

Sinfo

The Best from Slovenia

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SLOVENIA

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EDITORIAL

The holiday season has begun. This year, although there will be no traditional festive atmosphere in the city streets as we have been accustomed to in the past, there will be an opportunity to celebrate the holiday exactly where it should be celebrated. Among family and loved ones in the warmth of our homes, with gratitude in our hearts if we have all these things. And, at the same time, thinking of those who may not be so lucky. Despite being able to socialise only to a limited extent due to the epidemiological measures, it is still possible to find a way to bring joy to others who may be lonely, who are facing difficult financial situations or are perhaps even without anything, suffering from an illness or otherwise disadvantaged when compared to us. Let us use our imaginations as to how to bring joy to our fellow beings even in such difficult situations. Christmas is not about gifts, it is about expressing love, and spreading hope and trust.

One of the symbols of the holiday season is the Christmas tree – usually a spruce or a fir tree. This year, St Peter's Square in the Vatican will be decorated with a spruce tree from Slovenian forests, a beauty from Kočevska Reka. It will represent us as a green country, one rich in cultural heritage and symbolically also as a nation with long and successful diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Indeed, the Holy See was one of the first countries to recognise the independent state of Slovenia. In 2021, we will celebrate 30 years of an independent Slovenia, which is why this spruce is also a symbol of gratitude. In the second half of 2021, Slovenia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, and all of this shows Slovenia as an equal partner of other nations in the diplomatic world.

We hope you're healthy and stay healthy, both in spirit and body. However you feel, Sinfo is sure to help bring a smile to your face, as we always create it with love for all who read it.

I hope you have blessed Christmas holidays, and a happy New Year!

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Editor-in-Chief



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The new year is here. Let it erase the woes of the year gone by and fill you with hope and joy. Do everything that you think or dream you can do, as boldness is where genius, strength and magic can be found.

All the best from the Sinfo team



IN FOCUS

THE SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS TREE IS A MESSAGE OF PEACE BETWEEN NATIONS

Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

For the second time since 1996, a Slovenian Christmas tree will brighten up St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. The realisation of this kind of project is the best evidence to confirm that we can still succeed - even in these challenging coronavirus times.

The event is rich in symbolism, as the Slovenian Christmas tree will brighten up the central Vatican square as we enter 2021, which will also mark the 30th anniversary of Slovenia's independence. Moreover, the Holy See was among the first to officially recognise the young Slovenian state. The then Pope, Saint John Paul II, supported Slovenia's efforts on the path to independence. At this point, I would also like to recall the efforts of the deceased Dr Alojzij Šuštar, the Archbishop and Metropolitan of Ljubljana, and Dr Štefan Falež, the first Slovenian Ambassador at the Holy See. The gift of the Christmas tree will therefore also be an expression of our appreciation for the Holy See's support upon the creation of the Slovenian state.

It is noted in the strategic document of Slovenian foreign policy of 2015 that the Holy See is an important interlocutor in Europe and the world, whether it involves issues of peace, development, religious freedom, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, cultural identity, or humanitarian and other global issues emphasised by Pope Francis.

The Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See share their views in many areas. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives due consideration to inter-religious dialogue and the issue of religious freedom, as set out in Slovenia's foreign policy strategy.

While the coronavirus crisis dictates changed behaviour, the anchors remain unchanged. We have increased the intensity of virtual cooperation by maintaining personal meetings, which are an integral element of diplomacy. Moreover, virtual cooperation has enabled us to become aware of the importance of genuine personal contact. A virtual tree is beautiful in an email, but only a real Christmas tree – this time from Slovenia – can create the authentic Christmas atmosphere in St. Peter's Square. I feel Slovenia!

Christmas is also a time to reflect on the path we have taken. In 2020, the diplomacy of Slovenia was very active. In particular, we intensified preparations for Slovenia's presidency of the EU Council, strengthened the dialogue between the trio of presiding countries – Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia – and visited European capitals which we have not yet seen in 30 years of independence.

We also strengthened transatlantic dialogue. After 23 years, we hosted the US Secretary of State, we signed a joint statement on cyber security, and drew up everything necessary to upgrade the strategic dialogue between our two countries.

The plans for 2021 are bold, and a lot of work still needs to be done. I believe we will find many reasons for optimism under the Christmas tree. In the new year, we will be presenting an updated strategic document on Slovenian foreign policy. We will also be reopening our embassy in Dublin, which will be followed by the opening of two new diplomatic representations.

The Slovenian Christmas tree at the heart of Christianity is a message of peace. Peace between nations and safety – this is the core of the work of our diplomacy with a new self-confidence.

Merry Christmas and very best wishes for 2021!

Dr Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs



IN FOCUS

CHRISTMAS BRINGS A NEW HOPE

Photo: Jurij Palk/STA

Christmas is again coming to our hearts, which is very important for each and every one of us. Especially in a year that has been marked by COVID-19, which brought us fear, uncertainty, suffering, and pain. All this has made many of us confused, tired, and lacking in hope. In contrast, the Christmas mystery can open up new horizons and help us understand our lives in a more authentic way. God spoke to us by withdrawing from Himself and giving Himself to us. He thus showed us how we should interpret our lives: As a fruit of love and openness to others. God's child is coming to those of us who suffer from poverty and lack of solidarity. Such was the case over 2,000 years ago, and these two problems remain today. God's child is coming to us to bring to our world God's logic and with it a heart that sees, feels, and answers our distress and pain. When we accept God's logic, we no longer simply live next to each other, but rather see a sister or a brother in others, and build bridges from heart to heart. Christmas holidays therefore become those holidays that are closest to us due to their warmth and sense of home.

For me, Christmas begins when I embrace God's love. He does not come to us to take something away, to deprive us of anything; on the contrary, He is the one that brings us something. He brings new hope. He comes to warm our hearts, which are often ruled by the cold. He comes to bring us love for which He demands nothing in return. Christmas tells us that we need to place our hearts, our mutual relations, to the forefront. This applies both to our families, as well as to our communities, both near as well as far. Christmas then becomes a holiday of great sharing: God became a man so that every one of us could become part of eternal dignity and live life to all its fullness. St. Paul sees the Christmas mystery as the kindness and love of God, which is the fruit of His mercy, so that we could become heirs to life (Titus 3,4-5). To give oneself to others is the highest wisdom, that is God's wisdom. The human mind can find it hard to accept this logic, but without it we cannot walk on the path to the right and truthful life. The true message of Christmas is a message from the heart. From the newborn child radiates love and the closeness of God to humans. Whoever feels this, whoever accepts this invitation, makes themselves happy and may bring happiness to others. Celebrating Christmas therefore also means thinking of all the sick and elderly, especially those suffering from COVID-19, the medical staff who are working in our hospitals and care homes, drawing on their selfless love. We must also not forget about those who are lonely and seeking their purpose in life. Holidays give us the chance to show them some kindness, which God brought to the world with the birth of his Son. I hope you will feel in these holiday times that we are all loved and valuable in God's eyes, and that He is our hope. I hope this happy announcement of Christmas will reach as many people as possible, and bring them peace and happiness in their personal, family, and social lives.

Let 2021 be filled with health and happiness!

Alojzij Cvikl, Maribor Archbishop and Metropolitan



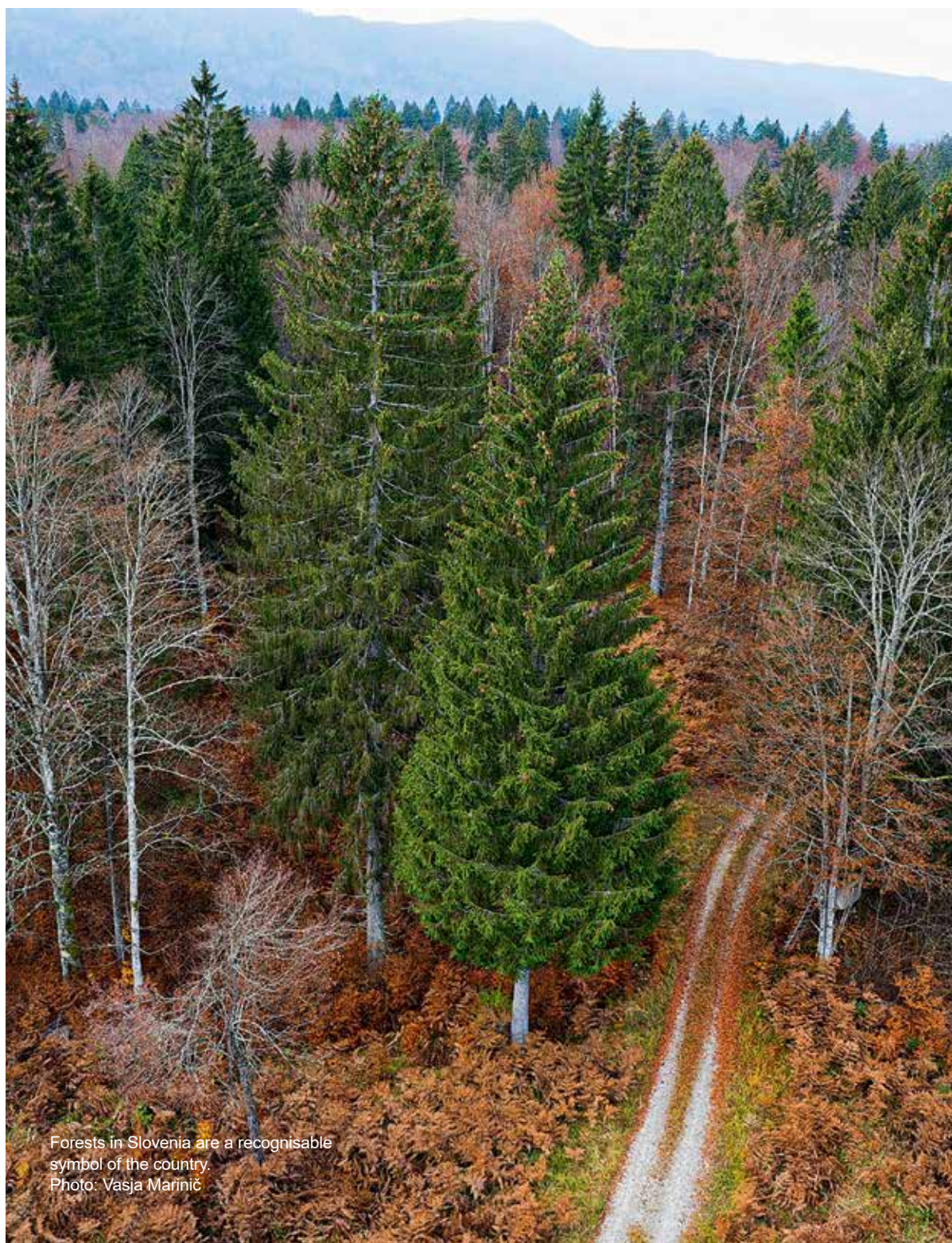
IN FOCUS

A SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE VATICAN

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ, DANILA GOLOB

THIS YEAR, FOLLOWING THE DECISION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND IN AGREEMENT WITH THE HOLY SEE, A SLOVENIAN CHRISTMAS TREE, A SPRUCE FROM THE KOČEVJE FORESTS, IS ERECTED IN ST PETER'S SQUARE IN THE VATICAN CITY STATE. IT IS DECORATED WITH HANDMADE SLOVENIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC ORNAMENTS.

Photo: Vasja Marinič



Forests in Slovenia are a recognisable symbol of the country.
Photo: Vasja Marinič

A Slovenian Christmas tree being put up in the Vatican, as well as the accompanying promotional events that took place, is an excellent way to promote Slovenia, especially in the light of the country's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2021. The project is managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. The opening ceremony took place in Vatican City on 11 December 2020.

A SYMBOL OF STRONG DIPLOMATIC TIES

The Christmas tree is a symbol of strong diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Slovenia.

As we begin to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Slovenia's independence in December 2020 and continue to do so throughout 2021, this will also serve as a kind of inaugural event.

Moreover, it is one of the international projects that will consolidate Slovenia's recognition in light of its upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU. Slovenia has been granted this honour for the second time, with the first being in 1996.

For the decoration of St Peter's Square, Slovenia provided a large spruce, suitable for a Christmas tree, which arrived in Rome on the 30 November. For the decoration of the Vatican, Slovenia also supplied 42 smaller spruce and fir trees from 1.5 to 6 metres high. Smaller ornamental trees are placed in the official premises. Slovenia also decorated the Vatican's rooms with Advent wreaths.

FORESTS ARE A SYMBOL OF SLOVENIA

Forests in Slovenia are a recognisable symbol of the country. And the country, through sustainable and multipurpose management, strives to ensure the continuous, optimum functioning of forests as an ecosystem, of biotic communities of plants and animals and their habitats, and the sustainable use and management of this resource.



Preparations for sawing the native Christmas spruce tree.
Photo: Vasja Marinič



The Christmas tree is 30 m high, 75 year old and weighs 7 tonnes and a diameter of 67 cm.
Photo: Vasja Marinič



The spruce tree has an FSC certificate.
Photo: Vasja Marinič



The arrival in Rome on 30 November.
Photo: UKOM archives



Christmas tree being put up in Vatican.
Photo: UKOM archives



The event is an excellent way to promote Slovenia.
Photo: UKOM archives

The Slovenian forestry system is based on one of the most sustainable approaches to forest management. Christmas trees from the Kočevje forests, which hold the FSC certificate for sustainable forest management, are therefore a symbol of the qualities of Slovenian forests and forestry.

The Christmas tree is 30 m high, 75 years old, weighs 7 tonnes and has a volume of 5.33 m³ and a diameter of 67 cm. The native Christmas spruce tree, as well as the remaining smaller spruce and fir trees, also hold an FSC certificate. The project of preparation and transport of Christmas trees is financed by the Forest Fund, one of whose tasks is the promotion of forests and forestry and the use of wood, wood products and forest-wood chains.

DECORATION

In addition to its green message, the Kočevje spruce will also spread a message of Slovenian ethnological heritage.

In deciding what ornaments are most Slovenian and therefore most suitable, Dr Janez Bogataj, an outstanding expert on Slovenian ethnographic heritage, was enlisted to help. The ornament design he presented was the hexaconch. It is one of the core elements used in Slovenian cultural heritage. It was most commonly used as an ornament and symbol on house beams, door panels and sides of chests. The orna-

ment is made of wood, which is also related to Slovenians. In addition to comet stars and a star in the form of a hexaconch, the spruce tree will also be decorated with a couple of single hexaconch stars.

Florist Dr Sabina Šegula, who, together with renowned horticulture expert Peter Ribič, has decorated the Vatican's rooms for Easter and Christmas for the past several years.

The main theme of the decorations was intergenerational cooperation. The decorations were primarily made at workshops.

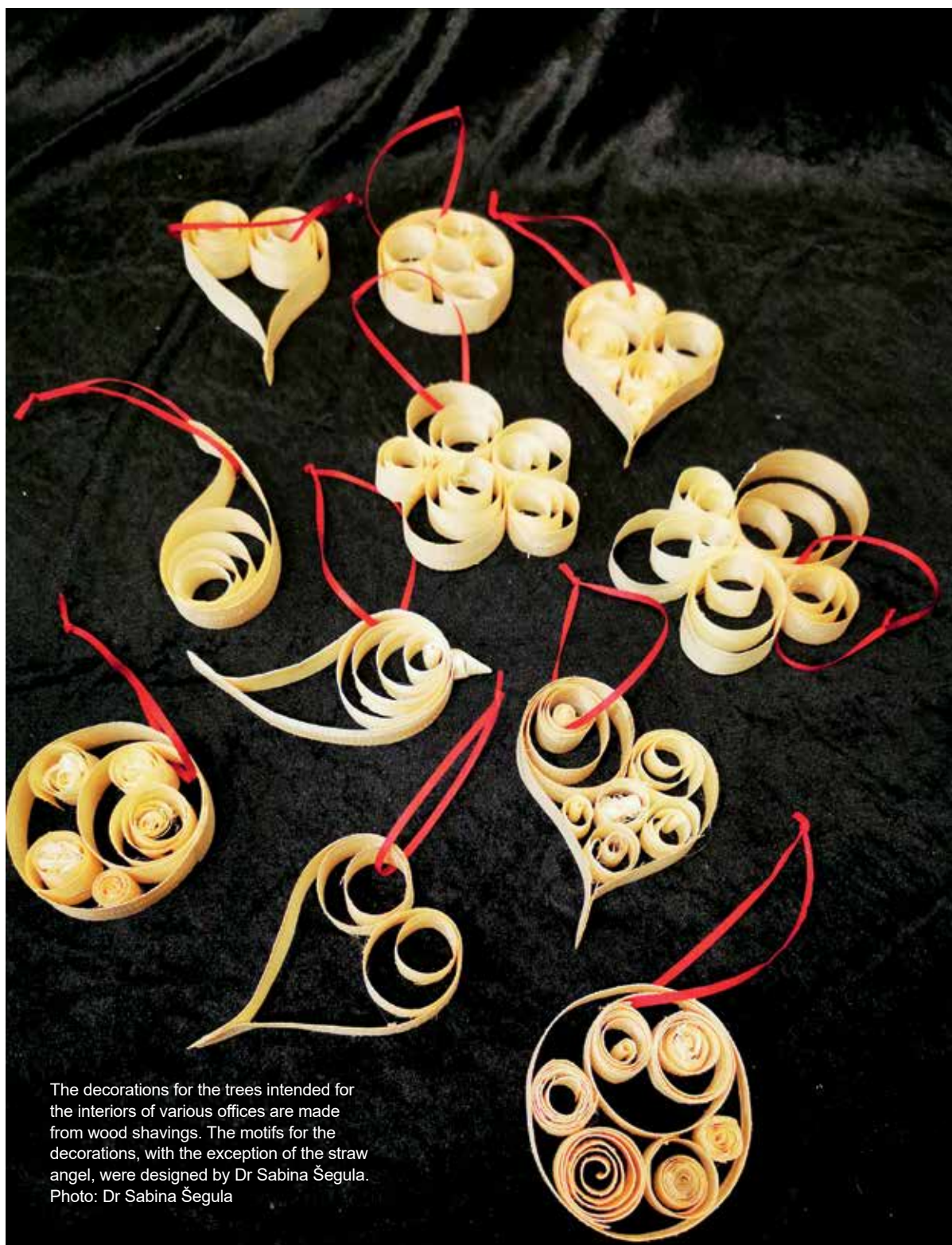
The outdoor trees that will adorn the Vatican are decorated with straw decorations, and those indoors are decorated with wooden ones. The decorations' motifs were designed by Dr Sabina Šegula, with the exception of the motif of the straw angel.



A circle with small rolls inserted inside – safe in the arms of the family.
Photo: Dr Sabina Šegula



Workshops were carried out all over the country at which mentors shared know-how about making decorations.
Photo: Dr Sabina Šegula



The decorations for the trees intended for the interiors of various offices are made from wood shavings. The motifs for the decorations, with the exception of the straw angel, were designed by Dr Sabina Šegula. Photo: Dr Sabina Šegula

Just like the hexaonch-shaped decorations, the decorations on the smaller trees also carry a special symbolic meaning. The straw angels represent our guardians against evil, while the straw snowflakes represent the snow-covered forests of Slovenia, as well as the peace and pureness of spirit that we associate with the Christmas season. Due to their unique shape, they are also a symbol of divine beauty. In addition to being a symbol of purity, they are one of new life. Just as snowflakes melt into water, people transform during the holiday season.

A real snow crystal takes the form of a six-pointed (hexagonal) star, to which the motif of the decoration on the large tree is connected. The wooden decorations also have interesting designs. The flower shape made of five loops – we can succeed together – symbolises the connection of the five continents. The circle with small coils symbolises the safety of being surrounded by fam-

ily. The asymmetric heart symbolises the individuality of people and how every single person can show love to others in their own special way. The stylised bird decoration symbolises the Holy Spirit, a symbol of freedom.

THE CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Since we are facing difficult times in this epidemiological crisis, the cultural programme did not take place in the Vatican's St Peter's Square, but was recorded in the studio of RTV Slovenija and was projected onto a big screen in the Square. The script for the event was written by Igor Pirkovič, and it featured the very best Slovenian musicians, from singers to instrumentalists. In the Vatican, the festivities began with a mass for Slovenia and an audience with Pope Francis, then continued in the afternoon with the cultural programme and the attendance of high-level guests.



Each snow crystal has the shape of a six-point (hexagonal) star. This connects it to the motif of the decoration on the large spruce. Photo: Dr Sabina Šegula



His Excellency Jakob Štunf
Photo: Personal archives

Putting up a Christmas tree in St. Peter's Square is an excellent opportunity for Slovenia to further enhance its visibility, not only in Rome and the Vatican, but across the world as well. We could almost say Urbi et Orbi!

The photographs of the Christmas tree and the nativity scene in St. Peter's Square, together with information on the country of origin of the Christmas tree, are seen around the globe every year. It goes without saying that there is always considerable interest in such cooperation, which is why I am especially pleased and proud that this year our country was given this opportunity, on the 30th anniversary of the plebiscite on autonomy and independence.

By putting up a Christmas tree on this anniversary we symbolically mark the centuries-long ties between the Holy See and the Slovenian nation, which were especially important at the time of gaining our independence. The Holy See and particularly Pope John Paul II have always strongly supported Slovenian independence. We will never forget it and we will always be grateful.

At the same time, this is a welcome opportunity to highlight the main direction of our future economic and social development – Green. Creative. Smart! Slovenia takes care of the environment, our common home, and firmly believes that the future must be based on the sustainable management of all our entrusted resources in order to preserve them for future generations. For our whole human family!

Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the Holy See

His Excellency Jakob Štunf



Photo: Dr. Sabina Šegula

The Slovenian Bishops Conference (SBC) welcomes this year's governmental initiative to provide a second installation of a Christmas tree in the Vatican as a sign of gratitude on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Slovenia's independence. The installation of this tree coincides with three anniversaries that are extremely important for Slovenia: the anniversary of the plebiscite, the anniversary of our country's independence and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Archbishop Alojzij Šuštar, who was the first president of the independent SBC to invest all his efforts in Slovenia to gain independence and one of the prime movers of the Vatican's international recognition of Slovenia. When in 1996 St. Pope John Paul II visited Slovenia, the provision of the first spruce Christmas tree from Slovenia was a sign of heartfelt thanks for his visit and recognition of independence, for which he personally advocated. In the spirit of the Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato si", this year's Christmas tree placed on St. Peter's Square at the Vatican will be a sign of common values such as striving for peace, nature protection, solidarity and caring for the poor. In addition to the Christmas tree, St. Peter's Basilica will be adorned by Slovenian florists, who have been working with the Holy See for many years. This year, they will be joined by many artists who will decorate the Slovenian Christmas tree with decorations made of domestic and natural materials. This will emphasize Slovenia's character of an environmentally friendly country as well as its commitment to sustainable development. On this occasion the SBC express their wish for the Christmas tree on St. Peter's Square to mark good interstate relations and a commitment to further constructive cooperation in the area of common interest.

Slovenian Bishops Conference



St. Peter's Basilica. Photo: Matthias Lemm/Pixabay

IN FOCUS

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND THE HOLY SEE

DANILA GOLOB

SLOVENIA HAS MAINTAINED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE HOLY SEE FOR ALMOST 30 YEARS; THEY HOLD SIMILAR VIEWS ON A NUMBER OF GLOBAL ISSUES, AND THROUGHOUT THE TIME HAVE ENJOYED FRIENDLY RELATIONS AND A REGULAR AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEIR RESPECTIVE HIGH REPRESENTATIVES.

The Holy See, which is the juridical personification of the Catholic Church, has diplomatic relations with 183 countries, the European Union and the Sovereign Order of the Knights of Malta. As many as 89 countries have resident embassies to the Holy See in Rome.

The diplomatic activity of the Holy See, which is considered to be a unique subject of international law, is related to important international political issues concerning the development of humanity.

“The Holy See is involved in many international processes, especially those relating to issues of world peace, respect for international law, protection of human rights, migration, economic and social development, protection of the environment and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the fight against poverty, trafficking in human beings and drugs, and the strengthening of trust and cooperation between nations and countries,”

said Jakob Štunf, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the Holy See in the Vatican, adding that all these areas are also priorities for Slovenia.

The Slovenian Foreign Policy Strategy also states that the Holy See is an important interlocutor in Europe and the rest of the world, especially in matters of peace, development, religious freedom, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, cultural identity, and humanitarian

and other world issues. In addition to bilateral relations, the dialogue with the Holy See also takes place in the framework of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.

The legal basis governing relations between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See is the agreement between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See on legal issues, which entered into force on 28 May 2004.

FOR THE SAFE AND FREE PRACTICE OF FAITH

Slovenia maintains and continuously strives to strengthen its relationship with the Holy See, which, with its moral and symbolic weight, has a significant impact on relations within the international community. In foreign policy, our country attaches great importance to respect for human rights, which also include freedom of religion and belief.

Slovenia has also joined the initiative launched by the United States regarding the exercise of religious freedom, especially in those areas where Christianity is the most persecuted faith.

It is an effort to ensure the safe and free practice of religion everywhere. Minister of Foreign Affairs Anže Logar noted at the conference of Slovenian diplomacy that this is also one of the country's priorities, and that he expects that our diplomatic and consular representatives will be even more active in this field in the future.

The Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia to the Holy See in the Vatican and contacts with the Apostolic Nuncio in Slovenia play an important role in the country's relationship with the Holy See.

TALKS WITH THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIO ON SLOVENIA-VATICAN RELATIONS

Prime Minister Janez Janša received the Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps in Slovenia, the Apostolic Nuncio to Slovenia, Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich in June 2020. In their talks, they affirmed the importance of relations

between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See, including in the light of two upcoming commemorations – the thirtieth anniversary of the Holy See’s recognition of Slovenia (2022) and the twentieth anniversary of the Agreement between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See on Legal Issues (2021). They also touched upon the far-reaching challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Apostolic Nuncio commended the Government on its very successful handling of the pandemic and its effective crisis management. The Prime Minister further exchanged views with the Apostolic Nuncio, who is also the Apostolic Delegate to Kosovo, on the situation in the Western Balkans.

The Pope’s visit would represent a recognition of our country’s activities in various areas of foreign policy, where we share views with the Holy See on a number of issues affecting all of humanity.

THE POPE’S VISIT TO SLOVENIA

The high representatives of the Slovenian state have invited Pope Francis to visit Slovenia several times and on different occasions.

“Apart from the pastoral dimension of the Pope’s visit, this would certainly be an excellent opportunity to exchange views on various topical issues in the international community,” said Dr Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs.



Both visits by Pope John Paul II to Slovenia, from 17 and 19 May 1996 and again on 19 September 1999, deepened relations between Slovenia and the Holy See. Photo: Robert Balen/Salomon 2000. Source: Government Communication Office



The Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the Holy See in the Vatican, Jakob Štunf, presents his credentials to Pope Francis on 5 October 2019. Photo: Servizio fotografico Vaticano

RECOGNITION SLOVENIA’S INDEPENDENCE

The centuries-old ties in the relations between the Holy See in the Vatican and Slovenia came to the fore particularly at the time of Slovenian independence. On 13 January 1992, the Holy See was among the first to recognise the Republic of Slovenia.

Particular credit for recognising Slovenia’s independence must go to Pope Saint John Paul II, himself a Slav, who understood very well the time and background of events in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s.

making it happen, woven from many official and unofficial ties spread throughout the world,”

said Jakob Štunf, Slovenia’s Ambassador to the Vatican’s Holy See. Shortly after the recognition, diplomatic relations were established between Slovenia and the Holy See at the level of embassy and nunciature.

“Rapid international recognition was a great success for Slovenian diplomacy at the time and for those involved in

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Slovenia, we also remember the support and benevolence of the Holy See on behalf of the independence of our country. A further opportunity to highlight the strong bond between the Holy See and Slovenia and to express our gratitude will be the installation of a Slovenian Christmas tree in St. Peter’s Square at the end of 2020.



IN FOCUS

Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

DECISION ON INDEPENDENCE PLEBISCITE TAKEN 30 YEARS AGO

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

AS WE BEGIN TO CELEBRATE THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF SLOVENIA'S INDEPENDENCE IN DECEMBER 2020 AND CONTINUE TO DO SO THROUGHOUT 2021 WE REMEMBER THE EVENTS OF THAT TIME. AT A SECRET MEETING ON 9-10 NOVEMBER 1990, THE DEPUTY GROUP OF THE RULING DEMOS COALITION, ELECTED IN THE FIRST MULTI-PARTY ELECTION SEVEN MONTHS EARLIER, TOOK A DECISION TO HOLD A REFERENDUM ON SLOVENIA'S INDEPENDENCE. THE VOTE WAS HELD SIX WEEKS LATER.

At the meeting in Poljče, a centre for defence training in the north-west, three members of a constitutional commission, philosopher Tine Hribar and jurists Peter Jambreč and Tone Jerovšek, joined forces with DEMOS leader Jože Pučnik to convince the MPs to back the referendum idea.

The then opposition, dominated by the reformed Communists, wanted the plebiscite to be held in the spring of 1991, but eventually accepted the December 1990 date. DEMOS meanwhile agreed to a provision that an absolute majority of all eligible votes be required to declare independence.

But the election outcome of the 23 December 1990 plebiscite substantially exceeded the 50% threshold; 93.4% of all eligible voters cast their votes, of whom 95% opted for independence, which translated into 88.5% of all eligible voters in the then socialist Yugoslav republic of Slovenia.

The legal basis for the plebiscite was a law on the plebiscite on Slovenia's independence, which was passed by parliament three weeks before the vote. The plebiscite result was declared on 26 December 1990, which is now celebrated as Independence and Unity Day, a public holiday. Based on the overwhelming referendum support, the DEMOS government launched preparations to declare independence. Six months after the vote, on 25 June 1991, the parliament passed the constitutional charter declaring Slovenia's independence from Yugoslavia.

On 6 December 1990, the Assembly adopted the Plebiscite Act and the people overwhelmingly voted in favour of the sovereignty and independence of Slovenia on 23

December. On 26 June 1991, Slovenia officially declared its sovereignty and independence. A ten-day war followed, which ended with a ceasefire and an agreement on the withdrawal of the Yugoslav People's Army from Slovenia.

The Demos Government led Slovenia after its first democratic elections in April 1990. It accomplished Slovenia's independence and laid the foundations for the country's development. Slovenia held its first democratic election to the 240-member tricameral Slovenian Assembly on 8 April 1990. The elections to the socio-political chamber, the most important body of the assembly, were won by the Demos coalition, which entitled it to form the Government. The Government, which was led by Lojze Peterle, was sworn in on 16 April 1990.

THE DEMOS GOVERNMENT SPEARHEADED SLOVENIA'S EFFORTS TO GAIN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Soon after being sworn in, the Government presented a detailed programme. The key parts of its strategic guidelines were ensuring an autonomous and independent legal system in Slovenia, the primacy of Slovenian legal acts over the legal acts of other countries, Slovenia's own state administration and public finance system, complete independence regarding the defence of the state and Slovenia's own armed forces, independent foreign policy, and an efficient economic system.

After that, events unfolded quickly. On 20 February 1991, the legal order of SFRY ceased to be in force in Slovenia. With the adoption of an amendment to the Slovenian Constitution, all articles of the Constitution transferring the exercise of sovereignty



Photo: Nik Jevšnik

ownership transformation of companies as the opinions within the Government, in the wider political environment, and among economic experts differed widely. Slovenia then decided in favour of ownership transformation in the form of certificates, which opened the possibility of ownership to many people.

The discord within Demos was becoming ever clearer; therefore, the National Assembly dismissed Peterle's Government through a constructive vote of no confi-

dence on 14 May 1992 and elected a new government of mostly centre left parties led by Janez Drnovšek (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia – LDS).

“After we gained independence and protected Slovenia from outside threats, a power struggle ensued within Demos, which overshadowed our common goals,” said Peterle of the main reasons for the dissolution of Demos. “The problem was that the Slovenian Democratic Union had different views on privatisation and did not support the Privatisation Act. This brought on calls for the replacement of the Prime Minister and the dissolution of Demos,” reflected Peterle.

Although this Government was in office for only two years, Peterle assesses that it achieved most of the goals it set for itself. “We declared independence, secured international recognition, introduced our currency, and implemented numerous democratic reforms that set Slovenia on its way to becoming a democratic country... In short, we achieved everything we dreamt of as a nation,” added Peterle. However, he is also convinced that Slovenia's democratic foundation would have been even stronger had the Government stayed in office for the whole four years.



The Government was led by Lojze Peterle who was sworn in on 16 April 1990.
Photo: Bor Slana/STA

to the Federation were annulled. In March, the Assembly adopted an Act stipulating it was no longer mandatory for Slovenian citizens to enter into military service in the Yugoslav People's Army.

The Constitutional Act implementing the Basic Constitutional Charter on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Slovenia and the Declaration of Independence were adopted in June, leading up to Slovenia declaring its sovereignty and independence on 26 June 1991. The Demos Government fulfilled its promise, while an (armed) struggle ensued for its practical realisation.

After the ten-day war and with the intervention of the European Community, the Brioni Declaration was adopted in July 1991, which was reluctantly agreed to by

the Slovenian leadership as it foresaw, among other things, a three-month freeze on the independence project. Nevertheless, it turned out to be the right decision and the momentum gained by the independence project could no longer be reversed. Belgrade also came to the same realisation and agreed to withdraw the Yugoslav People's Army from Slovenia. The withdrawal took place on the night of 26 October 1991, when the last Yugoslav soldier left Slovenian territory.

THE FIRST MAJOR DIVISIONS WERE CAUSED BY DIFFERING OPINIONS ON PRIVATISATION

In addition to gaining independence, one of the key tasks of the Government led by Peterle was the economic recovery of Slovenia. The transition to a market economy along with privatisation were significant challenges, which were only exacerbated by the severe economic crisis in the second half of the 1980s, high inflation, and the loss of Yugoslav markets, which forced many companies out of business and caused a rise in unemployment.

Problems also arose with regard to the



IN FOCUS

WHAT MAKES THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT?

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ, VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

DECEMBER IS A TIME OF GIFT-GIVING, COMING TOGETHER, ENJOYING THE COMPANY OF FAMILY AND REVIVING OLD TRADITIONS.

Photo: gmvozd-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto

During this time, Slovenian children look forward to the visit of at least one of the three good men, many of them of Saint Nicholas, but more and more also of Father Frost or Santa Claus. Christmas wreaths are hung on the doors or advent wreaths placed on the tables, and many Slovenians set up nativity scenes and decorate Christmas trees in their homes.

CULINARY DELICACIES

In Slovenia no Christmas holiday is complete without the traditional potica cake.

Of all the holiday breads, the most magical powers were once attributed to those made for this season. Each member of the family, including the animals, re-

ceived a piece, for it brought good fortune to the house, health to parents, rapid growth to children, and a husband for girls, while also fattening livestock, driving evil spirits from the house and protecting the homestead from lightning and thieves. Special powers were held by the ceremonial bread of Štajerska, known as *kuc* or *krhljak* (fruit bread). The Christmas bread of the Bela Krajina, Dolenjska and Notranjska regions was beautifully decorated with dough Nativity scenes and animals.

CUSTOMS

On the eve of the Feast of St Nicholas (from December 5 to 6), the custom was to put baskets or plates on the window ledge or table before children went to bed. In Slovenia, St Nicholas traditionally brings children walnuts, dried fruit, pastries and biscuits, as well as some small gifts. On the Feast of St Barbara, 8 December, or St. Lucia, 12 December, Slovenians have the custom of planting wheat grass, which sprouts by Christmas and then serves as a decoration or symbol of prosperity. In the period running up to Christmas, Slovenians place an

advent wreath on the table, woven from evergreen branches, and in some places from moss, adorned with candles, dried fruit or other simple decorations. The gradual lighting of the candles symbolises the growth of the good at this season.

Nativity scenes are an obligatory part of the Christmas atmosphere, alongside New Year trees.

In some parts of Gorenjska they still preserve the ancient custom known as "follow the bell," when people ring a bell through the entire village at 22:00 on Christmas Eve, inviting the locals to midnight mass. The practice of sprinkling holy water and lighting incense at home is very old, and this would supposedly protect the home, animals and fields from disaster, and summoning prosperity, health and a good harvest. The master of the house burned blessed wood in a pan, placing in it embers, incense and pitch. This gave the house a very pleasant fragrance. While walking around the home, the woman of the house prayed and sprinkled holy water with a spruce branch or other greenery, and the children followed their parents carrying lanterns or little candles.

New Year fir trees adorn Slovenian homes, streets and squares.

Each family decorates them in their own way. Some use natural materials, while others use traditional ornaments, but all have twinkling lights. A very old and typical custom is wassailing, where people sing carols for Christmas and New Year, and also enjoy cups of hot mulled cider from 24 December to 6 January. The Feast of St Stephen (28 December) is the day farmers traditionally dedicated themselves to this saint for the protection of their horses.

A special role and significance was enjoyed by "beaters", who also played their part on 28 December. On that day children went around the village at first light with St Nicholas sticks beating the adults.

On the morning of New Year's Day a woman was not allowed to be the first visitor to a house, for that brought misfortune. Moreover, in order for fruit trees to bear an abundant harvest, the farmer would shake the snow off each of them on New Year morning.

On the eve of Three Kings' Day the family would bless the house with incense and water.



St Nicholas brings children walnuts, dried fruit, pastries and biscuits.
Photo: Ente Breed/stock.adobe.com



The traditional potica cake.
Photo: Peter Irman/stock.adobe.com

Over the entrance the master wrote the initials of the three kings in the middle of the numbers for the year, such as 20 + G + M + B + 21. The inscription then had to stay above the door until the next year, a custom that is still practiced today. On that night Slovenian villages would be visited by Three Kings wassailers, who brought good wishes for health and happiness to the house.

The festive time of Christmas and New Year was over when the woman of the house stopped opening the bins in the granaries, as she would do during the Christmas period so that God's blessing would be called into them. She would sit at the bin and select only the best grains for seed, yet another seasonal tradition that looks forward to spring.

THE CRISIS SHOWS THE REAL VALUE OF WHAT WE TOOK FOR GRANTED

We have created a world in which greed and profit stand for strong values. However, the current crisis is holding up a mirror to our actions. It has forced us to

abandon activities that were, until recently, indispensable, such as consumerism, and revived the values of solidarity, closeness and empathy.

The pandemic has thus forced us to think of others, especially the elderly, lonely and poor.

When the situation returns back to normal, we will have a better understanding of what we took for granted and undervalued before the pandemic hit.

Yes, Christmas culinary delights and customs are an important part of every nation. But today's crisis gives a chance to prove that each nation has a soul, a heart, and that people are connected and care about each other. This is the true holiday spirit we celebrate this year.



Families make Nativity scenes at home.



The procession of children in festively decorated Ljubljana.
Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

IN FOCUS

FORESTS – THE GREATEST NATURAL ASSET OF SLOVENIA

POLONA PREŠEREN

I FEEL
SLOVENIA

Almost two thirds of Slovenia are covered by forests.
Photo: Ernad Ihtijarević/www.slovenia.info

“In Slovenia, green is more than just a colour; it is ‘Slovenian green’. It denotes our unspoilt nature and our determination to keep it that way. It symbolises the balance of lifestyles, and our common vision to go forward with the environment. The Slovenian green also describes our focus on the elemental, on what we feel with our hands. The Slovenian green speaks of the harmony of all the senses with which you experience Slovenia. These senses ensure that Slovenia is never remembered by images alone.

The memory of Slovenia combines the scent of the forest, the murmurs of the stream, the fascinating taste of water and the softness and warmth of wood. We feel Slovenia.”

This is what we wrote back in 2007, when the Slovenian national brand I feel Slovenia was created. Green as the primary colour was a obvious choice for its visual image. The forest is the most characteristic type of ecosystem in Slovenia, and forests are our greatest natural treasure. Forests provide us with an identity. Forests are our promise of a future and they improve our quality of

life. The forest and its green are two of Slovenia's most important, recognisable features – if we looked at our country from a bird's eye view, green would be the predominant colour.

The choice of colour for Slovenia's national brand was thus logical and unanimous – green.

According to public surveys, almost 95% of Slovenians agree that forests are an essential component and a

co-creator of the Slovenian landscape. Slovenians want a clean natural environment, and consider forests' various effects very important.

This is only natural, since some 60% of Slovenia is covered by forest. Slovenia is among Europe's most forested countries. For comparison, the world average of forest cover is about 30% and in Europe about 40%. It is also interesting that, in 1875, forests covered only 36.4% of present-day Slovenia, but due to regrowth on abandoned agricultural land this area increased steadily over the last century. Today, however, the Slovenia Forest Service observes that the increase in Slovenia's forested areas has mostly stopped after more than 130 years.



The forest and its green are two of Slovenia's most recognisable features.
Photo: Aleš Zdešar/www.slovenia.info

FORESTS AS A VALUABLE NATURAL FEATURE

Forests are home to many plant and animal species, and thus also an important element in maintaining biodiversity and offering a variety of benefits.

Wood and berries are among the most important ones, but the forest is also a place for recreation, relaxation and work. It helps conserve clean drinking water and acts as a carbon sink, thereby mitigating climate change. Slovenian forests play an important role in doing this on a global scale.

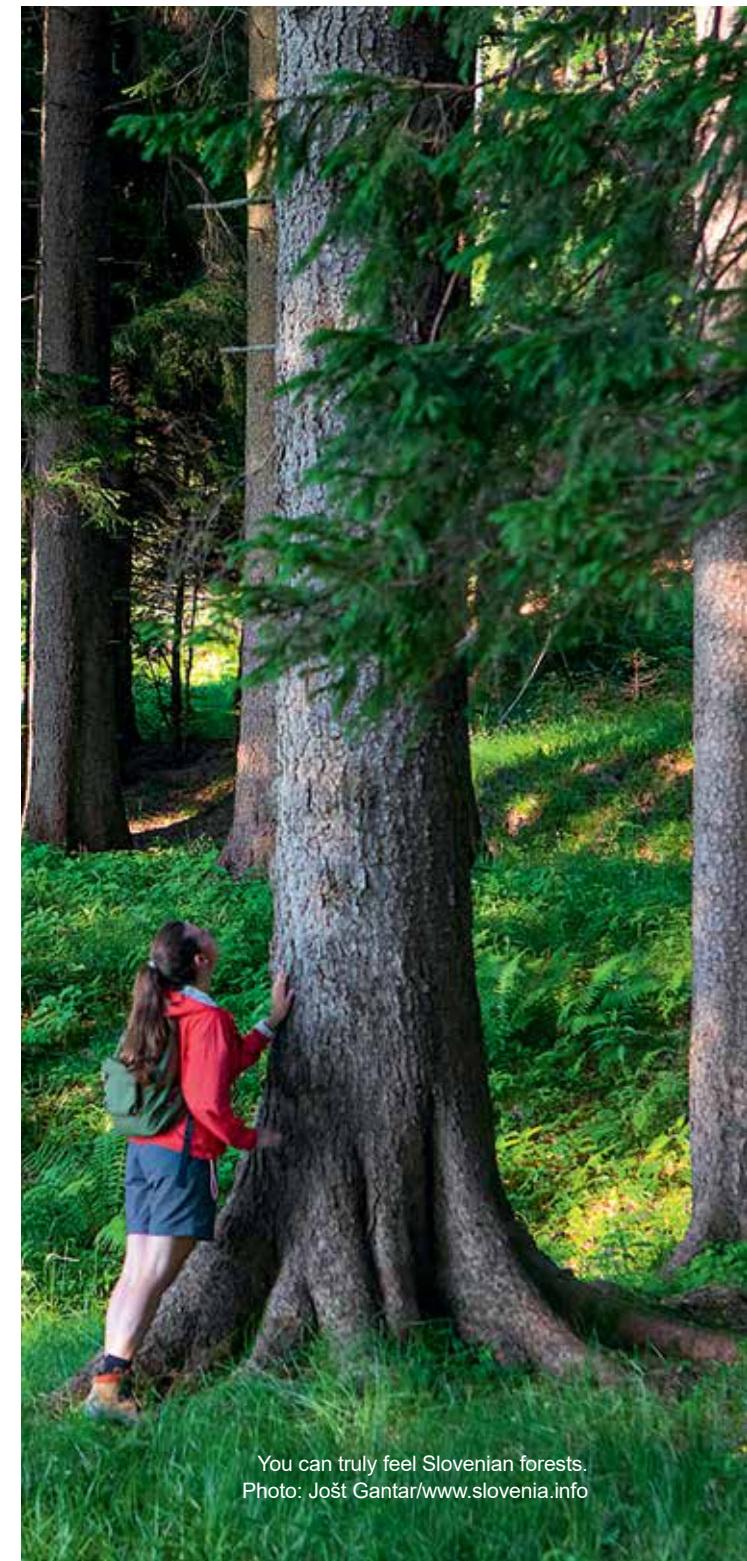
FORESTS AND TOURISM

Forests are undoubtedly also important in terms of the tourism industry. At least indirectly, their impact on tourism is great. The success of many tourist destinations depends on the presence of large, wooded areas, and the fact that access to forests is available to anyone, whereas this is not the case in some other countries. An increasing number of new recreational activities thus take place in the forest, which positively affects the sales of related leisure equipment.

FORESTS AND LEISURE

In Slovenia, forests are synonymous with a high quality of life, with recreational leisure activities that are extremely popular, as well as with places for relaxation. Even the middle of Ljubljana – the capital and home to approximately 270,000 people –, boasts Rožnik Landscape Park and Šišenski Hill, where 1.75 million visitors per year are recorded, including hikers, joggers, cyclists and others..

An increasing number of Slovenians are seeking a quiet moment in the woods, and spending their free time hiking, biking and engaging in other recreational activities in or nearby forests. Foraging for food is popular as well. Slovenians particularly enjoy picking mushrooms, chestnuts and blueberries. But beware: in Slovenia, the amounts that you can forage are limited by law.



You can truly feel Slovenian forests.
Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info

A spruce from the Kočevje forests
Photo: Peter Ribič

IN FOCUS

SPRUCE OR FIR?

PETER RIBIČ

AT THE END OF THE YEAR COMES THE FESTIVE SEASON, WHICH IS MARKED BY SPRUCE AND FIR TREES. IT IS THE TIME BETWEEN CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR WHEN WE SAY GOODBYE TO THE OLD AND HELLO TO THE NEW YEAR. THE DAYS ARE GETTING SHORTER AND THE NIGHTS LONGER. THIS REACHES ITS PEAK AT THE END OF DECEMBER AND ANCIENT PEOPLES BELIEVED THAT NATURE WAS DYING. TO ALLEVIATE THIS, WE USE THE GREENERY OF CONIFERS AND OTHER EVERGREENS IN DECORATING OUR HOMES AS A SYMBOL OF ETERNAL LIFE.

The spruce tree decorating custom originates in the Germanic world and it became fully observed in Slovenia sometime after World War II. Before that, in our region only Nativity scenes were set up, announcing new life, new times and thus a new hope.

In the period after the war, the use of the Christmas tree as a symbol of hope and a new beginning also spread across our country. Slovenia is mostly covered by forests, and the leading conifer is certainly the Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), so it is not surprising that most Slovenes use the Norway spruce to decorate their homes. We have different notions about it. Christmas fir trees, New Year's fir or spruce trees, however in Slovenian homes can be found both, trees and nativity scenes.

USAGE HISTORY

Greenery, as the main element of decorations, represents eternity. In these gloomy months of the year, the green colour itself reminds us of something fresh, something that grows, develops and represents life. If we only imagine the time after 1 November and leading up to the new year, when the world outside is blanketed in snow and cold, and when the trees lose their leaves, then we can say that which is green is life. Even in the Advent season, when Advent wreaths and other decorations are at the forefront, greenery plays a prevalent role.

The traditional Advent wreath of our region was woven from spruce branches with the addition of four purple candles and four bows of the same colour.

Spruce branches with their robust structure and low persistence did not last long, especially indoors, but unfortunately for many years there was nothing else to replace them.

WHAT ABOUT FIR?

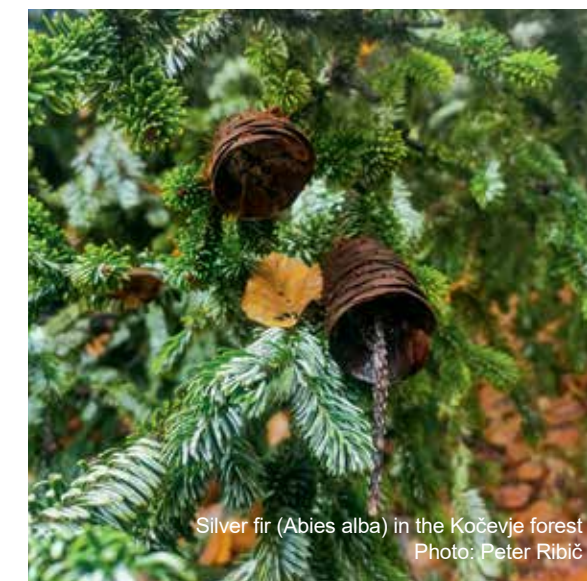
Silver fir (*Abies alba*) is an indigenous species in Slovenia, but it is displayed much less frequently. On one hand it requires fresh, nutritious and deep soil, and on the other hand plenty of air humidity. The largest fir stands in Slovenia are located in the south of the coun-

try, further extending into neighbouring Croatia. One of their biggest enemy is definitely deer, as they feed on young tree tops in the winter, eating them as a dessert. This is why in our region you will hardly find a beautiful, evenly and strictly pyramidal mature fir tree. At least not in large numbers. It is accordingly difficult to find a fir tree for Christmas decoration at our markets.

At large shopping centres its relative is available, the Caucasian fir (*Abies nordmanianna*), which from a decorative point of view certainly has the best properties of all fir trees. This is a fir tree that originates in the Caucasus (Georgia), while the largest growers of Christmas trees are located in the north of Europe. Today Denmark and Germany are the largest producers of these trees in Europe. Caucasian fir has become synonymous for durability, beauty, and dense and compact growth. With its long, smooth and brush-like lined needles with a blunt tip and wonderful scent, it has become synonymous with Christmas. Currently, this is the most beautiful example of perennial greenery for a variety of uses and, in addition, it will not shed needles after two months or more, even if it is not kept in a bucket of water.

MAY THE HOLIDAYS BE DECORATED TO YOUR TASTE

No matter what decoration we select, the most important thing is certainly originality and uniqueness. Nothing can replace the festive warmth in a home, a family gathered to adorn the Christmas tree and decorate it with everything they love. May this year's holidays be made to your taste, as they will remain in your fondest memories.



Silver fir (*Abies alba*) in the Kočevje forest
Photo: Peter Ribič



IN FOCUS

PRIEST MARTIN GOLOB - MODERN MAN IN CONSTANT SEARCH FOR MEANING

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

“TODAY MAN IS ABOVE ALL A GREAT SEEKER OF THE DEEPER MEANING OF LIFE AND EXISTENCE,” IS MARTIN GOLOB’S ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF WHAT HE THINKS OF MODERN MAN. HE MEETS PEOPLE WHO ARE WORN OUT BECAUSE OF THEIR WORK AND THEIR JOBS. SOME ARE IN DISTRESS DUE TO BAD RELATIONSHIPS.

People do not spend enough time together, they do not listen and do not talk; many children are left to themselves. Sometimes Golob has the impression that they are like orphans who spend too much time alone. He meets people who are extremely worried about tomorrow, and the coronavirus has only caused them increased fear.

He recommends that we should not forget to live, and should not be isolated from the rest of the world because of the current situation.

And what does Golob think modern man misses the most? “Time for himself and for those who are closest to him and also deeper relationships,” Golob answers carefully. Good relationships can motivate us, give our lives a boost, while bad relationships make us depressed. That is why he himself always seeks out the company of optimistic people.

He has noticed that people miss simplicity, that they just want to be people.

Golob believes that we live in a visual world, and that via television and the internet we receive hints and tips on how to become idealised versions of ourselves, and thus we become tired, striving for perfection. Not everything needs to be perfect. “Values such as peace and solitude are also increasingly appreciated in tourism,” he adds.

He is also convinced that today people criticise too much, they simply blame others for their mistakes without any real reason for doing so.

Golob also believes that we live in a time which lacks a philosophy of

life, a profound culture and real art that could be compared to ancient art. But he maintains his optimistic attitude and goodwill, which seem to be contagious to people around him.

POSITIVE ENERGY COMES FROM FAITH

Faith gives energy, as do the many opportunities in our current lives, which will grow into something beautiful. In the present period of great saints, Golob looks at the world optimistically, because, as he says, living with a pessimistic attitude prevents you from moving forward. “We are in this world to live a full life and to create,” the priest tells us decisively, with a smile on his face.

Golob took over the position of pastor in Grosuplje two months ago. He loves this place very much. Before he came to Grosuplje, he had served in Srednja Vas v Bohinju, in Vrhnika and in Zagorje ob Savi for five years. What does he like most about his profession? “Contact with people and freedom.

I am here for the people. To be a human to a human. I really care about people. This is the most wonderful thing.

And also faith, which means a lot to me personally, so I tell people that it is good to have faith, I encourage them to believe in God. In this context, religious education and preaching are also important.”

Where does he get his energy from? “From faith,” says Golob, “I am free in what I am and happy with what I do”. Even if not everything runs smoothly, he is always ready to grit his teeth and move on; sometimes he also needs to ignore what others say, it just goes in one ear and out the other, he comments. As he is a priest, everything is granted to him, he explains, he has no sal-

ary, all he has is the donations of people who voluntarily donate for mass or other events. Golob is grateful to have an office in which he works every day, and even if it is not his own, he can use it.

He gets positive energy from all those who show him their gratitude and attention.

But he also gives his energy to others. The money he got for his car, which he sold at auction, he donated to Caritas. He has been given everything and does not



He maintains his optimistic attitude and goodwill, which seem to be contagious to people around him.

need much, Golob says. He is not worried about the future; he keeps in good shape through regular exercise and particularly likes mountain hiking, running and cycling. These activities clear his head and relax his mind. Golob also regularly visits his parents and five brothers in Šmartno pri Litiji to help them on their large farm. If he is free at least half a day, he goes home. The last time he was at home, he spent two days on the tractor, harvesting corn for silage, which he says was great therapy for him. "Direct contact with the soil and nature gives me energy," Golob explains, smiling. He grew up on a farm and knows how hard farm work is and how much milk a farm must sell to buy a tractor. He is aware that one person alone cannot do everything, and therefore needs help from others. Golob's guiding principle is that we can achieve much more if we work together.

SLOVENIANS ARE A CHARITABLE NATION

Martin Golob is fascinated by the willingness of Slovenians to help others. This has been demonstrated time and again. There are not many other countries with such a high number of voluntary firemen societies, charitable foundations or voluntary contribution funds. During his work in different parishes, the pastor has learned that people are good by nature, but he also knows that Slovenians can be malevolent, gossiping and jealous, and to often like to compare themselves to others.

"If we could avoid arguing over things, we could live just as in Heaven," he believes.

Golob thinks that we should tame our egos and that we do not always have to be right. He looks at both the world and the people in it in this way. "Because God also constantly instructs me to be humbler," he explains. Did Martin Golob know from the very beginning that he would become a priest? "Not really," he says, "I had always wanted to be a farmer, I used to dream about having a farm, but I would miss people too much. I like being with people – this is a far bigger challenge to me than spending the time on the farm among the cows, which is not necessarily to say that it is easier," Golob adds. Besides, the pastor in his village set him a good example – everybody liked him and his positive character had a strong impact on the young Martin's plans for the future.

LIVE STREAMING MASS ON FACEBOOK

In the first wave of the epidemic Martin Golob became a real internet celebrity when he started streaming mass from his parish church in Bohinj on Facebook. Almost 2,000 users watched the holy mass live online, and several thousand watched the ceremony later. Mass could be watched every day at 7.00 p.m.

At the Easter Mass as many as 6,300 people were present. Martin Golob held mass via Facebook for 52 days; during that time he received many letters in which people expressed their distress and asked for help.

He could not possibly imagine that a new platform such as Facebook could connect people to such an extent. People found new contacts and made new friends. For Golob this was a completely new experience.

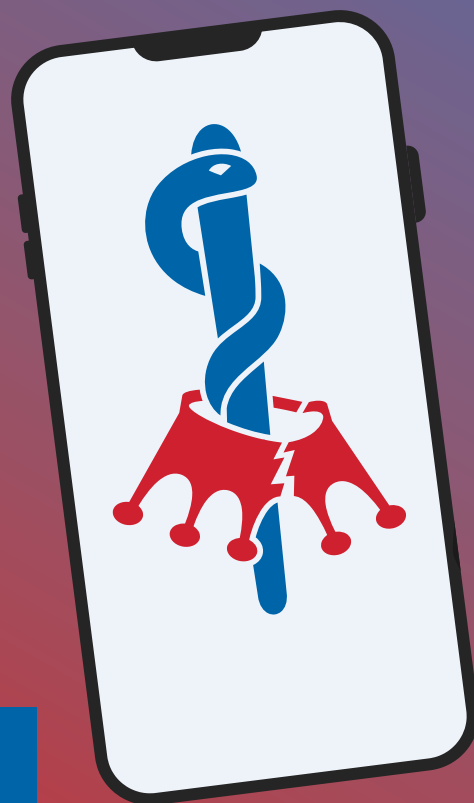
The pastor also loves to work with children. "They teach you to be direct and honest, and if you work with children, you avoid the risk of becoming weird," he says laughingly. Golob knows most of the young people in his parish, he greets them and talks to them, and does not blame them if they do not come to mass. They are still his parishioners and he knows that maybe one day they will come by when they need him. None of them is an outcast.

If he had to decide over again what to do with his life, he would take the same path. To start young, to be with people and to work. This is a mission; this is the way you must live. Martin Golob is grateful that people trust him and that they talk to him about themselves. He is aware of his great responsibility and constantly questions whether he is worthy of that trust. Personal contact always helps, but it by no means dictates anything. He allows for the possibility that everyone can decide for themselves which path to take. "I myself consistently try to do my best, and then God can decide how I should proceed," Golob tells me as our conversation reaches its end.



"We are in this world to live a full life and to create," the priest tells us decisively, with a smile on his face.

STAY HEALTHY



#OSTANIZDRAV (STAY HEALTHY!) APP

TEA KNAFLIČ

DURING THIS PERIOD, IN WHICH THE WORLD IS FACING THE NEW CORONAVIRUS, EVERY COUNTRY IS DOING EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO KEEP ITS CITIZENS SAFE, MAINTAIN ORDER AND STABILITY AND ALSO STRENGTHEN ITS ECONOMY. HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN UNINTERRUPTED DAILY LIFE AND A SITUATION WHERE WE MUST CONTAIN THE VIRUS TO PREVENT IT FROM SPREADING? EACH COUNTRY FACED THIS CHALLENGING TASK IN ITS OWN WAY. HOWEVER, ONE OF THE DECISIONS MADE BY MOST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WAS TO DEVELOP AN APP THAT SIMPLIFIES THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING NEW INFECTIONS.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE APP

The application for the identification of potentially infected people was first used in Austria, very soon after the coronavirus outbreak. This was soon followed by Norway, France and other European countries. While commending numerous European nations for their rapid and positive reactions, we nevertheless realise that there is still room for improvement; in particular for a single app that would cover all EU member states, as the different apps for each country are currently incompatible with one another.

SLOVENIAN APP - #OSTANIZDRAV

RSteam developed the #OstaniZdrav app in Slovenia. The company was imaginative in adopting the open source code that was already used by the German app Corona-Warn-App and then implementing it. This also enabled quicker access to the app for all Slovenian citizens.

The app is free in Slovenia, and its use is voluntary. Its aim is easier detection of new infections, a shorter reaction time between an infection and self-isolation, and the containment of the virus to prevent it from spreading to others.

Slovenians naturally had a number of concerns regarding the app's safety and mode of operation, so it's important to stress that the software's source code is open, meaning that any computer expert can verify its security for themselves without any problems.

THE APP IS SAFE

The #OstaniZdrav app uses a decentralised system for data collection, meaning that data is collected on the phone itself. This data is then erased automatically from the phone after fourteen days. Data therefore cannot be

collected in an uncontrolled manner, and cannot serve any other purpose. The app also has no access to location data, e.g. to the phonebook or other data on your phone.

FUNCTIONING OF THE APP

Upon meeting another person your smartphones exchange a random transmission code automatically via Bluetooth. Your phone also records the duration of this contact and the distance maintained between you and the other individual. In the event of illness this data is used to calculate the level of risk for the transmission of infection. The phone sends the encrypted keys of the devices that it comes into contact with to an external server on a daily basis, enabling the app to verify whether a person has come into contact with another person whose infection was confirmed.

In the event of a positive COVID-19 test the individual in question decides for themselves whether to enter the TAN code that they received during their test and thus inform all the others using the app. The app will verify whether the COVID test was actually positive and then notify all other devices that were in contact with that person's device over the last 14 days.

The app provides others with information on the level of risk to which they were exposed, and gives clear instructions how to proceed.

For personal data protection reasons no one learns the identity of the individual in question or the location where the potential infection took place.

The app has therefore been certified as safe and ready-to-use. It is available for smartphones running the Android system and also for those running the iOS operating system. How we take advantage of modern technology to combat the new coronavirus mostly depends on the willingness of all of us to cooperate. However, let's not fool ourselves that the app alone is the solution to this difficult situation, it's only a part of the answer. It is crucial, as always, that every individual acts prudently and understands that this issue affects each and every one of us, and can only be solved together.

STATEMENTS MADE ABOUT THE #OSTANIZDRAV (STAY HEALTHY!) APP



Photo: Danijel Novaković/STA

Dr Mitja Štular, court-appointed expert for telecommunications:

“The app operates such that each phone that has it installed transmits a random identifier, i.e. a series of numbers and characters. All devices in the vicinity of this phone store these random series or identifiers. It should be noted that this identifier has no data that reveals the absolute location of the device, meaning that whether we are in Koper, Ljubljana or Murska Sobota, the two phones exchange exactly the same random series. These series also do not contain any data on the user’s identity, nor on the identity of the device that sent them. If the user of a phone gets tested and finds out that they are infected with the coronavirus, then once their consent has been provided the app confirms that all the random identifiers that the app used over the past 14 days will be transferred to a server. This server therefore only stores the lists of ‘infected’ identifiers, or identifiers for which it was subsequently demonstrated that they had been used by phones whose users were infected. Each app regularly and continuously transfers this list of infected identifiers from the server to the phone, and then calculates whether the phone, and thus the user, was in the vicinity of another phone whose user was later proven to be infected with the coronavirus. If the app on the phone calculates or determines that the likelihood of proximity is significant and the risk material, it warns the user and instructs them how to act in that case.”

“The most important aspects of this concept are as follows. First, that the app is distributed, so the entire concept is distributed in the sense of 99% of all data is only on your phone, and definitely not on a server. The server only contains data on infected identifiers; there is no data on the absolute location of people and devices, nor on identity, while no data is available as to which other users were in contact with those that had been infected. The second most important aspect is that the entire software for this app is open-source, and thus the entire professional public is able to verify the app line-by-line, and whether there are any possibilities of abuse. Overall, it is extremely important that the app will be used by a large number of people, and this means by as many people as possible. Only then can a sufficient database be created that will enable us to detect an infection or the potential proximity of someone who has been infected at a sufficiently early phase, even before a person who could be infected has transmitted the virus forward to those around them. Anyone who receives a notification from the app revealing that they might have been in contact or in the vicinity of someone exposed to a high-level of risk, they will then be able to act immediately, thereby preventing the spread of the virus. It is important that people are not afraid, and it is important to recognise that the technical concept underlying the app gives no reasons that could be used by anyone to advise against using it.”



Photo: Anže Malovrh/STA

Prof. Dr Mojca Matičič, Department of Infectious Diseases at the University Medical Centre in Ljubljana and professional mentor to students working at the call centre for coronavirus information:

“We live in abnormal times that have been impacted significantly by the new coronavirus. It is true that we have won the initial battle, but the war, as it seems, has just begun, and unfortunately we have no effective weapon in the form of a drug or vaccine to fight it. However, what we do have that has proven to be effective is our behaviour that can prevent infections. In these times we can do one of two things: we can turn a blind eye that jeopardises our own health and lives, and those of our loved ones, or we can regularly adapt our own behaviours, depending on where, in what way, and how much time we spend in contact with different people. Potentially we can be at risk anywhere, from anyone who can be infected and is not aware of this, or does not reveal their infection. It is precisely for this reason that the app helps immensely, as it warns us if we have been in contact with someone who was infected. Knowledge of this then gives us the option of self-isolation, thus preventing harm to ourselves and others. The app is anonymous and free. It offers important information with which we can prevent a tragedy from occurring. As a Slovenian citizen and doctor, I have a great responsibility to use the app as it is available for my own benefit, the benefit of others, and ultimately for the benefit of us all, as health is our greatest asset. Let’s be responsible and protect health for ourselves and others. This will only get easier by using this app.”



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

Dr Veljko Pejović, Researcher and lecturer at the Faculty of Computer and Information Science:

“I think it is a good thing that the issue of privacy protection is being discussed. Specifically, this is an app developed on the basis of an open protocol. It was developed by multiple European universities and the German version has already been implemented. However, it’s concerning that the data on contacts, which the device gets when it pairs with other devices on its wireless network, is only stored on the device itself. So there’s no central database that would allow a country to reconstruct these contacts. It’s an app that allows individuals to obtain information about whether they’ve been in contact with a person whose infection was confirmed. It’s not an app that would, for example, enable the monitoring of someone under quarantine or verify whether that person is complying with the terms of the quarantine. As I understand it, the app will not require any personal data from users. However, such a fear is certainly justified, and it’s good that concerns are being discussed. It was precisely the public’s reaction in this regard that ensured that the specifications of the app were so well planned. Our concern for privacy enables us to achieve better results with the efforts of both the government and market. As a researcher in this field I hope to continue this discussion on other apps that we use daily. These apps provide a large amount of our personal data to foreign corporations. I will install the #OstaniZdrav app immediately.”



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

Dr Aleš Rozman, University Clinic Golnik:

“Infection with the coronavirus does not concern me personally, as I am not part of a group that is particularly at risk. However, I am concerned about infecting my parents or the patients at the hospital. The disease would likely have a significantly worse outcome for them. We constantly carry our mobile phones, as we use them practically all day long, meaning that ‘Big Brother’ knows where we are all the time. Now, with the corona epidemic being here, I also installed the app to my phone so it warns me if perhaps I’ve been in contact in the previous week with a person who was infected, and I hadn’t been aware of this fact. It would also warn my contacts anonymously if I’d fallen ill and they’d been in contact with me. This way I could isolate myself for the next couple of days and thus prevent others from being exposed to the infection, primarily protecting my parents and vulnerable groups of people. I like to live freely, but responsibly. I don’t want anyone to end up in an intensive care unit or even die because of me.”



Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

Prof Dr Bojana Beović, Department of Infectious Diseases at the University Medical Centre in Ljubljana:

“This app is beneficial to everyone who uses it, helping them recognise that they’ve been in contact with someone who was infected, so they can thus act appropriately. This means that a person will be able to distance themselves from those who could have contracted a severe form of the disease, in addition to being able to identify their own symptoms and seek medical assistance at an early stage. The app runs completely anonymously, and identities are not revealed to those that are infected, nor to those that gained information about coming into contact with an infected person. A person who received information about being in contact with someone who was infected does not know the identity of that person, nor when and where this contact occurred. Instead, they just receive a message about being in high-risk contact with someone who was infected. That way they can make sure the infection does not spread further.”



Photo: Danijel Novaković/STA

Dr Mateja Logar, Department of Infectious Diseases at the University Medical Centre in Ljubljana:

“This app certainly enables each individual to know if they are in an environment in which they could potentially contract the infection. It allows that person to remove themselves safely from this environment and disrupt the high-risk chain in order to prevent the secondary transmissions that we are most afraid of. I will definitely install the app, as I see it as an advantage. You can never know when you’re in contact with someone who’s infected, especially when they don’t show any severe symptoms. This means that a person could experience a mild form of the disease or does not even try to conceal it. This app will definitely have a positive impact with regard to avoiding such cases.”



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

Jernej Kunter, TV and theatre actor:

“The #OstaniZdrav app is extremely important in order to stem the new coronavirus. Our common good and the health of all Slovenians are at stake. So I’ll definitely install it. I suggest you do too, as we’ll only be successful in this battle if we act collectively. Let’s make responsible decisions and stay healthy.”



Photo: Anže Malovrh/STA

Dr Matjaž Jereb, Department of Infectious Diseases at the University Medical Centre in Ljubljana:

“As a citizen and physician I personally support this app, as it helps us obtain information about being in contact with an infected individual and also act accordingly. We can thus perhaps stay one step ahead of the infection, but mostly the app helps us protect ourselves and close relatives, our children and parents, who, ultimately, could die from this infection. If we receive a warning from the app then we can be careful not to socialise with them, thereby preventing the spread of the infection. It is a fact that we got through the first wave of the epidemic relatively unscathed, but today we again face a spike in the number of infections. I am afraid that the second wave is imminent. It is thus important to take advantage of all the tools available to fight the spread of #COVID19. I strongly believe that the app is one of the tools that can help us effectively battle the virus.”



Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

Igor Zorko, Vice-President of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and President of the Information Technology and Telecommunications Association:

“The corporate sector mostly wishes to take advantage of technology and digitalisation to create safe, healthy and friendly environments for employees. That is why we believe that apps like this one are very important, because they can help us achieve this. As for me, I immediately installed the app as soon as it was available, primarily to protect myself and everyone in my vicinity by knowing when I’m at risk and if I’ve been exposed. I try to avoid certain places where I could get infected. I was already tested, with a negative result, as I’d fallen ill, and I hope that everyone who has been found positive for the virus is entered in this app, thereby warning others who want to stay safe and preventing the spread of the virus.”

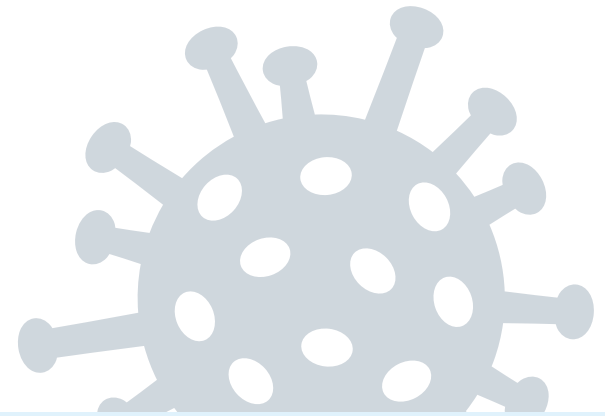


Photo: Danijel Novaković/STA

Ana Soklič, singer:

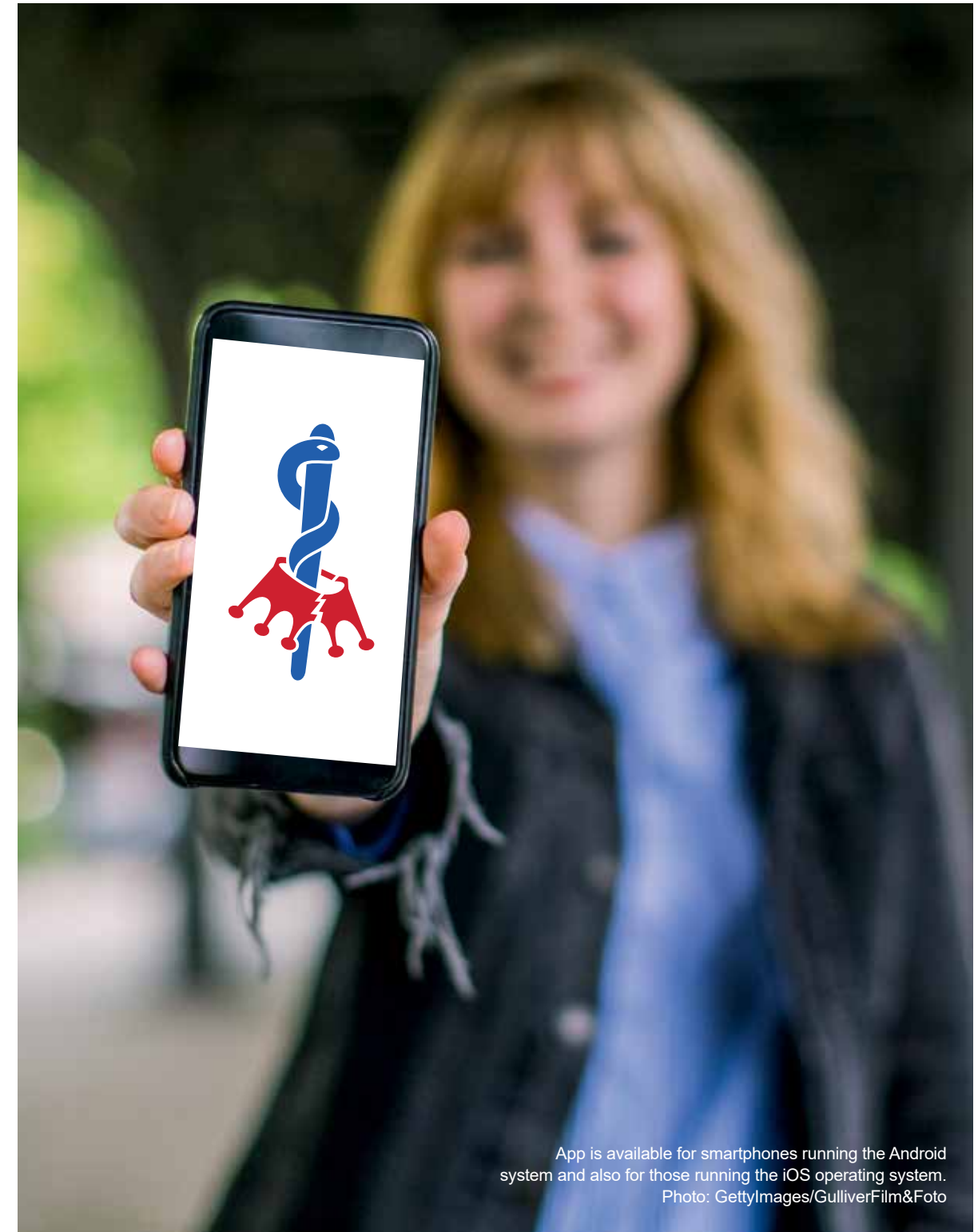
“Most people download apps that follow their every move without hesitation if they’re for entertainment or to pass the time. However, when our health and the health of the most vulnerable is at stake, we selfishly take offence at this and look to various conspiracy theories. I will download this app because I’m concerned for others. If by doing this I only save one life or a serious illness from affecting grandparents, or a mother or father, I will know that this icon on my phone paid dividends.”



Photo: Bor Slana/STA

Prof Dr Adolf Lukanović contracted the virus at work at the outbreak of the epidemic. He had certain catarrh symptoms with no elevated temperature, and within a few days was hospitalised at the Department of Infectious Diseases, where he spent almost two months on a ventilator:

“Today we know that there are over 20 million people infected globally, so something needs to be done in terms of prevention, early detection and the management of measures to stem this epidemic. The measures implemented to date, such as the wearing of face masks, washing and disinfecting hands, avoiding large groups and crowds and maintaining distance, have proven to be insufficient globally. All signs point to a second wave approaching that could also bring major economic shocks globally. All the proposed restrictive and preventive approaches are therefore appropriate. This includes an app that can be downloaded to your smartphone that maintains privacy, and all those who oppose this implementation unnecessarily create unrest. This app protects the individual and prevents the spreading of the infection throughout the area where we are. As such, I strongly recommend that this app, which was modelled on the example neighbouring countries where it is already operational, is also implemented here. We know that our health is most valuable to all of us, and an elementary right of all individuals. Therefore, it is not just our right but also our duty to care for our health and that of others.”



App is available for smartphones running the Android system and also for those running the iOS operating system.
Photo: GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto



SCIENCE

Photo: Bor Slana/STA

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS CREATED A NEW REALITY

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

ONE IMPORTANT TOPIC RELATED TO THIS IS DIGITALISATION. THIS IN TURN HAS BROUGHT MANY NEW CHALLENGES, AND AT THE GIVEN MOMENT WE ARE FACED WITH BOTH ITS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES.

How is digitalisation related to the new reality, and what issues does it solve?

In essence, digitalisation is a mechanism which optimises certain life processes and makes them more efficient. In the past, this role was played by machines; today it is played by computers. During the COVID-19 epidemic, digitalisation was important – mainly from the perspective of providing information. Of particular importance was rapid data transfer, and without it there would have been many more victims.

Digitalisation and COVID-19 have also changed people's lifestyles. Many physical contacts have been transferred to the digital world.

School, meetings, business operations and so on. Enterprises also needed to undergo a significant digital transformation. Exceptions to this were factories, where this process is much more complicated. At the same time, digitalisation has helped in developing a vaccine and understanding the disease.

A very useful application introduced by the Slovenian Government is without doubt the mobile app #OstaniZdrav (#StayHealthy). It helps the few Slovenian epidemiologists, all working at maximum capacity, and above all it protects us. It is an example of good practice and has already been introduced by some other European countries.

COVID-19 is not only a health issue. Does it also bring global economic challenges?

Absolutely. Society is a dynamic process and there is a link between cause and effect in everything. But sometimes it is not quite clear in which ways things are connected. Business processes have an impact on changes with regard to work, the economy and so on. Part of this is physical distancing, or so-called social distancing, which also has its consequences.

In a situation such as the COVID-19 crisis,

people also change their consumer habits. Global changes have strongly affected the Slovenian economy, and with this some people have lost their jobs.

At the beginning of the year, I visited New York. At that time, it was a city buzzing with energy, there was an abundance of everything and traffic jams everywhere. If, back then, someone had asked me in what situation this could all disappear, my first thought would have been war. But of course it was not war that brought quiet to the city, as a very short time later this situation was caused by COVID-19. The fact, however, is that the COVID-19 crisis is going to last. We must be aware of it and adapt our lives accordingly.

The present Slovenian Government places great emphasis on cooperation with neighbouring countries in all areas, which is an important part of good neighbourly relations. Can Slovenia also become one of the most important regional partners in the field of digitalisation and artificial intelligence?

On the international stage, Slovenia is definitely an important partner in many areas. In our country, there are approximately 200 researchers and up to 20 enterprises active in the field of artificial intelligence. In comparison with others, Slovenia's capacities are limited due to its small size.

However, we must be aware that in scientific work the capacities are not necessarily the most important element. It is the quality of ideas, innovation and so on that count more than the number of people involved.

And from this aspect Slovenians are indeed competitive, which is something to be proud of.

Is trust one of the most important values in the current situation?

One of the projects the Institute is engaged in is analysing news. These days, one particular problem we face is the so-called “infodemic”, which is not necessarily fake news, but news that is only half true or misleading. I would like to mention this because a large part of the public, not only in Slovenia but also worldwide, claims that this virus does not exist. This is usually the opinion of some non-experts or semi-experts who have a strong influence on the formation of public opinion.

As someone who is an expert in numbers, I am convinced that it can be statistically proven that the virus exists, and that we must not underestimate it.

Certain fears are of course also the result of people’s mental state and the circumstances in which they now live. Lockdowns definitely have far more serious consequences for those living in smaller flats and with unstable family relationships.

What about the question of democracy in this new reality?

I am not a lawyer. But I understand how complex systems function. And society is a complex system. We should be aware that even in a democracy, there is no voting on certain things. For example, on human rights and taxes. Currently, we are faced with a situation, the COVID-19 epidemic, which requires a fast response. In a situation like this, it is important to trust the government we have elected. We should bear in mind that in these circumstances the government must react promptly and with determination to curb the problem, which, in a certain sense, might also seem authoritarian.

In times of war, when we are attacked, the only logical response is to defend ourselves. Today there is an invisible enemy among us, one which arrived unexpectedly, and we are therefore confused. We must be aware that currently we have to face a phenomenon that can cause or is causing great damage. It is therefore our task to behave responsibly and to respect the measures important for our safety and that of others.

Could digitalisation make the world a better place?

Digitalisation definitely contributes to the optimisation of those aspects of life where we introduce it. Looked at it this way, it is very positive. But at the same time it can change our way of work and our way of life, which might also have negative consequences for certain people. For this reason, this new reality cannot be completely idealised.

Some years ago I gave a lecture at the Chamber of Agriculture on robots capable of picking fruit. With these robots farmers would, of course, reduce their costs, avoid problematic relationships and so on. But on the other hand, several people would be left without financial resources.

In the future certain jobs will definitely become redundant. In this context, sooner or later a new social contract will be needed, because otherwise problems will occur in terms of the distribution of wealth in society.

Digitalisation therefore opens up completely new aspects and horizons, and thus may be able to solve problems that we have previously been unable to solve. And artificial intelligence, particularly, is a field that is extremely interesting and sometimes, at first sight, reminds us of science fiction, although it is really only a collection of mathematical and computer tools.



Marko Grobelnik is a researcher at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of the Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana and the digital ambassador of Slovenia. In recent years he has cooperated intensively with international organisations, such as the OECD, the Council of Europe, the GPAI and the European Commission, with regard to the future regulation of artificial intelligence. Along with his team at the Jožef Stefan Institute he participated in the launching of the “OECD AI Policy Observatory”, the purpose of which is to constantly monitor and understand the development of artificial intelligence at the global level (<https://oecd.ai/>). In 2020, he participated in setting up the International Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (IRCA.org) under the auspices of UNESCO, which is located in Ljubljana.



SCIENCE

Dr Miha Mlakar, scientist and athlete.

DR MIHA MLAKAR - A SCIENTIST CONNECTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WITH SPORT

POLONA PREŠEREN, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

MIHA MLAKAR IS A FORMER CAPTAIN OF THE SLOVENIAN DAVIS CUP TEAM, AND A DOCTOR OF SCIENCE SPECIALISING IN ALGORITHMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, A RESEARCHER LINKING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, DATA AND SPORT.

He is head of the Agents Group in the Department of Intelligent Systems at the Jožef Stefan Institute, and explains his work as follows: "Our main focus is on applied research, or how to apply artificial intelligence methods to practical problems of businesses. We, for example, cooperate with companies Gorenje and Unior in the automated analysis of (semi-finished) products on the production line." The group's objective is to develop new methods of working and living.

"We are now developing a conversational agent to help people deal with stress, anxiety and depression. However, we would also like to expand our cooperation to as many companies as possible in order to connect their problems with our expertise, thus helping them increase their added value."

DATA PROCESSING AND SPORT

Mlakar has always been fascinated by numbers, and with his experience of being a professional tennis player and coach, he is now as a scientist focused on establishing links between data science and sport. As this is a really novel approach, he is interested in learning how it works in practice.

"I apply my knowledge of artificial intelligence and data processing to sport, where many of these approaches are still unique. As a former professional player I have the advantage of knowing both aspects really well, i.e. the technical and the domain side. I can thus solve problems and focus on issues that are later used by players or coaches

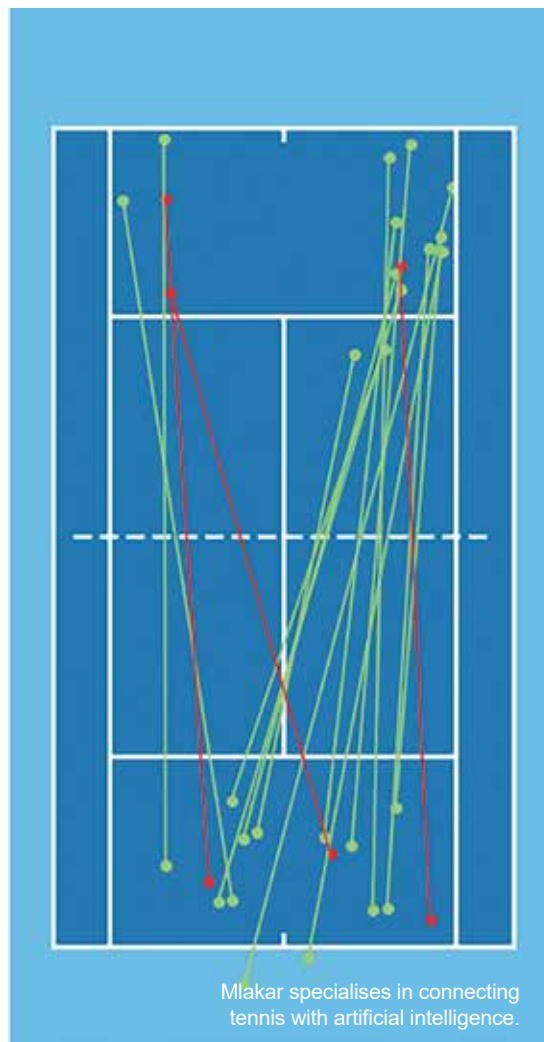
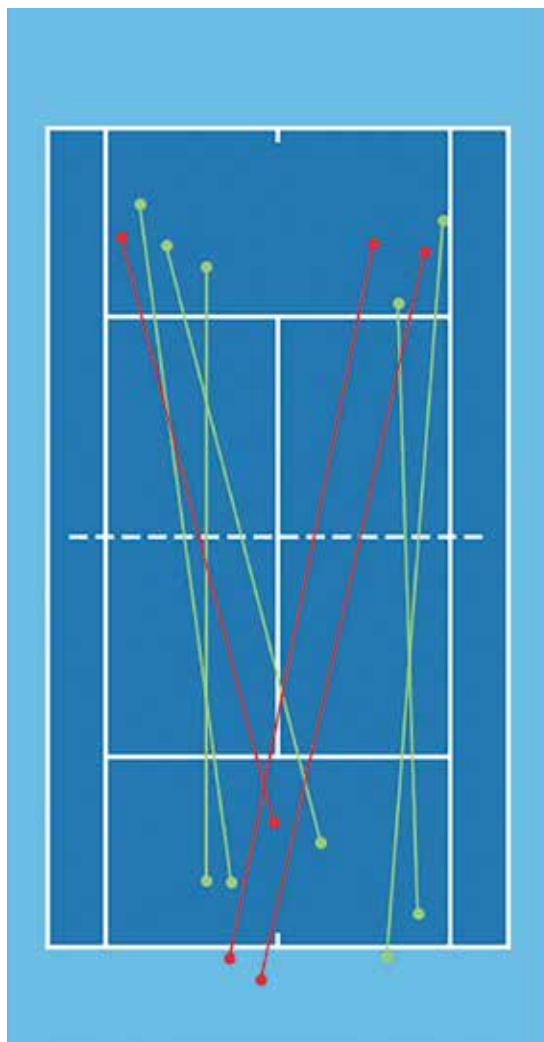
to improve their performance. In practice, we deal with large quantities of data on individual players.

I search for hidden data patterns on whose basis I am able to advise players how to improve their game or, if the data refer to the opponent, which tactic to employ against them," added Mlakar.

He works with a number of professional tennis players but, for the reasons of confidentiality, cannot disclose all their names. "I can, however, tell you that we work with Alexander Zverev, Naomi Osaka, and Simona Halep, and that we are currently in talks with Stefanos Tsitsipas for the next season."

Mlakar previously worked with the world's top players, Serena Williams and Novak Djoković. His task and that of the data processing team is to assist coaches by providing objective advice on what needs improvement. "This enables coaches to prepare their players in the best possible way.

For every match we also analyse the opponent's data to establish what our player must pay special attention to, what the opponent's weak spots are and how to turn those weak spots to our advantage."



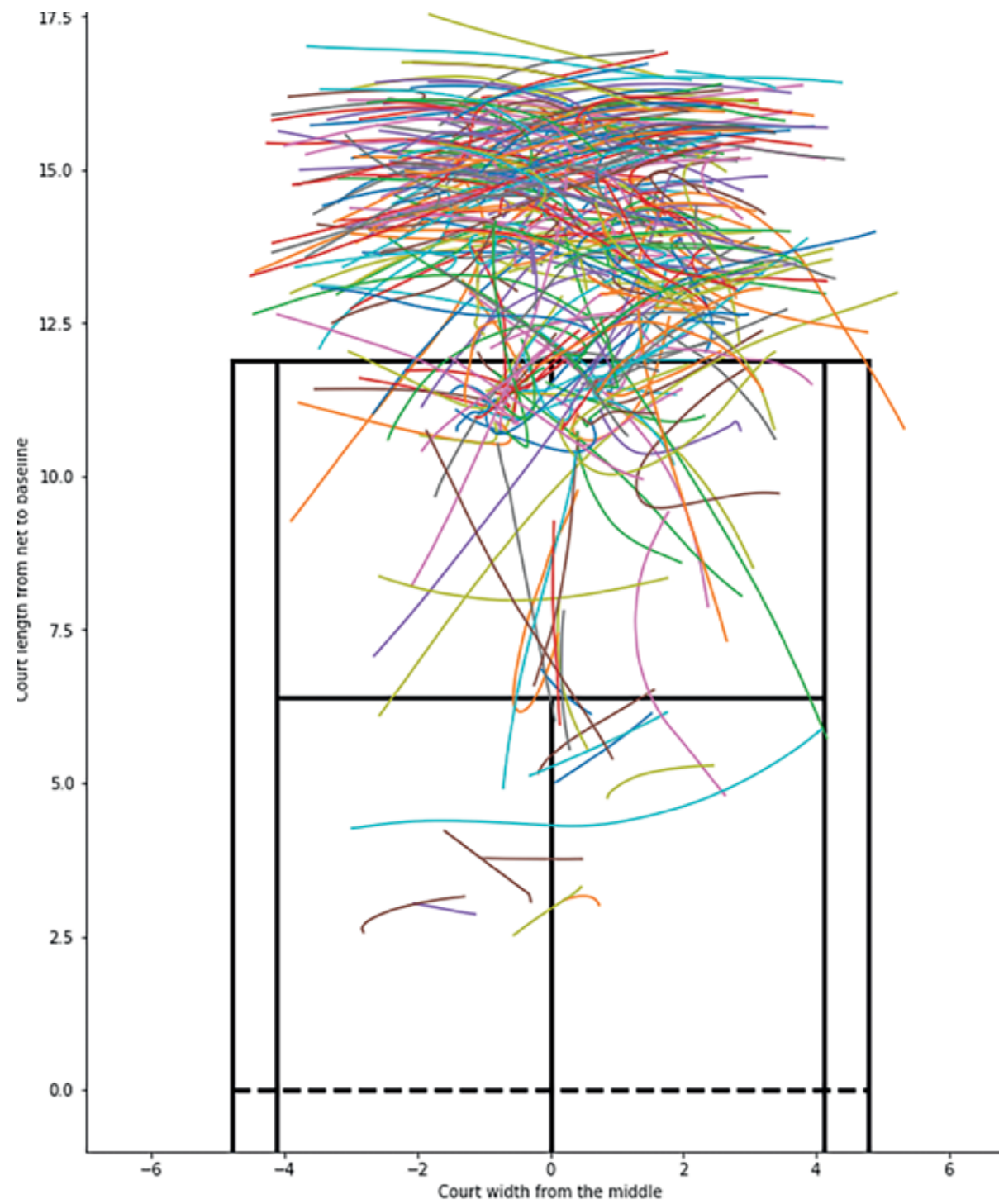
Mlakar specialises in connecting tennis with artificial intelligence.

ANALYTICS AND SPORT

As an excellent tennis player and coach, and former captain of the Slovenian Davis Cup team, Mlakar specialises in connecting tennis with artificial intelligence, but his interests go beyond this. "I am also interested in analysing other sports, and I read a lot about analytical achievements in other sports, so that I closely follow the developments in my research area. In the future I will definitely analyse data for other sports, since the fundamental concepts are similar, you only need to ask the right questions to identify the factors important for your answers. You then translate them into numbers using the right method. I think that analysis is becoming increasingly more recognised and significant in all sports, which means that we will see

even more analytical work in the future. There are only minor differences between teams, so even the slightest improvement matters."

Miha Mlakar is thus active in many areas. "Yes, that's true, I have many interests and sometimes not enough time for proper sleep. But if your work makes you happy, then it isn't 'work'. My biggest problem is that the day only has 24 hours," he stresses, and goes on to say that some things overlap, and, while he develops his knowledge of artificial intelligence at the Jožef Stefan Institute, at the same time he applies this knowledge to other areas. "Of course, credit for my work also goes to my family, who has always supported me and made all this possible."



Miha Mlakar's task is to assist coaches by providing objective advice on what needs improvement.

A ROCK FROM THE SURFACE OF THE MOON ON DISPLAY AT THE NOORDUNG CENTRE

TEA KNAFLIČ



SCIENCE

The Moon's seas are less light-reflecting than its mountains because they are rich in iron and therefore look darker in colour.
Photo: Nasa-jlv2k_Fx0fc/Unsplash

AFTER TEN MONTHS OF DETERMINED EFFORT AND FRIENDLY COOPERATION WITH THE US EMBASSY IN SLOVENIA, THE HERMAN POTOČNIK NOORDUNG CENTER OF SPACE TECHNOLOGIES IN VITANJE HAS PUT ON DISPLAY ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE EXHIBITS IN SLOVENIAN MUSEUM HISTORY: A ROCK FROM THE SURFACE OF THE MOON AND A REPLICA OF THE SPACESUIT WORN BY ASTRONAUT NEIL ARMSTRONG DURING HIS FIRST WALK ON THE MOON.

THE ROCK IS ESTIMATED TO BE ABOUT 3.75 BILLION YEARS OLD

The lunar sample, part of which is on display at the Noordung Center, is the largest of all brought to Earth from the Apollo 17 mission. The rock was unusually dark in colour and immediately caught the attention of the landing module's crew. When the rock was successfully brought back to Earth it was assigned number 70215, which can also be checked on the website of the Lunar and Planetary Institute, where much more information is available about the rock itself and the exploration of the Moon in general. A piece of this interesting rock is intended for display

around the world. The rock was sent to Slovenia according to strict protocols directly from NASA headquarters in Houston, where it will be returned after the exhibition. The director of the Noordung Centre, Dr Dominik Kobold, says of the famous rock:

“The precious cargo arrived with the Apollo 17 mission, which returned to Earth on 19 December 1972. The artefact is of inestimable value, and is one of the most valuable museum heritage exhibits that has ever been displayed in Slovenia.”

What is the origin of the Moon? Science has been dealing with theories about this for many years. One of the various popular hypotheses is a theory according to which the Moon was once part of the Earth, but an unequivocal answer to its origin most likely only be obtained from the study of lunar aggregates.



The Moon's seas are less light-reflecting than its mountains because they are rich in iron and therefore look darker in colour.
Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA

A REPLICA OF NEIL ARMSTRONG'S SPACESUIT

The launch of the Apollo programme was fuelled by rivalry between the Soviet Union and United States. Unimaginable effort and the participation of more than 400,000 people were needed to achieve the desired goal – the landing of man on the Moon. Neil Armstrong, the commander of Apollo 11, landed on the lunar surface on his second and final space flight in 1969, becoming the first person to set foot on Earth's natural satellite.

The spacesuit had to protect the astronaut from extreme temperatures, strong sunlight and micrometeorites. It also had to provide the astronaut with pure oxygen to breathe, rather than the mixture of nitrogen and oxygen that we breathe on Earth, due to the low pressure inside the suit. A replica of his spacesuit, with all the details of the original, is now proudly on display in Slovenia. The replica was made by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History last year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first landing on the Moon. A total of 15 replicas were made, but only one is intended for tours of various institutions across Europe.



A replica of the spacesuit worn by astronaut Neil Armstrong, who set foot on the Moon a good 51 years ago.
Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA



Noordung Centre. Opening of the exhibition displaying the Moon rock which was brought to Earth in 1972 within the Apollo 17 mission, prepared by the Noordung Centre in collaboration with the US Embassy and NASA.
Photo: Tea Knaflič

HERMAN POTOČNIK NOORDUNG

A pertinent question is whether the rock from the surface of the Moon would be here today if not for our compatriot, the Slovenian rocket engineer, officer and pioneer of cosmonautics Herman Potočnik.

Herman Potočnik made a great contribution to connecting Slovenia with other space researchers around the world. He was born in 1892 and his

vision was years ahead of his time. He saw the possibility of obtaining energy from the oceans, wind and even the Sun.

Potočnik's book *The Problem of Space Travel*, published in 1928, became a foundation for the further conquest of space.

The Noordung Centre, a very interesting place to visit at all times, is really something special at the moment. No lover of the universe and of the unknown, or anyone just curious by nature, will want to miss this exhibition!



ECONOMY

Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

SLOVENIA SHOWS ITS COMMITMENT TO BEING A PROGRESSIVE, JUST AND OPEN-MINDED COMMUNITY

KATJA UJČIČ

DESPITE HAVING A POPULATION OF ONLY JUST OVER TWO MILLION, SLOVENIA IS COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING SMART-UPS, DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION, AND PROGRESS, BUILDING A SOCIETY THAT WILL AFFORD EVERYONE AN EQUAL STARTING POINT IN ALL AREAS.

The vision of Slovenia as a green, digital and development-oriented country is one that it shares with the entire European Union. Among other things, this vision can be realised with the help of EU funding from the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027, secured at the European Council meeting in July.

Slovenia was very successful in these negotiations, remaining a net recipient with EUR 6.6 billion in grants and EUR 3.6 billion in loans, and securing an additional EUR 350 million for the cohesion region of Western Slovenia, as well as more than EUR 80 million of extra funding for rural development.

By 2030, Slovenia will have received EUR 2.9 billion under its national envelope of the cohesion policy budget, over EUR 1.5 billion under the Common Agricultural Policy and over EUR million from the Just Transition Fund. The majority of EU cohesion policy funding will go towards supporting structural changes and reforms, as well as public investments that are essential to long-term recovery, supporting a green and digital transition, strengthening the resilience of healthcare systems, addressing the issue of long-term care and strengthening eldercare facilities, maintaining and creating jobs – particularly for young people – and ensuring investment support and working capital for small and medium-sized enterprises.

In addition to funding for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy and the Common Agricultural Policy, Slovenia

will be able to use funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the React-EU initiative, the Just Transition Fund and rural development funds in the following years.

These funds will be available under the national recovery and resilience plan that will form the basis for the implementation of projects supporting the necessary reforms and structural changes. The projects, which follow the guidelines of the European Commission, will be carried out under five pillars for strengthening resilience and sustainable development and five pillars of structural changes and reforms for the people:

- a supportive business environment, digital Slovenia, sustainable and green transition, knowledge-based economy, tourism and culture,
- the labour market, social protection and long-term care, healthcare system, financial and fiscal system, and removing administrative barriers.

EU funding from the aid package to ease the impact of the epidemic will have to be used wisely and efficiently, with a focus on the speedy recovery of the economy, the labour market and social life, strengthening the healthcare system, and laying the foundations for resilience in financial, economic and other areas.

Funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility can be used until the end of 2026, while the additional EUR 312 from React-EU available to Slovenia in the 2014–2020 programme period can be used until the end of 2023. Together with the unused funds from the current Multiannual Financial Framework in the amount of EUR 1.8 billion, which have mostly been earmarked but not yet used, Slovenia has at its disposal EUR 12 billion until 2030, of which EUR 3.6 billion is in the form of low-interest loans.

Through wise decision-making, quick project implementation and the de-bureaucratisation of its administrative system, the current content-related, procedural and HR challenges associated with the absorption of EU funds will be an opportunity for Slovenia to once again show its commitment to being a progressive, just and open-minded community.



LITERATURE

DRAGO JANČAR – A EUROPEAN STORYTELLER IN THE SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: ANŽE MALOVRH/STA

WRITER, PLAYWRIGHT AND ESSAYIST DRAGO JANČAR IS THE MOST TRANSLATED AND AWARDED SLOVENIAN AUTHOR. FOUR KRESNIK AWARDS FOR HIS NOVELS, THE PREŠEREN PRIZE FOR HIS OEUVRE, THE HERDER PRIZE AND THE AUSTRIAN STATE PRIZE FOR EUROPEAN LITERATURE ARE ONLY SOME OF THE ACCOLADES HE HAS EARNED. HE DRAWS INSPIRATION FROM HISTORY AND LIFE IN ALL ITS NUANCES. HIS BOOKS REMIND US OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A NATIONAL BORDER TURNS INTO A FRONTLINE OVERNIGHT.

The central topics of his novels are the individual's existential and moral crisis, the search for meaning and support, the individual's endangerment and hopeless conflict with the social reality, the stifling spiritual atmosphere, fatalism, destructive power games, the chaotic state of the world and ever-present violence, all of which are often allegorically set in the past.

For years, Jančar's writing has been fighting against narrow-mindedness and calling attention to the dangers of one-dimensionality. His works discuss the political twists and turns of the 20th century, depicting totalitarianism as something that works against the interests of people. At the same time, the author portrays people in all their complexity and diversity.

He is a four-time winner of the Kresnik Award for the novels *Catherine, the Peacock and the Jesuit*, *Ring in the Head*, *That Night I Saw Her* and *And Love Itself*. The French translation of the latter won the award for best foreign book, as chosen by the association of French critics and publishers, and was nominated for the French literary prize Prix Femina. In December 2015, the German translation topped the ORF critics' choice list of best books. That same year, the novel was a candidate for the Polish literary prize Angelus, awarded to Central European authors, for which Jančar had already been nominated with his novel *Catherine, the Peacock and the Jesuit*.

AN ETERNAL SEARCH FOR MEANING

In his mostly critical or polemical essays and non-fiction writings, Jančar considers the current social reality in Slovenia and the world, laying bare the image of humanity, time and social conflicts, discovering the extended past and its roots, studying the cynical distance, dissecting the state of the mind, cultural politics and literatures, exposing the reality of the post-Communist world, demystifying illusions and considering globalisation, American influences, European perspectives and the essence of Central Europe.

His plays, which include *Dissident Arnož and His Band*, *The Great Brilliant Waltz*, *Daedalus*, *Klement's Fall* and *After Godot*, analyse the conflicts of contemplative individuals in the light of individualism, will, ethics, scepticism, totalitarianism, bourgeois society and the revolutionary community.

Jančar is also the author of novellas and short stories, such as *Death at Mary-of-the-Snows* and *The Man Who Looked into a Tarn*, recently published in a collection entitled *Many Lives*. According to literary historian Aleksander Zorn, Jančar's prose is "a problem" because "it covers more or less everything that comes along". Jančar is "a colossus of many literary genres, aesthetics, poetics and foreign practices, even geographical areas, and he deserves no other classification than a classic of the century [...]". "Drago Jančar is universal. His works have everything that one looks for. And one cannot help but agree."

FOUR KRESNIK AWARDS FOR BEST NOVEL

Jančar has won a total of four Kresnik Awards for novel of the year, most recently for *And Love Itself* in 2018. On midsummer night 2011 when he earned his third Kresnik Award for *That Night I Saw Her*, the jury wrote that Jančar's novel represents "one of the best literary texts about Slovenians entangled in World War II and interpersonal relationships". The story "about a few years in the life and mysterious disappearance of Veronika Zarnik, a young bourgeois woman from Ljubljana, sucked into the whirlwind of a turbulent period in history", is now considered the best novel of the third decade of the Kresnik Awards, according to both current and previous jury members.

Jančar's 11th novel, *And Love Itself* (published by Beletrina), was his fourth work to receive the Kresnik Award presented on Rožnik Hill by the newspaper publisher Delo for the best Slovenian novel of the past year. As the laureate stressed in his acceptance speech, the novel had waited some time to be published.

The novel is an intertwinement of stories about three people affected and broken by World War II.

The thought that truly captures the essence of the novel is that war conquers all, even love and poetry.

"I wrote about the evil that had descended on the town, the land and its people. With each sentence, it was becoming clear to me that I was writing about how to survive in a time like that. Not only that, but how, in a time of hate, the most powerful feeling still remains – and that is love. For love is as powerful as death, hard as the underground is its ardour, its blazes are the blazes of fire," said Jančar upon accepting the award. The novel illustrates what is most difficult to put into words – how people, who are sensitive but not necessarily ethical beings, deal or fail to deal with extreme historical circumstances. To the greatest possible extent, the book speaks to one's empathy, making the reader become the victim of torture in a Gestapo prison, a Partisan in the forests of Pohorje, a person suspected of treason or an internee in a concentration camp. *And Love Itself* is yet further proof of Jančar's narrative and stylistic mastery.



Jančar is a four-time winner of the Kresnik Award.



LITERATURE

Boris Pahor is considered to be one of the most significant living authors writing in Slovenian and also one of the most translated Slovenian writers.
Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

BORIS PAHOR - THE GREAT AUTHOR'S VENERABLE 107 YEARS

DANILA GOLOB

2020 WAS A VERY SPECIAL YEAR FOR BORIS PAHOR. AS THE ONLY STILL LIVING EYEWITNESS TO THE BURNING OF THE NATIONAL HALL IN TRIESTE BY ITALIAN FASCISTS, HE HAS NOW WITNESSED ITS RETURN TO THE SLOVENIAN COMMUNITY IN ITALY AFTER 100 YEARS. TO COMMEMORATE THE ANNIVERSARY, THE PRESIDENTS OF SLOVENIA AND ITALY CONFERRED ON HIM THE HIGHEST NATIONAL DECORATIONS.

The Trieste writer, intellectual and the most translated Slovenian author, celebrated his 107th birthday in August. For a number of years, he would spend his birthday surrounded by his loyal readers, usually with a new book in his hand, but this year, he was safely home with his loved ones due to the epidemic.

Pahor's works have been translated into French, German, Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, English, Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Finnish and Esperanto. *Nekropola (Necropolis/Pilgrim Among the Shadows)*, a novel based on the author's life in the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, is his most widely translated work.

CHRONICLER OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Pahor's life was marked by wars and totalitarian regimes, and he thus draws attention to their dangers with the authority gained by his own grave experiences. He testifies to the Fascist violence against Slovenians in Italy and the suffering in German concentration camps during the Second World War. Pahor highlights the urgency of a confident and upright stance in the broadest meaning of the phrase, a stance which can only be based on a knowledge of history and one's own identity.

He is a fighter for the rights of endangered languages and members of threatened cultures and emphasises that national consciousness is pivotal for Slovenian survival in Italy and that of man and humanity in the world.

INCREDIBLE SUCCESS OF *NECROPOLIS*

The burning of the Slovenian National Hall in Trieste in 1920, which Pahor witnessed as child, has also impacted his literary work and career. His resistance to Fascism and later Nazism brought him to the Trieste prison and later into Nazi concentration camps. Pahor's

literary works, *Necropolis* from 1967, his most famous work, and *Spopad s pomladjo (A Difficult Spring)* from 1998 bear witness to those times.

Following numerous translations and reprints, *Necropolis* is globally considered to be one of the most authentic testimonies about concentration camp life.

The novel was first translated into French and then into numerous other languages. The incredible success of *Necropolis* and the author's unwavering views on history and injustice place Pahor among the most renowned Europeans.

His other famous literary works include the collection of short stories, *Grmada v pristanu (The Bonfire in the Quay)*, *Mesto v zalivu (The City in the Bay)*, *Zatemnitev (Twilight)*, *Parnik trobi nji (A Steamboat Blows to Her)* and *Trg Oberdan (Oberdan Square)*.

As a writer, essayist and polemicist, Pahor has been creating literature and observing the zeitgeist from the early 1950s until today.

This chronicler of the 20th century still responds to current developments in the world. 2020 was a year of changes for him, too. He says that he considers the epidemic to be yet another test for humanity, which must give priority to goodness, mutual aid and solidarity. Only then can this world become better.

Author Boris Pahor is a paragon of nationality. His love of Slovenian-ness, the Slovenian language and culture is inspirational, setting an example for all of us.

AWARDS AND HONOURS CONFERRED ON BORIS PAHOR

- 1970 – Vstajenje Literary Award (Trieste)
- 1992 – Prešeren Award
- 1993 – Corresponding Member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- 2000 – Silver Order of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia for his lifetime achievements, unrelenting efforts for a free Europe, against Nazifascism and in supporting the welfare of Slovenians living in Italy
- 2003 – Golden St Justus Award conferred by Trieste journalists on internationally acknowledged people of Trieste
- 2005 – Honorary Doctorate from the University of Primorska
- 2007 – the highest French Order of Merit (Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour)
- 2008 – Honorary Doctorate from the University of Ljubljana
- 2008 – International Viareggio Versilia Prize
- 2008 – Latisana International Literary Award for North-East
- 2008 – Premio Napoli World Literature Prize
- 2008 – Declaration of Necropolis for the Italian Book of the Year
- 2009 – Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art 1st Class for Raising Awareness of the Danger of Fascism
- 2009 – Full Member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
- 2010 – Honorary Citizen of Maribor
- 2011 – Commander of the French Order of Arts and Letters
- 2012 – Medal of Honour of the City of Salzburg
- 2013 – Honorary Citizen of Trieste
- 2013 – European Citizen's Prize awarded by the European Parliament
- 2013 – Tischler Award (Klagenfurt)
- 2017 – at the initiative of the management of the Mladinska knjiga publishing house, his larger than life-sized statue was unveiled in Ljubljana's Tivoli Park in April 2017 (by sculptor Mirsad Begić)
- 2017 – Pahor's memorial room was arranged at Bunčet Homestead in Dutovlje
- 2020 – Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Merit of the Italian Republic and the Order of Merit for Distinguished Service of the Republic of Slovenia (the highest Italian and Slovenian state decorations)

He has been proposed for the Nobel Prize several times.



The Slovenian and Italian presidents, Borut Pahor and Sergio Mattarella respectively, conferred on the Trieste writer, Boris Pahor, eyewitness to the fascist arson in Trieste one hundred years ago, the highest decorations of both countries upon the return of the National Hall in Trieste to the Slovenian community. Photo: Danijel Novaković/STA



TOURISM

Bled.
Photo: Dean Dubekovič/www.slovenia.info

TOURING SLOVENIA WITH TOURISM VOUCHERS - LET'S GET TO KNOW OUR COUNTRY

MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

TOURISM IS THE INDUSTRY THAT HAS BEEN AFFECTED THE MOST BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND WILL THEREFORE NEED A LONG TIME TO RECOVER. TO HELP THE TOURISM SECTOR AND THE ECONOMY, CERTAIN MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IN ORDER TO REMEDY THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EPIDEMIC.

Among the most notable measures is the introduction of tourism vouchers that are aimed at boosting demand in the tourism sector, which is crucial to the industry's preservation and development, as well as the preservation of jobs. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, international travel has declined significantly and, at one point, even came to a complete standstill. In the first eight months of 2020 (January–August), a 70% decrease in the number of foreign tourists and a 67.3% decrease in the number of overnight stays were recorded in accommodation facilities. We wanted to compensate for this decline by promoting domestic tourism.

The purpose of this measure is also to provide as many Slovenians as possible with an opportunity to get to know their country from a tourist's point of view, to explore its hidden gems and to experience new and attractive tourism products that are being developed in all Slovenian towns.

The funds for this instrument are provided in the budget of the Republic of Slovenia for 2020.

In total, there are 2,047,261 beneficiaries of tourism vouchers. The total value of tourism vouchers amounts to EUR 356,858,450.00.

At first it was determined that vouchers could be redeemed until the end of 2020, with the possibility of extending their validity into 2021. On 3 December 2020, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted a decision to extend the validity of vouchers until 31 December 2021.

A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE FOR SLOVENIAN TOURISM

The tourism vouchers served to boost the demand from domestic tourists, which will have a significant multiplier effect on many areas of the economy, as well as on the national budget. Tourism is an economic activity with a significant multiplier effect on the rest of the economy, seeing as it encourages consumption in the production chain of tourism-related activities (commerce, agriculture, transport, culture, etc.).

According to an analysis prepared by the Financial Administration of the Republic of Slovenia (data as at 23 August 2020), most vouchers have been redeemed on the coast, predominantly in the municipality of Piran. Beneficiaries most often redeemed tourism vouchers in the following municipalities: Piran, Kranjska Gora, Bohinj, Izola, Brežice, Moravske Toplice, Podčetrtek, Bled, Koper and Ankaran. When redeeming tourism vouchers, domestic tourists usually opted for hotels, in second place came apartments that were followed by apartment complexes and, lastly, camps.

Up to and including 16 November 2020, 932,030 vouchers were redeemed in a total amount of EUR 127,778,171.06 and reservations were made for 3,650 tourism vouchers with a total value of EUR 504,132.41.

By the middle of November, a total of 45.7% of tourism vouchers were either redeemed or reservations were made to redeem them – the overall value of which equals 36% of the reserved funds – while 54% of tourism vouchers remain unused.

After the introduction of tourism vouchers, the Slovenian Tourist Board carried out a survey on the domestic tourists' travel intentions in 2020. According to the survey, 52% of respondents intend to spend most of their holidays in Slovenia. As many as 41% of respondents said they will go on several short holiday breaks, a quarter of the respondents (26%) opted for one short holiday break and a fifth of them (18%) decided on a combination of both.

For 42% of respondents, the tourism voucher is one of the reasons for this year's holiday in Slovenia. There were 48% of respondents that said they would redeem the vouchers in the summertime, 47% that would use them in the autumn months and 5% that would spend them on a winter holiday. One of the

most frequently listed reasons for holidaying in Slovenia is the effectiveness in containing the spread of COVID-19, as the respondents said they are inclined to spend holidays in Slovenia because of the sense of security.

THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE EVEN TOWARDS THE YEAR'S END

Based on the survey data, it was expected that many beneficiaries would redeem their vouchers during the autumn school holidays. All tourist destinations in Slovenia put together a wide variety of interesting offers. Many holiday suggestions and ideas were also published on the website of the Slovenian Tourist Board at www.slovenia.info. Unfortunately, due to the worsening epidemiological situation, strict measures have since been adopted to contain the epidemic, making it impossible to fulfil these plans.

That's why The Government of the Republic of Slove-

nia decided that it will be possible to use tourism vouchers also during 2021.

Slovenia is a beautiful and attractive tourist destination, where everyone can find a tourism offer that suits their taste. We sincerely hope that the COVID-19 pandemic will be over soon and that we will be able return to exploring our beautiful country.



Balnea Wellness at Terme Dolenjske Toplice.
Photo: Nea Culpa, Mankica Kranjec/www.slovenia.info



Vogel.
Photo: Iztok Medja/www.slovenia.info

Nejc Ban, the chef at Otočec Castle, is always testing new techniques for the preparation of top-quality dishes. Photo: Terme Krka d.o.o.



GASTRONOMY

PROTOCOL CUISINE - HIGH-LEVEL CUISINE FOR HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS

DANILO GOLOB

SLOVENIA HAS BEEN AWARDED THE TITLE OF EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY 2021. THIS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD IS PROOF THAT OUR COUNTRY IS BEING INCREASINGLY RECOGNISED AS A UNIQUE WORLD-CLASS CULINARY DESTINATION, WHICH DELIGHTS EVEN THE MOST DISCERNING GUESTS.

In its 30 years of independence, Slovenia has hosted many distinguished foreign guests. In addition to conducting state talks, making agreements and signing treaties, such meetings are also an opportunity to promote Slovenian cuisine.

THE BRDO ESTATE

Brdo pri Kranju is an estate of almost 500 hectares where the highest representatives of the Republic of Slovenia host high-level state visits.

In addition to the beautiful surroundings, unspoilt nature and cultural heritage, guests enjoy attractive Slovenian dishes prepared by the team of top chefs under the leadership of chef Gregor Rozman.

Chef Gregor Rozman is a strong advocate of traditional dishes, which he prepares in a modern, innovative way while still maintaining the essence of their flavour. His wealth of experience includes a long-standing position in the Slovenian national culinary team, and cooking in Michelin-star restaurants. A speciality of Brdo cuisine are dishes made of trout they smoke themselves, lamb and their own wild game. Of course, the dishes are accompanied by wine from the best Slovenian winemakers. The excellent team ensures a gourmet experience for guests at all the locations of the Brdo Estate, as well as at Vila Bled and Vila Zlatorog.

FORMAL DINNER FOR THE PRESIDENTS WITHIN THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE

On 5 and 6 June 2019, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, hosted the Three Seas Initiative Summit. On the first day of the summit, he held a dinner for the distinguished guests at the Presidential Palace, where they enjoyed excellent food and wine. President Pahor said at the time that the dinner was the real summit and the heart of the Three Seas Initiative meeting.

The chefs of the Brdo State Protocol Services, led by chef Gregor Rozman, prepared a four-course menu for the presidents made solely of local ingredients.

As a starter, they served a marinated fillet of sea bass from Piran with an orange reduction on a pea purée, a selection of baby lettuces with pine nuts, and a basil cream with tomatoes.

This was followed by a warm starter – a homemade žlikrof dumpling on a potato mousse with herb oil and aged sheep cheese sauce.

For the main course they served veal medallions with veal sauce on a broccoli coulis, filo pastry with a porcini mushroom filling and asparagus heads and Romanesco broccoli with hazelnut granulate.

For dessert, the distinguished guests enjoyed an almond pie with currants, mousse with strawberry filling and tarragon cream with berries and fruit sauce.

They made toasts with select Slovenian wines – Chardonnay, Duet and Moscatel.



The meeting of four presidents at Brdo on 13 January 2018. The welcoming address of President Borut Pahor at the beginning of the working lunch. Photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

VILA BLED

During the renovation of Brdo Hotel, the main tourist facility of the Brdo State Protocol Services is Vila Bled, which is located in close proximity to the shore of Lake Bled and is surrounded by a magnificent park. Vila Bled has always been known for its top cuisine, but with the new chef Gregor Rozman it has been raised to an even higher level. The dishes are based on fresh seasonal and local ingredients. They are served with a selection of the best Slovenian and foreign wines. During summer, meals are served on the hotel terrace with a wonderful view of Bled Island.

Vila Bled was included among the recommended

restaurants in Slovenia in the 2019 and 2020 editions of the renowned Gault&Millau Guide.

The excellence of the restaurant was also recognised by the 2019 selection of the Slovenia Restaurant Awards, which ranked it among the 10 best hotel restaurants in Slovenia.

Vila Zlatorog is another villa by Lake Bled. Its luxurious countryside style conjures the spirit of the past intermixed with the present. The team at Vila Bled also takes care of the culinary experiences of the guests at Vila Zlatorog.



US Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, was also received by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, who held a formal lunch for the Slovenian and American delegations at Vila Zlatorog. Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

VISIT OF THE US SECRETARY OF STATE MICHAEL R. POMPEO AND HIS WIFE

On 13 August, 2020, the United States Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, visited Slovenia. As part of the visit, he met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anže Logar, at Vila Bled. Mr Logar and Mr Pompeo signed the Joint Declaration of Slovenia and the United States on 5G Security. The distinguished guest was also received by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, who held a formal lunch for the Slovenian and American delegations at Vila Zlatorog.

OTOČEC CASTLE

Otočec Castle offers a first-class culinary experience in its unique castle atmosphere and the surrounding nature. The culinary team led by chef Nejc Ban pampers the guests of the Castle restaurant with fresh and healthy food and drinks with a regional twist.

Chef Nejc Ban finds his inspiration in local and seasonal flavours of the surrounding area. Otočec Castle also has its own organic garden, where they grow vegetables, herbs and aromatic plants and berries.

This year, the castle restaurant and its young chef received a prestigious award – a Michelin Plate. The inspectors were impressed by the restaurant's orientation towards local ingredients and specialities, but most of all by the seasonal selection of fresh vegetables, berries and herbs from the Castle Garden and the comfortable atmosphere of the restaurant. The team at Otočec Castle was naturally very happy to receive the award. However, they are aware that they have a great responsibility to maintain, nourish and improve the menu, quality and atmosphere.

FIRST MEETING OF ANDREJ PLENKOVIČ AND JANEZ JANŠA AS PRIME MINISTERS

On 10 July 2020, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša, met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Andrej Plenković, at Otočec Castle. The talks of both prime ministers and their delegations focused on a more coordinated fight against COVID-19. Prime Minister Janša hosted the Slovenian and Croatian delegations on the outside terrace of Otočec Castle.



Prime Minister Janša hosted the Slovenian and Croatian delegations on the terrace of the Otočec Castle. Photo: Office of the Prime Minister

HOLIDAY DISHES

TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ, ANKA PELJHAN

GASTRONOMY

THERE'S NO HOLIDAYS WITHOUT SOME TRADITIONAL CAKES AND BREAD. DISCOVER THE SLOVENIAN HOLIDAY GASTRONOMY...IT IS A SMELL OF FAMILY, HOME, FRIENDS, HAPPINESS...

HOLIDAY BREAD WITH "BIRDS"/POPRTNIK

1 kg flour
1 dl warm milk, 1 tsp sugar, 4 g yeast – for rising yeast
2 tbsp sugar
2 tsp salt
7 tbsp butter (could be ghee)
1 tbsp sour cream
4 egg yolks
5 dl lukewarm milk
1,5 dl rum
1 egg, 1dl cream for coating

1. Prepare the yeast: heat the milk, add the yeast and sugar, and let it rise.
2. In a larger bowl, whisk the egg yolks with sugar and butter into the foam.
3. Mix all other ingredients and rising yeast and knead the dough.
4. Let the dough rise for at least 1 hour.
5. Then tear off a piece of dough to make the ornament, shape the rest into a ball and let it rise for another 40 minutes.
6. In the meantime, design decorations suitable for a particular holiday or occasion.
7. Attach it to the base and coat it all with a mixture of egg and cream.
8. Bake in a preheated oven for about 1 hour at 170 degrees.
9. If the dough is enough, form birds and bake only 20 minutes ob 170 degrees.



Photo: Anka Peljhan

WALNUT CAKE

Dough:

500g white flour
30g yeast
120g butter
80g sugar
Three egg yolks
2.5dl milk
Rum
Lemon or orange peel
Vanilla essence
Salt

Put the flour in a bowl, sifted if you like, and add salt. In one cup dissolve the yeast in water or milk, and in another mix the eggs, sugar, rum, vanilla essence, lemon or orange peel. Heat the milk and melt the butter.

Add hot milk to the flour, stir and add the mixture of eggs, sugar, rum and flavourings. Stir again, add dissolved yeast and melted butter and stir into a medium thick dough. Knead this until it is elastic inside and smooth on the outside. Make sure the dough does not stick to the bowl and that it is not too hard. Cover the dough with plastic film and leave to rise at room temperature. Once the size of the dough has doubled, knead it once, roll it out and spread it with the filling.

Filling:

500g ground walnuts
100g sugar
100g honey
One dl milk
Two eggs
Vanilla essence
Ground cinnamon
Ground cloves
Lemon peel
Rum

Melt the honey in tepid milk, then add one half of the walnuts along with the sugar, eggs, flavourings, spices and rum. Spread the filling on the rolled-out dough and sprinkle with the other half of walnuts. The temperature of the filling should be equal to that of the dough. Roll tightly, put in a mould, prick and leave to rise. Before baking, coat with a thin layer of milk and egg mixture, and make sure the holes are not blocked.

Bake 50 minutes at 190°C.



Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

CRACKLINGS POTICA WITH TURNIP STEW

Dough:

1 kg flour
1 dl warm milk, 1 tsp sugar, 4 g yeast (for rising yeast)
6 dl water
1 egg
1 tsp salt
3 tbsp lard

Stuffing:

1 onion
20 dag dry cracklings
3 tbsp lard with cracklings
10 dag bacon

1. Prepare the yeast: heat the milk, add the yeast and sugar, and let it rise.
2. In a larger bowl, put flour, salt, egg and melted lard.
3. Add rising yeast, water and knead the dough.
4. Cover it with a kitchen cloth and let it rise for at least 40 minutes.
5. Cut bacon into small pieces.
6. Fry chopped onion on hot lard with cracklings. Add bacon.
7. Roll the dough (5mm thin), spread the stuffing over it, and sprinkle the dried cracklings over.
8. Turnover and let it rise for at least 40 minutes.
9. Bake in the oven at 200 degrees for about 50 minutes.

Turnip:

25 dag fermented turnip
5 garlic cloves
2 potatoes
2 tbsp pork lard
bay leaf, salt, pepper

1. Heat the grease and add the chopped garlic.
2. After some seconds, add turnip and some water.
3. Season and cook for 30 minutes.
4. Peel the potatoes and cook them separately in salted water.
5. Add boiled potatoes to the turnip and let it stand for connecting the flavours.
6. Serve with pieces of crackling potica.



Photo: Anka Peljhan

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY – ICE HARVESTING

TEA KNAFLIČ

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE HOW INVENTIVE PEOPLE BEFORE OUR TIME WERE, AND WHAT THEY DID TO KEEP FOOD FRESH. TODAY WE TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT WE CAN SIMPLY OPEN OUR REFRIGERATOR AND TAKE OUT SOME FOOD. BUT HOW MUCH EFFORT WAS NEEDED JUST 100 YEARS AGO TO KEEP FOOD FRESH?

HERITAGE

Photo: stone36/stock.adobe.com

The first refrigerators, so-called iceboxes, hardly remind us of our modern refrigerators. These refrigerators were not yet powered by electricity. The interior was made of tin, and each day it was filled with ice to cool its contents. The melted ice was then used to water plants or for other household activities. Iceboxes were used by innkeepers and wealthy individuals.

THE BEGINNINGS OF USING ICE

The beginnings of using ice to cool food go back much earlier. People have been using ice for thousands of years.

In Alpine regions, characterised by long and cold winters, shepherds used ice caves. They went to the caves to collect ice or simply to store milk and dairy products. In other parts of Slovenia, ice needed to be properly stored to be used during the warmer months of the year.

In the 19th century farmers in the Karst region and the Brkini Hills built ice houses, where they stored ice during the cold winters which could then be used throughout the year, while in other regions ice was just stored in shady areas or in caves.



An ice cream maker from Tržič has loaded ice onto his ice cream cart to prevent the ice cream from melting. He obtained the ice at the Stara Pošta Hotel, which had an ice house. Photo: Jurij Smolej – Tržič Museum Archive

ICE HARVESTING IN SLOVENIA

Winters were often extremely cold in Slovenia. Temperatures could even drop below -20° Celsius. Ice was cut from the frozen surface of lakes, ponds and streams and then harvested. Ice harvesters stored some of it for their personal needs, while the rest was sold. Historical records, for example, indicate that immediately after the formation of ice, the inhabitants around Lake Cerknica first cut ice into large pieces using big saws and then into smaller pieces weighing up to 20 kilogrammes. Within a few hours the ice was loaded onto carts and transported either directly to consumers or to the ice harvesters' ice houses, from where it was sold.

The greatest demand for ice came from innkeepers, brewers and butchers, who then stored the ice in specially adapted cellars.

ICE CAVES

Ice was not harvested only from lakes and rivers. It was also cut in caves rich in ice. The most famous cave from which ice was harvested is the Big Paradana Ice Cave (Velika ledena jama v Paradani) on the Trnovski Gozd Plateau. It is more than 4 kilometres long and 650 meters deep. During mild winters when there was not enough ice, ice was also transported from Nanos, a Karst plateau near Vipava. In the underground ice caves of Nanos there was a large amount of ice because the caves are more than 100 metres deep. Ice was also harvested from the Karst caves in the Snežnik Plateau, Kočevski Gozd and Hrušica.

ICE TRADE

The entire Vipava Valley was strongly involved in the ice trade due to the high demand in the local

villages, in larger European towns and even as far away as Alexandria.

In spring, icemen covered the ice stored during the winter with straw or spruce branches and already before sunrise they would take it by cart to their customers. Huge quantities of ice were also transported to Trieste. At that time, Trieste was the crossroads of the ice trade. Ice was then transported by truck to Budapest, 500 kilometres away, and to Vienna, more than 400 kilometres away. The valuable cargo was also transported by ship to Egypt.

EXTRACTION OF ICE IN EUROPE

Dr Andrej Mihevc from the Karst Research Institute says that Leonardo da Vinci also reported ice caves located in Italy, above Lake Como, on a mountain 1500–1600 meters above sea level, in which people cut ice and carried the ice blocks on their backs into the valley. The ice was then loaded onto carts and brought to towns in Northern Italy, where wealthy people used it to make ice cream or for cooling drinks.

In the past, ice traders earned good money. The ice trade was a very strong industry at the beginning of the 19th century, and remained so until the middle of the 20th. The Industrial Revolution contributed to the rapid development of the economy and therefore increased the demand for ice. But what first made the ice trade flourish, later made it collapse completely, as electricity brought along electrical appliances and the current method of cooling a wide variety of food items.

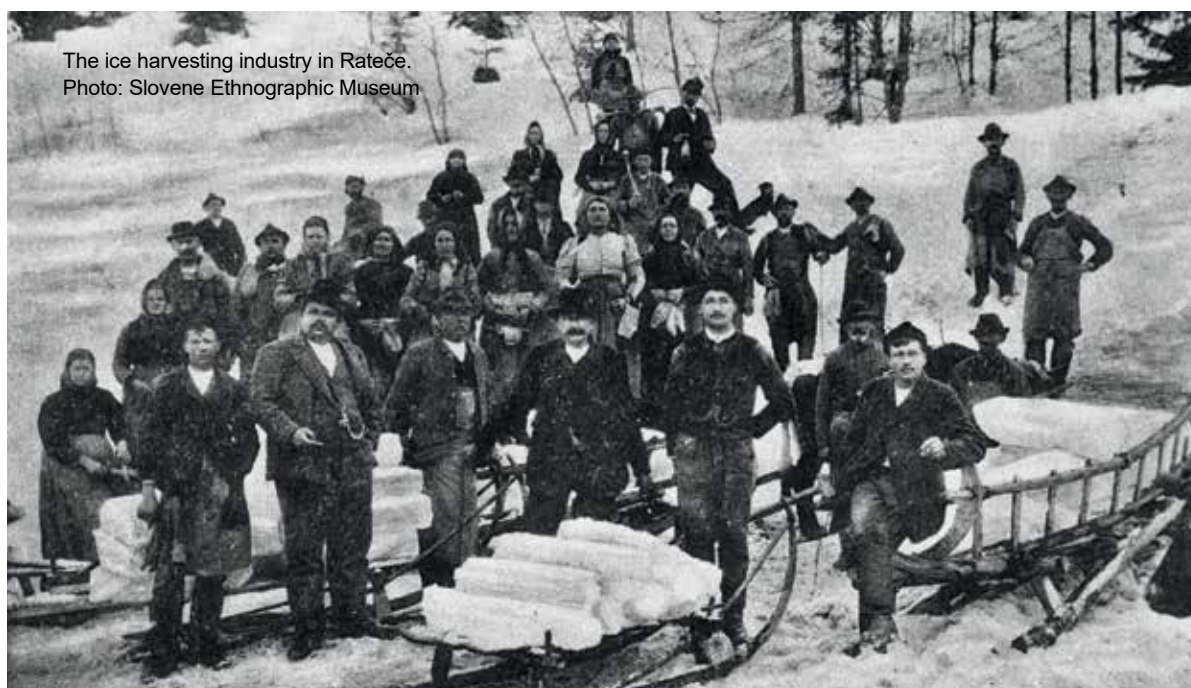
The ice harvesting industry in Ljubljana.
Photo: Ante Kornič/Slovene Ethnographic Museum



The ice trade was a very strong industry mainly at the beginning of the 19th century.
Photo: Ante Kornič/Slovene Ethnographic Museum



Winters were often extremely cold in Slovenia.
Photo: Ante Kornič/Slovene Ethnographic Museum



The ice harvesting industry in Rateče.
Photo: Slovene Ethnographic Museum

BSF

Bled Strategic Forum

DIPLOMACY

ON THE MARGINS OF THE BSF

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

ON THE LAST DAY OF AUGUST, BLEED HOSTED THE 15TH BLEED STRATEGIC FORUM – BSF; ATTENDEES INCLUDED EIGHT REGIONAL HEADS OF STATE, SIX FOREIGN MINISTERS, THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY, AND MANY OTHERS. THE MAIN TOPIC OF THE EVENT, ENTITLED “CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE POST-COVID-19 WORLD”, WAS THE FUTURE OF THE EU AFTER BREXIT AND THE PANDEMIC. WHAT FOLLOWS ARE A FEW STATEMENTS FROM THE PARTICIPANTS.

Anže Logar, Slovenian Foreign Minister: “Attendance at today’s forum shows that it was very much needed, particularly at a time when most major events are being cancelled. It also gives Slovenian diplomacy the encouragement to continue with its active and energetic approach to international relations. We saw that the heads of state have different views on the EU, as well as on the circumstances in which we have found ourselves. The key message of today’s discussions is that we are all aware of the importance of this crucial moment, which will determine how the EU will function as a whole in the next six months, the next year and next decade. This diplomatic exchange will produce solutions benefitting not only the citizens of Slovenia, but everyone living in the EU. I believe it is in everyone’s interest for Slovenia to strengthen relations with all Member States, not playing any favourites. We need investments in projects that will bring added value to Slovenia in the years to come. Today’s forum discussions will be an introduction to the upcoming talks about the future of the EU. They are also a foreign policy triumph that puts Slovenia back on the map of diplomacy.”

Zdravko Počivalšek, Minister of Economic Development and Technology: “Digitisation and competitiveness are inextricably linked. As the size of the market represented by the wider region is limited, new growth opportunities can be found in digitisation. The Slovenian Government is fully aware of this.”

Christian Pawel, Sandoz: “If around 20% of doctors were able to communicate with their patients through digital channels before the coronavirus crisis, this percentage has now risen to 70.”

Joško Mrndže, Country Manager for the Adriatics Region at Google: “Many trends that have emerged as a result of the coronavirus crisis will stay with us at least for a while, maybe even forever, for instance the rise of e-commerce and remote work and learning. Google is dedicated to providing equal assistance to all users, ensuring transparency and cybersecurity.”

Simon Zajc, State Secretary at the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology: “A number of digitisation measures have been taken over the years, and one of the results is that it is now easier to set up a business than ever before.”

Marko Grobelnik, Jožef Stefan Institute: “Crises propel progress. Never waste a good crisis. The development of artificial intelligence brings many challenges.”

Giuseppe Conte, Prime Minister of Italy: “Europe needs more joint actions in the run-up to the intensification of the COVID-19 pandemic and fewer nationalist stances. The best responses to the crisis are the solidarity and cohesiveness of the EU and, above all, a strong political vision.”

Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša: “In terms of the rule of law, the main problem is double standards. In 2014, elections in Slovenia were stolen and I myself was a political prisoner, yet no one protested over that.”

President of Slovenia Borut Pahor: “The ‘new normal’ will bring about political, economic and social changes. It will have a much greater impact than just the direct health consequences. However, this should not be at the expense of multilateralism, active EU and NATO membership, transatlantic cooperation, fostering good neighbourly relations, and peaceful conflict resolution.”

Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: “It is essential that the fund for the reconstruction of Europe is finally approved. The implementation of the fund will be no small task, either.”

Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues: “If the Western Balkans are not in our camp, we will have serious problems. The ‘us against them’ rhetoric suggesting that we have enough of our own problems and do not have the time to deal with theirs too is unacceptable. The problems of the region are also European problems, and vice versa. And if the Western Balkans are not on the EU’s side, this can pose serious problems for the EU. Because in that case, its place will be filled by other players, such as Russia or China. If Western Balkan countries are not offered a credible European perspective, we are creating problems for ourselves. The issue is that we are losing our immediate neighbours, yet we want to be a global player.”

Aleksander Vučić, President of Serbia: “Serbia wants to become an EU Member State because being a member of the club is better than not being one. We receive a lot of support from the EU, but we have our own way of thinking; we see what is happening in the EU and what is happening between the EU and the United States.”

Bettina Cadenbach, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Security Policy at NATO: “To solve all of these crises, such as the coronavirus crisis, the economic crisis as well as cyber threats, cooperation between countries and international organisations is vital. NATO has also been striving to achieve greater agreement among allies at other international forums.”

Pawel Herczyński, European External Action Service: “Both our international partners and European citizens expect the European Union to assume greater responsibility for its security, and a bigger role when it comes to global security.”

Matej Tonin, Slovenian Defence Minister: “The EU needs united diplomacy, a strong army and a strong economy if it wants to be a global player. Investments in the military are also important for Slovenia if the country is to adapt to the new normal created by COVID-19. Furthermore, new cyberspace capacities must be developed.”

Christopher Cavoli, Commanding General of U.S. Army Europe: “The competition for influence and supremacy in the European IT space will continue to intensify. Countries must make individual and collective efforts to identify such issues.”

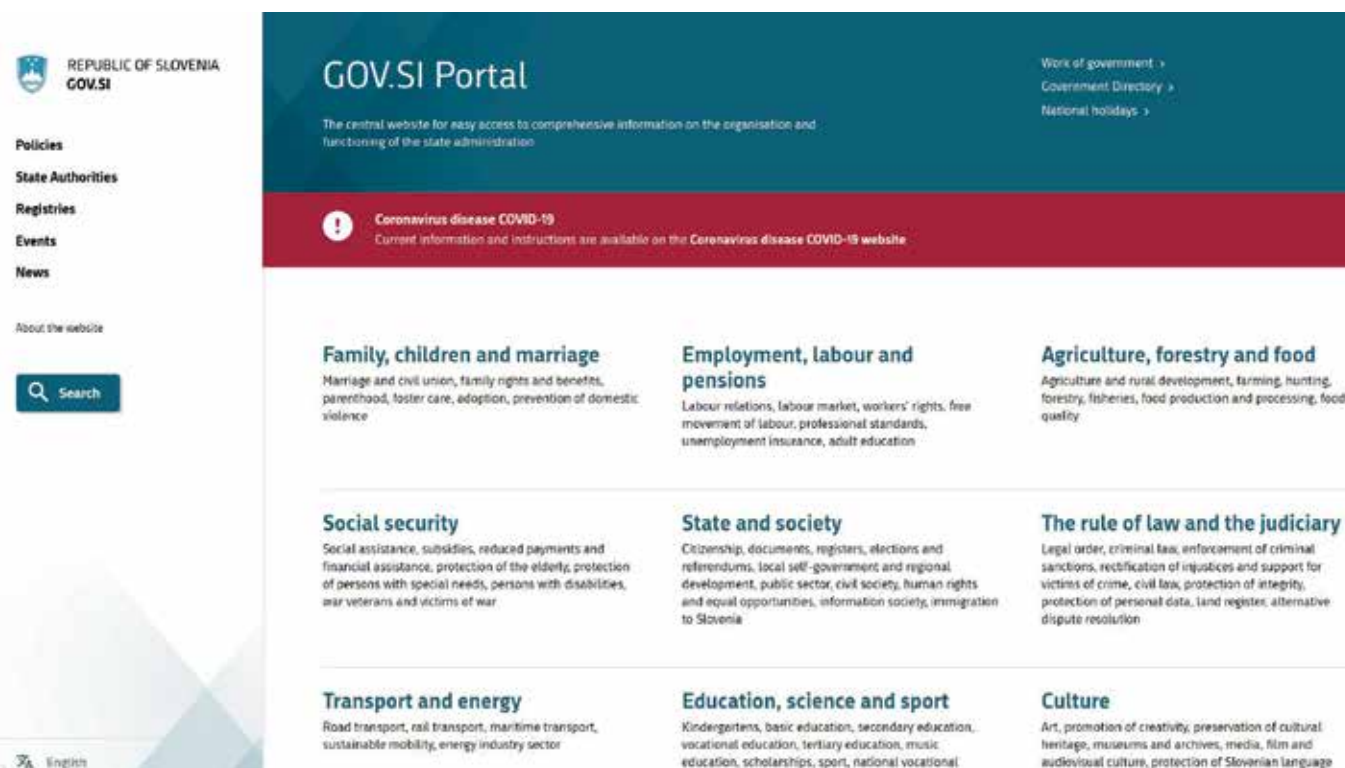
Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs: “Economic problems will have social and perhaps even political implications. But first we must face the economic consequences of the pandemic. We will need a lot of innovation and to preserve both people’s incomes and companies’ capital.”

Péter Szijjártó, head of Hungarian diplomacy: “The EU should relax certain rules during the economic recovery, for instance those concerning state aid. I believe that the EU can be strong only if its Member States are strong; it must be in the interest of EU institutions to strengthen the Member States.”

Gordan Grlić Radman, Croatian Foreign Minister: “Cooperation and unity among countries could, among other ways, be strengthened by working together on transport and digitisation, thereby also stimulating the economy.”



Photo: Nebojša Tejić/STA



DIPLOMACY

UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON SLOVENIA IS ONLY A CLICK AWAY

DANILO GOLOB

WANT TO GET TO KNOW SLOVENIA BETTER? DO YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA OPERATES, WHAT IMPORTANT DECISIONS IT MAKES, AND IN WHICH AREAS IT IS ESPECIALLY SUCCESSFUL? ARE YOU LOOKING FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT SLOVENIA? DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? YOU CAN FIND THE ANSWERS ONLINE, WHERE SLOVENIA AS A COUNTRY IS PRESENT ON MULTIPLE PLATFORMS.

GOV.SI

GOV.SI is the central website of the state administration; it contains presentations of the Government, its ministries, the bodies within the ministries, government offices, and administrative units. The purpose of the website is to provide users with complete information in a uniform, comprehensible and transparent manner as regards the functioning of the state administration in different topical areas. You can choose to view the content on the website in Slovenian, Hungarian, Italian, or English.

SLOVENIA.SI

The Slovenia.si website is the main national entry point for the promotion of Slovenia and its "I Feel Slovenia" brand. It is intended for Slovenians as well as the foreign public. With the latest news, stories, interviews, statements and videos, it presents Slovenia as a country that is successful at home and abroad, and is led by a government that is efficient in tackling current problems and challenges in different areas.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ON FACEBOOK

The purpose of the Government's presence on Facebook is to inform citizens of its work and decisions, to deepen the dialogue between the Government and the citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, and to encourage discussion of the Government's work and decisions. The Government of the Republic of Slovenia's Facebook page is also a space that encourages the participation of citizens.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ON TWITTER

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia runs Slovenian (@vladaRS) and English (@govSlovenia) accounts, which facilitate the rapid communication of key messages regarding its work.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ON INSTAGRAM (@GOV.SI)

The Government also posts on Instagram, where its work is presented in pictures and infographics, as an easy and concise way of communicating current topics. The Government also shares key communication messages on Instagram.

THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ON INSTAGRAM (@SLOVENIA)

Slovenia is a small but diverse country. Slovenians are proud of their country's natural beauty, as evidenced by the wonderful photos taken around Slovenia. They are also proud of their past, culture, and popular customs and traditions. Slovenia is represented by its people, and we are proud of the successful individuals whose achievements have carried Slovenia's name around the world.

THE WEBSITE OF THE 2021 SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL

The website of the Slovenian Presidency will present in one place all current information about the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. In September 2019, it was officially confirmed that the General Secretariat of the Council will implement an initiative (supported by Slovenia) to establish a single website for the presiding states. The Slovenian Presidency will be the first to use this joint solution. The website will be available in Slovenian, English, French, and German, and will go live one month prior to the beginning of the Presidency – i.e. at the end of May 2021.





DIPLOMACY

Edward Clug.
Photo: Ivan Vinovrški/SNG Maribor

HOW WILL SLOVENIA PROMOTE ITSELF DURING ITS PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL?

POLONA PREŠEREN

SLOVENIA WILL HOLD ITS SECOND PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION NEXT YEAR. EVEN THOUGH THE PRESIDENCY IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, A RESPONSIBILITY AND DUTY OF EACH MEMBER STATE, IT IS ALSO A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE THE COUNTRY. THEREFORE, SLOVENIA IS PREPARING A SPECIAL PROGRAMME.

Slovenia's first Presidency of the Council of the EU took place in 2008, and it was the first of the new Member States that joined in 2004 to undertake this task. In fulfilling this duty, Slovenia impressed Europe as an excellent organiser and carried out promotional activities in all Member States. With the use of a roadshow, Slovenia visited all Member States in the six months of its Presidency, and organised various events as part of this.

As the Presidency of the Council of the EU is an excellent opportunity to raise Slovenia's profile, we will organise several events where you will be able to discover the country both before and during Slovenia's Presidency in 2021.

The programme we have prepared takes into account the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency, while we have also added detail's of the country's economic and social achievements, as well as its culture, green and sustainable orientation, Slovenian science, and its natural beauty, which we have intertwined into a story – the story of Slovenia as promoted by the I Feel Slovenia national brand.

The 30th anniversary of Slovenia's independence will also be an important part of the programme. Slovenia has travelled an extraordinary path since 1991. From the struggle for autonomy and independence to a democratic country that will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the second time.

Several large events are to take place in Slovenia next year, and the country will also be participating in events organised abroad.

Together with Portugal, as a member of the so-called "Presidency Trio", Slovenia will be the European Region of Gastronomy. Slovenia will co-host the 2021 UEFA European Under-21 Championship with Hungary, and host the 2021 Division I-A IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship, while also hosting the Europa Cantat events during the Presidency.

The opening protocol event in Brussels, Edward Clug's contemporary ballet adaptation of *The Water Man* (Po vodni mož), as performed by the Opera and Ballet of the Slovenian National Theatre Maribor, will be of particular interest. This contemporary ballet, adapted by the world-renowned choreographer Edward Clug and the recognised Slovenian composer Milko Lazar, draws inspiration from the nation's traditions and mythology – and especially from the epic poem *The Water Man* by France Prešeren.

In the performance – deriving from an honest philosophical-ballet gesture– the author delves into the question of the origin of Slovenian nationhood and, ultimately, of the "mythological" beginnings of everything European.

The performance will be streamed online on multiple digital platforms, thus ensuring that the opening event

will reach the widest possible audience. An exhibition of the works of the costume designer Alan Hranitelj and a retrospective of Slovenian film curated by the Slovenian Cinematheque (Slovenska kinoteka) will also take place during the series of events in Brussels.

In cooperation with the diplomatic and consular network, interesting discussions on artificial intelligence with Slovenian and foreign experts will also take place. Slovenia is one of the key countries with regard to the development, implementation and application of artificial intelligence. The diplomatic and consular network will also assist in setting up virtual libraries as spaces of social dialogue and pan-European reflection on the current challenges faced by the EU and the wider world.

Slovenia will also gift other countries a Slovenian beehive as a symbolic reminder of the important messages underlined by World Bee Day, which was proclaimed upon Slovenia's initiative.

Slovenia as a country would like to emphasise the importance of sustainable development, while showing our traditions and green orientation.

Installing Christmas trees at the Vatican and in Strasbourg in December will serve as the introduction to a series of promotional events that will take place in Slovenia and abroad, such as at EXPO Dubai and the Tokyo Olympic Games, as well as other activities taking place in Brussels and Ljubljana.

While the programme is based on live events, digital presentations of Slovenia are also planned in light of the uncertain health situation. We are certain that you will come to know and feel Slovenia better through this series of events and activities on digital platforms.



Perpetuum Jazzile in performance.
Photo: Irena Herak



DIPLOMACY

Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

THE “YOUNG FEMALE AMBASSADORS” PROJECT

TEA KNAFLIČ

AT SOME POINT, EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS CONFRONTED WITH THE QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I BECOME, WHAT AM I FOND OF DOING, WHAT DO I EXCEL IN? THE CHOICE OF A CAREER IS ONLY SIMPLE FOR SOME INDIVIDUALS, AND A REAL CHALLENGE FOR MOST. EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS DIFFERENT, AND EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN PATH. THE FINAL DECISION IS ALWAYS A COMBINATION OF DIFFERENT FACTORS.

The Young Female Ambassadors project went even further. The project provided female secondary school students insight into the activities of Slovenian and foreign ambassadors and their work in diplomacy and international relations. These young girls gained an experience they will certainly never forget.

The project was mainly aimed at encouraging young women to nurture ambitions for their future, and to reflect on how women can be part of diplomacy and international relations. ase their added value.”

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR MORE WOMEN TO BE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND ITS RELATIONS, INCLUDING DIPLOMACY?

At the initiative of Simona Leskovar, the previous State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, female second- and third-year secondary school students were invited to participate in the “Young Female Ambassadors” competition. The students were encouraged to write an essay while reflecting on the question “Why is it important for more women to be actively engaged in the international community and its relations, including diplomacy?” The ten authors of the most persuasive essays were enrolled in an informal education programme. This unique project saw the participation of female students from Ljubljana, Šiška, Brežice, Kranj, Škofja Loka, Krško, Murska Sobota, Ravne na Koroškem and Maribor general upper secondary schools and one secondary school for construction.

Guided by their mentors, the students learned about the activities of the Republic of Slovenia in terms of international

relations, protocol and consular affairs, promotional activities and the economy, the education and science system, finance and taxes, security and home affairs, the operation of Parliament, civil society and the media.

Undoubtedly, the students will be able to take advantage of the skills, knowledge and confidence gained from the project in their future careers.

WOMEN AS IMPORTANT ACTORS IN DECISION-MAKING

During this one-year project, the students participated in several events with an international focus. They visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and other ministries, where they were welcomed by the respective ministers and state secretaries. The students also met with the President of the National Assembly, participated in events related to the visit of Prince Edward from the United Kingdom, and witnessed the presentation of the credentials of the new Ambassador of Qatar to the Republic of Slovenia.

At the end of the programme, the participants received certificates of recognition and were invited to a closing ceremony held at the Presidential Palace. They were welcomed by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor. He encouraged the “Young Female Ambassadors” to nurture ambitions and follow their hearts, while thanking the ambassadors for helping the girls on their path to realising their dreams.

In concluding the ceremony, Simona Leskovar noted: “The greatest satisfaction at the end of the programme stems from forming connections and new friendly ties among participants from all over Slovenia, and the awareness that the students were given the possibility and opportunity to understand what an important role women play in decision-making in all international and interpersonal relations.”



SPORTS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DAY OF SLOVENIAN SPORT – FORGING LINKS, GETTING TOGETHER AND STRENGTHENING NATIONAL IDENTITY

ALJA PAHOR

Rajmond Debevec
Photo: Stanko Gruden/STA

THE PACE OF LIFE IS GETTING FASTER AND FASTER, AND IT IS PUTTING US UNDER MORE STRAIN THAN EVER. AND BECAUSE OF THE CONSTANT LACK OF TIME, PHYSICAL RECREATION IS GROWING IN IMPORTANCE AND VALUE. APART FROM BEING AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN HEALTH, INCREASED MOTIVATION AND WELL-BEING, SPORT ALSO HAS THE POWER TO UNITE, INSPIRE AND BRING TOGETHER. IT IS AN INFLUENTIAL FACTOR IN NURTURING AND STRENGTHENING NATIONAL IDENTITY. ON WEDNESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER, THE DAY OF SLOVENIAN SPORT WILL BE CELEBRATED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

“This holiday carries a special significance and is dedicated to Slovenian sports and its promotion in the broadest sense. Our citizens are encouraged to mark this holiday by engaging in a physical activity of their own,” stated the Olympic Committee of Slovenia – Association of Sports Federations, which put forward the idea of a new national holiday. The idea was welcomed by Slovenian sports enthusiasts and supported by local communities, the Expert Council on Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, parliamentary deputy groups and many others. The biggest sports area, offering diverse training possibilities and activities for people of all ages, was set up in Ljubljana’s Republic Square for the occasion of the holiday. On the same day, Employee Sports Day was held in Novo mesto, and the 20th anniversary of the triple Slovenian victory in the Sydney Olympics was marked by a ceremony in Bled, celebrating the day when Iztok Čop, Luka Špič and Rajmond Debevec made history.

MOTIVATION AND PERSEVERANCE ARE THE KEY TO A HEALTHY LIFE

Our primary goal is to promote sports among the widest possible range of people in order to encourage them to have a healthy and active lifestyle. When they are active, people relax and become calm, and develop their

self-confidence, perseverance and patience. "By being physically active, people not only gain and enhance their motor skills, but also strengthen their body, lead a healthy lifestyle, learn patience and increase their motivation.

The Day of Slovenian Sport is a holiday for all of us. Let's celebrate it together!

For this year's holiday, we have prepared numerous recreational sports events for people of all ages together with our supporters and partners. Sports recreation satisfies the basic need for movement and fulfils our wish to share our joy and energy with friends. It allows us to feel the very essence of sport. Since humans are built for movement, its lack can cause our body, mind and energy to slowly deteriorate. Let's celebrate sport in Slovenia," urged the Olympic Committee of Slovenia – Association of Sports Federations.

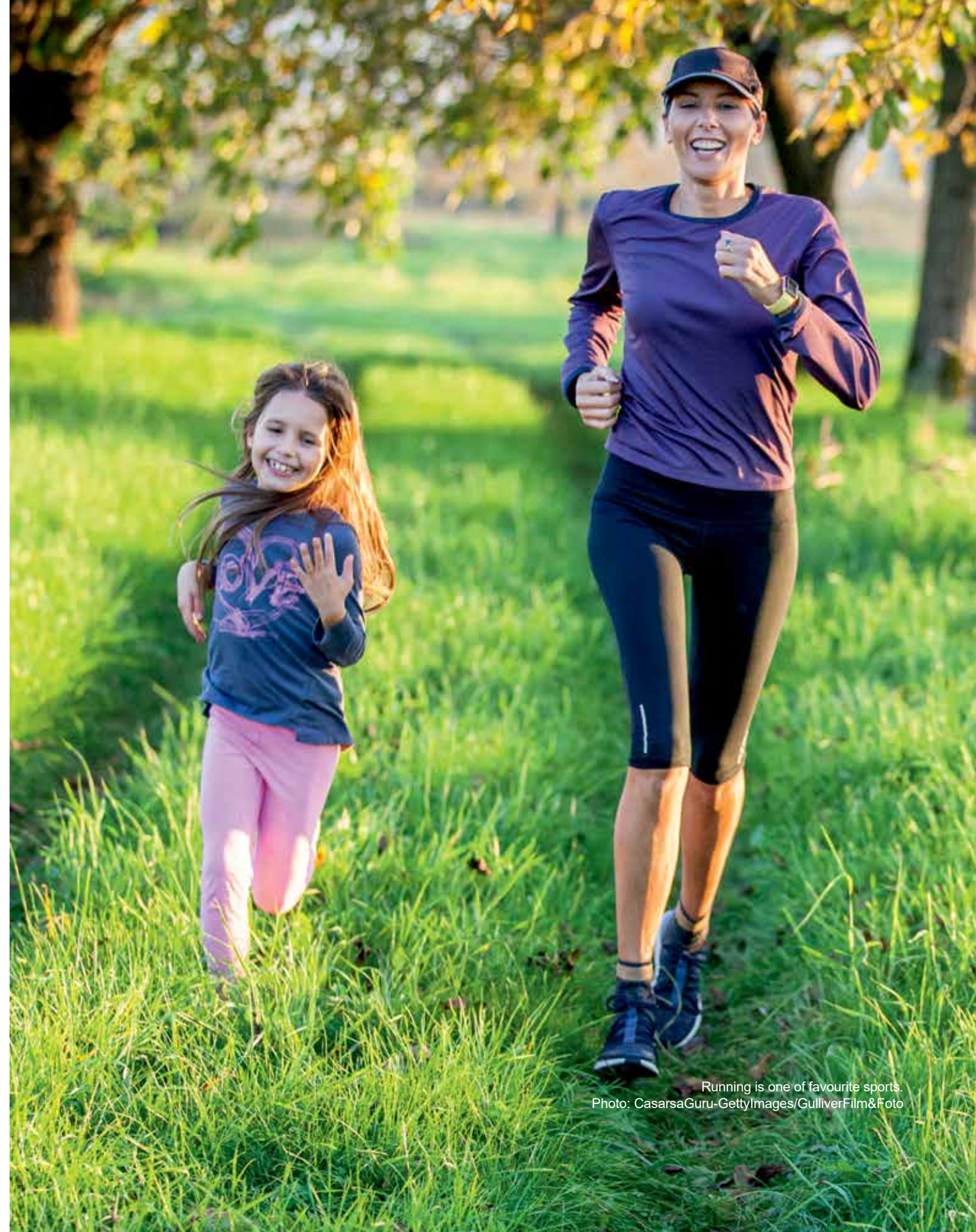
Top Slovenian athletes represent Slovenia worldwide, fill us with pride and enhance our national identity.

At the same time, they motivate people to take up a sport and to choose an activity that makes them feel good and gives them energy. Slovenia has thus joined four other countries with a national sports day. "Physical activity has a great impact on a child's development, as it provides education and promotes positive values," added the Olympic Committee of Slovenia – Association of Sports Federations.

The Day of Slovenian Sport will mark the opening of a week dominated by sport, with the 6th European Week of Sport taking place between 23 and 30 September. Numerous events will be held all around the country, such as guided workouts, sports games, sports presentations, consultations with experts and children's activities.



Luka Špik and Iztok Čop
Photo: Aleš Fevžer



Running is one of favourite sports.
Photo: CasarsaGuru-GettyImages/GulliverFilm&Foto



Articles about Slovenia can also be found in the slovenia.si website's new section, Inside View. In addition to articles about nature, art, cultural heritage, business ideas and innovations, Inside View also contains news and political content. Slovenia.si also comes in Slovenian; some of the articles about Slovenia are the same and some are different from the English version. New stories are added every day.

Learn something new about Slovenia!