



Sinfo

Hand in Hand for 20 Years

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



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Photo: Bruno Toič

HAND IN HAND FOR 20 YEARS

Since independence, Slovenia has been successfully involved in various international communities, especially at the regional level in Europe. With the accession to NATO and the European Union 20 years ago, the challenges for Slovenia became even greater. This related not only to challenges within the community, but above all to challenges of asserting ourselves. And this was not only an issue of political assertion, but also one of cultural, social and economic assertion.

In this issue of Sinfo, we look back at the pivotal times of our acceding to both international communities. And its spotlight is also on the results Slovenia has already achieved. Along the way, Slovenia has shown itself to be a trustworthy partner and to have enriched its partners with its identity and uniqueness.

We Slovenians have both followed our dreams and accepted our responsibilities. The secret of our success lies above all in self-belief. Co-existence in a community is a lesson of duties based on understanding; a community is a bond, and together we have been successfully writing the story for 20 years.

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Editor-in-Chief



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Photo: rarrororro/depositphotos.com

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On 1 May 2004 Slovenia became a full member of the EU after completing the accession process. In addition to providing financial and developmental advantages, EU membership also opened up new opportunities for Slovenian citizens as regards living, working and studying in other member states. Photo: Jan Van de Vel/European Commission archives

NEW CHAPTERS

Slovenia as an equal member of the community of the most advanced and modern European countries

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

How did you see and experience the period of Slovenia's accession to the EU; what did Slovenia gain with the accession; how do you see Slovenia 20 years after its accession; did Slovenia meet the expectations with regard to the EU and those of the Slovenian citizens? We put these questions to the then Prime Minister and the President of the National Assembly, Dr Anton Rop and Borut Pahor, respectively. The statement of the then Slovenian President, Dr Janez Drnovšek, on the occasion of ratifying Slovenia's Accession Treaty with the European Union on 28 January 2004 in the National Assembly, was summarised.

Dr Janez Drnovšek on ratification: A new chapter is beginning



Photo: Domen Grögl/STA

On 28 January 2004, at the time of the ratification of Slovenia's Accession Treaty with the European Union, the then President of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Drnovšek, stated in the National Assembly:

This is the beginning of a new chapter. The period of adjustment is over, and we are beginning to work together on an equal footing with other European countries. We have many tasks ahead of us, and Slovenia will already face many challenges this year as a new EU Member State. In my view, the biggest challenges in the coming period are the finalisation of the European Constitutional Treaty and the start of the very difficult negotiations on the new Financial Perspective, which will govern the EU budget between the end of 2006 and the end of 2013. Many questions will be raised, such as the future role of the Structural Cohesion Funds, all of which

will have an impact on Slovenian development.

The union Slovenia will join will be very different from the present one. Having negotiated its membership with 15 Member States, Slovenia is joining a 25-state Union. In total, the extended integration will have a population of approximately 450 million, with two-million strong Slovenia contributing around 0.4% of its citizens. The entry of the relatively poorer Eastern European countries into the “rich club” will be marked by significant development disparities. For example, the average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the acceding countries is only around 45% of the EU average. At around 70% of the EU average, Slovenia is at the top of the development ladder.

The text of the Accession Treaty is the fruit of almost five years of accession negotiations, and the ratification itself is the culmination of more than a decade of Slovenian efforts and preparations to join the Union. Slovenia applied for an Association Agreement with the EU as early as 1992 and concluded it in 1996, when it applied for membership. It began negotiations on membership in 1998 and concluded them in December 2002, in the company of nine acceding countries. Slovenians voted in favour of EU membership in a referendum in March 2003, and the Accession Treaty was signed in April 2003. The Treaty must be ratified by all current EU Member States before the country's accession to the EU can be completed on 1 May 2004.

Dr Anton Rop: Membership in the European Union not only includes a package of advantages, but also bears responsibilities



Photo: Žan Kolman

The EU membership, i.e. the accession to the modern, democratic, safe and solidarity-based part of Europe, had been Slovenia's strategic objective since its independence. Slovenia formally requested the opening of negotiations on the association agreement in June 1996 and it was then that the accelerated preparations for the accession also began. In different roles and in various fields, I was almost continuously involved in the preparations and the pre-accession negotiations. First as the Minister of Labour, then as the Minister of Finance and finally as the Prime Minister. I can safely say that we all together began a journey of great and thorough changes. These changes not only included the amendments to regulations, acts and models of operating of the private and public sectors, the entire country and society, but also denoted changes in the way of thinking, functioning and the lives of all citizens.

The process of Slovenia's accessing, adjusting and reforming in all fields of action of the state and society was equally, if not even more, important than the accession itself.

I experienced it as a great challenge, an opportunity and a responsibility to actually realise the necessary changes in all fields for which I was responsible. That period was strenuous and complex operationally, but it was also relatively straightforward in terms of politics, as we had a clear strategic objective. And finally, I was granted great honour at the end of that period to be able to welcome Slovenia to the EU as the then Slovenian Prime Minister together with the then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi.

What did Slovenia gain with the accession to the EU? With the accession to the EU and its membership, Slovenia became an equal member of the community of the most advanced and modern European countries. A community of stability, democracy, the rule of law, solidarity, prosperity and development. Slovenia accepted the principle of free movement of goods, services, people and capital and was assured access to the EU single market and numerous mechanisms of sustainable development financing. It undoubtedly acquired greater political and economic stability and better opportunities for development and knowledge exchange with other EU member states. Slovenia also obtained enhanced legal security and protection of human rights by enforcing European standards and rules. As an EU member state, Slovenia has access to European institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice, which enable efficient enforcement of citizens' rights and legal certainty. The advantages of the membership are numerous and significant and result in better, safer and freer lives for us all.

However, we must not forget that membership in the European Union is not only a package of advantages, but also bears responsibilities. Particularly, the protection of the hard-earned rights, values and freedoms and the responsibility for proactive and constructive cooperation in the building of our common future.

How do I see Slovenia 20 years after its accession; did Slovenia meet the expectations with regard to the EU and those of the Slovenian citizens? Many things could have been done better, more promptly and more successfully, but it is crucial that we stayed on the common European development path and that we have the opportunities to tackle the challenges and tasks ahead. Slovenia's population is one of the fastest ageing in the EU, which requires the establishment of a financially sustainable and more efficient health system, a reform of the pension system and the establishment of long-term care.

The development policy measures must be primarily aimed at the structural (smart and green) transformation of the economy for a long-term sustainable and inclusive development and higher quality of life.

Everything must be done to support a highly productive, competitive and knowledge-based economy that generates high added value and ensures sustainable prosperity for all. The education, research and development sectors have to be developed and supported on an ongoing basis. And finally, Slovenia can and must make better use of the resources available from various EU funds and international financial institutions and subsequently fully realise its development opportunities within the European community.

Borut Pahor: Decisions for an independent state and its integration in the EU and NATO were possibly three of the most important strategic decisions in recent Slovenian political history



Photo: Office of the Former President of the RS archives

I presided over the National Assembly at the time of intense harmonisation of the Slovenian legal order with that of the European Union. An extensive package of regulations had to be discussed and adopted until the accession to the European Union on 1 May 2004, many of which were also politically sensitive and required a sense of dialogue and compromise.

When transposing the European legislation in the Slovenian legal order, two circumstances assisted the Slovenian politics which were created by the politics itself. The first one was that the presidents of parliamentary parties decided to establish

the Coordination of parliamentary parties for the accession of Slovenia to the European Union even before the turn of the millennium. The consultations and agreements within the framework of the Coordination did not replace extensive parliamentary discussion, but they reduced the risk of the transposition process slowing down or even coming to a halt due to sensitive political issues. The second circumstance was that the Coordination adopted the proposal which was passed by the National Assembly as a decision, namely that the package of regulations for the transposition of the European legislation was discussed as a priority at every session. In this way, the harmonisation process was fully controlled in the political and procedural sense. It is difficult to give a fair assessment even from a historical distance of the importance of both agreements showing the maturity of the Slovenian politics of that time.

A wrong impression may be imposed from the present point of view that the accession of the ten countries from Central and Eastern Europe simultaneously in a package was self-evident and planned as such in Brussels from the very beginning. Such an option was permitted, but it could not have been relied on and to this end every country, including Slovenia, hurried the harmonisation process in their own way.

But before the grand finale of transposing the European legislation, the process of Slovenia's accession to the EU was seriously tested several times in the second half of the 1990s. The issue of meeting the condition that the constitutional subject-matter be changed due to initially Italian

and then European requirements, the so-called Spanish compromise, was the most sensitive. This should perhaps be particularly recalled because it seems with the difficult rapprochement of the Western Balkan countries with the EU that the brute political requirements and unilateral conditions only began with them.

In the book, Zmaga je začetek (Victory is the Beginning), I describe a story, an anecdote, on how the voting in the National Assembly relating to the most important decision of the entire process – the vote on the accession to the EU – almost failed due to great euphoria and lack of attention. It was written in the session management scenario that the decision would be passed simply if a majority voted for it, but in fact a two-thirds majority was necessary as per the Rules of Procedure and the Constitution. That something was not quite right I realised just before the vote, recalling I heard journalist Erika Štular on the morning news on Radio Slovenija explicitly emphasise that the National Assembly would vote on this capital issue with a two-thirds majority. It must be noted that the legal order of the National Assembly prohibited a second vote. The complication would result in an outrageous scandal that was luckily avoided.

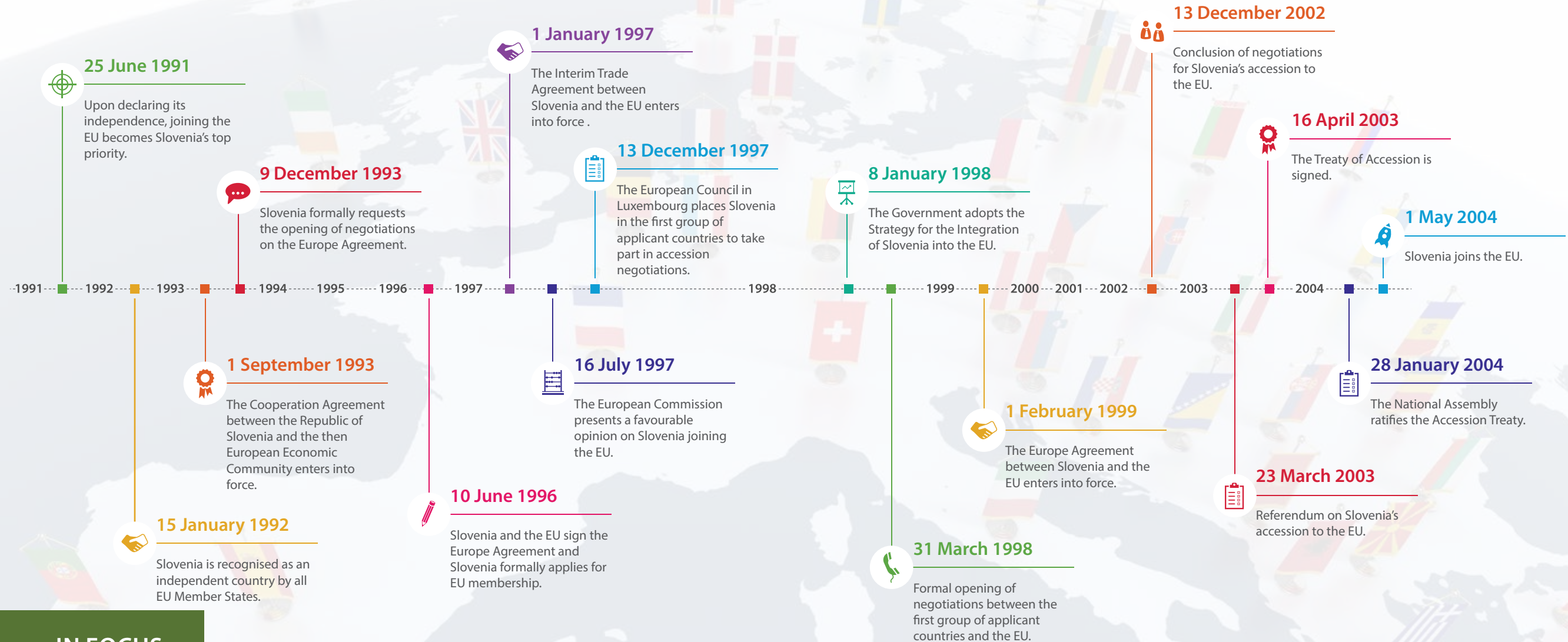
I emphasise that the decisions for an independent state and its integration in the EU and NATO were possibly three of the most important strategic decisions in recent Slovenian political history.



Photo: wlad74/depositphotos.com

TIMELINE

Important milestones before Slovenia's access to the EU



IN FOCUS

TEXT BY NATAŠA BUŠLJETA
GRAPHICS BY DAMIR KOLAR



IN FOCUS

Address by the President of the EU Parliament, Nicole Fontaine.

THE PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION OF EU ACCESSION AND MEMBERSHIP

The Slovenian National Assembly was the only one actively involved in the EU accession negotiations

TEXT BY DR ZVONKO BERGANT,
SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE ON EU AFFAIRS, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
PHOTO BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ARCHIVES

Since independence in 1991, Slovenia's key foreign policy objective was to become a member of the European Union. The National Assembly played an important role in achieving this goal. At the time of accession, its most important European tasks were to adapt the Slovenian legal order to European legislation and to approve Slovenia's negotiating positions for the negotiations with the European Commission.

Slovenia has been "voluntarily" adapting its legislation to European legislation since 1993, having chosen the legislation of the European Communities as its reference framework. With the entry into force of the European Association Agreement on 1 February 1999, we also made a formal commitment to align our national legislation with that of the EU. We drew up a plan, which we called the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis. The National Programme set out our tasks for the period 1999–2002, as we set ourselves the objective of being ready for the obligations arising from EU membership by 2002. The National Assembly ensured that the adoption of legislation proceeded smoothly, thus implementing the plan, which was further supplemented and amended until the accession.

This responsibility was entrusted to the National Assembly by the Agreement on Cooperation in Slovenia's EU Integration.

On 3 July 1997 the Agreement was signed by six of the seven parliamentary parties at the time and was a political commitment to support Slovenia's rapid EU integration.

Compared to the other candidate countries at that time, Slovenia had a special system for adopting the negotiating positions. In fact, the National Parliament was actively involved, as the National Assembly and the Government agreed that, in substance, the Foreign Affairs

Act would be used to process the negotiating positions. This meant that Slovenia's EC Accession Treaty was an international treaty and that the negotiating positions were discussed and approved in the context of so-called partial initiatives for the conclusion of an international treaty. The Parliamentary Committee of the National Assembly on International Relations thus considered all negotiating positions and took a position on them, endorsing or amending them.

In order to function more effectively in the EU integration process, the National Assembly, following the example of other national parliaments, established a Commission for

European Affairs in May 1996. The Commission played a central coordinating role on European affairs within the National Assembly. It thus differed in terms of its sphere of work from other working bodies specialising in particular areas.

The Commission ceased its work on 21 May 2004, when the Committee on EU Affairs was established by a decree of the National Assembly.

The Slovenian part of the Parliamentary Association Committee also played an important role in the accession period. In accordance with

the European Association Agreement, political dialogue at the parliamentary level took place within the Parliamentary Association Committee. The important role of the National Assembly during the accession process was maintained after EU accession.

The National Assembly's participation in the formulation of Slovenian positions was based in principle on the Finnish model of parliamentary handling of EU affairs and slightly adapted to the Slovenian political system.

Most of the materials related to decision-making for Slovenia's activities in the Council of the EU and the European Council are adopted by the Committee on EU Affairs, and for foreign and security policy by the Committee on Foreign Policy. In plenary, the National Assembly considers only key documents and decisions, such as the Declaration on activities of the Republic of Slovenia in the institutions of the European Union.

The National Assembly was also active during the two Slovenian Presidencies of the EU Council (in 2008 and 2021), organising several inter-parliamentary conferences and committee meetings on topical EU issues.



Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament in Slovenia.



The law on the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon was adopted.



IN FOCUS

Dr Janez Potočnik: "Be active in European elections and decide your own destiny!"

DR JANEZ POTOČNIK

It is wise to take part in all elections, not just European ones

TEXT BY PETRA BEZJAK CIRMAN AND VESNA ŽARKOVIČ
PHOTO BY ŽAN KOLMAN

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's membership in the European Union, we are reminiscing about how we joined the European Union, what our role in this political union is today and what its future holds. We invited Dr Janez Potočnik, Slovenia's chief negotiator for accession to the European Union, to the studio of the Government Communications Office.

We start 20 years ago, when you were the chief negotiator for Slovenia's accession to the European Union, the head of the narrow negotiating team. What are your memories of that time?

Those were good times. It was also one of the moments when Slovenia was very united. The narrow negotiating group was usually something like 12 to 13 people, and we were all from the profession; in short, it was not a politically selected group. At that time, Slovenia entered the so-called Luxembourg Group of six, initially more through the eye of the needle, because we were burdened by the story that we were part of the former Yugoslavia and everything that had gone on there before. At the beginning, we were somehow seen as not being the best prepared, but through the negotiation process itself, not only because of the narrow negotiating team, but because of a whole group of people across the ministries, including the Government's European Affairs Service, Minister Bavčar, at the time, when he was extremely effective, these things moved forward quickly. We were increasingly seen as someone

who is well aware of what it means, what needs to be done and how to be well prepared.

But would you change anything today? Today, in retrospect, it seems to be a great success for our country to have been the first Balkan country to enter the European Union.

We are, of course, wiser with the years, but when I look at the process, how we managed it at the time, it seems to me that it was managed quite optimally, and we had a very interesting approach which proved to be effective, which is that we basically systematically presented our approach in the capitals of the European Union, and every time we went to Helsinki, for example, we invited all the representatives of the diplomatic services, including those from other countries, and they then reported back to those countries, saying that we were well prepared. Things looked difficult at the time, a lot of work was done, but the negotiations at home were many times more difficult than those with the European Union. At home, you have to convince people why joining the EU makes sense.

Was it important at the time that politicians were united in this objective?

Of course, of course, that was extremely important. In fact, we were united in this objective and worked hand in hand. We were also the only ones to adopt our negotiating positions in the Slovenian Parliament. Other countries did not accept this in their parliaments. But we have never had any problems with that; on the contrary, it has turned out that we have actually created a much greater sense of belonging. People felt like they were part of the story, not excluded. In all these kinds of processes, it is extremely important to be somewhat inclusive from the beginning, because once things are decided, people don't feel the same and they don't have the same belonging that they have if they are part of the process from the beginning.

This year, we have European elections, which will be attended by Slovenes who were born in the European Union and who do not know life before the European Union, but it is well known that abstention from voting is high among young people. Why should they vote in these elections?

Why? Because it is wise to take part in all elections, not just this one. We are part of Europe, geographically, historically, economically, and I would say to the young generation, above all, be active in this process, decide your own destiny, do not let others decide your destiny, because too often they will decide your destiny in a way that maximises their own well-being.

The Euro Barometer, a survey carried out last year measuring public opinion, shows that the people of Slovenia feel themselves to be citizens of the European Union, and that we have an above-average preference for the various policies and proposals of the European Union. On the other hand, if we go back a little to environmental problems, we see the farmers' protests. In Slovenia, too,

there has been criticism about Natura 2000 and farming. To what do you attribute this disparity?

Thank goodness Slovenia has chosen to be the country with the largest share of Natura 2000 areas, but believe me, in the long run, this is the greatest asset we could protect for posterity. Yes, it causes us a problem here and there in the short term, but Natura 2000 was never intended to be a network of areas completely protected from people. It was meant to be a responsible coexistence between people and nature.

We are less in favour of the proposal for a common European policy on immigration, we are also talking about climate refugees coming, we are talking about people coming to Europe from war zones. Prime Minister Robert Golob, at the meeting of the Mediterranean Prime Ministers, proposed that educational centres be set up in Africa where Africans could learn a European language, whatever it may be, and learn to live with us, and that this would stop illegal migration. And the biggest cemetery in the Mediterranean. And at the same time get the necessary workforce. Do you see this as a solution for Africa, given that you are often in Africa?

I would go one step further. In this historical context, we have to look at the relationship between Africa and Europe. And we know that many European countries were colonisers. Their wars, of course, put pressure on Europe because we are close. In short, we need to start working systematically on how to get Africa on its feet as much as possible, how to provide the conditions to reduce these pressures. Education, especially for young girls, investment in infrastructure and so forth is essential. Let us think in terms of how we can essentially enforce a mobility system so that we need fewer cars per family, so that we relieve the pressure on traffic, but at the same time, with alternatives for people, so that they have the kind of choices that they do not have

today, no? And many people today, especially young people, are very conscious and they are willing to accept that, not least because they have no other choice. We have an economic system that is wasteful and unfair, and we all know that. And if we are not going to change anything, then let us also stop dreaming about dealing with climate change and other things and, above all, let us stop talking out loud about the young generation, because we are not caring enough about it, because we are actually putting it in front of closed doors and problems.

Is Slovenia well placed in the European area?

Slovenia is probably better viewed in Europe than it is among its own people; the European Union views us better than we view ourselves, and perhaps even better than we really are. We are

a fairly constructive partner in Europe, someone with whom there are not many problems.

Finally, is the European Union still fit for purpose or is it no longer so?

Look, the European Union, you know why it was created, do you? And it has been fulfilling that purpose, with minor deviations, more or less successfully for quite a few decades now. And we do not know what would have happened if it had not existed. Today, we are the first generation ever to live in a social-ecological world of planetary proportions. We see how we have been connected in a pandemic, but also with climate change, with the internet, with global trade... there are many global challenges that you cannot solve in isolation, that Slovenia cannot solve, and that the EU is the only way out and the only solution.



With the GOVSI podcast, the Government of Slovenia is expanding the established ways of informing and communicating with the public and enhancing the transparency of government activities. One of the guests was dr Janez Potočnik.



A celebration on the accession of the EU in 2004. Photo: Uroš Hočevár/Salomon2000

EUROPE DAY

Europe Day to be the main celebration of the 20th anniversary of EU membership in the future European Capital of Culture

TEXT BY NATAŠA BUŠLJETA

Slovenia became a member of the European Union on 1 May 2004. The 20th anniversary of its accession will be celebrated on Europe Day, 9 May in Nova Gorica.

The venue is the same as 20 years ago, when the then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, symbolically welcomed the then Prime Minister of Slovenia, Dr Anton Rop, and Slovenia into the European Union.

Nova Gorica will be the European Capital of Culture in 2025, together with Gorizia in Italy, so the central celebration here has an added symbolic significance.

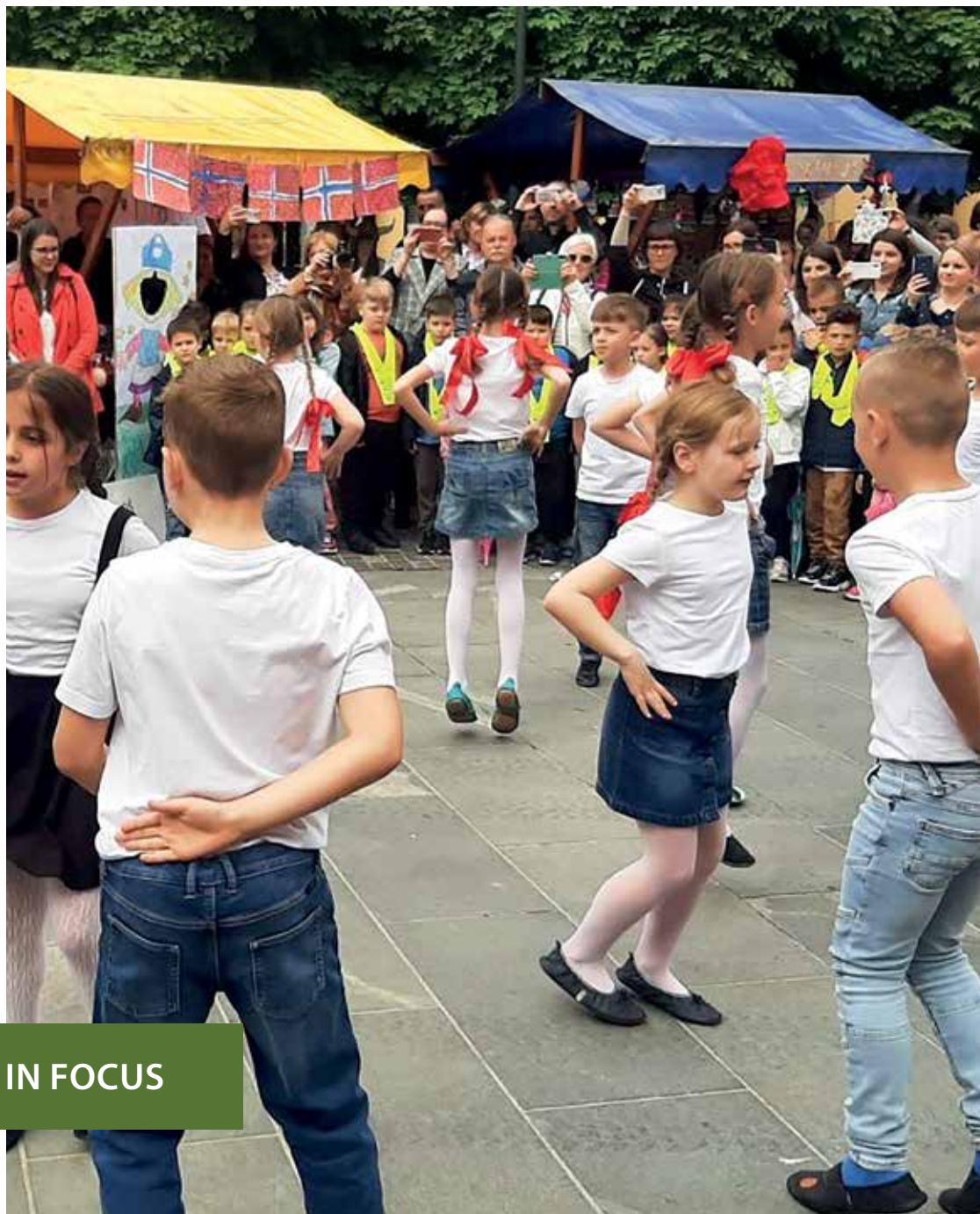
We have invited both Romano Prodi and Anton Rop, the two key figures at the time, to the celebration. In Government podcast GOVSI we will reminisce about the times twenty years ago and discuss the progress made by both the European Union and Slovenia since then.

In the afternoon, a festival of good EU stories, collected and presented by SPIRIT, will open at Bevkov Square. In the late afternoon, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs will host an expert panel discussion with some of Slovenia's most prominent EU representatives, from European Commissioners to MEPs. It will be moderated by Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Tanja Fajon.

In the evening, a national celebration will take place outdoors in front of the Slovenian National Theatre, with Prime Minister Dr Robert Golob as the keynote speaker. Guests and visitors will be able to enjoy a superb cultural and artistic programme outlining the story of Slovenia's journey as a member of the European Union, devised by renowned director Neda Rusjan Bric. The national celebration will be jointly organised by the Government and the Representation of the European Commission in Slovenia.

Following the celebration, there will be a culinary event organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food together with the Slovenian Tourist Board. By presenting Slovenian food products protected by the EU, our aim is to introduce visitors to European values and accomplishments in the field of safeguarding and preserving food diversity.

We have invited a number of institutions and organisations to host events, ensuring that the day offers a diverse and captivating array of activities. The Communication Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia will ensure everything runs smoothly.



IN FOCUS

Photo: III. OŠ Celje archives

EUROPE OF THE YOUNG – THE FUTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Celebrating 20 years of Slovenia's EU membership with young people

TEXT BY NATAŠA BUŠLJETA AND TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

Most of today's young people were born after Slovenia became a part of the European Union. For young people, EU membership may seem self-evident, but it is important they recognize that European cooperation and integration are not guaranteed. Young people themselves must also contribute to the furthering of this integration.

Slovenia's 20th anniversary of EU membership will culminate in a youth engagement event in Celje on 8 May.

In the Main Square, children from kindergartens and schools in the broader region of Celje will present EU Member States and countries on the path to EU membership.

Children get acquainted with and explore individual countries throughout the school year. The celebration will culminate in a presentation of the European Village Project, that has only endured in the Municipality of Celje, which has held it continuously for 19 years, practically since Slovenia joined the European Union. As part of the project, young participants showcase the rich cultural diversity, languages, lifestyles, and unique traits of European inhabitants. At the same time, they highlight the similarities of EU nations that connect and strengthen them.

Europe at School

On 8 May, Celje will also host the award ceremony for the best works by pupils who participated in the Europe at School competition. This project has been active in Slovenia since 1999, with the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth assuming national coordination in 2005. This year's competition is entitled "If you do good, the good comes back to you". It encourages young people to be aware that we all have the opportunity and responsibility to contribute to shaping the future of Europe that benefits everyone. The competition encourages young people to contemplate the concept of goodness and how to foster conditions for their own happiness and that of others, as well as how to demonstrate respect for themselves and others. Prizes and accolades will be awarded to the best entries in the literary, visual, photographic, video, web and creative categories at the closing event in Celje.

Prior to Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth assuming national coordination of



The illustration by elementary school student Iva Racman titled "Life is a Gift of Water." Photo: ZPMS archives



Photo: HotPhotoPie/depositphotos.com

this project in 2005, it was overseen by the Information and Documentation Centre of the Council of Europe starting from 1999. Over 10,000 young individuals participate in the competition every year. The main goals of the competition, which engages kindergartens, primary and secondary schools as well as schools with adapted programmes, include fostering a creative approach to addressing social issues locally, in Europe and globally, as well as promoting the acquisition of new knowledge and enhancing mutual understanding, tolerance, and solidarity.

Common values form the basis of cooperation and integration among EU Member States. These values, including human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, have been upheld by the EU for over seventy years.

Slovenian birdhouses for Belgian birds

As Slovenia celebrates 20 years of EU membership, a unique initiative is underway to highlight the creativity of young people through the construction and painting of wooden birdhouses. Slovenia's accession to the EU has also enriched European Union through its biodiversity, landscape diversity and commitment to sustainability. The birdhouse project ingeniously combines Slovenia's green dimension with the significance of parks in Belgium, where celebrations for Slovenia's EU accession will also take place. Secondary schools where students specialise in woodworking skills have been invited to craft 30 birdhouses. Subsequently, Slovenian language pupils at the European School in Brussels, where the Slovenian section will open in September, will paint these birdhouses. Once finished, the birdhouses will be placed in the school's park, providing a hospitable habitat for Belgian birds during the winter months.

Active citizenship

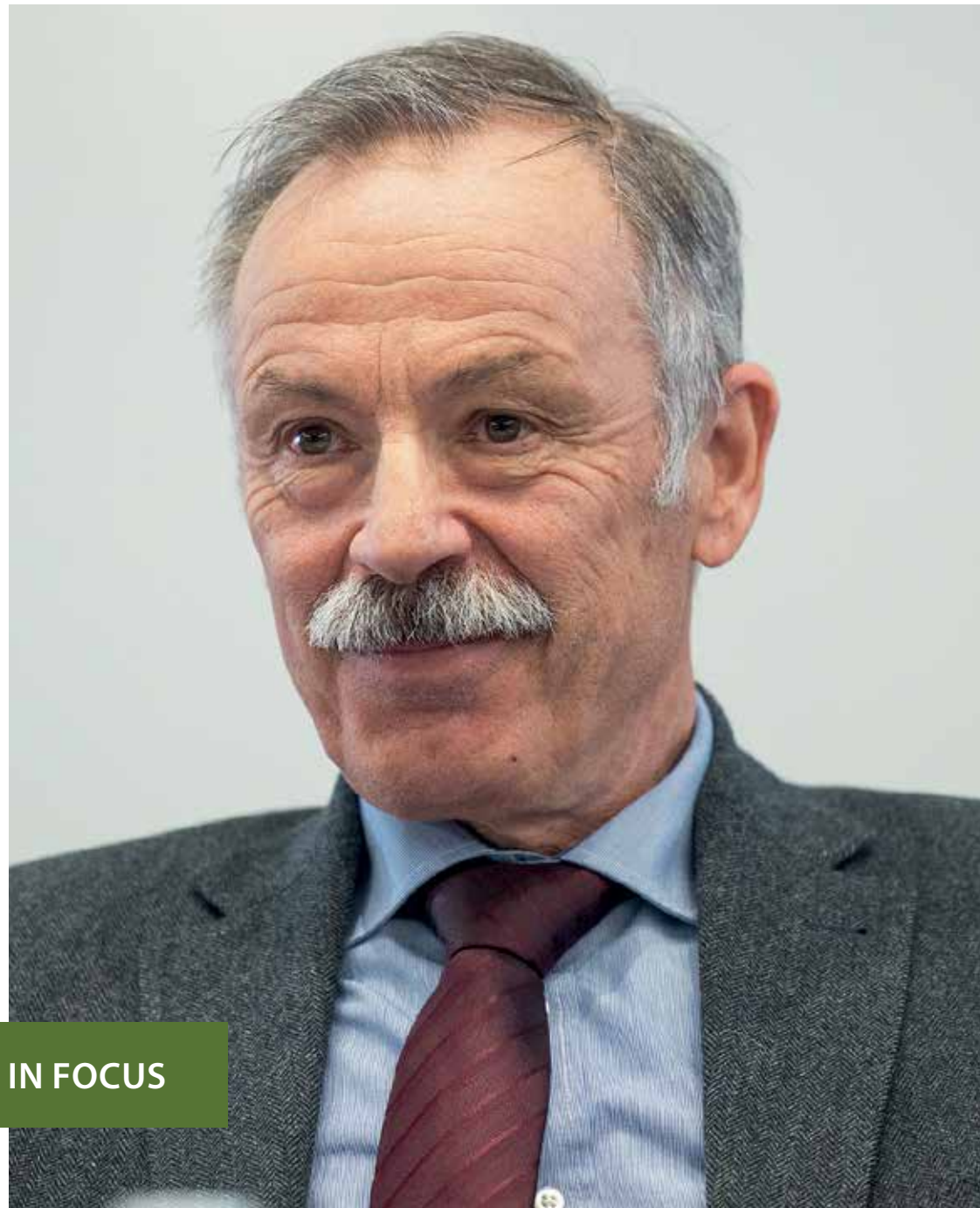
Another significant EU value is active citizenship, which encourages individuals to work together in shaping society and addressing public issues at local, national and international levels. Active citizenship must be based on mutual respect and other EU values. Cooperation between the Communication Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (UKOM) on behalf of the Slovenian Government and Slovenian secondary schools is also part of the active citizenship programme. We also talk about the EU and the anniversary of Slovenia's accession with young people attending Slovenian secondary schools during their visits to the Government, which are also part of the Active Citizenship Programme.

This school year, we have already welcomed more than 1,300 students from 15 secondary schools and grammar schools.

The Government's premises are open to the students. The Government's representatives provide insights into the work and responsibilities of the Government. They also discuss Slovenia's role within the European family and how the government coalition fulfills its commitments. Additionally, they inform students about the importance of elections.



The Government's premises are open to the students. Photo: Damir Kolar



Mojmir Mrak: "In order to achieve successful economic development, it is crucial to be linked to international environment."

DR MOJMIR MRAK

The economic benefits of Slovenia's full economic integration into the EU far outweigh the drawbacks

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO BY BOR SLANA/STA

We asked Dr Mojmir Mrak, a professor at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Ljubljana, whether he could evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the single European currency, and other economic aspects of Slovenia's integration into the EU. Here are his thoughts.

In order for a small and open economy to achieve successful economic development and overall prosperity, it is crucial that it is closely linked to its international environment in all respects.

For Slovenia, which first became an independent state towards the end of the last century, the EU was the natural international environment.

It is a regional economic integration that has evolved from a relatively simple customs union through a common economic area of four freedoms to a monetary union as the most complex form of such integration. Slovenia's accession to the EU 20 years ago, and the adoption of the euro just three years later, were strategic economic objectives of the people of Slovenia and its economic policy makers already at the time of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, and the commitment to these

objectives has only strengthened since Slovenia became a sovereign state.

I believe that Slovenia's experience so far in the EU and the euro area has been a distinctly positive one, especially when viewed through an economic prism. The Slovenian economy has integrated very quickly and efficiently into the European single market, where the vast majority of our total exports of goods and services are directed, and where they now account for nearly three quarters of the country's GDP.

As a result of its EU membership, Slovenia has seen significant net inflows of funds from the EU budget over the past two decades.

These funds have been a very important – and at the time of the financial crisis exactly a decade ago, virtually the only – source of funds



"The economic benefits of Slovenia's full economic integration into the EU far outweigh the drawbacks."

to finance investment. The introduction of the euro has also had a markedly positive impact on Slovenia's economic flows. Indeed, the economic measures implemented in the years leading up to Slovenia's membership of the euro area were crucial not only for lowering inflation, but also for the country's overall macroeconomic stabilisation. Moreover, the changeover to the single European currency has helped Slovenian businesses avoid the exchange rate risks to which they were previously exposed, and it also eliminated the risk of potential attacks on the tolar as the currency of a very small currency area. The introduction of the euro has also been

well accepted by Slovenian citizens, as it not only makes it easier, but also cheaper, for them to travel to nearby countries. The Eurobarometer results from autumn 2023 speak for themselves about how satisfied Slovenian citizens are with the euro.

86% of Slovenians rate the euro as a "good thing", which puts us among the four euro area countries with the highest support for the single currency.

Of course, joining the EU and adopting the single currency also came with certain "costs", notably the loss of monetary sovereignty. This was felt most acutely during the euro area financial crisis, when, in the changed macroeconomic conditions, the country no longer had important economic tools at its disposal to maintain international competitiveness, in particular monetary policy and the exchange rate, but had to overcome the crisis through "internal devaluation", which was of course based on painful fiscal consolidation. The euro area crisis has also clearly exposed the fact that the original institutional structure of the single European currency, established at Maastricht, was rather flawed and has been subject to major changes and amendments over the last decade.

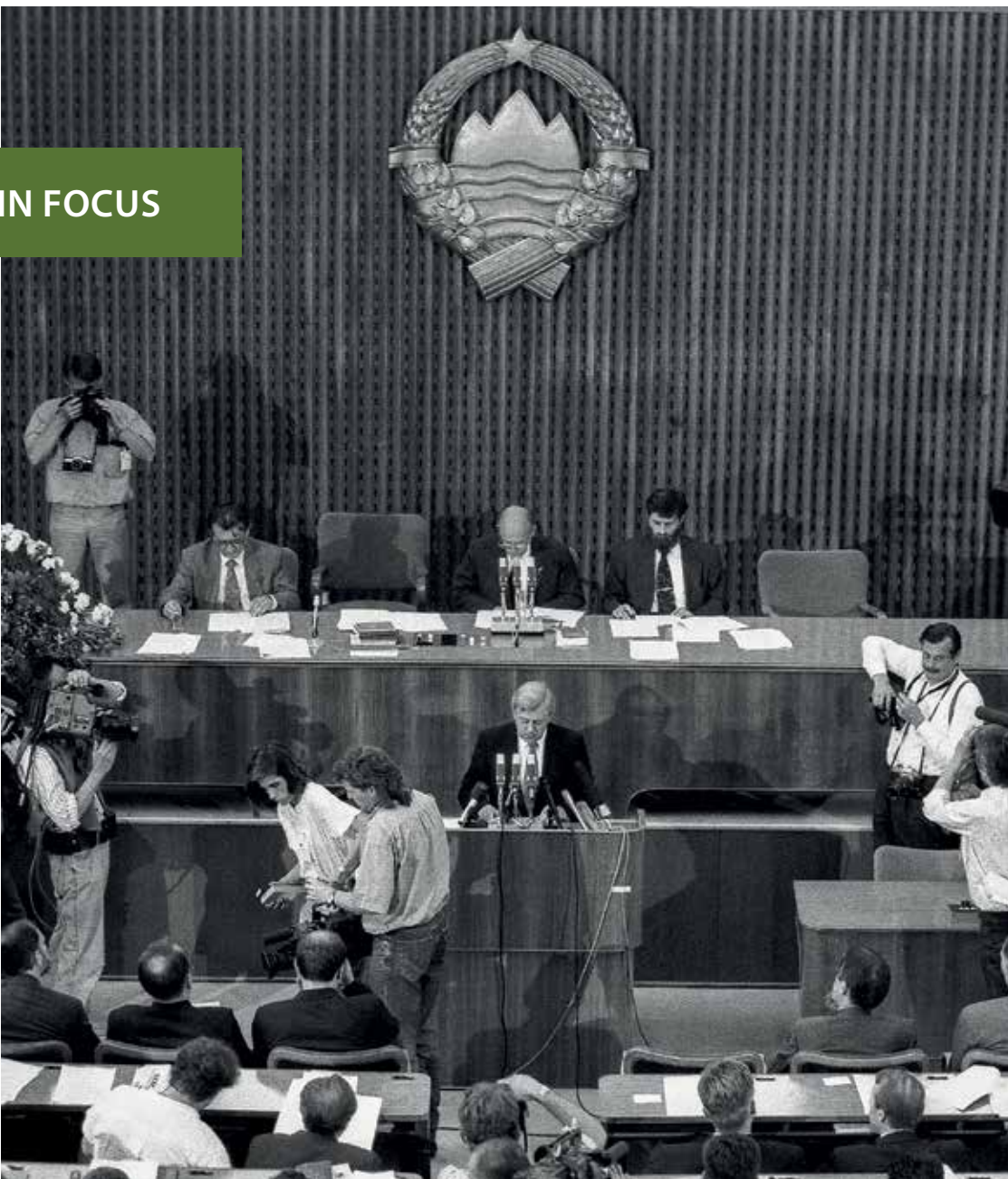
Today, the institutional structure of the euro area can be assessed as

considerably more comprehensive and robust, as evidenced by the quality of access to financial markets that all euro area member states, and therefore also Slovenia, enjoy today.

Despite the challenges that Slovenia and its economy have faced since joining the EU and adopting the single currency, the economic benefits of Slovenia's full economic integration into the EU far outweigh the drawbacks. Slovenia has not only reduced its development gap with the EU average over the last 20 years, but its membership of the EU and the euro area has also provided it with a higher degree of macroeconomic stability than it would otherwise have enjoyed, and a stable international framework in which to pursue its interests.



Photo: Boris/depositphotos.com



Address by the President of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, at the joint session of the three chambers of the Slovenian Parliament, where the Basic Constitutional Charter on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Slovenia and the constitutional act for its implementation were adopted by an overwhelming majority. Ljubljana, 25 June 1991. Photo: Nace Bizilj, kept by the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia

SLOVENIA'S EUROPEAN PATH: 20 YEARS OF SLOVENIA IN THE EU

Exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia

TEXT BY BARBARA KOČEVAR

The anniversary of Slovenia's full EU membership will also be marked by a small temporary exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia entitled *Slovenia's European Path: 20 Years of Slovenia in the EU*.

The exhibition will showcase Slovenia's path towards becoming a full member of the European Union. To mark the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's EU membership, we have selected 20 items, both photographs and objects, to show the major milestones on Slovenia's path to Europe.

A badge bought on the streets of Ljubljana in 1992 will remind us of how we shifted our focus towards Europe in the first year of our independence.

An official gift, presented to the Slovenian President, Dr Janez Drnovšek, by the Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Simitis, reminds us of the importance of the signing of the Treaty of Accession to the European Union in Athens in April 2003. There will also be a special border sign, which was erected from 1 May 2004 to 21 December 2007 in Europe Square, the joint square of Nova Gorica and Italian Gorizia. The exhibition also reveals the reason why it stood there for only three years. The "Euro Calculator", distributed by the Bank of Slovenia to Slovenian households, brings back memories of the time when Slovenia

adopted the euro and we used the calculator to calculate and compare prices in tolar and euros.

The "Slovenian-European" items will be on display in the foyer of the Knights' Hall of the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia, where you will also be able to learn about the memories of some of the important individuals on Slovenia's path to EU membership. The exhibition will be open from 4 April to 6 June 2024.



Visit of the President of the European Commission Jacques Santer to Slovenia. Pictured with Slovenian Prime Minister Dr. Janez Drnovšek. Ljubljana, 11 April 1997. Photo: Tomi Lombar, kept by the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia.



IN FOCUS

In 2021, the Bank of Slovenia celebrated its 30th anniversary. Photo: klemsey/depositphotos.com

A MONETARY HISTORY OF SLOVENIA

Not just a medium of payment, but also a symbol of sovereign political authority

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

On 1 May 2004, when the Republic of Slovenia became a full member of the European Union, the Bank of Slovenia joined the European System of Central Banks (the ESCB). With the introduction of the euro on 1 January 2007, it also became part of the Eurosystem.

Throughout modern history, money has been a symbol of sovereign political authority. Before Slovenia joined the European Union and the Eurosystem, it also successfully carried out the historical task of becoming financially independent upon declaring its independence.

When the moratorium from the Brioni Agreement was lifted on 8 October 1991, Slovenia was able to introduce its own currency. The Republic of Slovenia's first National Currency Unit Act was adopted, along with the Monetary Unit of the Republic of Slovenia Act and the Bank of Slovenia Act. As our first very own currency, the words Slovenian tolar will always be written in Slovenian history in gold letters.

October 1991, when Slovenian money in the form of provisional payment notes entered circulation for the first time, is therefore the birth month of Slovenian financial independence.

The time before the tolar

In addition to being a medium of payment, money also writes history. It features in everyday life and festivities. Names, proverbs, customs and traditions, and stereotypes help us understand specific periods of history. The word "payment", for example, is related not only to the material value of an object or service.

Throughout Slovenia's history, money has carried many designations, both formal and colloquial. Official names include *dukat*, *tolar*, *goldinar* and *krajcar*, and currency names from fairy tales, poems and stories include shiny gold coins, bright silver coins, *žuti*, *zlati*, *rumeni*, *zlataki*, *rumenjaki*, *beliči*, etc. Sometimes the names also designated values, such as *dvojač*, *trojač*, *petica*, *zeksar*, *šestica*, *cvanc'garca* and *dvajsetica*.

Others (coins) referred to symbols. Examples include *šmarna petica*, denoting the symbol of Our Lady, and *repar*, referring to the "repa" (turnip) in the coat of arms of a Slovenian-born archbishop.



Museum visitors can also see an armchair made from recycled banknotes with a telling sign: "I'm sitting on EUR 2,000,000". Photo: The Bank of Slovenia archives



Money in Slovenia was also used as part of clothing accessories, especially jewellery. Wast with coins "kančak" is a part of woman folk costume in Bela Krajina. Photo: The Bank of Slovenia archives



Images of money also appear on beehive panels. Photo: The Bank of Slovenia archives

The 1000-unit banknote was named "jur" after the image of St George (sv. Jurij) that it featured. The term for a thousand banknote has thus survived to the present day.

Folk customs of life and annual cycles

These mark important events, such as births, baptism, marriage customs, house building, deaths and funerals.

Pregnant women were given a *šmarna petica* to alleviate labour, a coin was stuffed in newborns' diapers and placed in the water of their first bath. The economic aspect was even more pronounced in wedding customs. Money played an important role starting with engagement. The more dowry a bride brought into the house upon marriage, the more valuable she was. Suitors often assumed the role of buyers. The village boys would put a barrier ("šranga") in front of the bride's house in order for the groom to pay a "ransom" for the bride. Money was thrown to children for good luck at the wedding ceremony, hidden in a brick oven, a jar or a wedding cake. Money was also collected from wedding guests to pay for the musicians and cooks. It was built into foundations, walls or other parts of a building along with other small valuables. The end and the beginning of life come together in the custom of throwing money into the open grave of a godmother to "pay off" death if a baptism and a funeral party happened to run into each other in the churchyard.

The annual cycle begins with Shrovetide, which is followed by Easter, fairs, blessings of food and feast days of saints, and ends with Christmas and New Year's.

People dressed in Shrovetide masks would go from house to house collecting gifts, most often money, to spend on parties or charity. On Easter Monday, godfathers and confirmation sponsors would often bring gifts to their godchildren, sometimes also in the form of coins. Trade took place on the occasion of fairs, food blessings and saints' feast days. Many families would put money on the table to bring good fortune to the house during Christmas time or on the last day of the year.

Financial education

To educate children and adults who are not financial experts, the Banka Slovenije Museum opened its doors on 18 May 2021, International Museum Day. While its main target groups are children and young people, it is also interesting for adults.

Through didactic games and interactive materials such as atlanta's Secret game, the museum aims to introduce visitors to the operation of the central bank and its role in the development of an independent country.

The museum consists of six sections. These cover the main roles of the Bank of Slovenia, which include ensuring the supply of cash, writing history, monitoring, connecting, maintaining stability and educating the public.

Since gaining independence, Slovenia has changed its currency three times.

Yugoslav dinars were replaced by cash vouchers, followed by tolar and finally euros.

Euro coins bear images of the greatest Slovenian poet France Prešeren; the Reformation figure Primož Trubar, whom we have to thank for the first Slovenian printed book; the highest Slovenian mountain, Triglav, the symbol of the Slovenian nation; an unrealised design of the Slovenian Parliament by architect Jože Plečnik; the sower depicted on an impressionist painting by Ivan Grohar; the symbol of the first organised state authority, represented by the Prince's Stone; and storks, a symbol of birth and long life.

The museum also displays the national sides of the two-euro coins of all EU Member States.

On display are money from different periods of Slovenian history, money boxes in the shape of various animals, the first Slovenian ATM, a real gold bar, and a chair made of battered and damaged banknotes.

A particularly fascinating insight into the history of the Slovenian nation is offered by special occasion coins. Commemorative coin collections were issued on the 150th anniversary of Jože Plečnik's birth, the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the euro, the 500th anniversary of Primož Trubar's birth, the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the University of Ljubljana, etc. Collector coins were issued on the 110th anniversary of the birth of the Slovenian writer Boris Pahor, the 30th anniversary of Slovenia's statehood, the 100th anniversary of the first Olympic medal, the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, etc.

A reflection of the nation

When we talk about the history of a currency, we are also talking about the history of a nation.



The aim of the museum is to provide financial education. It is also appropriate for children, who can get to know the laws of finance through didactic games. Photo: The Bank of Slovenia archives

The material form of money is a reflection of a moment, achievements, vision, the recognition of oneself and other matters.

Slovenia's independence in 1991 is undoubtedly a major event also because Slovenians gained their own currency for the very first time.

Today, being part of the large European family as a sovereign state, euro notes still bear Slovenian marks.

And these images will never run out, because Slovenians are a rich nation with many unique features. We are independent and can be an equal piece of any mosaic.

In Slovenian language, the verb "gor plačou" often bears hidden connotations, such as negative consequences for bad actions or mistakes. Furthermore, the word "enumerate" also means lecturing someone for doing something wrong.



Since independence, Slovenia has changed its currency three times. Yugoslav dinars were replaced by cash vouchers, followed by tolar and finally euros. Photo: Johan10/depositphotos.com

The Slovenian tolar was the monetary unit of Slovenia before it was replaced by the euro on 1 January 2007. In addition to financial experts, the process of selecting the name and developing the tolar's appearance and story involved numismatists, politicians, historians, designers and painters. Other proposed currency designations included klas (an ear of wheat), lipa (the linden tree), Triglav, the crown and the Slovenian dinar. But the prevailing opinion was that the word should contain an "r", a hard letter that expresses firmness. The Slovenian tolar was also known as "men's money", as the banknotes only portrayed men upon the currency's introduction. It was only in 1993 that the first woman was featured on the tolar, namely painter Ivana Kobilica. The Slovenian tolar owes its historical significance mainly to the fact that it was only OURS. It made it possible for Slovenians to get used to independence and autonomy and to gain confidence.

The tolar has played a central role in developing the Slovenian identity and awareness that Slovenians have always been an important part of Europe. The consumer value thus became a story of victory over history.

IN FOCUS



Brdo Congress Center. Photo: Mitja Kobal/www.sloveniainfo.si

THE CLUB OF VENICE SEMINAR WILL BE IN SLOVENIA THIS TIME

Addressing the disinformation challenges and sharing experiences on communicating EU enlargement

TEXT BY NATAŠA BUŠLJETA AND VINCENZO LE VOCI

Twenty years on, the largest EU enlargement presents an opportunity to draw lessons from past communication efforts and to prepare for the upcoming EU enlargement, which is once again high on the EU political agenda.

For this reason, together with the Club of Venice, we decided to organise a conference in Slovenia, 26 April 2024, and invite Government representatives and communication experts to discuss and share knowledge and experiences on the subject, with a special focus on disinformation. We will bring together many distinguished experts from across Europe.

The seminar will commence with a morning panel dedicated to a debate on how to counter disinformation in the EU.

First, we shall exchange views on the effectiveness of the current EU legislative action in this field, especially based on the Digital Services Act adopted last year, and how the new EU legislation could evolve in short and mid-term against the increasingly challenging developments in the European communication and media ecosystem.



CLUB OF VENICE

The Club of Venice is an informal group of the most senior communications professionals from the governments of EU Member States and candidate states, as well as from European institutions. The Club aims to promote effective government communication at both national and European levels for the benefit of Europe's citizens and their democratic engagement.



Park Brdo. Photo: Marko Arandjelović/www.slovenia.info

Since the dissemination of reliable information is essential for democracy, and even more so in the context of the many electoral deadlines foreseen this year, we will not only focus on legislative instruments, but also explore other possibilities to detect and neutralise disinformation, the sharing of information on national governments' communication plans and strategies in this field, on the responsibility of the media, and on the role and possible use and impact of artificial intelligence in this regard.

The afternoon panel of the seminar will focus on communication challenges in both the EU and candidate countries: from (unrealistically) high expectations to disappointment and apathy in various candidate countries, to opposition and disinterest in EU Member States, and from disinformation to propaganda.

While approaching the huge enlargement in 2004, the EU had to prepare the institutional structure in parallel with carrying out the negotiating process, and we recall the adoption of the Nice Treaty as completing a memorable path for this purpose.

At both the EU and Member States level a remarkable effort was made to communicate the added value of the new memberships to the citizens and to keep momentum high in public opinion.

We now find ourselves in a similar situation, but one which has prompted the following question: Can we draw positive lessons from the largest enlargement or are the circumstances so different that the processes cannot be compared? We argue that, from a communication standpoint, the principles remain the same, although the challenges are greater, especially in countering disinformation in the media and on social platforms in this regard.

We are proud to host Borut Pahor, a former member of both the Slovenian parliament and the European Parliament, as well as a former Prime Minister and President of the Republic of Slovenia, as the keynote speaker on the topic of communicating the enlargement of the EU.



A modern glass structure with around 9.000 m² of use-surface offers options for the organisation of many different events. Splendis Hall is the hall located on the ground floor and offers a wonderful view of Brdo Park and has access to an open terrace. Photo: www.brdo.si



Grandis Hall - the largest hall of the congress centre and thus great for various types of events. The hall is also perfect place to host concerts, dances, different shows, and social and ceremonial events. Photo: www.brdo.si



Photo: Simon Avsec/Park of Military History archives

NATO MEMBERSHIP

Slovenia's 20 years in NATO

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

Full-fledged NATO membership was one of Slovenia's strategic goals when it became independent. Our NATO aspirations were based on fundamental values, strategic security and vital national interests.

Slovenia joined NATO on 29 March 2004. The membership invitation demonstrated the belief of NATO members at the time that Slovenia was capable of contributing to the implementation of the North Atlantic Treaty provisions in terms of politics and defence. The latter remains the key document of the Euro-Atlantic community.

NATO membership has strengthened Slovenia's security and contributed to its long-term development.

It has placed Slovenia in the political and security framework of the most developed Western countries and enhanced its international visibility as a democratic and peaceful country that supports integration processes. The preamble of the 2015 Declaration on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Slovenia hence stipulates that NATO provides a basic framework for ensuring national security.

International operations and missions

On 14 May 1997, members of the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) were deployed to a crisis response operation for the first time: the humanitarian operation Alba, in Albania. Since then, the SAF have deployed some 15,000 members to 25 different

international operations and missions. With international deployments of more than 5% of the SAF's active members, Slovenia ranks among the allies bearing an above-average operational burden. In February 2007, the SAF deployed a battalion-sized unit to an international operation for the first time in its history.

The unit assumed its own area of responsibility and was in command of members of a foreign armed force from a NATO member state.

Nearly 300 SAF members are participating in international operations. They are deployed in missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Syria, Italy, Iraq, Germany, Latvia and Slovakia. SAF members also operate within the EU Battle Group and the NATO Response Force, which is intended to operate both inside and beyond the Alliance. The SAF also appoint members to peacetime positions in military representations and the NATO structure, as well as within EU forces, international organisations and bodies, and multinational staffs and commands.

How does the former Director of Government Communication Office, Dr Alja Brglez, remember Slovenia's accession to the EU and NATO?



Photo: Boštjan Podlogar

I remember it distinctly; it was 23 March 2003; we voted in a consultative referendum, and 89.61% of the people voted in favour of Slovenia joining the EU. But it started long before that. Even before we had an independent state. When the upright poet Pavček read out the May Declaration 2.0 in Ljubljana's Congress Square on 8 May 1989, he also said: As a sovereign state we will be able to independently decide on the connections with South Slavic and other nations within a renewed Europe. I remember this exactly as Pavček read it – the 1980s were the years when we in Slovenia felt European in almost every way. Borders, walls, prejudices were falling, and self-confidence, boldness and ambition were growing. We knew that differences could be overcome, that difficulties could be overcome, and we were not afraid of change.

When Prime Minister Drnovšek put me in charge of the Information Office in March 1999, the slogan under which we wanted to become a member of the European Union was "Slovenia. At home in Europe." It seemed to us that it said it all. We were already at home in Europe, Europe was our home, we just needed to become a member – that is what we wanted, that is what we could do. It may seem quite simple in retrospect, because we were really fast in completing tasks, closing chapters, progressing through the acquis. Slovenia was considered the best student, effectively harmonising its legislation with the EU acquis. These are rather forgotten words today, but back then they were featured in every evening news broadcast and morning newspaper report. Even more forgotten today is the responsibility with which we approached our work: those who worked with Brussels took the EU very seriously, and we who worked with the domestic public took the people and democracy seriously. To make sure that all the important facts were always available to everyone, we invented innovative tools: the Europhone, quizzes, leaflets, booklets. When we decided to simultaneously inform citizens about NATO accession, we added the "Natopis" publication and the "Natofon" line. It was important to us that those who have a different opinion or even those who are against have a say, and even more so with NATO. We took time to listen to the people, gauged and responded to public opinion, held round tables, public debates, went into every hidden corner. We learned about and valued democracy. We were in a hurry to reach our destination, but we were not looking for shortcuts. Those were different times, I guess.

Today, Slovenia is different and Europe is not the same. However, they are still our home. As solid and safe as we value and care for it, no more, no less.



Alja Brglez and Jamie Shea, NATO spokesperson, at the National Assembly for a public hearing on Slovenia's integration into the NATO, 16.1.2002. Photo: Arsen Perić/Bobo



Alja Brglez, Dimitrij Rupel (Minister for Foreign Affairs) and Janez Potočnik (Minister of European Affairs), December 2002. Photo: Denis Sarkič



IN FOCUS

The photo exhibition at the Park of Military History will be on display for one year. Photo: Park of Military History archives

DOUBLE JUBILEE EXHIBITION

Slovenia is a credible member of NATO

TEXT BY JANKO BOŠTJANČIČ

Twenty years ago, when the competent US Senate committee was debating NATO enlargement, Bruce Jackson, President of the non-governmental US Committee on NATO, summed it up: *“One of these members, these candidates that we are discussing today, a future member of NATO, is a little different from the others. And that is Slovenia.”*

“Slovenia defended itself against a much stronger opponent when it was attacked. It has shown that it is capable of looking after its own security, it has shown that it can be a credible partner and that it is capable of meeting the conditions necessary for us to have collective security.”

It was against this background that the Republic of Slovenia joined the Alliance in 2004, with the strong backing of its citizens in a referendum.

Convinced that this is due to a lack of knowledge about NATO, its importance and role in the world, and the important benefits that membership of the North Atlantic Alliance brings to our country, we decided to set up an exhibition in the Park of Military History to acquaint museum visitors with the most important facts. We also invited the Government Communication Office and the Ministry of Defence to participate, and both were enthusiastic about participating. The result was a two-part photographic exhibition in the area in front of the entrance to the museum.



75 LET / YEARS

The first part, entitled NATO 75 YEARS, presents in a visitor-friendly way the history of the Alliance, its development and, last but not least, its military strength.

The fact is that this is the most successful and effective Alliance in history. Analyses show that the average lifespan of existing alliances in history is only 17 years, which means that NATO has outlasted that average by more than four times. NATO is by far the strongest military alliance in human history and it has been significantly strengthened by the accession of Finland last year and Sweden this year.



The second part, entitled **SLOVENIA IN NATO 20 YEARS**, presents the path of our country's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance through the main milestones.

It shows how our country benefits from NATO and how membership contributes to our security, our development and our visibility. A selection of photographs shows various aspects of cooperation, such as the Slovenian Armed Forces' cooperation established in 1993 with the Colorado National Guard, at the outset of NATO integration.

Over a period of 30 years, cooperation in the field of military exercises and training has reached an enviable level. The exhibition also showcases the activities of the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence in Poljče, in Slovenia's Gorenjska region, one of 28 accredited NATO Centres of Excellence specialising in specific fields. Since 2015, the Centre in Poljče has been a hub for knowledge, development and innovation across the Alliance in the field of mountain warfare.

The exhibition offers visitors a comprehensive perspective of the Alliance, which provides Slovenia with a stable security and political environment and the Slovenian Armed Forces with a new dimension.

As the Republic of Slovenia defends itself with its own armed forces and in accordance with the principle of collective defence, as set out in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.



The Park of Military History Pivka is providing its visitors with a unique insights into rich military and historical heritage of Slovenia. Photo: Park of Military History archives



The exhibition was opened by Petra Bezjak Cirman, Director of Government Communication Office, Damir Črnčec, State Secretary of Ministry of Defence and Janko Boštjančič, Director of the Park of Military History in Pivka. Photo: Danijel Kovačič Grmek



The participants in the roundtable agreed that NATO plays an important role in maintaining peace in Europe. Photo: Danijel Kovačič Grmek

GASTRONOMY



When it comes to customs and tradition, Slovenia is a land of extraordinary diversity, a mix of Mediterranean, mountain and lowland flavours. All of this is reflected in its rich gastronomical heritage and wide variety of local and traditional agricultural products and foodstuffs.

THE BEST WAY TO GET TO KNOW SLOVENIA

Tradition on the plate in the land of infinite flavours

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ
PHOTO BY MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FOOD

In Slovenia, love also flows through the stomach. Once you taste Slovenia, you will fall in love with it forever.

The best way to get to know Slovenia is undoubtedly by tasting Slovenian local and traditional dishes and products.

The European Union set up the following European quality schemes, laid down in EU regulations:

- protected designation of origin (PDO),
- protected geographical indication (PGI),
- traditional speciality guaranteed (TSG), and
- organic production.

European quality schemes also enable the protection of names of agricultural products and foodstuffs. These schemes are protected designation of origin, geographical indication and traditional specialty guaranteed. Agricultural products and foodstuffs with these designations are called protected agricultural products and foodstuffs.



Protected designation of origin

- 1 *Bovški sir* (Bovec cheese)
- 2 *Ekstra deviško oljčno olje Slovenske Istre* (extra virgin olive oil from Slovenian Istria)
- 3 *Istrski pršut* (Istrian prosciutto)
- 4 *Kočevski gozdni med* (Kočevje forest honey)
- 5 *Kraški med* (Karst honey)
- 6 *Mohant* (Mohant cheese)
- 7 *Nanoški sir* (Nanos cheese)
- 8 *Oljčno olje Istra* (Istrian olive oil)
- 9 *Piranska sol* (Piran salt)
- 10 *Tolminc* (Tolminc cheese)



Protected geographical indication

- 11 *Jajca izpod Kamniških planin* (Kamnik Alps eggs)
- 12 *Kranjska klobasa* (Carniolan sausage)
- 13 *Kraška panceta* (Karst pancetta)
- 14 *Kraški pršut* (Karst prosciutto)
- 15 *Kraški zašink* (Karst cured pork neck)
- 16 *Prekmurska šunka* (Prekmurje ham)
- 17 *Prleška tünka* (Pork meat preserved in lard from Prlekija)
- 18 *Ptujski luk* (onion from Ptujsko polje)
- 19 *Slovenski med* (Slovenian honey)
- 20 *Šebreljski želodec* (stuffed pork stomach from Šebrelje)
- 21 *Štajerski hmelj* (Styrian hops)
- 22 *Štajersko prekmursko bučno olje* (Pumpkin seed oil from the Štajerska and Prekmurje regions)
- 23 *Zgornjesavinjski želodec* (Stuffed pork stomach from the Upper Savinja Valley)



Traditional speciality guaranteed

- 24 *Belokranjska pogača* (Bela Krajina cake)
- 25 *Idrijski žlikrofi* (Idrian dumplings),
- 26 *Prekmurska gibanica* (Prekmurje cake)
- 27 *Slovenska potica* (A traditional Slovenian dessert)

GREAT SLOVENIANS – CO-CREATORS OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

Exceptional woman and man

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

Slovenians boast many exceptional women and men who built and continue to build our Slovenian identity. Being a European fundamentally means being a part of European culture.

The core of our shared European spirit is our cultural intertwinement in the course of history.

Europe is a plurality of various cultures, languages, religions and, all in all, a culture with a unique outlook on time and space.

Being a European is of course not the same as being part of the European Union.

Slovenian European stories

These are stories of Slovenian giants who have left a permanent mark on the identity of the Slovenian nation.

Their work has been a source of strength and inspiration for the Slovenian people in gaining independence and entering the EU.

Knowing where you want to go means knowing who you are.



CULTURE

The statue is devoted to the globetrotter, authoress, polyglot and Theosophian Alma M. Karlin. Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



The Church of St. Michael, built between 1937 and 1940 at Ljubljana Marshes, belongs among the architect Jože Plečnik's most original creations. It combines the features of Greek temples with those of the churches of the Slovenian Kras region, which are characterised by open belfries as part of their front façades. Photo: Miran Kambič/www.slovenia.info



Photo: Tinkara Zupan/STA

France Prešeren (1800–1849)

We remember him as a patriot and an intellectual, and showcase him to the world as the greatest Slovenian poet. The seventh stanza of his poem *Zdravljica* (A Toast) has been Slovenia's national anthem since 1989, set to the music of a choir piece of the same name by composer Stanko Premrl. *Zdravljica* is an expression of Prešeren's vision of unity and peace that goes beyond national borders. Its tone is optimistic and conciliatory. The poem is not just a symbol of Slovenia's statehood, but also an expression of universal values, such as coexistence, freedom and equality. The day of his death is also a public holiday – Prešeren Day, the Slovenian cultural holiday. It is not only a day commemorating Prešeren but a day dedicated to Slovenian culture. France Prešeren is particularly important for the Slovenian people as the first Slovenian whose writing skills were comparable to those of literary greats from abroad. He was not just a great wordsmith, but also a sensitive visionary.

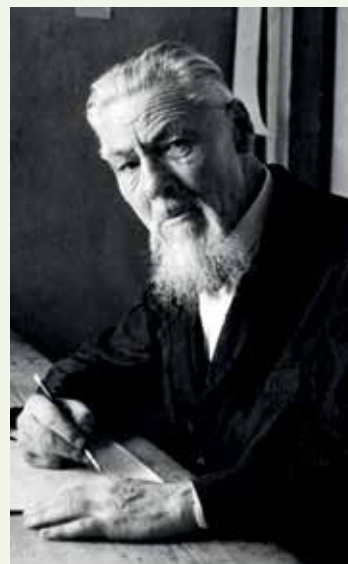


Photo: www.wikipedia.org

Jože Plečnik (1872–1957)

An architect who strove to win recognition for Slovenian and European architecture through his works. He worked in Prague and Vienna, but left his greatest mark in Slovenia. His designs were used to build bridges, numerous churches, the Žale Cemetery in Ljubljana, Ljubljana's main city market, the sluice gates, the Ljubljana National and University Library, the capital's biggest promenade, Tivoli, and other buildings, as well as sacral items, furniture, interiors, etc. He designed the Zacherlhaus and the Ottakring Church of the Holy Spirit in Vienna, and redesigned the Hradčany Castle and devised the plans for the Church of the Most Sacred Heart of Our Lord in Prague. He was a 20th-century pioneer of modern architecture, a truly world-class architect, so it is no coincidence that the capital of Slovenia is often referred to as Plečnik's Ljubljana. Selected works of Jože Plečnik have also been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in recognition of the universal value of his oeuvre. He saw art as the wings of eternity, something that can never be taken away from any nation or individual.



Photo: www.wikipedia.org

Alma Ida Wilibalda Maximiliana Karlin (1889–1950)

Globetrotter of Slovenian descent. In addition to Slovenian, she spoke eight languages fluently. She founded a foreign language school in Slovenia. She is known for her travels around the world. She visited all continents and recorded her adventures for various foreign newspapers. She published 24 books, more than 40 works of prose in the form of short stories, articles, poems, musical notations and drawings. Her travelogues, novels, ethnological and theosophical works were already translated during her lifetime and published in France, England, Finland and Switzerland. Her long journey around the world, explorations of new horizons and worldly lifestyle won her the nickname Columbus's daughter.



Photo: www.commonswikimedia.org

Anton Janša (1734–1773)

Slovenian beekeeper, pioneer of modern beekeeping and one of the greatest bee experts. An academic painter by education, he taught beekeeping at the imperial court. He travelled around the provinces of Austria, presenting his beekeeping findings. Thanks to him, Maria Theresa established other beekeeping schools around the empire. He is the author of two major books in German, *A Treatise on the Swarming of Bees* (1771) and *A Complete Guide to Beekeeping* (1775, published posthumously). An exceptional painter, he also painted Slovenian motifs on beehive panels. Janša's Apiary is still preserved today. Owing to him, the autochthonous Slovenian Carniolan honey bee became famous around the world. Janša's birthday has been declared World Bee Day.



Photo: www.wikipedia.org

Jurij Vega (1754–1802)

An engineer and math teacher, who also studied philosophy. In 1789, he achieved a world record by calculating pi to 140 decimal places. His calculation stood for another 52 years and his calculation method is still used today. His most important work is *Logarithm Tables*. They were used for calculations until the invention of electronic computers. It was these tables that accelerated progress in technology and science. He was a member of the Academy of Practical Sciences in Mainz, the Physical and Mathematical Society of Erfurt, the Bohemian Scientific Society in Prague, and the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin, as well as an associate member of the British Scientific Society in Goettingen. His birthday, 23 March, is also the Slovenian Armed Forces' Artillery Day, with Vega having been a successful officer and gunner who distinguished himself on many battlefields around Europe. He applied mathematics, physics, ballistics and science in finding practical solutions to strategic problems in the field. During his successful military career he was awarded the Order of Maria Theresia, the title of hereditary baron and the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.



Photo: The National Gallery of Slovenia archives

Ivana Kobilca (1861–1926)

She is considered to be the most successful Slovenian woman painter. She studied painting, mostly in Germany and France. Most of her paintings are figural. She painted more than 350 artworks in the course of her life, focusing on portraits and women scenes. Her two most well-known paintings are *Woman Drinking Coffee* (1888) and *Summer* (1889/1890). She was considered an individualist, always searching for her own path as an artist. She exhibited her works in Austrian and French galleries and spent some time living in France. She also spent part of her life in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Photo: Dejan Mijović/STA

Primož Trubar (1508–1586)

Protestant minister, writer and great reformer. His biggest contribution is as author of the first printed books in the Slovenian language, *Catechismus* and *Abecedarium* (1550). He is considered the founder of the Slovenian standard language. He wrote a total of 22 books in Slovenian and greatly contributed to literacy and education among Slovenians. Slovenia celebrates Reformation Day as a national holiday, a constant reminder of the importance of the Slovenian written language.



Photo: Jože Suhadolnik

Boris Pahor (1913–2022)

Slovenian writer, intellectual and the most translated Slovenian author. Living in Trieste (Italy), like many other Slovenians, he was also a promotor of the Slovenian language, and fought against Fascism, Nazism and hatred among Slovenians. It was this fight against hate, destruction and all forms of violence that had a significant impact on his literary oeuvre. BBC even made a documentary about his life, entitled *The Man Who Saw Too Much*. He was a recipient of numerous Slovenian and foreign awards (the Slovenian Silver Order of Merit and the French Legion of Honour, among others). His deepest wish and everlasting hope was that there would be no more wars and that people would understand that spiritual maturity must be nurtured above all else. He never stayed silent, either at home or abroad, his word was decisive and loud, and his principles unwavering. He was a "troublemaker". He died at the age of 108. He was the conscience of the Slovenian nation and the conscience of Europe. He was a literary giant, a man of peace and respect.



LITERATURE

The Bologna Children's Book Fair is, beside the book fair in Frankfurt, the international platform at which the greatest number of Slovene publishers are presented. Photo: www.sloveniabologna2024.com

BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR

After Frankfurt, Slovenia is the Guest of Honour at the Bologna Children's Book Fair

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

Slovenia will be the Guest of Honour at the Bologna Children's Book Fair from 8 to 11 April. Slovenia will promote its literary creativity in Italy through various events.

The fair, its 61st edition, will offer a unique and comprehensive opportunity to discover the creative and rich tradition of Slovenian children's publishing.

An international jury has selected the works of 79 illustrators from 31 countries, including Ana Maraž from Slovenia.

According to the organisers, the exhibition has traced the evolution of the world of children's books over the decades, following their development and identifying their creative dynamics, from the tradition of illustrated stories to the arrival of the book as a predominantly visual medium of expression.

A total of 3520 illustrators had work submitted for the Illustrators Exhibition 2024, with a total of 17,600 works from 81 different countries and regions. This year the selection was performed by a jury that, after meeting online to shortlist 344 illustrators, came together in person in Bologna at the beginning of January to finalise the choice of 78 sets of illustrations, the work of 78 illustrators from 32 different countries and regions.



Ana Maraž. Photo: Miloš Milošević

From Slovenia, the jury selected Ana Maraž, born in 1985. She graduated from the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, Department of Fine Arts Education.

Her illustrations have been published in the books *Kako dolg je čas* and *Božaj veter*, the latter of which won the 2021 award for best illustration in the book illustration category.

Her works have been published in the Cicido and Ciciban children's magazines.

The fair is a meeting point for all those involved in the creation and publishing of children's books, primarily for the buying and selling of copyrights. The Comics Corner 2024 will be bigger, featuring publishers of comics from all over the world, and with the third edition of Spotlight on Africa the focus will be even more on African publishing.

The Slovenian Book Agency traditionally in Bologna

As is traditional, the Slovenian Book Agency will have its own stand at the fair, presenting new Slovenian children's and young people's literature, and some Slovenian publishing houses are also presenting themselves in Bologna, for example, Mladinska knjiga, which will also have its own stand. The fair is also visited by Slovenian authors, illustrators, publishers, editors, booksellers and representatives of the Slovenian section of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), who learn about new developments and trends in the field of literature for young readers.

Slovenia will be present at the opening event and will host ten events, which will take place as part of the official programme of the four-day fair.



Illustration called Rainproof soup by Ana Maraž

As the fair is attended by around 1,500 librarians each year, the plan is to hold an international professional librarians' conference at the Salaborsa Library in the city centre. This will be an opportunity for Slovenia to present good practices in the field of reading culture, including the Ljubljana Reading Manifesto, which will certainly be mentioned. We must take advantage of the visibility it has already gained through publications, not only at Frankfurt but also in several international media, and the fact that, in addition to Slovenian authors, it has been signed by several high-profile authors from abroad, emphasises Katja Stergar, the Director of the Slovenian Book Agency.

As she explained, the Bologna Book Fair is very different from the Frankfurt Book Fair. It is completely closed to the general public and is only open to the professional public, so they have to organise events in and around the city to reach the general public. In addition, the Guest of Honour does not have its own pavilion or stage at the fair, but only 300 square metres for the illustration exhibition, where no events are held.

Among the events that will accompany the fair, she mentioned the guest appearance of the Ljubljana Puppet Theatre at the Testoni Theatre with a performance of Rabbit's House in Italian.

They are also in talks with colleagues from Switzerland to organise a live illustrator's competition at one of the venues in the city. They will also present the Slovenian Book Agency's project A Book's Journey, and would like to see more exhibitions in the city.

SPORTING EVENTS

Suggestions for recreational enthusiasts

9-11 May: Walk Along the Wire

This is the biggest recreational sporting event in Slovenia. The largest numbers of participants are usually drawn to the hike along the trail where during the Second World War, first the Italian and then German occupying forces surrounded Ljubljana with barbed wire – hence the name Walk Along the Wire. People, young and old alike, who are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and would like to spend a relaxing day in good company and enjoy Ljubljana from a hiker's perspective, are welcome to join the walk.

7-9 June: Franja Marathon

With its choice of cycling routes, the Franja Marathon caters to the best cyclists as well as average recreational cyclists and families.

20 October: Ljubljana Marathon

The biggest event for recreational runners in Slovenia.

Where to cheer for Slovenian athletes

European Rowing Championships, 25-28 April, Szeged, Hungary

2024 European Athletics Championships, 7-12 June, Rome, Italy

UEFA European Championship

Slovenian team matches:

16 June: Slovenia vs Denmark, Stuttgart

20 June: Slovenia vs Serbia, Munich

25 June: England vs Slovenia, Cologne

Paris 2024 Olympic Games, 26 July-11 August



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