majdič made her debut as a delicate girl with keen determination, growing stronger over the years and, as a result, on 12 December 1998, stepped on the World Cup winners' podium for the first time. In the Swiss city of Goms Ulrichen, she won a 3rd place in the 10-km classic.

A string of successful achievements followed, with better results year after year in the World Cup sprint and total

scores. In recent years, the trophies and medals came one after another. Petra ran and sprinted, ending her career with 24 wins in the World Cup. This is the highest number of wins of all Slovenian winter athletes in World Cups (Alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, biathlon, acrobatic skiing). Petra Majdič won three medals in major competitions. At the World Ski Championship in Sapporo (Japan) in 2007, she was 2nd in sprint, while, this year in Oslo, she was 3rd in the same discipline. At last year's Olympic Games, she also won 3rd place, coming to the winners' podium in spite of a bad fall in pre-race training.

Petra Majdič always demonstrated a tremendous power, energy, desire and determination. These are the qualities possessed by the very best athletes in the world.

She retired from professional competition in Falun, Sweden, and bade farewell to her village inhabitants in Dol pri Ljubljani where she first started cross-country skiing. Majdič has promised to stay in close contact with the sport and help young skiers to become part of the competing

team. Like Primož Peterka, Petra Majdič remains a member of Slovenia's large family of Nordic athletes and with her rich experience she will, beyond doubt, contribute to the creation and training of new champions like her.

## PETRA MAJDIČ

Born: 22 December 1979  
 Club: Dol pri Ljubljani  
 World Cup: 24 victories, 20 second places, 17 third places  
 Total score: 2nd place in 2009, 3rd place in 2010  
 Total score in sprint: 1st place in 2008, 2009, 2011, 2nd place in 2007, 3rd place in 2010  
 World Championships: 2nd place in sprint in 2007, 3rd place in sprint in 2011  
 Olympic Games: 3rd place in spring in 2010  
 The best 'Female Athlete of the Year' in Slovenia: 2006, 2007, 2009

Besides Primož Peterka and Petra Majdič, a number of outstanding winter athletes bade farewell at the end of the 2011 season, including ski jumpers Janne Ahonen, Adam Malysz, Emmanuel Chedal, Matti Hautamäki, Michael Uhrmann, Andreas Küttel, Dmitrij Vasiliev, Harri Olli and downhill racer Michael Walchhofer.



# Easter dishes

Some parts of Slovenia and the neighbouring regions are known for their great variety of Easter dishes, many of which are common to all these regions, but some are special, typical for a particular region and its cultural features, or even of a particular town or village.



Homely atmosphere is typical of Easter Sunday. In the morning, of course, the blessed food was on the table everywhere in Slovenia.

No other holiday boasts such a variety of popular traditional dishes, including dishes covered by the famous žegen (the blessing of Easter baskets – a custom that differs slightly from one place to another), various Easter buns, potica (rolled yeast dough with filling), flat cakes, štruklji (rolled dumplings), Easter eggs, meat dishes and the like, and dishes served for Easter Sunday lunch, traditionally enriched with interesting and unique Easter specialities.

The length of the Easter holiday period, the upcoming spring season, and the first crops that come with it all add to the abundance of Easter dishes. Lent dishes, which differ according to the region and to different dates – from Ash Wednesday, Lent Sundays, Good Friday to Holy Saturday, the last day of Lent –, are another subject. These dishes are less common and less popular among people. But let's talk about them some other time. In recent years, there has been a Slovenia-wide campaign starting every year at the beginning of the 40-day Lent period, calling for 40 days without alcohol.

## Slovenian žegen

On Holy Saturday afternoon, the blessing of Easter dishes, which are called žegen almost everywhere, takes place in most Slovenian towns. This custom has not changed since the 16th century. In the second half of the 17th century, the polyhistor Baron Janez Vajkard Valvasor described žegen in his famous book *Slava vojvodine Kranjske* ('The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola'): 'Smoked pork, salted beef, hard-boiled eggs (painted Easter eggs) and a cake, always made of fine white flour, with a special filling of grated cheese, milk, eggs, cream, wine, sugar and raisins. It would be rolled (like potica), weighing over 10, sometimes also up to 17 kilograms. People also

provided themselves with lamb, and even the poorest brought it to the church to be blessed.'

Dishes (žegen) were brought to church in huge baskets with two handles (jerbas) and later also in more typical baskets and straw bags with different names (korbla, protzajna, pletenica, korpača, cekar, plenir).

Nowadays, dishes put in Easter baskets (žegen) include pastry and various cakes (kolač, potica, šartelj, and white spicy butter bread), meat (usually only pork – smoked ham, smoked pork thigh, shoulder, and sausages), painted Easter eggs and horseradish. But there are also other dishes. The Prlekija region is known for dishes like boneless meat, zviti zavec (stomach meat), roast loin, bosman (special richly decorated bread), povitice and remenice (painted Easter eggs), and different flowers seeds, most often cloves or even potatoes. Haloze is well-known for bidrih (a special cake). In the area around the village of Fram, dishes brought to be blessed would also include a part of a pig's head with ears. In the Prekmurje region, these dishes would include meat, počervina (bacon with meat), baba (potica made of rolled yeast dough), with vrtanek (potica made of stretched dough), a traditional dish of the region, on the top.

In some places in the Štajerska region, a large round loaf of milk bread (bresmec, presmec, presnec), from which a slice had been cut off, would be put on the top of Easter baskets. In these places, bresmec was also the name for žegen. Pumpkin and corn seeds would be added to the bread, symbolising chicken feed, to prevent a fox from stealing hens. In Lemberg pri Šmarju, žegen dishes would also include glavnata klobasa (a large sausage) and mlinčevka (a special potica).



Painted Easter eggs on ivy leaves





Ham baked in pastry

A stuffed stomach is a dish typical of the Dolenjska and Notranjska regions, although today, the stuffing is usually put inside a bladder, not a stomach. When you cut it, it should have a nice reddish colour and smell of 'a carnation'. In Babno Polje, people put budel in Easter baskets to be blessed. In a bowl, they combine beaten eggs (sometimes even up to 50 eggs), cubed white bread, a small onion, cubed ham, salt and pepper. They put the stuffing into intestines and cook them. Budel is eaten cold. They would also put large bread wafers (similar to communion wafers) in baskets.

In the Primorska region, dishes put in Easter baskets include famous pršut (air-dried ham), pinca (milk bread with cinnamon, topped with egg yolk to give it a golden, shiny appearance), in some places also presmec (a flat cake with cebib (raisins), pine nuts and different spices), pastry birds, made for children, and a speciality menihi (braided bread made of similar dough as pinca and topped with Easter eggs). Different cakes (e.g. šišare, kite), oranges, sometimes onions, a bottle of wine, and even a wooden rattle are also put in baskets, which are nicely covered with embroidered cloths. In the past, baskets were fairly large because the loaves of bread, cakes and potica were large as well. Their size and shape changed when large brick ovens became very rare. Now they are sized to fit in modern ovens, and are brought to church in smaller baskets and bags.

Dishes put in Easter baskets have a symbolic importance. There are more than forty such symbols. For instance, Easter eggs represent the blood of Christ, his tears or five wounds, meat symbolises his body, a cake his crown, sausages the ropes with which Christ was tied, headcheese the earthquake felt by those guarding Christ on the cross, horseradish the nails with which Christ was crucified, vinegar and wormwood liqueur his suffering, etc.

## Some more about Easter dishes

There are far too many of them to mention all these dishes. Bread baked on this occasion is tastier, prepared with milk and enriched with different spices; it is often decorated, comes in different shapes and sizes, and has different names. A traditional dish in the Koroška region is majželj, a specially prepared complex cake. For Easter and other holidays, women in Dražgoše baked famous dražgoški kruhki (uniquely decorated honey pastries). They are similar to škofjeloški kruhki (honey pastries), shaped into different figurines, most often into roosters, hens and chicken. They are made of rye flour and honey. Kovač, large stuffed bread (60 or more cm in diameter), is a dish prepared in lowland areas of the Gorenjska region and was formerly baked in special large clay or metal pots. Vrtanek, braided white bread made with milk and often studded with different seeds, and the famous pereci, formed into two braids, are typical of the Prekmurje region; large thin Easter cakes are a speciality of Bela Krajina; pletenka (braided bread), štüca (loaf of bread), (Trnova) krona (an Easter cake), velikonočno jagnje (Easter lamb), kuglof (traditional ring-shaped cake with raisins), and velikonočni venec (braided bread topped with Easter eggs) are specialities of the Pivka region. Children look forward to bread rolls baked in different shapes (golobičke, tički, fitule, pinkice, košarice, mihe, gnezdeca, etc.). Budla (bread made of two types of flour, coiled into spiral) is characteristic of the Cerkljansko region.

At Christmas time, we wrote about štruklji and different types of potica, a typical Slovenian festive dish, which is also made for Easter. Let's now look at several others.



Easter lamb

Zgornjesavinjski želodec (the Upper Savinja Valley stomach) is one such dish. Since it is dried in a special process and becomes mature around Easter time, it is considered a ceremonial dish. Kvašen ajdov želodec (a buckwheat stomach) is a dish characteristic of Lower Carniola, while vezanski želodec or poljanski nadev (a type of stuffed stomach prepared for Easter), made of pork chops, dried bacon, eggs, etc. is characteristic of the Kočevje region. The Bela Krajina region is famous for roast lamb and piglets, and fulanka, a traditional Easter dish with special stuffing, also called a white sausage. The Notranjska region and the Koroška region swear by pork tongue. Koroška is well-known for čisava župa (a sour soup), which is made of cream with chunks of lamb and other meat, spiced with cinnamon, ginger and other spices, and for nabulana prata (stuffed roast meat).

A dish highly typical of the Štajerska region, and especially of the Primorska region, is headcheese (žol(i)ca, žuč, žiuca, žuca, žüca), also called mrzla župa (cold soup). It can be prepared in many dif-



Easter cakes

ferent ways – with pršut, veal, beef or pork thighs, heads or bones; in the Goriško region, it is accompanied by boiled eggs.

If you visit the Primorska region, you should certainly try fulje, fule or ponjave (Brda), a dish made of bread soaked in soup in which shoulder meat has been cooked. The bread is then squeezed and combined with flour, eggs, chives, onion fried with butter, raisins, vanilla sugar, and lemon or orange zest. The mixture is formed into dumplings, which are cooked in salted water. This dish can also be prepared in a different way by forming the bread mixture into rolls, which are then stir-fried. A visitor to the Primorska region should also try firtalje, a well-known local dish made of eggs and different plants and herbs, and fritole or fritle (fried pastry). A specialty of the Slovenian Istria is a flour dish made for Easter. It is prepared in a different way in each town and has unusual names: nádova, ná(a)lda or nakelda. The basic ingredients in this dish are breadcrumbs, savoury, crumbled pinca, grated sheep cheese or parmesan, bacon, raisins, and chicken soup.



Easter breakfast the old way



# The Smell of Books

The Fabula literary festival, which started in April 2010, marks the end of the period in which Ljubljana held the title of World Book Capital, thus rounding off a series of magnificent cultural events in Slovenia. It can be said, without false praise, that we have been introduced to some software and social approaches that will be worthwhile to follow in the future when preparing other programmes intended mainly for social cohesion, from culture to sport.



## A year that quickly passed

The programme, which has been in good shape all year round and carefully followed not only by the Ljubljana public but also by the Slovenian public, had two distinct "halves". This is understandable, since a year is an extended period and it would be challenging to go through this entire time with steady dynamics and concentration. The organisers have prepared a well-formed dramatic arc, reaching its first peak at the beginning while introducing the project to Ljubljana with an almost pompous flair. Memory takes us back to the beautiful introductory scenic layout of theatre director Matjaž Berger, concerned with the destiny of Slovenian and the world spirit, personified by a book; it also takes us back to the witty introductory ceremonies in front of the City Hall and other important places within the city with the cooperation of the whole body of notable figures from Slovenian social and political life, as well as important visitors from the interested international public.

According to media response and frequency of events, a second dramatic peak was reached in March this year with the hosting of a two-day World Book Summit, with Ljubljana a meeting place of "all concerned with the book," as Mitja Zupančič, the president of the organisational committee, said, pointing out that this was the first world summit of this kind. The event paid particular attention to the publishing industry, particularly the penetration of digitisation in the area of books, and elsewhere also to challenges concerning reading and translating. As a parallel part of the world summit, a UNESCO regional forum

Particularly refreshing was the visit of Nobel Laureate Herta Müller who, with pleasant simplicity and modesty, brought to Ljubljana and to the Slovenian spiritual atmosphere completely new elements of cosmopolitan behaviour that differs from the vanity and hollow "glamour" of local media and political stars, which was easily noticed, but also quickly forgotten by the majority. This is regrettable, since this was an enjoyable and important lesson! The Fabula also hosted other eminent guests; discussions with them attracted attention and many visitors, something that Ljubljana is a little unfamiliar with.



entitled "Writing, publishing, translating: building cultural diversity in South East Europe" was held. The symbolic highlight of the World Book Summit was

the adoption of the Ljubljana Resolution on Books, containing nine points from Ljubljana's experience over the year, and passing these on to Buenos Aires, as of April 2011 the World Book Capital 2012.

This year's Fabula literary festival fell under the framework of this already declining dramatic arc. In an extremely communicative and sufficiently popular way, the festival mainly linked authors and their public in a series of discussions, public debates and round tables, often sparkling with controversy. The first guest was Italian novelist Niccolò Ammaniti, author of the novel "I'm Not Scared", followed by Slovenian writer Drago Jančar, Christoph Ransmayr of Austria, Margriet de Moor of the Netherlands, César Aira of Argentina and Per Olov Enquist of Sweden. It was indeed a beautiful farewell to the World Book Capital, which enriched Ljubljana throughout the entire year.



## Living with a book

In March last year, when Head of the Department for Culture Dr Uroš Grilc, the main force behind the project, unveiled the basic policy guidelines in SINFO, an attentive reader could have noted that the organisers were well aware of the global cultural area that books and media represent in general, but wanted to explore in what way a certain local area can encourage reading and use of books in general. If anything, the inhabitants of Ljubljana will remember some very innovative development born on this subject and tested in the Slovenian capital. The Books for Everyone campaign brought various responses; with appropriate subsidies, 21 book titles were issued, with a print run of 8,000 copies, available for purchase for a one-off price of EUR 3 per copy. This is, of course, a considerable number of books in our market. The answer to the question posed of whether books in Slovenia are too expensive, and whether this consequently results in relatively low sales of around 800 for more demanding literature, is still unknown. Meanwhile, the books of eminent authors,



for example Herta Müller, Slavoj Žižek and Svetlana Makarovič, were sold out immediately. In the very centre of the city, Trubar Literature House has become a cultural centre for chamber events. A valuable acquisition! In the most friendly way, the book has been brought to the urban environment

through public readings at attractive spots in the city along the banks of the Ljubljanica, in new and imaginatively equipped specialist shops for youth literature and comics, as well as through lending libraries or book-exchange spots at bus stops; these were all fresh and innovative activities promoting the book



as something blending into the urban environment. I believe that these activities proved their excellence; however, because of their limited scope, they failed to attract a still larger number of people – the author of this article focused particularly on city transport and the purchase of inexpensive books; the best of them escaped. To me, this is proof that the campaign has been successful.

The World Book Capital City programme was a fascinating event, endowing Ljubljana with remarkably greater cosmopolitan spirit than the general atmosphere of our city. It is proof that it pays to invest in culture, since, in the long term, cultural products are most precious to the spirit of a city.

**We asked the Director of Slovenian Book Agency Slavko Pregl, for his comments regarding the conclusion of the World Book Capital programme.**

“Slovenians have been truly nurturing our love for books for as much as 500 years, this love being, however, sometimes more tangible and at other times more platonic. Trubar was impoverished because he spent all he had on publishing books that

he mainly gave away for free. Slovenian publishers sometimes mention between gritted teeth that he was the one to instil belief among people that the book is a gift, something that need not be paid for. Figures on the number of issued book titles per capita in our country are in fact high, as well as figures on lending books in libraries; figures for purchases by individuals, conversely, are among the poorest in Europe. However, if we want books to survive so that we can read, we also need to buy them.

As regards the completion of the World Book Capital project, now comes the time when we can evaluate the entire happening, a great variety of events, and determine their importance both in the moment and in the long run. In devoting great attention to the book, and also to many events, I see a generous gift of the state, an infinite variety of seeds that will, in the coming years, grow into mighty trees, on the one hand of great and overarching love for books in the broadest sense, and on the other hand of a vast variety of intimate pleasures that the most beautiful couple, a book and a reader, can conjure in life.

Now it is not the time to evaluate what benefits the project has brought to Ljubljana and to others. The World Book Capital programme offered a multitude of opportunities for developing our imagination and doing something “for the book” and also a host of opportunities for “the book” to give something to us. Anyone who has managed to find a balance here could not have had a bad time. Events indeed mostly occurred in Ljubljana; yet, they were not scarce in other places throughout Slovenia. Again, it has been demonstrated that a book is available anywhere in Slovenia to anyone who wants to get hold of it and, of course, what is probably most valuable, that readers are not misled either by glamour or by low prices: a Slovenian author and a good book always come first. This is a joyful message.

The Ljubljana Resolution on Books is a document of great importance, at first glance not strikingly concise, but within its context it indicates the direction in which the “book: the bearer of human development”, within the “public interest”, must head. I think that the development directions outlined by the document summarise the conception of the Slovenian path. The resolution should also be read very carefully by us, especially the part directing the material basis of our path into the future. In other words, it would be quite painful if the Ljubljana Resolution did not reach our own ears.”



Dr Uroš Grilc, Head of the Department of Culture



# Easter Sunday Customs

EASTER IS THE CENTRAL AND THE OLDEST FEAST IN THE CHRISTIAN LITURGICAL YEAR, AND ALSO THE LONGEST.

After Shrove Tuesday, i.e. on Ash Wednesday, Eastertide begins and lasts until Easter; the period between Easter and Pentecost, which begins (as the arrival of the Holy Spirit) fifty days later, is called the Easter period. During that period, a number of fast days and holidays follow one another; they are connected with the liturgy and folk piety, as well as with a barely transparent array of archaic pagan customs, beliefs and superstitions, a feature particularly typical of Slovenia. Moreover, the folk customs are in no other season more intertwined with ecclesiastic liturgy than in the Easter season. Therefore, they have remained very much alive and popular until present day.

Because Christ, according to the Bible, rose from the dead at night or on Sunday at dawn, that night really was a 'great' night. This is how Slovenians perceive it and that is why the Slovenian name for Easter, Velika noč, means 'great night'. Elsewhere in Europe, people use a range of terms for this day, terms which are usually derived from the name for the Jewish spring feast, pasha. The Slovenians, however, also have other terms for this holiday, such as vuzem, vezen and vüzen related to the word vzem (taking). The word refers to the taking away of meat during the forty-day Lent, when it was not consumed. Lent (Post) begins after the Shrove Tuesday carnival when in older times people refrained (opustiti) from eating meat (meso; mesopust). On Easter Sunday they 'take' meat again, meaning they can eat meat again. In the Prekmurje region, one can find a very interesting term denoting Easter: letnice (annuals), a term derived from the word leto (year), thus testifying the importance of this spring festival. At that time, with the spring equinox, the year turns and starts a new cycle.

## Before Sunday there is still a little bit of Holy Saturday

Easter customs begin at the very moment when the mourning for Christ's death on Good Friday is over and when the bells in the church towers sound again. According to tradition, the bells already 'return from Rome' on Saturday and initiate a joyous Easter hallelujah. Pritrkovalci (bell-ringers) climb the bell towers where, by using clappers, they make the big bells peal, producing unique melodies and rhythms. Across various Slovenian regions, pritrkovanje (pealing) is alternatively called nabijanje, klonkanje, trijančenje, linganje, tamburanje, etc. This is a Slovenian



Because Christ, according to the Bible, rose from the dead at night or on Sunday at dawn, that night really was a 'great' night.

speciality. This popular musical art is typical of our entire ethnic territory and probably dates back to the 16th century. All major ceremonies are accompanied by pealing and a national competition in this traditional skill is also well-known.

As in many places across Europe, Holy Saturday, among other things, is characterized by the blessing of the fire, when the priest in front of the church blesses the fire and people take the embers home to heat the stoves and ovens and light the candles. In some places, including the immediate vicinity of Ljubljana, the priest blesses the fire at a particular house, which is then visited by the entire neighbourhood to collect the embers. This needs to be highlighted because the custom is still very

much alive almost everywhere, including towns. In Kranj, the main town of the Gorenjska region, the blessing of the fire, for example, takes place right in the central town square with people coming from near and far to take the embers home. On this day, as well as on Easter Sunday and on the occasion of certain other holidays, fire, smoke and water have a particular power, still seriously taken by people. In some other places, particularly in north-eastern Slovenia, the well-known Easter bonfires, called vüzemnice, are made on Saturday evening.

The traditionally most widespread custom on Holy Saturday is, of course, the ancient blessing of Easter foods. This will be further discussed in a separate article.





All major ceremonies are accompanied by bell ringing; an all-Slovenian competition in this specific and traditional skill is also well-known.

## Easter Sunday – a special holiday, still very much alive

Being so festive, no work may be done on Easter Sunday. In rural areas, the master and the mistress of the house were only allowed to go to the field to bless the crops. Going around other houses, not to mention pubs, was a grave sin. Receiving visits was also not allowed. Staying in is (was) typical of Easter Sunday. In the morning, of course, the blessed food was on the table everywhere in Slovenia. The whole family had to gather. Blessed food was also given to domestic animals. They were fed blessed brown bread and horseradish. In Slovenske Gorice, the cat was the only animal not given bread, “because the devil quite often appears disguised as a cat”. On that day, the cattle were given pieces of presnec and other ritual types of bread, as well as blessed water and salt. In the traditional Slovenian minority community in Zilja (Gail) in Austrian Carinthia, we find the remnants of pre-Christian sacrificial

rituals. While eating, they threw pieces of meat into the fire, intended “for devout souls in purgatory”. The wind also received its share. They threw four pieces of food through the window, intended for four elements – fire, water, air and earth – in order to prevent damage on the house and crops. The nearby spring was also given blessed food.

In certain places in the Prekmurje region, the foods were not taken for blessing to the church, but instead, the Easter baskets were placed on fences before sunrise. As the sun rose, the meat in the baskets was blessed. They used to say that the Pope thus gave a blessing with the sun all over the world.

In Kobarid, a town in the Primorska region, they threw some of the bužgine (eggshells) into the fire, while preserving most of them in order to usually scatter them around the house and outbuildings or throw them on the fields. This ritual was intended to chase away ‘poisonous things’, such as snakes, toads and lizards.

A special role was attributed to the bones of the Easter foods. In some places, they had to be burnt, while elsewhere, they

were stuck beneath the roof as a protection against lightning. They were also burnt and smashed to dust, subsequently used as an ingredient for an ointment against various diseases.

Particularly in the Štajerska and Gorenjska region, they still practice a very popular custom, where young men – throughout Easter week and especially during the Easter two-day festival, i.e. on Saturday and even more on Sunday – shoot so loudly that “the earth shakes”. They either shoot with small cannons or mortars using gunpowder or carbide, which is easier to obtain. Sometimes, the mortars sounded already on Holy Saturday at midnight. In the traditional Prekija region, people still compete in who will produce the loudest and the most frequent cracking. Young men, called strelci or pokarji (shooters or bangers) collect money for carbide and subsequently also for food and beverage. In addition to participants, these noisy activities are today attended by a large audience. The banging is to salute Christ’s Resurrection, though this custom conceals a pagan element of chasing away evil spirits and demons and ‘cleansing’ the



atmosphere, thus enabling the arrival of heavenly forces, which bring fertility, health and happiness. As across most of Europe, this banging coincides with Easter processions.

It was said that on this day witches always possessed special powers, but were outwitted by Slovenian people, who through their cunning prevented them from inflicting damage. The bones from the blessed foods, buried crosswise in front of the stable threshold, were particularly helpful.

Around Lendava, for example, a black cat had to be carried to the woods on Easter and thrown on a crossroads. The devil then threw money on this spot.

Again elsewhere, people shook fruit trees on Easter Sunday, in order to wake up tree spirits, who would subsequently contribute to a good harvest.

Lovers of delicious Slovenian wine, take note! Whoever buries a bottle of good wine into an anthill on Easter Sunday and digs it up the next year during the Resurrection, will have a beverage that will make him extremely strong.





**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**



Fisherman  
Photo: Borut Peterlin