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Slovenia – mine, yours, ours

- INTERVIEW: **Milan Kučan, Lojze Peterle** • PEOPLE: **Dr. Mrs. Mateja De Leonni Stanonik, Md.**
- SPORTS: **Rebirth of Slovenian tennis** • ART & CULTURE: **Festival Ljubljana**
- SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS: **Brda cherries are the best**

contents



1



2



3



4



5



6

1 In focus 6

Slovenia celebrates its 20th anniversary

2 Interview 10

Milan Kučan and Lojze Peterle

3 Before and after 16

20 years of Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

4 Art & culture 27

THE WORLD ON A STAGE

5 Green corner 32

Julon, the first in the world with “green” polyamide

6 Natural trails 48

Slovenian caves and their telliness

MONTHLY COMMENTARY 4

“No” to referendum like jumping off a train?

BUSINESS 14

The Economy is Being Revived and Exports are Increasing

A LETTER 20

Hans van den Broek, Dan Damon

ART & CULTURE 22

My, your, our Slovenija, The Lipizzaner Museum, France Marolt Academic Folk Dance Group at turning point, Desetnica goes to two writers, Aleš Šteger, Festival Ljubljana, The capital of culture

OUR EXCELLENCE 28

A house where the sun lives

PEOPLE 34

Dr. Mrs. Mateja De Leoni Stanonik, Md.

SPORTS 40

Rebirth of slovenian tennis

SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS 40

Brda cherries are the best

CULTURAL TRAILS 44

Celebrations of the new european country

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Editorial: Government Communication Office,
Director: Darijan Košir, Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana,
tel. +386 (0) 1 478 2630, fax + 386 (0) 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Editor-in-Chief: Valerija Mencej
Executive Editor: Vesna Žarkovič, vesna.zarkovic@gov.si
Editorial Board: Mateja Malnar Stembal, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren,
Hana Souček Morača, Nataša Marvin, Manja Kostevc
Photo Editor: Janez Vidrih
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editorial



Vesna Žarkovič, Editor

Slovenia – mine, yours, ours

Regardless the differences among us Slovenians, we nevertheless have a common view of what sort of a country we want to live in: a developed, open, tolerant, free and solidaristic one – among creative individuals in one of the most developed countries, to put it shortly. We also set these values as our goal 20 years ago when Slovenia gained its independence. How do the former president of the presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia Milan Kučan and the first prime minister Lojze Peterle see those times today, 20 years later, how do they remember them and how do they project them to the present time? Read about it in this issue's interview.

I was hopeful then and I'm hopeful now, says Dan Damon, Journalist, BBC World Service, in his letter: “I was hopeful for an independent Slovenia even before 1991 because I believed (unlike quite a few Slovenians I spoke to at the time) that Slovenia would be viable as a small, self-governing nation. I had worked in other small countries, Ireland and Denmark, and I knew that with a strong sense of national purpose a small population size was no obstacle to economic viability. Identity is what matters. The Irish and the Danes know what it means to be part of their nations and I could see those characteristics in Slovenia when I first toured Yugoslavia in 1989.”

On 20 June 1991, five days before Slovenia declared its independence, the STA (Slovenian Press Agency) published its first communication, informing the domestic and foreign public that the purpose of the Agency was “up-to-date and prompt informing of the foreign media and other institutions abroad about the developments in Slovenia while simultaneously providing information flow for the needs of the Slovenian media.” Namely, for the young country it was of special importance to secure its own independent information channel which would professionally inform the domestic and, above all, the foreign public about the ongoing developments.

20 years later, we are wandering about the significance of “no” at the pension reform referendum. Does it mean that this rejection will be reflected in Slovenian public finance where drastic austerity measures will have to be carried out – or shall we assume that Slovenia simply isn't a reform-oriented country and could consequently gradually be forced out of “our” markets where it has already established its positions? This could be a development blow from which our country would not recover for quite some time. In this regard, the upcoming internal political crisis that will develop as a result of the referendum defeat is the mildest side effect of this vote.

After more than nineteen years of study and medical and scientific work in the USA, Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., is returning to Slovenia, where on invitation by the Minister of Health, Dorijan Marušič, she will take over the management of the e-Health Project, set out in 1995, with the goal of healthcare services informatization at the level of the entire state.

We are also proud of Blaž Kavčič, a young tennis player from Ljubljana. In recent years, Slovenian men's tennis has been witnessing a revival; as a result, a Slovenian tennis player now takes the highest world ranking position in our tennis history. The current 79th place in the world ranking is the first time ever for a Slovenian player to be among top 100 tennis players in the world. For Slovenia, which is not a tennis power nation, every victory at the Grand Slam tournament is precious and after Mima Jaušovec, we can again look forward to good tennis times full of victories.



Darijan Košir

“No” to referendum like jumping off a train?

Prime Minister Borut Pahor summarised his assessment: “Today we missed the Franco-German train. It left without us.”

A very brief, but probably the most accurate diagnosis of the results of the June 5 pension bill referendum, which was conclusively rejected, with 72% voting against. The fact that Slovenia is the only country in the world to have held a referendum on a pension bill which envisages extending the employment period of all employees is not the most worrying aspect. We have decided whether we want to restrict some of the rights we have acquired over time, which have long ceased to correlate with the demographics, a fact which the legislation has not yet taken into account. Understandably, nobody wants to vote for the withdrawal of a particular right, no matter how obscure, let alone the right to a reduced employment period. From this view, the referendum never had a chance. The Government is most worried about how this rejection will affect Slovenian public finances,

which will have to be resolved with strict austerity measures. There is no need to explain how “popular” this has been in Europe lately. The situation will become even worse if, on the basis of this referendum result, the European and global business public assess that Slovenia simply is not pro-reform. This could result in “our” markets driving us out of areas we have already attained. Such a blow to the country’s development would be devastating. In this view, the upcoming internal political crisis arising from the referendum defeat will not be the worst side effect of this vote.

The objective of the Slovenian Government before this referendum, which was demanded by the trade unions, who collected 40,000 signatures (after the bill had been passed in the National Assembly by a qualified majority), was very simple: to put the pension

reform into effect, which was confirmed by both the Government and the National Assembly and which was drafted for our own sake and nobody else’s. The proposed reform was not a revolution but a system upgrade. A response to the new demographic facts, the ageing of the population, the longer life expectancy, and an decreasing number of employees working for an increasing number of retired persons. Western societies must carry out such adjustments every ten years and they are a natural part of the pension system model which is based on intergenerational solidarity. Such changes to the pension system were not prepared due to the economic crisis. We should have done so sooner, but unfortunately had to attempt to do so during this time of crisis. If the reform had been supported in the referendum, Slovenia wouldn’t have been pulled out of the crisis. It would, however, have had a better chance of successfully overcoming it.

To add some more statistics: from 2000 to 2010, the number of recipients of old-age pensions increased by 26 percent, while the average number of insured persons in the same time period increased by less than five percent. What needs to be resolved first is the issue of increasingly reduced pension funds, with increasingly less inflow and more outflow of capital. The pension funds already require approximately 30% additional financing from the budget. If this percentage were to continue to rise, there wouldn’t be enough resources for other social programmes, particularly investments, eventually even salaries. At the same time, the pension rate would also be reduced. Thus, what alternative did the creators of the new pension legislation have? It is very simple: in order to avoid further reductions in pension rates, government borrowing at a higher rate to reduce the shortfall in the pension funds, higher contribution rates for companies and employees, and a decrease in economic competitiveness, the solution lies, regardless of the crisis, in retirement at a higher age with longer transitional periods and bonuses for those who started working early. That is exactly what the proposed pension reform provided.

Aside from the positive message that we live longer and can enjoy our lives and work longer, the Government also had to warn the public about what was already mentioned above: that the rejection of the pension reform would have negative consequences. The reform opposition – trade unions as initiators and both of the largest opposition parties, Janša’s SDS and Erjavec’s Democratic Party of Pensioners – accused the Government of “scaring” the citizens. It would be utterly irresponsible of the Government to know about the negative consequences and to not communicate them to the people in a timely and objective manner, e.g. in order to not lose the forthcoming election.

At the beginning of the referendum campaign, Svetlik, the Minister of Labour and proponent of the pension legislation, for the first time presented a number: according to the calculations of the Ministry of Finance, if the pension reform were not implemented, in addition to all envisaged austerity measures, a reduction in general government expenditure in the amount of approximately EUR 300 million per year or 0.8% of GDP was expected, of which EUR 220 million per year or 0.6% of GDP constitutes the annual savings required to achieve the medium-term budgetary objectives. These assessments disregard the indirect effects of the downgrading of Slovenia’s credit rating, which will undoubtedly cause higher debt payments for the entire economy and all households, assessed to be at least EUR 160 million per year, and affect the business results of banks and companies, which will then generate fewer tax payments and contributions. Furthermore, individuals will have to make higher monthly loan payments.

Let us remain focused only on the budgetary savings of which Prime Minister Pahor warned right after the unveiling of the referendum results: where can we tighten our belts and find these savings? This is clearly evident from the structure of general government expenditure. Approximately a quarter of public finances is spent on pensions, a little less than a quarter (23.4%) on the salaries of public employees, approximately 15% on the purchase of goods and services, and a little less than 14% goes for other social transfers. In 2010, only 10% of public funds were used for investments. These are the global numbers from which we will be able to draw savings. Which savings exactly will be further discussed and negotiated in June, most likely within the government discussion on the supplementary budget, with or without the additional emergency bill.

To put it in simple terms: if the pension reform had been supported in the referendum, Slovenia would now have an excellent opportunity to slowly and gradually adjust the pension system to the current demographic circumstances. According to all calculations and the responses to the failed referendum, it is clear that another attempt at adopting new pension legislation is required, but in a stricter and quicker form, bringing even more social dissatisfaction and under external circumstances that will definitely not be to our benefit. Whichever government is to lead the state, it will have to confront these circumstances. Regardless of the political crisis, these circumstances will start to resemble the Portuguese situation. Unfortunately.

Slovenia celebrates its 20th anniversary

“We gained independence for ourselves, not against others, which gave us a moral substratum,” said the Prime Minister Borut Pahor at the opening of a photography exhibition on Slovenia’s 20th anniversary at Krakovski nasip in Ljubljana.



The exhibition titled “Slovenia – mine, yours, ours” includes 20 photographs of the events from the 20-year period of our state’s existence; it was prepared by the Government Communication Office and was a symbolic start of the second series of celebrations of the 20th anniversary of our independence. The final event within this series of celebrations will be the central state commemoration of the Statehood Day and the 20th anniversary of independent Slovenia which will be held at the Congress Square in Ljubljana on 24 June 2011.

The inaugural speaker at the central ceremony will be the president of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk; after his speech, an artistic part of the state ceremony, titled PogUM (Courage), conceived and subscribed by the director Matjaž Berger and his co-workers, will take place. The ceremony of 20th anniversary of Slovenia’s statehood is placed in a symbolic space of the Ljubljana Congress Square and the University’s volume. Symbolic points of Slovenian spirit are lining the horizon where the statehood is articulated as a succession of solemn

postures: dignity, honor, courage, love, utopia, creativeness, victory. Postures are mental gestures, they are poetic deeds and they are ethical bets – of individuals as well as of the community. Only such creative postures can give birth to positive principles that think of modern and future as a “principle of hope” (Ernst Bloch). Therefore, the high anniversary of a prudent and brave posture that gave birth to Slovenian statehood and sovereignty calls for new hopes of spirit and love utopias that will be able to think future landscapes of spirit and space of thought.

Therefore, the compliment to independence and sovereignty draws from the multitude of cultures and languages of art: literature, music, dancing, film, architecture, painting, sculpture, intermedia, performative and others.

Performing at the ceremony will be Slovenski oktet, Sidharta, Carmina Slovenica, Irena Yebuah Tiran, Pavle Ravnohrib, Borut Veselko, Petra Govc, Nana Milčinski, Jana Zupančič, Matej Recer, Nina Rakovec, Regina Križaj, Nadiya Bychkova, Miha Vodičar, Maša Kagao Knez, Katja Konvalinka, Marko Hatlak, Andreja Murn, Karmen Pečar, Leticia Slapnik Yebuah, Nejc Šurbek, Boštjan Gradišek, Katarina Štefanič, Brina Nataša Zupančič, Barbara Marič, Nik Rajšek, Beno Novak, Barbara Vuzem, Kim Kernand and others along with some Slovenian sports champions.

The calendar of other ceremonies that will take place all over the country is also available on www.dvajset.si.

A few days before the central state ceremony we will also commemorate the ceremonial planting of a linden tree at the Republic Square in front of the Slovenian Parliament on 26 June 1991 – on the day of declaration of independence and state sovereignty of the Republic of Slovenia. At that time, Slovenia’s independence was marked also by other lindens that were planted in all parts of Slovenia.

In days following 22 June 2011, the Government Communication Office in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture – National Commemorative Events Office, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Slovenia Forest Service and the society Ecologists Without Frontiers organized a wider action of planting lindens all over Slovenia in order to symbolically celebrate the independence anniversary in a similar way as 20 years ago.

The action was joined by many municipalities as well as local communities and primary schools.



Declaration of independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Slovenia – 26 June 1991



Since spring, more than a few lindens have been planted also by Slovenian embassies abroad – among others in the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the USA, and elsewhere.

Lindens were planted or, to be more exact, watered also in a virtual realm. A prize game which was organized on Facebook within the application “Plant your own linden” was one of the ways the Government Communication Office wished to attract as many people as possible to celebrate the anniversary. From mid-December 2010 until the beginning of June 2011, as many as 46,173 users planted their own lindens. No less than 2,024,606 droplets of water were used to water lindens in the Slovenia Avenue. Their number is actually approaching closely the number of inhabitants of Slovenia.

One of the activities with which the Communication Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia wishes to remind the inhabitants of Slovenia of the 20-year path walked so far is also a revival of a legendary TV advertisement from the marketing campaign “Slovenija, moja dežela” (Slovenija, my country). The ad will be available for watching also on the special 20th anniversary web site – www.dvajset.si or www.twenty.si.

The marketing campaign from the 1980’s was intended to involve the widest Slovenian public into the tourist service product. At that time, research and creative process brought about the symbol of Slovenian tourism and a slogan (Slovenija with a linden leaf and “Slovenija, my country”). The Slovenian public completely identified with the symbol and the slogan and “adopted” the campaign which was also manifested in the awareness that the inhabitants of Slovenia are the owners of historical and present identity and responsible for the property. The campaign “Slovenija, my country” unintentionally evolved into self-awareness; it initiated the independence process and

sparked self-confidence, acquiring its symbol, its slogan, its flag on the way towards independence.

WE ALSO CELEBRATE BEYOND OUR BORDERS...

This year’s 20th anniversary of independence offers an opportunity to look back at the path walked by the Slovenian foreign policy. Above all, however, it offers a challenge for looking forward. In the period before us, special attention will be devoted primarily to global partnerships. In the upcoming months, a lot of effort in the area of Slovenian foreign policy will be put into our Security Council candidature.

In the month of celebrating the 20th anniversary of Slovenian statehood, numerous activities to honor the solemn event will take place at diplomatic-consular missions of Slovenia abroad. At the missions, impressive achievements of our young, two-decades-old independent Slovenian state will be presented to the guests abroad through the organization of various concerts, performances, exhibitions, round tables and other activities.

... SLOVENIANS LIVING IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AND AROUND THE WORLD, EXPATRIATES AND ALSO AT HOME

Ceremonies and celebrations will continue also after 24 June 2011. Thus, on Friday, 1 July 2011, Slovenians living in neighboring countries and around the world as well as expatriates will gather in Ljubljana at the gathering of Slovenians from around the world and expatriates, under the resounding title “Welcome home!” In the city center, stands of Slovenian societies from around the world and from the neighboring countries will be set up; besides, various organizations active in the area of expatriation will be presented.

The event will be variegated by culinary delicacies and traditional Slovenian products as well as by performances



**DOBRODOŠLI
DOMA
—2011—**

of music, folklore and theater groups preserving and developing Slovenian culture also far beyond our borders. The performing guests will be Slovenian expatriate and cross-border musicians, dancers and artists coming from Belgium, Croatia, France, Serbia, the USA, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, Austria, and Argentina – therefore, virtually from everywhere.

Among others, the rock band Bališ from Carinthia, the band BK Evolution from Venetian Slovenia, an orchestra, choirs, dancing and theatre groups from Slovenia, from neighboring countries and from around the world will present themselves at various street locations across the city center.

The gathering will end in the evening hours at the Prešeren Square where inaugurating speeches will be followed by a multimedia performance by Sounds of Slovenia/Sozvočja Slovenije which will present Slovenian traditional heritage under the artistic leadership of accordion player and composer Janez Dovč. For this special occasion, the world-class opera singer Juan Vasle and united choirs from neighboring countries and from other parts of the world will join permanent members of the Sounds of Slovenia which is composed of exceptional Slovenian musicians such as Eva Hren.

As an accompanying program of the event, projections of films covering emigration will take place under the organization of Kinoateljje from Gorica/Gorizia, three exhibitions – one will present works of annual guest painters, the other will present Slovenians around the world during the time when Slovenia was gaining its independence, while the third will include works of an artist with Slovenian roots from Argentina. Apart from the above listed events, a show with experiments for children will also take place that day, while a day earlier a round table about the position of Slovenians around the world is planned to be organized. Within the event, the 4th football tournament of Slovenians around the world will be held in Ljubljana in the end of July.

More information is available on the web page www.dobrodoslidoma.si and on Facebook. The Slovenian Tourist Organization helped all Slovenians, their offspring and friends in easier deciding about visiting their homeland by preparing numerous actions and favorable options that can be checked on www.slovenia.info/homecoming. The site with announced special tourist arrangements and packages is also intended for the exchange of impressions and memories of the ancestors’ land of origin.



“Today, dreams are allowed; tomorrow is a new day.”

Milan Kučan and Lojze Peterle



Twenty years ago, the historic dream of an independent state of Slovenia shared by many of our predecessors came true. A feeling of pride, confidence and immense unity prevailed. Slovenia declared its independence on 25 June 1991. In his speech on the occasion, Milan Kučan ended with words that have remained famous: “Today, dreams are allowed; tomorrow is a new day.” How do they look upon those times today, 20 years later, and how are they transposed to the present by the then President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, and the first Prime Minister, Lojze Peterle?

What are your best and worst memories of the time when Slovenia gained independence twenty years ago?

Milan Kučan: My fondest memory of those times is related to the immense unity of Slovenians and our common resolve about having sufficient strength and courage to realise the project of securing independence as a generation that was afforded the opportunity and had the chance to realise the historic dream of our predecessors. Up until then, as a nation we had not had the opportunity to have our own state. The unity at the time still fills me with joy today, as we were not able to muster such unity either before or after that. It is with reluctance that I think of the war that attempted to reverse the decision taken by the Slovenian people at the plebiscite. People stood unarmed and faced the tanks; the war took its human toll, and I remember those people with sadness in my heart, even though the character of the attack on Slovenia was very different from that on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In our case, it was not due to a territorial policy, or ethnic cleansing, but to prevent Slovenia from establishing itself as an independent state. The essential element necessary for war was missing. This is of great significance for the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Lojze Peterle: I will begin with pleasant memories of the May Declaration, with which we

clearly stated our desire for an independent and democratic country in May 1989. The memory of the victory of the Democratic coalition, the parties of the Slovenian spring in the first democratic elections in April 1990, is outstanding. Power was taken by those political forces that had made independent statehood a key part of their political agenda. Some other fond memories that stand out are the plebiscite on independence; the declaration of independence; the great unity after the aggression of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army; victory in the war for Slovenia, and the departure of the last soldier of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army; the introduction of our own currency; and international recognition of Slovenia in January of 1992. One especially fond memory is of the meeting with Chancellor Kohl in August of 1991, when we discussed the issue of the international recognition of Slovenia. I will never forget the attitude of solidarity of my wife Branka who, in spite of many offers, refused to leave Slovenia with our children during the time of war.

The bad memories I have are associated with the seizure of the arms of the Territorial Defence Force; with certain media that belittled the independence project; with the opposition's stand after the plebiscite, and with the strikes just before independence. My distinctly disturbing memory is of a telephone call from General Adžić, who threatened to level Slove-

nia if we were to remain firm in our endeavours for independence.

Did you have the feeling at the negotiations on the Brioni islands on 7 July 1991 that there was a chance that dream would not come true, were you afraid of that possibility?

Milan Kučan: No, I was not afraid, even though the climate was complicated; but I did not for a minute believe that anyone could prevent our decision to pursue independence. I knew the journey would be an arduous one, and I was not certain that it would end as soon as at the Brioni meeting, which had several phases: from the one proposed by Van den Broek, namely the return to the original position, to the one Slovenia agreed to - that it would postpone the processes aimed at gaining independence for three months and arrange for the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army. The crucial element that moved me from my pessimistic state of mind was the final draft agreement by Van den Broek, one of the signatories of which - alongside the European Community and the federal government - was Slovenia. This was the beginning of Slovenian diplomacy that led it as an entity into the corridors of international life. In the months that followed, a lot of work needed to be done, as well as plenty of patience mustered, both of which led to the joint recognition of the Slovenia state by the

Member States of the European Community and, subsequently, the United States.

Lojze Peterle: We went to Brioni as representatives of an already proclaimed country which was winning the war with the Yugoslav Peoples' Army. Politicians abroad had to take new facts into account. At that point, some European politicians still hoped for the preservation of Yugoslavia, while others soon chose the pragmatic path. At Brioni, we agreed to withhold the implementation of independence, but we did not abandon the project. Many considered this agreement a cold shower, but in fact it provided us with a path to international recognition.

Did you already have a vision of Slovenia's future development at that time?

Milan Kučan: It would be an exaggeration to say that it was already clear to me then how things would develop, but I knew that Yugoslavia, such as it was, did not have a future, which is why I endeavoured from the mid-eighties to gain allies for a new agreement, or failing that, at least agreement to a peaceful departure from Yugoslavia. We wished to place the Yugoslav federation on a new footing; we were not yet considering independence. It was only after our ideas fell on barren soil that it became necessary to contemplate independence. This idea was brewing in the increasingly more structured opposition, which led to the establishment of political parties, as well as the first democratic elections. The Europe Now document envisioned Slovenia in the European integration process. If this idea could not be realised within Yugoslavia, we were determined to do it outside the structure existing at the time. The international environment was not inclined to independence, and it is usually forgotten in what kind of circumstances independence was achieved. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent unification of Germany were advantageous to what we were doing,

as they gave rise to a sort of new political configuration that established a new atmosphere in Europe. The negative sign was associated with the future of the Soviet Union – namely, how changes in Europe would affect future developments in the Soviet Union. Luckily, this fear was unjustified, as the Soviet Union disintegrated according to a certain logic – as did Czechoslovakia – while they wanted to see Yugoslavia as an internal problem in that overall context. There was no willingness to see it as an international problem requiring the intervention of the international community, because the prevailing belief was that this was an internal conflict that had nothing to do with Europe. They thus washed their hands of the whole affair, leaving Slovenia alone to warn of the possibility of Yugoslavia breaking up. It was only when the war in Slovenia began that Europe became aware that, after fifty years, it had yet again a new war zone on its territory.

Lojze Peterle: Independence was a precondition for a free future. We actually had two demanding tasks – to set up an independent state and to break away from Communist totalitarianism. Only as an independent and democratic entity, were we able to rely on international recognition and the integration of Slovenia in the EU and NATO. Our vision was based on a willingness to truly share values and principles with the European Union. This meant putting an individual at the centre, establishing the rule of law and a social market economy.

How do you assess the role of Slobodan Milošević (President of the Socialist Republic of Serbia and Republic of Serbia from 1989 until 1997 in three terms of office, and as President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1997 to 2000, A/N). Firstly, do you believe that he recognised early on that there was no possibility of preventing Slovenia from gaining independence; and secondly, how would you characterise his role at that

time, have you talked to him on any occasion?

Milan Kučan: Milošević was a pragmatic politician; he entered politics without the political programme fostered by the Serbian Academy of Science and Art, which was termed the Memorandum. If one wishes to understand his moves, one needs to understand this programme. It was an unfortunate set of circumstances, with academia lacking the power to realise their programme and Milošević being without a programme. But he had the power, and these two merged into an untoward combination; that is, Yugoslavia was a state in which all Serbs lived and represented the integrative nation, while everyone else had to live according to the rules set by Serbs. If it was impossible to realise the thesis of Yugoslavia as Serboslavia, then the territories that Serbs historically inhabited needed to be secured. He was convinced that it was impossible for Serbs to be only a national minority anywhere. When the Yugoslav Peoples' Army was withdrawing from Slovenia, it did not move to Serbia, but to the borders of Great Serbia that are to this day still the borders of Republika Srpska. Slovenia was ethnically a relatively pure country and historically not claimed by either the Serbs or the Croats. His view was that, if Slovenia could be preserved within the Yugoslavia that the Serbs desired, then they were welcome; otherwise, we would not stand in their way.

Lojze Peterle: The man was very unfortunate. I never met him, but I can ironically say that we should have erected a monument in his honour, because his actions helped us enormously in our struggle for our independence. Due to his nationalist and backward-looking policy, it was easier for us to explain to the international community why we could no longer live together in the same country. Milošević underestimated us, and he first tried with a wider restructur-

ing of Yugoslavia in terms of the ambition for a Great Serbia.

Had you received any warnings from the federal government ahead of the central celebration on 26 June 1991 in Ljubljana, when two warplanes buzzed the city?

Milan Kučan: The planes were just one of the many warnings that we received even before that. More so than to Milošević, the preservation of Yugoslavia was very important to the leadership of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, which held the view that, if the political leadership was unable to preserve the country, then this would be done by the army. The army became a partner to politics, which had no civilian supervision looking over its shoulder. It therefore assumed the role of a political originator and realised its role through threats. It saw Slovenia as a particular inconvenience, because we had had old grudges with the leadership of the army as, after the attack on Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Slovenian concept of territorial defence was adopted because of the threat that an intervention by the Warsaw Pact could also occur in Yugoslavia. This concept had already been implemented by Slovenians during the Second World War – not in the form of a parallel army, but as a complementary army. The constant issue was whether this defence force was subordinate to the federal leadership or to the republican leadership. The federal army was of the opinion that the Territorial Defence Force was merely an extended armed force of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army, which led to continuous conflicts due to the differences in opinion. When Slovenia chose independence, this was a great challenge to the army, and it also ended the view that the army was untouchable, so that it was subjected to civilian control. The Slovenian political leadership was therefore a disruptive factor for the army. They attempted to subordinate it – even with proclamations of a state of emergency. The planes

flying over during the night of the celebration was a declaration that the army had not come to terms with Slovenian independence, and so the war was a logical consequence of that fact. *Lojze Peterle:* We received the first warning from the Yugoslav Peoples' Army on the day my government was elected, when the Yugoslav Peoples' Army started claiming weapons from the Territorial Defence Force. Some of us understood this act as a declaration of war. Thus, we immediately began defensive preparations. The talks with the President of the Federal Government, Marković, and the Yugoslav Peoples' Army seemed unlikely to succeed. The over-flight of aircrafts was a sinister sign from the military; however, we had been receiving political indications before, despite the constitutional right to self-determination and secession. On his last visit to Slovenia before independence, Marković was very stern; although, there was no direct announcement of an attack.

How do you see Slovenia today, twenty years later?

Milan Kučan: Slovenia is still a success story, among other reasons because it is aware of its problems – both those brought about by the global crisis and those we brought on ourselves. We had a period of plenty, when we should have saved a portion of the wealth for difficult times, but we were living and spending beyond our means and, unfortunately, in an unproductive manner. We now find ourselves in the period of want, with no reserves, and this is having a detrimental effect on the future. We have slipped on a banana skin, and I hope that we will come to recognise the causes for the slip up and not repeat it – meaning that we will decide on reforms and on some sort of stable political atmosphere. Slovenia is not in as bad a shape as portrayed by the Slovenian internal political establishment, primarily to further particular party interests, and we should look at the objective indicators that support this view. The crisis

is also the result of a psychological crisis; a sort of creation of a feeling that everything is dismal, that there is no way out, which has come back to haunt politics like a boomerang, and which is why politics and not only the government is faced with the lowest level of confidence yet. The political parties are not faring any better, as it is difficult to cultivate positivism. But it is not the data on economic growth and competitiveness that is of key importance, but social and political unity, and the feeling of social compactness of Slovenian society. A big problem is the level of unemployment – something we are not used to – which is, however, still below the European average. For comparison, let me just provide some basic data: in 1990, Yugoslavia's GNP per capita was \$5000, with Slovenia having less than \$9000, while today, GNP per capita in Slovenia is EUR 25,000, which is 90% of the European average. Twenty years after the fact, Slovenia is recording an outstanding rise in welfare and economic development; we have sound foundations for further development, as well as for implementing changes, all of which requires greater maturity. I am optimistic and convinced that the parties have hijacked the state from the citizens, and that now is time for them to return it. *Lojze Peterle:* Twenty years ago, we took over Slovenia in a very difficult position, but the project of independence and democratisation was very uplifting. We were able to implement momentous changes and achieve unity in key political goals. Economic growth emerged after two years, and continued until the global financial crisis. For many years, we progressed dynamically and strengthened our international reputation. The image and atmosphere are different today. The global crisis has also revealed internal reasons. The fact is that we have not yet completed the transition. The 'planned economy' is still in operation and it has contributed significantly to the halt in economic growth. But what

I am most concerned about is declining competitiveness and the deficient functioning of the rule of law. Too much attention is being paid to the expenditure side, and too little to the income side. In addition, the country is too expensive and the management of state-owned companies is poor. Slovenia has lost the dynamics of reform, and borrowing is rising steeply. The necessary reform can only be assured by a different political option. I am certain that Slovenia has the potential to change the trend and also to return policy to the service of national interests. Extremely demanding challenges await us.

The outcome of the referendum on the confirmation of the new pension act was conclusively rejected by the electorate on 5 June, with 72% of votes being cast against the act. Is this a sign that Slovenia is not a reform-oriented country?

Milan Kučan: One could characterise the current situation as one in which the government had the right policy, but the proposal came from the wrong government. People need to be made to understand that it is one thing to express one's opinion about reform and another to express it about the government. We will express our opinion about the government at the elections – it is there that the government will have to account for itself and reap what it sown, whereas we are now voting on our future. If the goal is reform and the national interest, then no sacrifice is too great. This is the wisdom that goes beyond the wisdom of party interests.

The pension reform is urgent, and so are reforms to health care, the labour market, higher education, the education system, etc. We have come a long way in these twenty years; we were a success story, but the world has changed completely in the meantime, so we can not go forward with the same instruments. The world is moving faster and we are lagging behind. We were successful in the past because we were ready

for change, we had the will and knowledge, we adopted reforms – from ownership to the defence system reform – and made changes in foreign policy, all of which required effort, courage and a lot of motivation. We are now in a phase that requires us to take a step forward, for which we will need courage. I believe that we will be able to take that step, because this ensures a positive outlook for the future. We will adopt reforms by ourselves and not allow them to be dictated to us by the most developed countries, which would be an encroachment on the country's sovereignty and financial guardianship. The problem is that the reform proposal is not very well established in the dialogue between social partners; its opponents are proposing delaying the reform and a resumption of the discussion, whereby they are pushing the country into a time crunch and, consequently, into a subordinate position vis-à-vis other countries. The country's sovereignty is thus sacrificed. To me, it is the expert arguments that matter; but it is also true that referenda are dominated by a government with a low level of confidence. *Lojze Peterle:* This shows that we have poor government and little sense for mutual political denominators. The Government approached the reforms in an unprofessional manner and without a comprehensive package, which would also resolve the income issue. The result was known in advance.

Does this indicate that there are anti-European tendencies present in Slovenia?

Milan Kučan: There are by no means any such tendencies, as the standard of living in the EU is yielding positive results, and Slovenians are not attributing the problems to the EU, but rather to the incompetence of political structures to take advantage of the possibilities and opportunities afforded by living together. People believe that the euro has brought good things with it; there are no more borders, no customs controls; we

gained access to new technologies; but we are perhaps regretting a little the parting with the Slovenian currency, because it was after independence that we had our own money for the first time in history. It would be difficult to find real evidence that would place the blame for the conditions on the EU, but the referendum campaign has brought about the dangerous principle of people thinking that the pension reform is being dictated to us by the EU, so that it could be presented as a threat and not as an opportunity. *Lojze Peterle:* Some people in Slovenia are spreading the idea that independence and the EU are to blame for the crisis, which is far from the truth. Both contributed to better framework conditions for the realisation of Slovenia's national interests. How these conditions are exploited particularly depends on the ruling body.

If we take a look at the nationalist parties in Europe, we can observe that they are strong on NO, but provide little on visions for YES. With the new common challenges which are being discussed in individual countries, a strong joint European YES is gradually becoming more necessary. National and social demagoguery cannot ensure it.

After independence and the international recognition of Slovenia, Milan Kučan was elected as the first President of Slovenia in 1992, with the support of the citizens list. He won another five-year term in 1997–2002, running again as an independent, and again winning the majority in the first round. His presidency ended in December 2002. He was succeeded as President by Janez Drnovšek.

Alojz 'Lojze' Peterle was the leader of the Slovene Christian Democrats from the founding of the party in 1990 until it merged with the Slovenian People's Party in 2000. Between 1990 and 1992, he was the president of the first freely elected Slovenian government, and was among those who led Slovenia to independence from Yugoslavia. He is currently a Member of the European Parliament.



The Economy is Being Revived and Exports are Increasing



Marko Kranjec, the governor of the Bank of Slovenia

The Slovenian gross domestic product has increased by two per cent in this year's first quarter. This has already been the fourth subsequent quarter with two per cent economic growth in Slovenia. Export demand contributed most to the growth, along with investment, mainly an increase in investments in supplies, which had to be replenished by companies after the fall of the GDP during the crisis, and production reduction. In Slovenia, fast economic growth is hindered, in particular, by a decline in civil engineering due to difficulties of the building industry that should, as estimated by the national statistical office, fall to the same level as ten years ago. Should the decline in civil engineering stop, Slovenia would have an economic growth of three per cent, which would be a very strong result. The Statistical Office, which publishes data on inflation at the end of each month, calculated an inflation of 0.8 per cent for April, and 2.4 per cent as the annual inflation rate, which is slightly lower

than in the European Union. Otherwise, the Slovenian economy, as published by the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES), did business resulting in net loss for the first time in the period after 2001; namely, it produced more net loss and net profit. Commercial companies produced net profits of EUR 2.6 billion and net losses of EUR 2.8 billion. Within the AJPES framework, the mandatory process of set off of claims and liabilities takes place, which should help to improve payment discipline. Mr. Marko Kranjec, the governor of the Bank of Slovenia, pointed out that the most important characteristics of Slovenian public finances include the large dependency of the economy on external rather than internal resources, as well as the dependency of the bank sector on external resources. If Slovenia does not solve this issue by increasing savings and reducing real sector leverage, it will be hard to expect higher economic growth, in the opinion of

Mr. Kranjec. On the other hand, the interest rates in Slovenia are much higher on average than in the euro zone. Credit activities of banks in relation to companies were significantly reduced last year, and thus influenced the contraction of banks' balances. The credit growth is also low in this year's first quarter. Credit for non-financial companies is being reduced, and the intra-annual level of credit growth is lowering and is still negative, emphasises the governor, Marko Kranjec, who also implied that if Slovenia doesn't begin controlling public expenditure, the scenario of requiring help from the European Union and International Monetary Fund, could repeat in Slovenia. His words were rejected by the Minister of Finance, Mr. Franc Križanič, who did establish that it was important that the financial markets heard the statements of Mr. Kranjec, but pointed out that the Slovenian economy is being revived and is on the safe side. The reviving of the economy and growth of export is also shown in improved government inflows, stressed Mr. Križanič. This should already



Dr. Franc Križanič, Minister of Finance

influence reduction of the unemployment rate. Last year, the share of unemployed persons in the active population reached 7.7 per cent and was the highest it has been since 2005. According to the forecasts, the number of unemployed workers, which exceeded 110,000, should start decreasing. The Government should also continue with the measures that promote growth of the GDP.

The OECD expects that the recovery of the Slovenian economy will strengthen, and announces 1.8 per cent economy growth for Slovenia this year and 2.6 per cent for the following year. Although, the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development established that welfare in Slovenia did not increase in the last two years. On the other hand, the global competitiveness scale prepared by the IMD from Lausanne drew a lot of attention in Slovenia. Although Slovenia was placed one position higher on this scale than on the previous one, it still ended up low, namely in 51st place. The responses on the survey of the economists of each country contributed the most



Dr. Janez Šušteršič, the economist

to the fact that it is still so low, rather than that it advanced by one place. But the experiences show that Slovenian economists are very critical of the situation in their country, both in conditions of high conjuncture or crisis, above all, much more critical than economists in other states that were placed much higher on the scale. Slovenia was placed 21st, pretty low, among the 34 OECD states on the scale of life happiness. It was placed highest, eighth place, with regard to safety, lowest, 26th place with regard to environmental assessment, and 25th place with regard to general satisfaction. But some economists were quite reserved regarding the indicators of life happiness. Thus, Mr. Janez Šušteršič estimated that although the placement of Slovenia is approximately the same with regard to the other indicators, the global results of this scale should be less important than individual placements, which should be analysed. In addition, Mr. Šušteršič, as the former Director of Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, emphasised that they themselves took numerous other indicators into consideration upon their analyses. Mr. Matjaž Hanžek, former Human Rights Ombudsman, stressed among other things that several indexes similar to the index of life happiness, now published

by the OECD, are known.

The Slovenian economy and Slovenian economic diplomacy show that Slovenian economists were very active in the previous year, and on the other hand, several companies reached notable results. The NKBM bank (Nova kreditna banka Maribor) is the first Slovenian company to be quoted on one of the foreign markets, namely on the Warsaw stock exchange. Some other Slovenian companies have similar plans, among them Gorenje and Zavarovalnica Triglav. The business conference between Slovenia and Italy was attended by 80 economists and politicians, and, inter alia, the significance of foreign investments was stressed there, since Italy is the fourth largest foreign investor in Slovenia.

In one of the investments, the Ljubljana-based company, Julon, began new production of eonol, which is a technological innovation in the processing of raw materials for making plastic materials that will enable savings in both petroleum and energy consumption. As said by Mr. Giulio Bonazzi, the CEO of the Italian company, Aquafil, and the owner of Julon, this is the only plant of its kind in the world, and is the result of two years' work by an international team of experts. In the future, it will only be possible to gain buyers by offering products that will not destroy the environment.

At the Slovenian - Slovak conference, they mainly discussed the success reached by Slovakia upon recovery after the crisis, while the economic cooperation between the countries is increasing, the results of which are shown in the Port of Koper. At Pipistrel, from Ajdovščina, they built a new four seat aircraft, Panthera, the first aircraft that will use electric drive upon taking off and landing, making it almost inaudible to its environment. This will be the first aircraft intended for production next to Rojce airport near Gorica, since it will be too large for production in Ajdovščina. Annually, they intend to produce around 200 aircrafts of this type, which would also be hard to test in Ajdovščina due to frequent windy days.

Nieros Metal, from Slovenj Gradec, with its three hygiene machines for disinfection, is placed among the three largest world producers. This year, they plan investments in the amount of EUR 700,000, the most important of which will be in the welding robot with laser vision, being of great importance upon entering new markets, particularly in the USA.

In 2010, the highest total revenue was reached by Petrol (EUR 2.4 billion), Mercator and Revoz, and the highest net profit, by the pharmaceutical company Krka (EUR 166 millions), the Holding Slovenske Elektrarne and the pharmaceutical company, Lek. Last year, the company with the highest number of employees was Mer-

cator, namely 10,630. Slightly more than 7,000 employed persons worked at Slovenske železnice, and a slightly over 6,000 at Pošta Slovenije.

Since, a few years ago, compulsory membership in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia was replaced by optional membership. Now the Government is preparing legislation by which optional membership will be introduced in other chambers, both in the Chamber of Craft and the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry. The Chamber of Craft and Small Business, in particular, does not agree with optional membership, since craftsmen and especially private entrepreneurs need compulsory membership and assistance from the Chamber. This is particularly related to the fear of significant reduction of income from membership fees, which the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia had to face. In addition, a new President was appointed to the Chamber of Commerce. This position should be filled by Mr. Samo Hribar Milič, who thus far has been the Director-General of the Chamber. Now, the functions of Director-General and President shall be combined. At first, Mr. Hribar did not intend to run for the post of President, but afterwards, as he said, some significant Slovenian Directors asked him not to withdraw from the post, and the results of the elections confirmed the justification of his candidacy.



Barbara Štrukelj, STA editor-in-chief

20 years of Slovenian Press Agency (STA)

Years ago, an acquaintance of mine asked me who this journalist was, using the acronym “sta”, who was writing so many articles for a variety of newspapers. Of course, the question was asked half jokingly, half seriously, however, the work of the STA – Slovenian Press Agency – that celebrates its 20th anniversary only a few days before the Slovene state, is relatively unknown to the wider public. This is not surprising, as the press agency offers its news primarily to the media, companies, and state and other institutions. Its service has become available in a limited form to the ordinary reader only after appearing on the world-wide web.



The creation of the STA and the beginnings of its activities are closely linked with the birth of the Slovene state. The creators of the STA were already at the end of the 1980s aware of the importance of information for shaping the media image of Slovenia which was at that time on the threshold of gaining its independence. Such thinking bore fruits on 24 May 1991, when the contract on founding the STA was signed by the then Executive Council of the Assembly of the RS and by the company INI. A few days later, on 3 June, the STA was registered as a limited liability company, and Dejan Verčič became its first general manager. Five days before the declaration of independence of Slovenia, on 20 June 1991, the STA published its first message informing the domestic and foreign public that the intent of the agency is “to provide cur-

rent and rapid information to the foreign media and other institutions abroad on the events in Slovenia and at the same time to develop the information flow to meet the needs of the Slovenian media”. For a young state it was, indeed, especially important to ensure its own and independent information channel which would professionally inform both the domestic and foreign public on the current events. Jelko Kacin, who was then the minister for information, and his predecessor Stane Stanič, were very well aware of this fact. In those crucial days in the middle of 1991, the work of a handful of journalists and editors took place in the premises on Cankarjeva ulica in the centre of Ljubljana, when the buildings were being flown over by airplanes of the then Yugoslav People’s Army (JLA). The first news, that was often hand-

written, was sent by telefax; these items were mostly brief reports on the events in Slovenia. In those days, the Agency operated as one, general editorial office; at the end of 1991 it employed a staff of seven, and its first editor-in-chief became Dušan Rogelj. The work took place already then in shifts, we, the journalists, reported from press conferences, summarised press releases, followed the reporting by the foreign press agencies and media, and took care to ensure that the STA news service was evolving into a “serious” agency service. The golden rule was, of course – independent, credible, objective and swift information based on facts and sources. In the years to follow, the STA was growing and developing under the management of the general manager Tadej Labernik; its news became an indispensable part of the Slovenian

media space. In 1993, editorial offices for national and foreign policy were formed as the first two editorial departments, and a year later, economy, cultural and sports editorial offices. In the same year, an independent English news service started to operate in-house, while up to that time the news for foreign public in the English language was prepared by external translators. As one of the rare media houses in Slovenia, it also formed an editorial office for European affairs at the time of accession of the state to the European Union. The STA also put on its feet its permanent correspondence bureau in Brussels. In 1996, the agency also widened its presence in the media space to the worldwide web; 10 years later, a picture service started to operate, and two years ago the Agency developed an offer of radio news with sound clips.



The journalists of the STA report every day on the events at home and in the world; and an important source of information for a small national press agency such as STA are foreign agencies. STA, which has been a member of the European Alliance of News Agencies (EANA) for many years collaborates with more than 15 foreign press agencies, among them the American AP, French AFP, German dpa, Austrian APA, Croatian Hina, and others. The editorial system, which we use every day in our in-house work and which we endearingly named STAnka, is the result of own knowledge and development.

The STA was acquiring a role and recognisability in the Slovenian media space, and today it is one of the leading suppliers of the news for both the domestic and the foreign public. In a state-of-the-art “newsroom” on Tivolska cesta, where the Agency has its premises since 2001, more than 300 reports in Slovene on the most important events at home and abroad, and approximately 50 news items in English on the key events in Slovenia are prepared and published by approximately 80 journalists and contract collaborators. In addition to that, the STA has an extensive correspondent network across Slovenia and sev-

eral permanent and contract reporters abroad: in addition to Brussels, it has a permanent correspondent in New York and contributors in Zagreb, Rome, Trieste, Gorizia, Klagenfurt, etc.

The market in Slovenia, due to its smallness, is quite specific. With approximately 200 clients, among whom are all the important Slovenian media, economic and financial institutions, state and other institutions, the Agency creates approximately 3.6 million EUR of net income annually from sales of services.

Four services of the STA – the core and the largest general news service, the English news service, the picture service and the radio news service – are supplemented by a range of other specialised services. These include: news and picture archive, daily bulletin, clipping, possibility of distributing original press releases via O-STA, news alerts – brief information in the form of news blocks and news strips, as well as content-related projects that are produced by the Agency at every important event on which it reports even more extensively (e.g., the Olympic Games, inclusion of Slovenia into the Euro-Atlantic integrations, etc.).

New projects of a well qualified and dedicated team of



Barbara Štrukelj, STA Editor in Chief



Barbara Štrukelj, STA Editor in Chief and Bojan Veselinovič, General Manager



journalists and collaborators of the STA led in 2009 to the creation of a web page called the Crisis Mirror (Kr-og), which at the outbreak of financial and economic crisis brings an overview of the measures and best practices in Slovenia and abroad. Last year, a web page – “Think Slovenian” in the field of culture – was also added to the STA web contents.

In this year, the Agency launched, with co-financing by the European parliament, the project “Europe, the day after tomorrow” intended to present endeavours of the European institutions for setting up new development models. The STA also arranges attention-grabbing round tables on the topical themes under the auspices of its brand STAKlub and thus increases its visibility. The traditional status of authority of the Agency as the first one in the chain of communication of information is, actually, disappearing; the media environment is changing rapidly with the emergence of modern technologies which open up the possibility of applying new communication channels, Press agencies, both the largest agencies and the small national ones that operate in small markets and to which STA also belongs, are looking for a solution in the development of the range of new services and above all in offering the contents in a user-friendly manner. The development of applications for smart telephones and tablet personal computers is thus a new development stage, set as a goal by the STA.

On the threshold of its third decade, the STA is facing new tasks. Its status and future are linked with the understanding and support of the state for the development plans and with our own resourcefulness and insight which was typical of all teams of journalists, editors, photographers and other collaborators who were creating the image of the STA during all these years. To all who have stood and still stand behind the acronym »sta«.





Hans van den Broek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1982–1993), European Commissioner for External Relations and Enlargement (1993–1999)

My personal memories of the turbulent Dutch Presidency of the EC Council in 1991

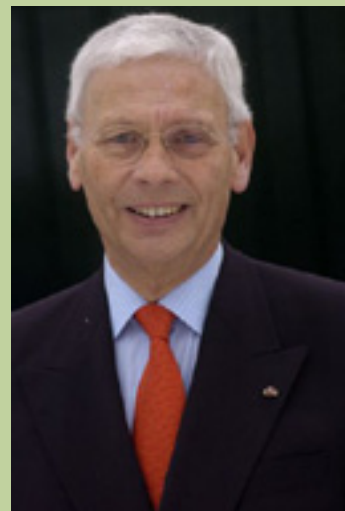


Photo: personal archive

Twenty years have passed. Looking back on the relatively peacefully attained Slovenian independence is a lot more positive than it was in the nineties, trying to find a proper solution to the Yugoslav conflict in terms of secession, which claimed a tragic number of victims in some republics.

The unilateral declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia on 25 June 1991 and the military intervention of the federal army were a wake-up call for the European Community (EC). Growing tensions in the former Yugoslavia in the late eighties were overshadowed within the European Commission by historic events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), German reunification (1990) and the Gulf War (1990–1991).

The secession of Slovenia and Croatia heralded the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Civil war was inevitable. During the urgent consultation of the EC Troika in Belgrade at the end of June 1991, it became clear that the federal government was determined to use violence to resist the dissolution of the federation.

Heated debates took place within the EC about what should be given priority: the right of the republics to self-determination or the inviolability and territorial integrity of the borders of federal Yugoslavia.

After 16 hours of negotiations during the Dutch six-month Presidency of the EC Council, on 7 July 1991, on the Croatian islands of Brioni, agreement was achieved among the Slovenian, Croatian and Yugoslav federal delegations, which ended the hostilities (the Ten-Day War) on the territory of the Republic of Slovenia. Crucial to this agreement was the willingness of Slovenia and Croatia to postpone the realisation of the already declared independence for three months.

After the Brioni Agreement, the EC no longer believed in the preservation of Yugoslav unity. It demanded, as a condition for recognising the declared independence, mutual agreement on the distribution of the assets of all six republics. The intensive efforts of the EC for the federal government and the republics to reach agreement under the mediation of Lord Carrington, were mainly impeded by the Serbian party. Due to serious differences within the EC in relation to the quick recognition of independence, which Slovenia and Croatia again declared on 8 October, there was not much time.

A week afterwards, multinational Bosnia and Herzegovina also declared independence. The negotiations by which the EC was attempting to reach mutual agreement became even more uncertain and fear of civil war with Serbia was growing. However, the Federal Republic of Germany, in particular, was determined to continue advocating the expeditious recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence. It even announced the

intention to do so on its own account if agreement was not reached by Christmas. After intense discussion at the meeting of EC Foreign Ministers held on 16 December 1991, agreement was finally reached, which led to formal recognition the following month. The tragic and violent further partition of the former Yugoslavia also led to unfortunate consequences in the Netherlands.

Slovenia deserves not only congratulations on its twentieth anniversary but also appreciation for having cooperated in achieving the Brioni Agreement. With its almost homogenous population and already well-developed political, economic and even military autonomy, Slovenia was ready for self-determination and independence.

Croatia, however, declared independence and adopted a new constitution without first properly regulating the status of the 600 000 Serbs who lived in its territory. This encouraged the Muslim leader of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Izetbegović, to declare unilateral independence against the will of the Serbian (33%) and Croatian (18%) population. A peaceful partition of Yugoslavia became even less likely.

During preparations for the meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 16 December, my American colleague Jim Baker, the UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar and Lord Carrington expressed their concern about the recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence without agreement about the future of the federation. Nevertheless, the EC Foreign Ministers associated themselves with the German decision that day and voted for the recognition of independence, which officially came into force on 16 January 1992. Prior to that, serious discussions took place in which I, as President of the EC Council, expressed my concern about the further increase in tensions.

It was no surprise that the long known differences Germany had with France, the UK and others regarding recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence were resolved for the sake of consensus on the legislation in the Maastricht Treaty.

The Republic of Slovenia celebrates 20 years of independence this year and sincere and heartfelt congratulations are in order for this. This well-developed, politically and economically successful country has already been an EU Member State since 2004. At the beginning of 2007, it introduced the euro and, in the first half of 2008, it held the Presidency of the EU Council, which demonstrate that it has long been oriented towards and affiliated with Europe.

I remember with gratitude the valuable cooperation with Slovenian political leaders at the beginning of the nineties: President Milan Kučan, Prime Minister Lojze Peterle, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel and the late Janez Drnovšek, the Slovenian representative and member of the Collective Presidency and later Prime Minister. Long live the Republic of Slovenia!



Dan Damon, Journalist, BBC World Service

I was hopeful then and I'm hopeful now



Photo: personal archive

I was hopeful for an independent Slovenia even before 1991 because I believed (unlike quite a few Slovenians I spoke to at the time) that Slovenia would be viable as a small, self-governing nation. I had worked in other small countries, Ireland and Denmark, and I knew that with a strong sense of national purpose a small population size was no obstacle to economic viability. Identity is what matters. The Irish and the Danes know what it means to be part of their nations and I could see those characteristics in Slovenia when I first toured Yugoslavia in 1989.

It seemed to me in 1990, as I filmed the “log revolution” and growing belligerence in Knin Krajina, that in an age of defence alliances across Europe Slovenia could also guarantee its own security. The JNA operation to remove the TO self-defence armoury made me less certain about that. But still, like most people who had grown up in a peaceful Europe, I didn't think that when it came to it anyone would really use tanks against a European nation seeking its own autonomy, would they? I was wrong, of course, and the decisions taken in secret then to rearm and develop an alternative chain of command were what saved Slovenia.

That really proved how naïve we had become, we who had grown up in peace. When the JNA defied the logic of post-WW2 Europe and did send in the tanks, I expected the big armies of democratic, victorious Western Europe to step in. I continued to expect that kind of intervention, like a fool, until sometime in 1994 when I'd been reporting from Sarajevo for two years and heard a UN press officer insisting that there wasn't a siege, only front lines that were difficult to cross.

My wife Siân and I lived in a hopeful Slovenia from 1992 as a base from which to travel to Bosnia, a reporter and a camerawoman chronicling the horrors and crimes. Early in 1993, we brought our baby daughter Lejla out of Sarajevo to Ljubljana – she was just 9 days old. She spent her first year in Slovenia, before we moved back to Britain.

Now Lejla is 18; independent, beautiful, creative, increasingly aware of her background and visiting Bosnia for the first time as an adult this

summer. I will tell her to view Slovenia once again as a place of hope and harmony when she becomes frustrated with the lack of progress in the land of her birth.

And I do have great hope for Slovenia now. I understand that the “political honeymoon” is long over – the creation of the nation has been achieved and Slovenia takes its proper place as a member of the most important international groups and alliances. The survival of the state is not an issue any longer, so party politics can be more ambitious and vicious. Money is tight, just as it is in most of Europe, and who else are you going to blame if not the government? Arguments about old battles have been revived as old graves have been reopened, and these agonies should not be forgotten but should be faced up to in a spirit of repentance and forgiveness. None of those bad things are a reason to despair.

The greatest sign of hope for me now is that Slovenia's people and their leaders, on all sides, are taking more and more responsibility for the region as a whole. Enlightened self-interest perhaps – Slovenia has access to the welcoming, undeveloped markets across the Western Balkans.

Slovenia is doing much more than that, though. Slovenians, who teach their children not to hate and mostly have poets and lovers as their heroes, also have the hard-nosed political skills that countries like Serbia and Bosnia need if they are to throw off the addiction to history that curses them and join a prosperous Europe in the future. Slovenia is already teaching those other countries marketing and engineering and networking. Now Slovenia's leaders are using their contacts and experience to try to pull the other new states upwards with them. Most of the time they get very little thanks for that. But they keep trying because they understand more than most other Europeans how dreadful it would be for all of us if the frozen front lines are not melted away, and soon.

Slovenia may not be the only hope for better times in Southeast Europe. But I believe it is the best hope.

Andreja Šonc Simčič, photo: STA

Photography exhibition on the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's independence

MY, YOUR, OUR SLOVENIJA



Prime Minister Borut Pahor, opened a photography exhibition "My, Your, Our Slovenia" on the Krakovski nasip embankment in Ljubljana, which was organised on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's independence by the Government Communications Office of the Republic of Slovenia, with the expert help of photographers Uroš Hočevar and Matej Leskovšek.

Prime Minister Pahor emphasised in his speech that we gained independence for ourselves and not from others, which became our moral foundation. According to him, Slovenians have a uniform vision of what we want to be in the future, despite our differences, and will therefore succeed.

The Prime Minister also said he was immensely proud to be Slovenian, since Slovenians are Europeans and because "we can show our children the way ahead, without any illusions, and just like we were dreaming 20 years ago, now our children can dream freely and creatively for the next 20 years and for their children." Pahor wishes for everyone to feel this sense of pride, "...because we all deserve it, because this is a moment of confidence, which overcomes seemingly insurmountable obstacles as they were 20 years ago and as they might seem today."

In his opinion, Slovenia has written a 20-year story of success with some chapters of mistakes and lapses and of unfulfilled dreams. "We have problems, but they are not insurmountable," he claimed. As he said, there had been differences among us 20 years ago, during the Slovenian political spring, while gaining independence and

in the following years. But he is convinced of our success if we as a community retain a uniform vision of who and what we want to be in the future – a developed, open, tolerant, free society of creative individuals, being aware of the significance of solidarity and situated among the most developed countries.

Pahor continued speaking about how in 20 years our children might remember this year's anniversary and say "On the 20th anniversary, it was said that we will make a new step forward. It seemed impossible, but yet we succeeded."

The exhibition is designed as a chronological walk through important moments in independent Slovenia's history and presents images that willingly or unwillingly marked our everyday life in our independent country. Sometimes it's politics, at other times sports, culture ... 20 years of Slovenian history, 20 events captured in photographic images. Far too few to cover everything that happened to Slovenians, inspired them and filled them with pride over the last 20 years. But they suffice for a short walk through the events recorded by photographers marking these 20 years in one way or another, and which confirm that we can rightfully take pride in the path already travelled by our young country.

The photographers exhibiting their work are Joco Žnidaršič, Igor Modic, Borut Krajnc, Aleš Fevžer, Matjaž Krivic, Uroš Hočevar, Matej Leskovšek, Diego A. Gomez, Nebojša Tejić, Tomi Lombar and others. The exhibition will be open for visitors until 25 August 2011 on the Krakovski nasip embankment.

Polona Prešeren, photo: STA

LIPIKUM

The Lipizzaner Museum, is now open in Lipica



The Lipica Stud Farm recently opened a state-of-the-art museum, one of the best in Slovenia, which will be telling its visitors the interesting story of Lipica and the Lipizzaner stallions, and offering them attractive and interactive presentations. With the opening of Lipikum, the Lipizzaner Museum, the 2005 Lipica Museum Project has been concluded; it was funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Ministry of Culture. The renovation of the museum was substantially funded by the Kingdom of Norway, who strongly supports heritage conservation.

The museum will offer its visitors a completely new experience of discovering the story of Lipica and the Lipizzaner stallions. Its content is based on state-of-the-art principles of museum interpretation, while the design setting includes interactive elements and multimedia presentations. The museum setting has musical, play, multimedia and interactive elements and various challenges to offer different possibilities of learning its content. The opening of Lipikum, the Lipizzaner Museum, is the final stage of the Lipica Museum Project. It is an important contribution to the stud farm's development, since in this way the process of integral renovation of this world wonder continues.

At the opening, Tomi Rumpf, the managing director of Stud Farm Lipica, said, "Lipica is something special. There is only one environment in the world, where a history of more than 430 years of natural and cultural heritage is being preserved, and that is Lipica. With this state-of-the-art museum, we will be proud to show it to the visitors." The Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, added that the Lipikum Museum has a clear objective: to place Lipica and the Lipizzaner on the map of the most important locations of European cultural heritage and to strengthen the role of the Lipizzaner as a national symbol.

Jože Osterman, photo: Tamara Bizjak

FRANCE MAROLT

Academic Folk Dance Group at turning point



The France Marolt folk group, which originates from Ljubljana University, as does the Academic Choir Tone Tomšič, can be considered a national "institution" in the folk field and has survived 63 years of operation. During all these years, the group has been proving a perfect, profound approach towards cultural heritage and occupied the leading position among Slovenian folk groups. Such quality continuity was particularly on account of its artistic director of many years, Dr. Mirko Ramovš, who is one of very few Slovenian top experts in musicology and ethnography and who succeeded in combining theoretical research in cultural heritage with live performance, which was realised through the work of the France Marolt group members. The France Marolt folk group has never been a group that relies on cheap attractiveness and agreeableness, as can be found with some groups that dance mostly for tourists and current public; it has always been a group of well-trained dancers and choreographers that represents Slovenian folk heritage by sticking to original facts and its social background. This makes the group unique on a European level.

This year, Ramovš decided to leave the group in spite of good physical and psychological health. This happened at a time that the group considers to be favourable and when there are members in the group who will be able to maintain the good quality the group currently enjoys. This, of course, will not be easy. The young Tomaž Simetinger, who won recognition some years ago and sent his audience into raptures with the concert in Cankarjev dom, performed in May, which was primarily his own work, as he took over artistic leadership of the venue. This ethnology student, who is just about to graduate, is concerned about the load of work and responsibility that has been laid upon him; however, he has no doubts about the further success of the group. His first concern is based on external circumstances, as financial crises have great impacts on the material basis of their activity. Students' organisations who contributed a great deal of financing to their work, as well as many other sponsors, particularly private companies, have reduced their financial support on account of their own problems. Besides this, Simetinger states that the problem of the group that has existed for many decades is the lack of professional management, since management and artistic work are performed exclusively on a voluntary basis. This is difficult for a group with such a reputation and does not promise a stable future.

However, Simetinger remains optimistic. The France Marolt group is a young group with members who come and go rather quickly, which represents a problem, particularly when trained dancers who have already won recognition decide to leave the group. But this has been the characteristic of the group from its beginnings, since the majority of members are students. This year, a great portion of the generation is making a change. On the other hand, the capability of quickly adapting to conditions enables unconventional work and demands that may contribute to a more vivid folklore creation. According to Simetinger, the challenge is in working with smaller groups, which enables working out of new areas of folk dance and thus providing for performances of even greater variability. One of such specialties was a unique show – a demonstration of the work of costumographer Ljuba Vrtovec Pribac at Ljubljana Castle in February, which was staged as a kind of danced fashion show. Simetinger speaks with pleasure of the appearance of the group in the Netherlands in July, which will be followed by preparations for the next annual concert where the group will demonstrate new dimensions of their endeavours. Great success!

Jože Osterman, photo: STA

THIS YEAR, THE DESETNICA GOES TO TWO WRITERS



Polona Prešeren, photo: STA

ALEŠ ŠTEGER



The poetic creativity of Aleš Šteger, a representative of a younger generation of Slovenian poets, has earned him a remarkable award. With the translation of his collection of poems, *The Book of Things*, he was named among the five finalists for translated poetry in the USA and also won the 2011 Best Translation Book Award.

Aleš Šteger's *The Book of Things* was published in Slovenia in 2006 by the Beletrina publishing house, while its translation by the poet Brian Henry was published in autumn 2010 by BOA Editions (Rochester, New York) as part of the prestigious Lannan Series, in which one translated book is published per year. Prior to that, individual poems were published in many magazines, including *Boston Review*, *Times Literary Supplement* and the weekly *The New Yorker*. This is the first time a Slovenian poet was published in such a prestigious and influential American weekly magazine.

Aleš Šteger was presented the award during the PEN World Voices Festival. According to a poetry committee member, Kevin Prufer, "the poems in Aleš Šteger's *The Book of Things* focus with nearly comic intensity on an array of everyday objects – an egg, a coat, a toothpick, a stomach. Here, a potato recollects the soil it came from. Or a hand dryer speaks a windy language we can't quite understand. Or a doormat forgives us all. But Šteger's poems go far beyond mere comic description, personification, or metaphor." He also added: "Šteger's *The Book of Things* is harrowing and hilarious, unnerving and weirdly familiar – and, most of all, ambitious in its attempt to look anew into our all-too-human darkness."

Aleš Šteger studied comparative literature and German at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and he continues to live there, working as an author, translator and editor. He was editor of the student magazine *Tribuna*; he has also published articles in various domestic and foreign media. He attends international conferences and reading sessions. He was co-founder and between 1995 and 2004 the programme director of the Days of Poetry and Wine international poetry festival, held in Medana. He also translates from German and Spanish. His poems have been set to music by several popular musicians, including Godalika.

The Slovenian Writers' Association awards the Desetnica to the best children or youth work published in recent years. Considering the great tradition of children and youth literature in Slovenia, which goes hand in hand with high-quality Slovenian book illustration, this is surely one of the most important literary awards in our country. It was first awarded in 2004 to Mate Dolenc for the book *Leteča ladja* and a year later to Slavko Pregl for *Usodni telefon*; in 2006, it went to Janja Vidmar and her book *Zoo*, in 2007 to Bina Štampe Žmavc for *Živa hiša*, in 2008 to Andrej Rozman Roza for his book *Kako je Oskar postal detektiv*, in 2009 to Marjana Moškrič for the book *Stvar*, while last year, it went to Dim Zupan for his book *Hektor in male ljubezni: zgodba nekega Hektorja*.

And this year? This year, for the first time, the award was received by two authors. Milan Dekleva for *Pesmarica prvih besed* and Bina Štampe Žmavc (for the second time) for the work *Cesar in roža*. Milan Dekleva, born in 1946 in Ljubljana, graduated in comparative literature and literary theory at the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts and Prešeren laureate in 2006 and worked as a musical pedagogue and journalist for the *Dnevnik Cultural Society*. After that, he was employed as the editor of RTV Slovenia's children and youth programme. Writer, poetess and drama-writer Bina Štampe Žmavc, born in 1951 in Celje, also graduated in comparative literature at the Ljubljana Faculty of Arts, taught Slovenian and was engaged in youth theatre.

Tone Partljič, a writer who provided a detailed explanation of the work and decision taken by the jury over which he presided, dedicated, as usual, much of his personal thoughts to the show. He emphasised that Milan Dekleva was the only poet that succeeded Oton Župančič in his unique manner of addressing children. As for the fairy tales by Bina Štampe Žmavc, in his opinion, they may be compared with the works of Oskar Wilde.

The following works were also nominated for the award: *Pesem za vilo* by Cvetka Bevc; *Žiga špaget gre v širni svet* by Aksinja Kermauner; the work by Miklavž Komelj, *Kako sta se gospod in gospa pomirila*; the book by Majda Koren, *Mici iz 2.a*; the poem by Tone Pavček, *Po morju plava kit*; the story by Slavko Pregl, *Geniji brez hlač*; *Vitez brez krave* by Primož Suhodolčan; and the work by Suzana Tratnik, *Zafuškana Ganca*. Evidently, last year's youth literature yield was abundant.

The EUR 300 prize was awarded to both winners by Zdravko Grginič, the Director of Založba Izolit, which also acts as the award's sponsor.

Hana Souček Morača, photo: Branko Pilih, Peter Uhan

THE WORLD ON A STAGE

Slovenian National Theatre Drama: 2011/2012 theatre season

The lights in the hall are dimmed, the red velvet curtain is opened and the show begins. The Drama Theatre has been entertaining audiences with its exquisite repertoire for almost a hundred years. With its charismatic actors and visionary directors, it has become recognized at home and abroad.

Each season offers a unique experience – a break from reality or confrontation with current social issues. Within the upcoming annual artistic concept, the Slovenian National Theatre Drama has prepared twelve new premieres; seven will be performed on the main stage and five on the chamber stage of Mala Drama.

The main stage will be opened in September with Vladimir Stojsavljevič's *Love and Sovereignty*, which will be directed by Dragan Živadinov using the vector method for the postmodern drama mask.

Maxim Gorky's *The Pretty Bourgeois* will be premiered in October. Gorky's first play from 1901 was immediately censored and banned several times. The play with its main focus on the conflict between generations will be directed by Mateja Koležnik.

Otfried Preußler's *The Little Witch* will first appear on Drama's stage in November. Andrej Rozman Roza's adaptation for the stage is melodic, interwoven with humorous, but also bitter rhymes and filled with picturesque magic spells. The first staging will be directed by Diego de Brea.

A Slovenian novelty, the premiere of *Bobby and Boris*, which was written by Mitja Čander, Eva Mahkovic and Dušan Jovanović, will be staged at the beginning of the next year. Jovanović will also direct the first staging. The play is written as a documentary drama with mixed drama and journalistic genres. It takes us to a chess match and the backstage of the legendary World Chess Championship in 1972 in Reykjavik, where the defender of the title, Boris Spassky, took on the challenger, Bobby Fischer.

Another play in January, *Bram Stoker's Vampires*, will be staged in the Gallus hall in Cankarjev dom, in co-production with Cankar-

jev dom. *Vampires*, as directed by Diego de Brea, is based on the classic version of the Stoker's story. According to the programme guide, the play mainly exploits the comic potential of the work.

The first staging of *The Fall of Europe* by Matjaž Zupančič who will also direct it, will take place in March. In his new play, Zupančič observes today's society and judges it without mercy, particularly for its deviance and depravation.

The Glembays, written by Miroslav Krleža and directed by Ivica Buljan, will be staged in the same month. This incredibly sharp and powerful play with sensitive criticism, written by one of the greatest Croatian authors, shows what happens when tycoons meet their destiny.

Several plays will be staged on the chamber stage of Mala drama: Jean Anouilh's *The Orchestra*, directed by Diego de Brea, György Spiró's *Prah*, directed by Vinko Möderndorfer and Dorota Masłowska's *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, directed by Ivana Džilas. In John Logan's *Red*, directed by Zvone Šedlbauer, the audience will lose themselves in the canvases of the American abstract expressionist, Mark Rothko. Mala drama's programme includes Staged Readings of Ancient Dramas, a concert reading of new translations of classic dramas as chosen and set by Jera Ivanc.

New in the repertoire is a play performed by children. For *The Little Witch* and another two plays by the Slovenian National Theatre Celje, *Muri the Cat* and *Emperor's New Clothes*, two sets of Cican season tickets will be available for children. Children will be able to go on guided tours of the backstage and its secrets. To win over more young spectators, season tickets will also be available for schools and families.

You don't need to walk to travel through time. Make yourself comfortable in a theatre hall and let the sound of squeaking wooden boards take you away from your everyday life. Where can you find all that? In a building designed by the Viennese architect Alexander Graf and built between 1909 and 1911 – in the Drama theatre.



THE CAPITAL OF CULTURE – A PROJECT OF NEW SOCIAL COHESION

Polona Prešeren, photo: archive Festival Ljubljana

THE MAGNIFICENT FESTIVAL LJUBLJANA



The magnificent opening of Festival Ljubljana will take place on 3 July with Mahler's Eighth Symphony. The unique festival summer will begin on Kongresni trg in Ljubljana, where many historic moments have taken place.

The renovated Kongresni trg which was, together with the Prešeren monument and Trg republike, the setting of a great many important events in Slovenian history throughout the 20th century, will be filled with the sound of the "Symphony of a Thousand". It will be performed by more than a thousand musicians from the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra, many Slovenian and Croatian choruses and eight world renowned soloists, among them also the exquisite soprano Sabina Cvilak. The concert will be held in honour of the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's and Croatia's independence, under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr Danilo Türk.

The conductor of the evening will be the charismatic Valerij Gergijev, who said: "A particularly important thing about this corporation is that the orchestras are coming from Slovenia and Croatia, Ljubljana and Zagreb. I hope that peace, understanding and cooperation, including cultural cooperation, music, theatre will grow enormously in countries that were once part of one big country which broke up, for example Yugoslavia." The conductor, who was born in Ossetia and performs throughout the former Soviet Union, also adds: "My strong belief is that a great piece of music like the 8th symphony of Mahler helped, helps all of us, helps thousands of people, hundreds of thousands, millions of people to embrace a challenge, to come in one big emotion and find again and again the power of music, the power of human genius that has no borders. We will have a great time and I'm very glad to hear that my Slovenian and Croatian friends are coming closer and closer to our fan-

tastic cooperation and being great neighbours will only strengthen what we believe is the future of Europe." This will most definitely be one of the greatest musical spectacles in Ljubljana and a magnificent commemoration of the birth and death of Gustav Mahler, a composer who also worked in Ljubljana (in the 1881/1882 season).

The Festival summer will be concluded on 7 September 2011 with the Halévy's opera *The Jewess* performed by the Lithuanian State Opera and Ballet. The main events will be accompanied by the 14th International Fine Arts Colony and an exhibition of the Lipizzaner horses.

The Artistic and General Director of Festival Ljubljana, Darko Brlek, highlights the concert of the Filarmonica della Scala orchestra, conducted by Daniel Harding, three evenings of the Lithuanian State Opera and Ballet, two evenings of the Béjart Ballet of Lausanne, Eifman's spectacular staging of *Onegin* and *Don Quixote*, and *Twilight of the Gods* by Tomaž Pandur. Somewhat more relaxed entertainment will be provided by Al Di Meola, Gilberto Gil, Vlado Kreslin, the musical *Hair*, the Belarusian State Dance Company Khoroshki and the celebrated Russian Cossacks. Brlek also adds that the festival's faithful audience is the main affirmation of their work and the stimulus to prepare the annual programme. "However, without the substantial support of the Municipality of Ljubljana, Mayor Zoran Janković and all of our loyal sponsors again this year, it would not have been possible to transform the seemingly impossible into reality."

The Festival will host 36 events and appearances of more than 3,000 artists from 30 countries. The entire programme of Festival Ljubljana 2011 is available at: www.ljubljanafestival.si. In addition to web sales, videos of the festival's highlights are also available.



The Meline Mercouri award of EUR 1 million, presented by the European Union to cities that prepare the best programmes among European capitals of culture, surely raised the self-confidence of the team that is preparing the Maribor 2012 European capital project. The same award is also to be received by the second European capital of culture 2012 – the Portuguese city of Guimaraes.

However, the awarding is far from being mere routine and is not reached by everyone who is the candidate for the capital of culture. The Maribor team's success is a result of the detailed and favourable report of experts that was based on the last presentation of the project in Brussels at the end of March. At the end of the report, the commission added a sentence that is surely not routine: the commission was fascinated by the team's dedication to the project, its impetus and ambitiousness. Over recent months, as they wrote in Brussels, the project has faced outstanding progress.

I can believe that the experts from Brussels were particularly attracted by certain specialties of the Maribor programme that took a step away from the somewhat stereotypical investment schemes into new cultural projects and performances of the best world-famous cultural performers and groups characteristic in recent years, when the financial sources for such programmes were also much more abundant. It becomes more and more clear that the specialty of the Maribor programme lies in the ambition that Maribor and participating cities would like to gain permanent elements from the project that will involve certain changes to their lives in cultural and other areas. In this sense, the Ključni mesta and Urbane brazde programmes, particularly, must be mentioned, as they should contribute to changes in the most fundamental living patterns of the citizens of the cities involved.

That is why the organisers first carried out a thorough social and economic analysis of the Eastern Slovenia "cohesion region", which includes Maribor and all participating cities. Slovenia consists of two cohesion regions: Eastern and Western Slovenia, which were intro-

duced on the basis of the Promotion of Balanced Regional Development Act. According to statistical data, the GDP of the Eastern cohesion region is only about 43%; the European rules thus classify this region among undeveloped regions. It encompasses about 60% of the Slovenian territory and includes about 1,100,000 people, which is 54% of the population of the Republic of Slovenia. Culture and activities that are resulting from and that are associated with culture could surely be one of the key factors of overcoming the differences between the developed West and undeveloped East, since according to Europe's assessment, cultural services, creative industries and cultural tourism are the fastest-growing industries with the highest employment rate and are therefore the future of European service-oriented development.

Which is the main effort of the programmes that will be ongoing in Maribor and other cities? Velenje will focus on its industrial heritage; Ptuj is the centre of rich antique findings and ethnological specialties (for example kurenti); Novo mesto is the city of situlas; Murska Sobota will take over the culture of countryside, while Slovenj Gradec is the global city of peace.

By means of this project, Maribor, as an old industrial city, which has become much more a trade and university city over the last few decades, wishes to fill in a considerable deficiency of public, and particularly cultural space, and thus increase the participation of its inhabitants in overall social life. In this sense, cultural objects and public gatherings will be concentrated on the banks of the Drava and in the old city centre, while the said programmes, Urbane brazde and Ključni mesta, will strive towards disseminating cultural and social matters among the largest possible number of people, on city streets and markets. Therefore, after the flags of the European capital are lowered at the 2013 New Year, the permanent achievement of the city should be a way of life that can only be introduced by culture.



Jože Osterman, photo: Mateja J.Potočnik

A house where the sun lives

The Rakitna health centre, which we represent today, has an interesting history. Its beginning goes back to the First World War when Rakitna became a military hospital used to treat the Austrian wounded and sick from the Soča Front. In 1927, patients with osteoarticular tuberculosis were treated here, and in 1930 they started treating pulmonary illnesses in children.

In subsequent decades, Rakitna became the only Slovenian Alpine children's treatment centre for respiratory diseases, and with some enhancements, this programme is still in place today, with several new added programmes. In the meantime, there have been numerous difficulties and problems in relation to the existence of the health centre, since at the beginning of independence, Slovenia was not quite sure how to include such a facility in its system, although it is also special on a European level. However, teams that were active on Rakitna believed in the future of the health centre, which has brought a rich return over the past years.

The institution was founded by the Brezovica municipality. Within this municipality, the Barje Landscape Park was established two years ago, which makes it significant for two extraordinary natural values: Rakitna and Barje. Municipal councillors are aware of this significance and therefore provide significant support to the health centre. However, this happened after the team in the centre proved its incredible perseverance and inventiveness in creating health and other programmes, which provided for their existence. One of the major successes is also the fact that they are being actively supported by donors from abroad, for example: the Norway mechanism and the special Mads Clausen fund that was established by the Danish Danfoss Corporation and which included

only two non-Danish programmes in its programme last year – besides the Rakitna programme, a programme from Mexico was included. Financial resources for the renovation and operation of the centre allocated from European Union funds, which require the fulfillment of high criteria, was additional proof that the Rakitna team know what to do and how to do it.

The main assurance that the institution is developing rapidly and represents a unique form of treatment of various children's problems in European circumstances is the recognition of the Ministry of Health, which included the centre's programmes in the health system and earmarked appropriate funds through the Institute of Public Health. In this respect, it must be admitted that our health system showed openness, as children's health is undoubtedly the best social investment. Although the working team manages to obtain 20% of funds directly through good offers, particularly for out-of-school programmes and some other activities, their absolute priority is the implementation of programmes financed from public funds. "Children are always our priority", says Director Romana Rasperger, and adds a statement that gives a great impression and which acts as the guidance of the Rakitna team: "What children need are small stimulations; however, the results gained therefrom are enormous!"

FROM SMALL TO BIG

The Rakitna health centre is really something special. It is situated at the verge of a village that is a quiet rural settlement and gives the impression of a real countryside, while being only 30km away from the centre of Ljubljana. A group of low buildings that compose the health centre looks like a small village, where this year, a large roof covering the riding ground has been raised and enables activities in nature and exercise with dogs and horses in all weather. During recent years, the facades of all the health facilities, which were built using the somewhat boring architecture of the early 50s, have been painted in vivid colours and decorated with pleasant children's motives, which inform the visitor at first glance that children are the main inhabitants. The administration building is especially interesting since it is constructed with big rocks that do not need any additional processing and that give the impression of stability and solidity. Similar houses can be seen in the Primorje highlands, constructed mainly by Italians. The desire of the young team to enrich the centre's ambience as soon as possible, while they still collect money for a more radical renovation, can be seen at every step, particularly in the interior of the facilities. All ideas come in very handy for the old houses with worn-out equipment, to contribute to a nicer appearance and a more pleasant ambience. The principle





that development can also take small steps and that small things become big, can be noticed everywhere. The ambience is very peaceful, despite the fact that over 60 children were living there during our visit, which is the full capacity of the centre. Small groups of bobbing children's heads and small figures in the meadows that surround the centre indicated that in the morning, just before lunch, children are fully occupied with various activities and that this peace is only the consequence of their concentration on work.

Some treatment programmes for children and youth are ongoing simultaneously and may have beneficial, even decisive consequences for their future development. The highest number of children is included in the early treatment programme for children and youth who are at risk of developing emotional disturbances and dietary disorders; this programme includes those who have not developed all the symptoms of said disorders yet, and provides for the prevention of such disorders. This is healthy growing-up programme for the children and youth with various problems in the area of sentiment, behaviour or inclusion in a group of peers. It includes all children with problems in school or at home and those who are preoccupied with their outer look or learning success. The programme is expressively preventive and lasts for 14 days. The programme for reintegration and rehabilitation of persons with emotional disturbances and dietary disorders includes all individuals who are experiencing such disorders and have already concluded specialist treatment and now need help in re-integration into everyday life, as well as a solid starting point for their personal development. Besides these psychologically-based programmes, they still exercise their oldest programme, treating pulmonary diseases using natural

advantages of Rakitna for respiratory organs. Children come to Rakitna from all over Slovenia, from all social and financial classes, and from various cultural and ethnic environments. The treated children do not have to undergo any pre-selection; they only have to agree to join the programme.

A FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

Although the programmes are different, the staff (in total, 40 people) closely cooperate in their implementation and breathe with the same lungs. During our conversation, in pleasant company, with Director Romana Rasperger, main nurse Dušica Košir, head of psychology, Julijana Pelc, and head of therapeutic riding programme Katarina Mavec and the psychologist Dordina Nakičenič, we realised how it was possible for the centre to make such huge steps forward. On the one hand, the women have a firm and justified confidence in their work and are proud of what they have achieved, and on the other, their reaction to eventual problems and open issues that they often come across, is almost unbelievable. They are all full of delight and optimism. The basis for their treatment is a child or youth who must be carefully treated as an individual, to be then included in the collective and performance of common assignments, by considering his specialties; on this basis, they also build the joint spirit of the centre through expressing their individual opinions and professional evaluations. This has resulted in a few interesting therapeutic methods that are rather unique and represent a special part of the excellence of the Rakitna health centre.

One of these methods is therapy through the use of animals; two horses are also inhabitants of the centre: the piebald Luidor and the gentle white mare, Mimi. And why horses? On the centre's website,

an almost heart-stirring explanation is given: "Horses are big, but very gentle and timid, as are our youth. The sympathy they need from us earns excellent responses. As children, they have so much in common and share such deep feelings - the horses and our youngest ones. Near a horse, with a horse, on a horse and with the help of a horse, children and youth learn to built relationships spontaneously, cooperate in a team and solve problems in a creative manner." It is similar to the second method of therapy: in cooperation with the Tačke pomagačke (Paw helpers) association, children from Rakitna keep company with dogs, take care of them and establish emotional relationships that help them strengthen their life experience and connectedness with people and nature.

It has been about five years since the beginning of the programme and the time for evaluation or assessment of the success of their work is approaching. The collective is not afraid of this, since they systematically follow the development of their clients and are well aware of everything happening with each of them. There are only a few who quit, but the number of those who finish the programme, continue with a successful life and frequently preserve contacts with the personnel of the health centre is much higher; some of them even return to Rakitna and repeat the programme. Proof of this success was just at hand: a small group of six playful children from all parts of Slovenia were very talkative and spontaneous in explaining their experiences; they laughed and evidently enjoyed the events of that day. One of them Maj, also mentioned Luidor as being an important member of the group.

It really does not take much for children to open themselves for life. Many thanks to Rakitna for its work.

Vesna Žarkovič, photo: Mateja J. Potočnik

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Yulon 

Julon opened a new production line, which is the first so far to allow polyamide production from 100% recycled materials.

There are several reasons why it is classified as the technology of the future: oil, which is the basic raw material for the “plastic” industry, will sooner or later run short or will become unbearably expensive; energy, the consumption of which is lower in the recycling process than in the processing of “virgin” raw material, is also getting more expensive, along with the fact that it has poor effects on the environment. Julon, along with Aquafil, where experimental production has been going on for almost six months and products made of 70% recycled polyamide were successfully presented to buyers, was thus the first to present its technological process.

The news is good for Slovenia too. During this crisis, it has and will gain several tens of jobs that can at least partially be considered technologically demanding, i.e. jobs that will bring higher added value. At the same time, Julon will maintain production in the coming years, bearing less risk for the environment compared to the existing one. Investment in Ljubljana would not happen if the state had not participated with a grant of EUR 3.2 million. For each new person employed by Julon in association with the project, the state contributed approximately EUR 45,000.

THE ONLY PLANT OF THIS TYPE IN THE WORLD

The production of econyl (polyamide or nylon from recycled raw materials) means a technological innovation in the processing of basic raw materials for plastic material production. “It is the only plant of its type in the world and is the result of two years of work performed by an international team of experts. We are convinced that the only way to attract buyers in future decades is with a product that is not harmful to the environment”, said Mr. Giulio Bonazzi, CEO of Aquafil, the Italian company that owns Julon. In cooperation with research institutions (including the University of Ljubljana), Aquafil developed a technological procedure that is the first to enable complete recycling of polyamide 6 from waste. Currently, the most important sources of the raw material replacing oil are floor coverings and fishing nets collected by Aquafil from all over the world. “Production capacity in Ljubljana is 10,000 tons per year, which means 9% of the annual volume of polyamide 6 required by Aquafil. We would like to increase this percentage,” said Mr. Bonazzi. The group with headquarters in Italy became the owner of Julon in 1995. Since Julon has a tradition in production and processing of granulates and fibres, state aid was also an important factor in the decision to build a plant with state-of-the-art technology in the branch. “Julon invested EUR 17.3 million, of which 12.4 million were costs that allowed us to apply for a 30% state grant,” said Mr. Edi Kraus, Director-General of Julon. Last year, the grant donated by the state to the company amounted to EUR 3.6 million, but the company had to commit itself to open a minimum of 45 demanding work places (primarily for chemical engineers and technologists). This commitment has already been exceeded, as 70 people have been employed in association

with the new production implementation. Within the framework of polyamide production from waste materials, Julon also prepared a sorting facility in Ajdovščina, where ten employees mechanically process materials for recycling. Slovenia does not want to be a country with a cheap labour force; therefore, investments providing jobs with higher added value are very important.

SUSTAINABILITY OF MATERIALS AS A WAY OF THINKING AND A WAY OF LIVING

The Econyl project opens a path for a new concept of serviceability, a concept that provides added value not only for the environment but also for the company and its clients. It is a result of belief that has matured for several years, which is that the sustainability of materials cannot simply be a result, but must be considered to be a way of thinking and a way of living. This coincides with a new manner of operation, which is entirely focused on the future realisation of dreams about production that will not steal from nature but, rather, will help the environment restore itself.

The project began in 2009, and is based on the advanced technology of chemical and mechanical transformation of waste material into the primary raw material, which can be used for polymer production, which can then, in turn, be used for the manufacture of new fibres. It is a competitive process providing equally high-quality standards to traditional production lines and enabling the possibility of unlimited transformation of waste material without affecting the features of the final product. The factor that contributes to the Econyl project and characterises its uniqueness is the international network of companies created by Aquafil, primarily aimed at collecting and transforming waste materials and other waste, from the abandoned fishing nets on the seabed and woven carpets to plastic elements made of nylon. Waste materials were collected from all over the world, from the British Columbia forests to far-away ports of the Middle East, which enabled participation of different groups and private institutes, partners and companies with business connections with Aquafil. All polyamide 6 materials and waste collected within Econyl in distant countries, USA, Egypt, Pakistan, Hongkong, Turkey, Thailand and Norway, were sent to Aquafil’s new warehouse in Ajdovščina. Here, the collected materials are stored, pre-processed and then sent to the plant in Ljubljana where they are used again as the primary raw material suitable for reuse in the production cycle. In full operation, the plant in Ljubljana will accept the input of 11,000 tons of waste, yielding approximately 10,000 tons of caprolactam, which is the basis for higher added-value plastic material production. Around 1000 tons of residues will be incinerated in the nearby incinerator plant. Julon is otherwise one of the major employers in Slovenia. It employs around 750 workers, more than 500 in Ljubljana, almost 200 in Štore, 35 in Senožeče and 10 in Ajdovščina. The Aquafil Group employs more than 2000 workers on three continents and had a turnover of EUR 432 million last year.



Albert Kos, photo: personal archive

DR. MRS. MATEJA DE LEONNI STANONIK, MD.

This spring, approximately four months ago, the Slovenian media published the news that after more than nineteen years of study and medical and scientific work in the USA, Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., is returning to Slovenia, where on invitation by the Minister of Health, Mr. Dorijan Marušič, MD., she will take over the management of the e-Health Project, set out in 1995, with the goal of healthcare services informatisation on the level of the entire state.

Until this news, the Slovenian public knew relatively little about the successful carrier and excellent achievements of Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., since individual media reported about her on rare occasions, and even then mainly for a narrower target audience. Her establishment in the fields of medicine and scientific activity have, of course, been well-known to the professional public for at least a decade, and therefore also to Mr. Marušič MD., who years ago, when he was still a state secretary at the Ministry of Health, made contact with her and established cooperation. Consequently, this year's invitation by Mr. Marušič was not surprising.

THE YOUNG YEARS IN SLOVENIA

To shed some light on the life path of Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., that lead her abroad for almost two decades, we of course have to go back to the period of her youth, spent in the native Poljanska dolina, in a countryside not far from the famous medieval little town of Škofja Loka. There she attended primary school, and then continued schooling at the secondary school in nearby Kranj and Škofja Loka. On their farm, which also dealt with farm tourism, she came across guests from abroad that brought her closer to foreign languages. But even more important was her decision of what to do with her life, which also reached back in time and marked her entire life path up to today.

Namely, already in secondary school, Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik was, next to several other interests and activities she cultivated, especially enthusiastic about the secrets of the human brain and its functioning, so she decided to dedicate her further study and professional path to this subject. Since she could not reach her goal in her home country or at nearby universities in Europe, she decided to make the journey to the USA where neuroscience, as a relatively new scientific discipline in which she was interested, was most developed. Thus, immediately after matura, precisely in the days when her homeland was gaining independence, she set out on a journey that led her to Knoxville in the American state of Tennessee, where she began systematically implementing her plan.

YEARS OF STUDY AND WORK IN THE USA

Following her English language exam, which she passed after a course that lasted only half a year, as a student, she registered for several courses and disciplines that were prerequisites for study-

ing medicine. She selected the study of biology, psychology, German, and political sciences, and within the framework of psychology study, she achieved a master's degree in cognitive psychology, and later on, parallel to the study of medicine, a Ph.D. in neuroscience.

She directed her study of medicine at the University of Tennessee to specialisation in clinical neurology and neuroscience and selected neuroradiology and nuclear medicine for postdoctoral study. Knowledge and mastering of all the mentioned professional and scientific fields enabled her to continuously research upon clinical practice, whereby she was focused on the study of selective attention mechanisms, memory functioning upon mild cognitive dysfunctions, detection of symptoms of Alzheimer's disease in its early stage, and treatment of this disease and other neurodegenerative disorders. Upon this, she did not limit herself to clinical work, but instead was active in raising the awareness of the wider public and of the direct local environment on Alzheimer's disease occurrence in the local environment, and was conferring her knowledge and experiences abroad, particularly in Slovenia.

TELEMEDICINE

The sphere of medical and research work activities of Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., was not concluded with the abovementioned, since discovering new horizons is obviously a part of her nature. A new side of her medical activities opened when Mr. Martin Strel, the Slovenian ultra marathon swimmer, asked her to take over medical care of him and his accompanying team, after he had, following his greatest swimming achievements in the rivers of Danube, Mississippi, Parana and Yangtze Kiang, decided to swim the Amazon River from its upper stream at Atalaya in Peru to its outfall into the Atlantic Ocean, at Belem in Brasil. Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., despite her lack of experience in tropical medicine, accepted the challenge, and started organising the telemedical part of a 66 day long expedition in remote areas of South America. She searched for cooperation with the most eminent experts from the field of telemedicine, and found a very enthusiastic co-worker, Mr. Rifat Latifi, MD., surgeon and traumatologist of Kosovo origin, also the world's authority in telemedicine, with whom she planned and selected the necessary money for the equipment for the boat that was to accompany them. The boat was to include entirely equipped emergency and operation rooms with telemedical units. Mr.

Latifi, MD., and Mrs. de Leonni Stanonik, MD., planned the expedition as a pilot project of implementation of telemedicine that was not limited only to the needs of possible assistance to the swimmer or his team, but also offering assistance to local inhabitants, particularly children who had never before seen a doctor or been medically treated. Mrs. de Leonni Stanonik, MD., made good use of the several thousand kilometres long navigation of the Amazon River, since next to practical work, she was also presenting the concept of telemedicine and the new possibilities of medical treatment that it enables to medical staff and representatives of the local authorities along the voyage. Of course telemedicine is inseparably related to modern information technology, enabling direct connection of medical teams in fields with remote medical experts who cannot be directly present with the patients or victims, but can, with instructions and advice, along with the help of robotics, directly participate in demanding medical procedures or even conduct them. Later on, Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., introduced a similar telemedical project on the Fiji islands in the Pacific Ocean, and thus linked the remote island country and its inhabitants with hospitals in Australia, in case they need demanding and specialised medical assistance.

INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL E-HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

In the last years, telemedicine for Mrs. Mateja de Leonni Stanonik, MD., is a part of her daily practice at work with her patients, particularly in cases of acute head injuries, brain injuries and strokes, especially since she moved and changed her position at the University Hospital in Tennessee to one at the George Washington University Hospital in the capital of the USA. She is convinced that telemedicine opens a variety of new opportunities for timely and professional optimal medical interventions in critical situations. Her work in this field is tightly related to activities of the International Virtual e-Hospital Foundation, the president of which is Mr. Latifi, MD., while she is the Vice-President. The activity of the Foundation was presented by both of them three years ago at the 6th conference "E-Health without Frontiers" in Portorož, but back then, Mrs. de Leonni Stanonik, MD., could not detect a more distinctive interest for sharing her knowledge and experience with the medical profession and health network in her homeland.



THE E-HEALTH PROJECT

This year, Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., ended up at the head of the e-Health Project precisely for her knowledge and experience in the field of telemedicine, and in which she recognised a challenge that was very close to her professional and expert ambitions for practical implementation of telemedicine and information technologies in the healthcare system. She commenced work in her new working field within the framework of public administration with the same enthusiasm as in all her previous tasks and responsibilities. She announced that she would attract doctors, information specialists, electro engineers, lawyers, and other professional profiles in the renovated team of experts that would accelerate the realisation of the e-Health Project, and who are necessary, since the project has to be founded on several professional bases, including on a legal basis. By means of project realisation, a lot of existing paper work will be eliminated in healthcare, and with information technologies, immediate flow of all the necessary medical data and results will be ensured to all the health institutions and medical experts that

treat individual medical cases. In public, there may be a fear that such accessibility of personal data could lead to abuse, but in the planned information system, there are virtually no possibilities that the data could leak to unauthorised addressees. Mrs. de Leoni Stanonik, MD., remains optimistic and full of trust in the project she manages, but also remains realistic, since she foresees a gradual approach towards project realisation. At the beginning of 2012, in some areas of Slovenia, the priority projects within e-Health should come to life, at least as a trial, including e-prescription, telerradiology, and e-appointment, while the other projects should be added to the set of e-Health services gradually. The target date for finishing the entire project on the national level, as set out, is in 2015.

CONTACTS AND TIES WITH SLOVENIA

By taking on the e-Health project, Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., actually changed the field of medical practice and research activity for the field of management and updating of the healthcare systems, which is becoming more and more complex and demanding in modern societies upon fast development of medicine,

medical technologies, pharmacology and extension of lifetime expectancy on one hand, and limited financial resources on the other. But Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., is far from inexperienced in these matters. In the long years of her absence and intensive professional activity abroad, she kept close contacts with her homeland, not only on a personal but also on a professional level; therefore, she was relatively well familiar with the situation at home and she tried to stay at home with "at least one foot". In the period of Slovenia's gaining of independence, when she had merely started her study, she was helping to gain sympathy of the American public for "the Slovenian cause" via her American acquaintances, and later on, as a young but established doctor and researcher, took advantage of all opportunities to keep constant contact with Slovenia. It should be noted that the Government of the Republic of Slovenia appointed her to be Honorary Consul of the Republic of Slovenia in Knoxville in 2004, and after she moved to Washington, she established a close and fruitful cooperation in the field of medical diplomacy with the Slovenian Embassy there, mainly as initiator of the series of



saloon lectures dedicated to redefining the diplomacy of global health. The first series of these lectures took place at the Slovenian Embassy in Washington, and its participants were addressed by Mrs. de Leoni Stanonik, MD., in the introduction.

Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., remained connected with Slovenia and Slovenians in the Slovenian World Congress as well, as its Vice-President for overseas countries, while particularly interested in the Slovenian academic diaspora developing as close as possible professional and scientific contacts with the home country of Slovenia. Last year, her efforts in this direction were acknowledged on a national level, when the Minister for Slovenians Abroad, Mr. Boštjan Žekš, Dr., appointed her as a member of the Scientific Committee, in which, next to her, there are eight other top scientists who work outside Slovenia.

The widespread professional activities of Mrs. Mateja de Leoni Stanonik, MD., and her achievements testify that she is a personality ranked at the top of scientific excellence, not merely in Slovenian circles but also worldwide, and with results that are internationally confirmed and acknowledged. From the very beginning, her determination is especially fascinating; she knows what she wants and she has the will to achieve it, while she does not set herself any predetermined limitations and no matter what she undertakes, she does not hold back her energy and devotion. The e-Health Project, to which she is currently completely dedicated, is certainly not the last stop on her career path, but her participation in the project is even more important and valuable, since by means of it, she gives special emphasis to social responsibility as an inherent dimension of scientific and professional work.



Andrej Stare, photo: STA

REBIRTH OF SLOVENIAN TENNIS

Currently at No. 79, Blaž Kavčič is the first Slovenian men's player to have ever ranked among the hundred best tennis players in the world.

Thanks to Blaž Kavčič, the Slovenian team has lately had excellent results in the Davis Cup (the unofficial men's world championship). At the beginning of March in Ljubljana, Slovenia managed to defeat Finland by a score of 3:2 after a fierce battle, and thus qualified for the elimination rounds for entering Group I of the Davis Cup. In July, Slovenia will compete against Italy, who has four players ranked higher than Kavčič (Potito Starace at No. 42, Fabio Fognini at No. 48, Andreas Seppi at No. 51, and Filippo Volandri at No. 74), who has won 11 out of 15 matches in the Davis Cup (for a winning percentage of .733). Nevertheless, nothing is decided yet, since Kavčič and the other top Slovenian player, Gregor Žemlja from Žirovnica (current world ranking No. 156), are excellent team players. Slovenia's goal is to reach the World Group with the world's top 16 national teams in the next five years. Slovenia is currently ranked 31st (132 countries are listed, Spain being the first and the Sultanate of Brunei the last), while the current ranking of Slovenia's next opponent, Italy, is No. 22.

The Slovenian men's and women's tennis players, in singles and in doubles, have made a great leap forward in recent years towards the world's elite. This year's Grand Slam tournaments (in Melbourne, Paris, Wimbledon, and New York) are a new challenge for Blaž Kavčič and Polona Hercog, both playing singles, as well as for Katarina Srebotnik, playing women's and mixed doubles.

Slovenia, having only few tennis players, cherishes every single victory at a Grand Slam tournament. Now, long after Mima Jaušovec, we again anticipate triumphs in tennis.

The golden age of Slovenian tennis is long gone. More than 30 years have passed since Mima Jaušovec achieved significant results. She is the only Slovenian singles tennis player to have ever won one of the four major tennis tournaments, a Grand Slam tournament, in Paris in 1977. After defeating Romanian Florenta Mihai by 6:2, 6:7, and 6:1, she achieved her goal and the dream of every tennis player. Mima reached the singles finals in Paris two more times (in 1978 and 1983). Together with her Romanian partner Virginia

Ruzici, she won the doubles title in Paris in 1978. In the same year, they were also runners-up at Wimbledon. Mima Jaušovec was awarded the title of best Slovenian athlete for five years. After she retired as a tennis player (today she is captain of the Slovenian women's tennis team), we had to wait almost a quarter of a century for new achievements in tennis. Katarina Srebotnik (with a career-high world ranking of No. 20 in 2008) and the just 20-year-old Polona Hercog (current world ranking No. 55) have taken Slovenian women's tennis back to the top. Srebotnik has been one of the best doubles player for many years (mixed and women's doubles). She stopped competing in singles due to injuries.

She has won five Grand Slam mixed doubles tournaments (three in Paris, one in Melbourne, and one in New York) and has reached the finals of the biggest tournaments five times. With her tennis partners, the Canadian Nestor, Norval from South African, Zimonjić from Serbia, and

the American Bryan, she has achieved outstanding results, comparable to Mima Jaušovec's.

Slovenians have never had a world class men's tennis player. In the early sixties, Boris Breskvar from Ljubljana (today a renowned tennis coach) became a member of the Yugoslav national team, but never got a chance in the Davis Cup due to the strong competition on the team from Nikola Pilić, Željko Franulović, Nikola Špear, and Boro Jovanović. Men's tennis in Slovenia has experienced a revival in recent years, with young Blaž Kavčič from Ljubljana ranked higher on the ATP Rankings than any other Slovenian men's tennis player. Blaž Kavčič's mother is Bojana Dornig, once an excellent alpine ski racer, who in the early eighties competed in the slalom in the World Cup. Her best result in the slalom was a 7th place in Piancavallo (Italy) in 1980. In 1981 she was recognised as the best Slovenian athlete of the year.



RK CIMOS KOPER – A NEWCOMER TO THE ELITE

Koper is Slovenia's third largest city and well known for its major port; however, in sporting terms, it is a football and basketball city. Handball has only been played in Koper at a high level since 1992. Although the sport had no tradition in the city, it soon gathered plenty of fans. In the 1999/2000 season, RK Cimos Koper qualified for the Slovenian Second League of Handball after only seven years, and then for the Slovenian First League of Handball just two years later. The club quickly became very successful. Every season, RK Cimos Koper came closer to becoming one of the 'great clubs', such as RK Celje and RK Prule. The Koper team became a regular member of the Slovenian First League of Handball and soon began collecting titles. In the 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 seasons, the club won the prestigious Handball Cup of Slovenia, but its appearances on the European stage ended quickly. The players lacked match experience against the best clubs in Europe. The 2010/2011 season was extraordinary. Five Serbian, one Montenegrin and three well-known Slovenian national players (Brumen, Podpečan and Mlakar) joined the team, taking it to amongst the best clubs in Slovenia and Europe.

The club began collecting titles. First, it took third place in the finals of the Slovenian Cup in Celje in April 2007. In front of 5 000 spectators in the Golovec Arena, it defeated RK Gorenje, from Velenje, by a score of 22:20. The man of the match was the Serbian attacker, Uroš Elezović, who scored ten goals, almost half of the club's total. Unfortunately, he became injured and was unable to help the team for the rest of the season.

The National Championship took place at the same time as the EHF Challenge Cup. RK Cimos Koper was winning both at home and abroad and, at the end of May, two final games were left.

The team first played against the members of S.L. Benfica, from Lisbon, one of the most respected multi-sports clubs in Europe. Although S.L. Benfica had never achieved top results in handball, it had won two European Football Championships.

The first game in Lisbon was a nerve-racking experience, but RK Cimos Koper managed to secure an exceptional result before the return match, a tied score of 27:27. The return match for the European club title in Koper's Bonifika Arena attracted more than 5 000 spectators, who were on their feet and cheering throughout the entire game – right up to the very last

minute. RK Cimos Koper kept their cool, played effectively and, with the help of their magnificent defence, defeated the Portuguese. The final score was 31:27 to RK Cimos Koper.

The club celebrated winning the EHF Challenge Cup and became the fourth Slovenian team to manage such a great achievement.

The first club to win a club title was the women's handball club, Olimpija (Ljubljana), which won the EHF Cup in the 1996/1997 season, while the women's handball club, Krim, won the prestigious EHF Champions League twice (in 2001 and 2003), reaching the finals on three occasions. As the third achievement, RK Celje won the EHF Champions League in 2004. Along with RK Cimos Koper, Slovenia is one of the few European countries to have won three of the prestigious European Club Championships.

The club secured its last title a few days after winning the EHF Challenge Cup. In the final game, the club defeated RK Gorenje, from Velenje, and became national champions for the first time.

The team, skilfully led by their coach,

Fredi Radojević, had won three titles in a single season. This equalled the success of RK Celje, which was the best club team in Europe in 2004.

Next season, RK Cimos Koper will enter the EHF Champions League for the first time, which will involve a great deal of responsibility and hard work. With fresh additions to the team and exceptional fans, RK Cimos Koper can also now reach the zenith of European club handball.

RK CIMOS KOPER PLAYERS FOR THE 2010/2011 SEASON:

Goalkeepers: Darko Stanić, Dušan Podpečan and Jure Vran

Outfield players: Bojan Skoko, Jure Dobelšek, Milan Mirković, Matjaž Brumen, Dean Bombač, Tine Poklar, Milorad Krivokapić, Sebastjan Skube, Matjaž Mlakar, Robi Konečnik, Uroš Rapotec, Vladimir Osmajić, Uroš Elezović and Zoran Jovičić

Slovenian national handball champions

1991–2011:

17 titles – RK Celje

1 title – RK Prule 67 (2002)

RK Gorenje (2009)

RK Cimos Koper (2011)

A RISING STAR

Slovenia is a basketball nation. In 1968, when Olimpija was one of the best clubs in Europe and in 1970, when Slovenia held the very high-profile world championship, women's basketball was still very much in the background. Actually, the Olimpija women's basketball team became national champions of Yugoslavia over 20 years ago but they have not achieved any impressive results in the last 20 years, either on the European or the world stage. Slovenia has contributed some outstanding basketball players to world women's basketball in the past: Sonja Mrak, Marjana Bremec, Metka Štoka and Polona Dornik, the last of whom won a silver medal at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul as a member of the Yugoslav national team. Dornik was born in Trbovlje, a place where great sporting talents are mined.

Nika Barič was also born in Trbovlje 18 years ago. She is the most promising basketball player in Europe today, although still very young. After displaying great talent at the age of 15, she began to play for Celje, one of the best women's basketball teams in Slovenia. While still a youth basketball player playing for Celje, she already won two state championship titles and three cups. Her

playing has impressed European women's basketball. She was declared the best female basketball player in all the European youth championships and the title of best European female basketball player under the age of 20, awarded to her by FIBA (International Basketball Federation), was yet further recognition of the extraordinary sporting talent of Nika Barič. Nika comes from a sporting family. Her father was a member of the first football league club, Rudar from Trbovlje, and it was in Trbovlje, which used to be among the top towns for Slovenian basketball, that she developed into such an amazing athlete.

From this autumn onwards, Nika Barič will be wearing the colours of Spartak Moscow, the second best team in Europe. Her future in basketball is secure. In a year or two, Nika could turn out to be the best female basketball player in Europe. This gives our national team a new dimension in European and world basketball, and maybe even a breakthrough at the top.

Remember the name of Nika Barič, the young basketball player from Trbovlje; she is currently the most promising young athlete in Slovenia.

Text and photo: Iztok Dimc

BRDA CHERRIES ARE THE BEST

Year by year, at the peak of spring, Slovenia becomes red again. Not because of Labour Day, but because of the round, red and delicious fruit that inundates the countryside and marketplaces in cities. So cherries predominate in the middle of May. Because of their shape and colour, the popular mind considers them a fruit of lust and erotica.

Diversification and density of cherry plantations all over the country prove that cherries hold a special place in Slovenia. Wherever one looks around in May and June, there is a wide selection of cherries with shades ranging from light and dark red to the sweetest black sorts.

“I Like to Eat Red Cherries, But I Prefer Black Ones”, a verse from a known Slovenian folk song reads.

For women, cherries have a touch of erotica; most men, however, believe that women are like cherries – beautiful and seducing on the outside, with a hard inner core that will eventually be reached. Despite their abundance, there is nevertheless a region where cherries in Slovenia literally reign and share their crown, depending on the season, with grapevines and wine.

This region is Goriška brda, the Slovenian Tuscany, hidden in a corner between new and old Gorica, between the Slovenian and Italian border, where only a narrow road corridor used to lead from the Slovenian side, but today is accessible from anywhere, with virtually no problems.

The region is a true paradise, and plants prosper. In the early spring, cherry blossoms cover the hills of Brda and soon mature into de-

licious red cherries. In the summer, peaches follow. Figs, apples, pears and plums prosper here as well.

Cherry is so important and respected in Brda that it even has its own all-day festival. There, cherries have the longest tradition of cultivation in Slovenia and cherry trees were often planted simply among the grapevines.

Cherries have always been a good source of income and used to be known all around the world, for example in Vienna and even in the Tsarist Russia. After World War II, production decreased due to the restoration of vineyards, but has increased significantly again in the last twenty years. Every year, in the middle of June, the inhabitants of Brda put their produce on stalls in Dobrova and present the Cherry in a procession with carriages in all its magnificence and history. Visitors can choose from a diverse choice of various culinary masterpieces made from cherries, such as compotes, jams, spirits, liquors, cherry wine, various desserts, etc. and, at the end of the day, the Queen of Cherries is chosen from among the girls of Brda, who then represents Goriška brda at various events and exhibitions, not only with her beauty but also with her knowledge of country life, cherries, wine and other produce. The Queen of Cherries symboli-



cally represents women of Brda, or 'Brike', whose characteristic image from the past includes full baskets of cherries that they carried on their heads to marketplaces near and far away.

Today, cherry is an important ingredient in modern cuisine and can be tasted in numerous recognised inns and restaurants in Brda and elsewhere in Slovenia. Irish beefsteak or dumplings in cherry sauce can be ordered, or pannacota with cherry dressing. Traditionally, cherry pie or cherry strudel is almost inevitable in every Slovenian culinary offer.

In recent years, the most well known variety of cherries from Brda, or more specifically, Kojško, is 'Briška hrustavka', which strives to win recognition all over the country as an autochthonous cherry variety cultivated in a natural and ecological manner. There are only three or four major producers in Brda, but there were many in the past who have since given up, since cherry is a rather sensitive tree. It is not pollinated if there is too much rain, and excessive rain later in the season makes the fruit crack. Picking is also a delicate pro-



Dobrovo Castle, the centre of Goriška Brda.



Goriška Brda, Slovenian pearl for all seasons.



The Mavrič Farm brand is the Briška hrustavke or Goriška Brda Bigarreau cherries, a symbol of first-class cherry products.



This is how the women from Brda used to carry baskets full of cherries on their heads.

cess, as the grower must have experienced pickers who know how to pluck cherries without damaging the tips. If picking is done incorrectly, the trees will not bear fruit in the following season. Birds taking their toll are a special story, as well as the passing tourists, who frequently treat themselves to fruit from trees too close to roads and cart tracks. They cause double damage to the farmers. Such practice is completely unnecessary, as everyone can have enough cherries to eat at the stalls, which are abundant along the roadside at this time of year. There is always a crate of cherries available for tasting.

Cherries are a fruit hard to resist, either on trees or on a plate. Their shape and colour excite our imagination, poets use them as inspiration for verses, their taste makes our mouth water, and delicious dishes can be prepared from them. Treat yourselves to cherries in Brda and you might get to know a new secret from the green hills above Gorica.



Delicious Irish beefsteak in cherry sauce, Evergreen restaurant.



Cherry strudel, an indispensable dessert in every Slovenian restaurant.

CELEBRATIONS OF THE NEW EUROPEAN COUNTRY

In mass media, there will be many reflections on the twentieth anniversary of Slovenia as a country, on the path we have travelled, transition, social justice and our international situation. The Fathers of the Nation will remember hard times and each of them will have his own story on the key lessons of the period. It is appropriate to take a look at the ritual side of the newly formed country, which distinctively unifies all the key social changes.



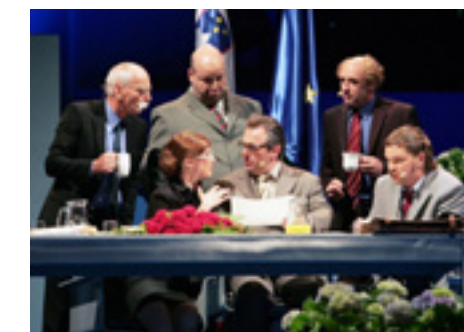
Political ritual, theatre and celebration, respectively, present a specific social model: it brings light to a series of clear images focusing on subjects from the past, present and future. Social, political and moral dilemmas, persons and events are transformed into symbols and stories that can be dramatised. In line with the Aristotelian tradition of European performance arts, a ritual is closer to tragedy than to comedy, as it involves dilemmas of the leaders (kings) and strives to reach catharsis of the community. In addition to the military and school systems, celebrations are the most powerful medium to represent political power, hierarchy



of values and the entire political society. Therefore, each authority dedicates a part of its mandate to a careful planning of mass events.

Slovenian celebrations of statehood can be divided into four to five periods. The first period lasted from 1991 to 1994, and was a time when painful consequences of the economic embargo showed, the time of mighty political disputes, of a search for sense, a pathway and merits in the new state of Slovenia. Due to the general nationalist atmosphere in the country and because of the official fight for power, celebrations directed by Drago Pečko, Igor Šmit and Roman Končar were devoted to great historical subjects. The chosen directors were looking for common foundations, thus, scenes based on Freising manuscripts, the Prince's stone, Primož Trubar and patriotic poetry from the 19th century were staged.

In the second period, from 1995 to 1999, the celebrations moved from Trg republike (Republic Square) to Cankarjev dom. The chosen directors (Janez Pipan, Barbara Hieng Samobor, Aleš Jan and Klavdija Zupan) were primarily focused on personal dilemmas and the search for protagonists, and the stage of Gallus Hall spontaneously emphasised classical theatrical approaches, not performance and spectacle approaches characteristic of outdoor celebrations. The scenarios addressed differences and common points between individuals and the community, between the collective and the subconscious, between the left and right political option, between



the new and old art. Because of the fight for economic and ideological domination, these celebrations also had a political echo, although they were the most artistic of all celebrations before and afterwards. There was not a lot of protocol. The jubilee celebration "Kons 5" in Republic Square in 1996 was particularly solemn and military-oriented, and director Matjaž Berger attracted a lot of attention and criticism. 2000 and 2001 were jubilee years. In 2000, the tenth anniversary of the first multi-party elections was celebrated, and in 2001, the tenth anniversary of the declaration of independence. Direction was again entrusted to Matjaž Berger, who produced a "civilisation spectacle" entitled "The Sower". Some were disappointed because he moved away from the established addresses that were patriotic in subject, but only such cultural context was suitable for the speech held by the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. In his address, he apologised to the present audience and television spectators for many bad things the German nation had done to the Slovenian nation. The appear-

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ance of President Milan Kučan and the German Chancellor as well as the cultural programme that followed announced the European future of Slovenia. They announced political consciousness, which they thought should exceed national interests and rivalry of the modern era.

For ten years, Slovenian elites strove to become part of the European Union, at the economic and business levels, at the level of administrative barriers for individuals, and with regard to development money that was expected to pour into the country at a greater extent. The pathway to the EU lead through Germany, the most important trade partner of Slovenia. The entire Republic Square was a stage and the audience was pushed to the edge.

After 2002, we were able to view more relaxed and joyous, less tragic and moral performances in the cultural part of the celebrations. Subjects and performers from popular culture were more and more frequent, and the stage itself was becoming an artistic achievement. Modern dancers, rock bands, big choirs and orchestras performed; everything was colourful and accompanied by national flags waved by audience members. The most distinct representative of this direction is director Katja Pegan, who prepared the 2006 and 2007 celebrations. Today, this is a norm.

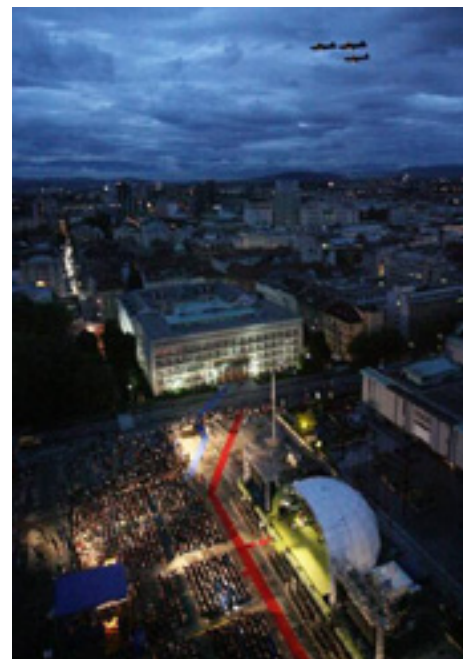
As a rule, people from Ljubljana participated in the preparations and execution of the Slovenian Statehood Day celebrations: educated at the Academy of Theatre, Film, Radio and Television, the Faculty of

Arts or the Faculty of Social Studies, and employed in one of the theatres, media houses or governmental institutions in the capital. Even the diplomatic corps, which is always present at celebrations, had its domicile in Ljubljana. These celebrations are therefore a medium of centralisation, of symbolic marking of the national territory (images and dances from different regions), of nationalisation of culture (particular turns into national) and of usurpation of the cultural heritage or history. All of the above served to reinforce the power of the governing political structures. Over an extended period of time, constants can be observed and meaning can be given to them, considering political rituals in other countries. The Slovenian celebration of statehood gets truly interesting when compared to others of its kind. Existential persistence in culture as its distinguishing element is demonstrated in all its glitter. Celebration and statehood cannot be imagined without culture. In the rest of the world, celebrations can be divided into monarchist and republican, military and civil, obscuring and uncovering.

Slovenian political ritual has always been organised in a republican and state-oriented way – through specific committees controlled by the Government, which is reminiscent of France and the Soviet Union. It glorified the magnificence of the nation and its ethnic and cultural connection (the Slovenian word for nation can be read as “for race”). It was tolerant and at the same time arrogant towards other political,

religious and ethnic identities within the community of citizens. It reached the stars with fireworks, and the heart with words and music.

Last year’s celebration, directed by Jure Zrnec, with its parodies in writing a script and the political negotiation around it, surprised us and made us laugh. It was a farce of everything that seemed self-evident and untouchable at the level of symbols and approaches to the scene. In 2010, the dominating theatre somehow revealed itself. Such aversion of statehood will probably not last, and can only be a short pause before the new construction of reality. Anyhow, let’s just wait and see.



Nadja Zupan Hajna, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

SLOVENIAN CAVES AND THEIR TELLINNESS



Volcanoes are a dream of every young geologist; in Slovenia, limestone, dolomites and Karst may be found almost everywhere, since carbonate rocks cover over 40% of the territory.

According to the Slovenian karstic terminology, a cave is an underground cavity that is passable by a human being and is longer than five metres. Currently (June 2011), 10,250 caves are registered in the Cave Registry of the Karst Research Institute at ZRC SAZU and the Speleological Association of Slovenia. The Postojna cave system is the longest with 20,570km, followed by the Kačna cave with 13,250km and the Predjamski system with 13,092km. The deepest caves in Slovenia are the Kanin massif caves, of which the Čehi II cave with 1,502m is the deepest, next is Mala Boka with 1,319m and the Renejevo brezno cave, with 1,242m.

Karst caves are usually the result of the corrosive extension of cracks in carbonate rocks, which occur along ruptures, cracks and lesions (by discontinuities between individual layers). Caves are actually underground channels, a product of rainwater running through the Karst. The tunnels may have been formed in the phreatic (saturated), epiphreatic or vadoze (unsaturated) zone. Each manner of running of the water forms various cave passages; during Karst development, these zones move downward, which results in a complex system of caves of various ages and forms. Exceptions are caves that, for example, result from the water running into the Karst from large depths, are warmer and contain H₂S or CO₂ in higher concentrations; such caves are called hypogenic caves.

Vertical abysses that are formed by rainwater are usually cracks extended by corrosion, and are some ten metres deep. On

high plateaus, level abysses that may reach great depths are frequent. Large horizontal caves were formed at the Karst water level and have been stable for some time. In this way, large sinking or outlet caves were formed in the river basin of the Karstic Ljubljana and along the underground current of the Reka River.

Big caves in the Ljubljana river basin between Postojna, Bloke and the springs of the Ljubljana near Vrhnika are the following: the Križna cave and Križna II cave, Golobina pri Danah, Karlovice, Zelške caves, Tkalca cave, Planinska cave, Postojnska cave, Logarček, Najdena cave and Vetrovna cave. The Postojnska cave is the longest and the most attractive Slovenian cave, as well as being one of the most famous Karstic caves in the world. The Postojnska cave system connects the following caves: Postojnska cave, Otoška cave, Magdalena cave, Črna cave and Pivka cave, each having its own entrance. The cave was formed at the contact of cretaceous limestone and Eocene flysch. The Pivka river stream disappears into the cave. It has an extensive tunnel system and abundant stalactite decoration, which has been attracting crowds of tourists for several centuries. Data obtained by means of various geological analyses indicates that Postojnska cave has gone through various periods of sediment depositing and erosion. Certain parts of the cave or tunnels were filled up and emptied several times during the rather long development of the cave; this is proved for example by cement alluvia on the walls of Stara cave, and elsewhere. The lengthy (assumed to be about 2 million years old) hydrological system, that was more or less stable, between Pivška kotlina – Postojnska cave – Planinska cave and Planinsko polje provided for the develop-



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ment of an extensive cave system with a complicated morphology in the relatively thin rock package.

The Škocjanske caves are 5,800m long and a 250m deep-water cave at the SE part of the Karst. On account of their huge channels, underground canyon, several collapsed dolines and extraordinary history of cave researchers, in 1986 the caves were included in the UNESCO list of natural heritage sites. The caves and the above surface are also preserved as a Regional Park. Old horizontal water caves that are leveraged above the water current level in the Karst become dry. Only a small quantity of rainwater can run through them vertically, which forms shafts, or excretes saturated water that forms stalactites. Denudation of the surface results in cave tunnels coming near the surface, until their ceilings are finally dissolved. Such caves are called roofless caves, which are sometimes difficult to recognise at the surface, since dissolution not only damages their roofs but also their walls.

In Slovenia, all caves, even those with entrances on private land, are national property and protected by law. Due to their geomorphological, geological, hydrological, zoological and botanical specialties, caves are important objects of natural heritage. Caves are very sensitive to human impacts. In isolated places, damage is permanent, their removal or overgrowing is very slow, particularly where there is no running water to wash it away. Even a minor change in the cave climate may stop the excretion of calcareous sinter, while specialised cave animals cannot escape such environmental changes. Unfortunately, numerous caves serve as waste dumps in spite of prohibitions.

For me, cave sediments are the most interesting. In general, they may be divided into autochthonous, which originate in caves (calcareous sinters, sinking materi-

als) and allochthonous, which are brought into caves from the outside. Their composition, graininess and sedimentation method reflects the climate and developments outside and inside the caves. We use various methods to acquire as much data as possible from such sediments, concerning their composition, properties, origin, transport as well as the environment and time of their formation or sedimentation. Allochthonous cave sediments are particularly important for getting acquainted with the environment of their origin before and after transport, and being deposited in the cave. Disintegration of the same rocks on the surface differs in different conditions (temperature, precipitation, pH, Eh). Decaying remains thus contain various minerals from the rest of the original rock to completely new minerals that reflect the environment of the rock disintegration. Considering Eocene flysch, which is a common rock in contact with carbonate rocks in South-eastern Slovenia, the remains of which were transferred in caves, the final decaying product is flint, feldspar remains and various clay and iron minerals that were formed under particular environmental conditions and are subject to changes over time regarding climate conditions in the environment.

However, in spite of all the research done in relation to caves and the studying of their content in Slovenia, there is still a lot that we do not know. There are still a number of unexplained questions in relation to their origin and development; if we add the number of 10,000 caves that we know, we can conclude that much work has been left for our descendants. And I must say that my eyes still glitter and I become enraptured in expectation of new information when I crawl through the unknown tunnels and when I am far away from our past notions that caves are dirty, difficult and completely uninteresting.



I FEEL
SLOVENIA

