Slovenia’s public spending is too high
In focus

Government meets with trade unions and employers for the first time

Slovenia’s membership of the United Nations

Interview

Janez Šušteršič

Slovenia’s public spending is too high

Business

Regional development

The driving force behind development in Posočje

Art & culture

Compliments to Metka Krašovec

Our excellence

Riko to build a EUR 100 million complex in Belarus

Green corner

Let’s clean Slovenia to make a nicer world

Available also at:

www.ukom.gov.si

Slovenia’s public spending is too high

http://e-uprava.gov.si

Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry:

www.gzs.si

Regional development

Ljubljana Stock Exchange:

www.ljse.si

Art & culture

The Španzel family

Slovenian delights

Slovenian delights

Balanced Budget

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences. We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.

We are also proud of the restaurant ‘Pri Lojzetu’ at Zemono and Tomaž Kavčič, a chef with several awards to his credit. He has recently received the award from Dining Guide, the leading Hungarian gourmet guide, for the best restaurant in central Eastern Europe. There are exceptional people, who have exceptional ideas, but if only left with actual possibilities, the project is alive and well and attracting large audiences.
At the extended meeting of the Economic and Social Council at Brdo pri Kranju, the social partners have begun negotiations for the conclusion of the Social Contract 2012–2017. The contract is to define the key steps that need to be taken by Slovenia to exit the crisis and implement the structural changes necessary to meet the objectives set – particularly the well-being of the people.

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

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

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

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

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

NEW GOVERNMENT – BACK TO THE FUTURE

At this moment, Slovenia can take no pride in its economic indicators. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia has stated that the country has lapsed into recession, while the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development has forecast development potential to be at one per cent of annual growth of GDP, with a record 6.4 per cent budget deficit in 2011.
On 27 February 2012 the Government briefed the social partners and prepared its macroeconomic and fiscal status. “In the revised national budget, public spending will have to be reduced by approximately EUR 800 million,” explained Prime Minister Janez Janša, who also said that he is open to proposals from social and other political partners on issues related to fiscal consolidation and structural changes. The first step will be to define the contents of the social contract for the period up to 2015, which the Government would like to adopt before 20 June 2012. The document will contain the points on which all the social actors agree concerning the key development challenges and anti-crisis measures that need to be taken, going forward, it will also include a decision on the possible course of structural changes. Prime Minister Janša reiterated his invitation to the opposition parties to participate. “The greater the level of consent and the degree of understanding in society, the more successful we will be in resolving the problems we face,” said the Prime Minister, adding that “the current economic crisis, which has hit Slovenia badly, shows no signs of abating – quite the opposite, in fact – as the EU faces recession in the future we will be confronted with the unenviable task of not only saving our own country, but other countries too, as we are part of the European area.”

The Minister of Finance, Janez Šušteršič, presented the bases for the revised budget underlining the fact that, in terms of the country’s economic capacity, this year’s budget revenue must not exceed EUR 8 billion, while the upper ceiling of budget expenditure will be EUR 9.5 billion (EUR 9.4 billion last year). The revised budget is expected to be adopted by the National Assembly in April, and the Minister of Finance will then present the first package of tax measures. The Government intends to exercise fiscal prudence, while Mr Šušteršič believes that savings can be made in material costs and public procurement. Ministers have already begun reviewing their budgets in order to establish whether all the programs currently being implemented are actually necessary and yielding appropriate results.

“The goals of the contract reflect the values of freedom, justice, work, responsibility, and solidarity,” assured the Prime Minister, proposing that a firm fiscal framework be defined and an agreement reached on an effective and efficient public administration and sustainable economic development. Other areas covered by the contract will be the labour market and employment, pay policy and knowledge as the basis for development and a social policy tailored to people’s needs. The Prime Minister also proposed an agreement on the way in which the social contract is formulated: “We want the contents to be agreed upon as soon as possible,” he stressed, suggesting that the relationship should be founded on equality from the very start. He further proposed a period of fourteen days during which all social partners will be able to prepare and submit comments and proposals to the contract.

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

**Employers Show Moderate Satisfaction, Trade Unions Less Confident**

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

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

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

“In the process of coordinating the budget there are no rapid solutions,” he said, highlighting the need to focus on the revenue side of the budget, uncollected taxes, and issues regarding public procurement, the grey economy and poor payment discipline. He proposes the introduction of a financial transaction tax and an extension of the progressive tax. He believes that restarting the economy is the key solution. “The question is not whether we support the lay-off of workers or lower wages. The real question is what to do to create quality new jobs and stimulate economic growth.”

**Igor Antauser**, Secretary General of the Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business of Slovenia said that the proposed contents of the social contract, in his opinion, did not sufficiently emphasise the role to be played by the rule of law and legal security. Janez Posedi, President of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovenia (PBZKOM) also welcomed the inclusion of the judicial branch of power in the contract, and advocated that representatives of agronomy, which is an important part of the Slovenian economy, should be invited to participate in the contract.

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

Yury Fedotov, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna

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

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

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

The spectrum of the Organization’s roles in promoting international peace and security is expanding. Human Rights today is an integral priority of the United Nations Charter, and the one closest to Slovenia—but also a hub of very key parts of the United Nations family that play a central role in the United Nations agenda to secure the global goods of development, peace and security and human rights.

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

Energy is central to eliminating poverty and a pivotal role is played by the Vienna-based members of the UN family in this field. Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, also key components of the United Nations work in Vienna, are not lofty ideals, but central to achieving international peace and security.

There are also less well-known aspects to the work of the United Nations in Vienna that provide a critical contribution to our global agenda and indeed to our daily lives. These include setting standards that facilitate international trade, or the work of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs that manages the benefits of space technology available to developing countries.

The late UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said: “The UN is not just a product of do-gooders. It is harshly real. The day will come when men will see the UN and what it means clearly …”

There are also less well-known aspects to the work of the United Nations in Vienna that provide a critical contribution to our global agenda and indeed to our daily lives. These include setting standards that facilitate international trade, or the work of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs that manages the benefits of space technology available to developing countries.

The late UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said: “The UN is not just a product of do-gooders. It is harshly real. The day will come when men will see the UN and what it means clearly…”

When people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird Picasso abstraction, and see it as a vehicle to navigate challenges, so that, over the upcoming two decades, we can leave today’s children and young people a world worth living in.
JANEZ ŠUŠTERŠIČ:
SLOVENIA’S PUBLIC SPENDING IS TOO HIGH

Janez Šušteršič: Slovenia’s public spending is too high

Government Communication Office

Vesna Žarkovič

Photo: STA

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

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

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

The most important objective in your term of office is…

...a balanced budget.

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

The Ministry of Finance presented a range of measures for balancing the public finances and an explanation to the trade unions that these were the starting points of the Government. This year, the deficit should be reduced by 3% of GDP. In the past years, the deficit was high and it became increasingly difficult to finance it; the results were not satisfactory – neither in the sphere of economic growth nor in the field of employment. Consequently, the Government is sending to the National Assembly a proposal for the revised budget which would reduce the spending by more than one billion euros, thus allowing the reduction of the budget deficit to three percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Expenditure may not exceed EUR 9 billion, which is approximately EUR 800 million less than the figure for 2011. Of this, a quarter of savings are to be yielded through a linear reduction of public sector wages by 10% as of 1 July, while simultaneously making the third step, which is the elimination of wage disparities.

What do measures in this field include?

The abolition or merging of public institutions and agencies, the reduction of rates of daily allowance and mileage, the reduction of price standards for medical technical devices, the reduction of transfers to municipalities, the streamlining of public service activities, the postponement of payment to the Slovenian Railways and the reduction of allowance payable to students for monthly transport, etc. These are, of course, only the starting points, the budget revision is still open to negotiations with the trade unions.

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

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

The trade unions stress that the measures will rigorously shrink the welfare state and have already organised a general strike. The measures are opposed by the opposition party reproaching the Government for not doing enough to increase budget revenues. They suggest increasing the highest rate of VAT by two percentage points. What stance do you expect the trade unions to take?

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

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

It is a relief in the amount of EUR 150 million per year and a set of amendments which should boost the economy: firstly, a 40% increase in tax relief on investments and the lower level to be increased to EUR 60,000; and, secondly, an increase in tax reliefs on research and development investments for commercial companies and sole proprietors. The third measure is designed to reduce the corporate tax rate to 18% and then by one percentage point each year up to 15%, while the objective of the final measure is to shift the lower limit of personal income tax bracket 41 to 3.5 times the average wage. All measures should start to apply during the year. They will have an immediate effect on the economy, invest-
...employment or the representatives of the economy. We will establish a working group which, together with the representatives of the economy, will examine the economic measures proposed; however, there are no measures that will bring results overnight. The employment situation therefore is on tax simplifications, a more favourable tax environment and better control of the shadow economy. We intend to carry out some of the ideas put forward by the previous Government, such as raising the customs officers who will now be less engaged in the field of shadow economy. I do not expect such changes to happen overnight. It is a process in which the mentality of people has to change. Therefore, I do not count on any additional revenues or some new resources. When this is received, everything will be much easier. If we succeed, in two years’ time the level of public spending will be reduced to a lesser extent.

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

Slovenia’s credit rating has been downgraded by Moody’s three times this year and the EC identified us as one of 12 countries that need to undergo a thorough analysis of its macroeconomic situation. What measures will you take? The credit rating downgrade always hits a larger group of countries, the entire euro area, with the exception of some countries, is dealing with a credibility crisis; firstly, because of a low economic growth, and secondly, because some countries in the euro area are heavily indebted and paying high interest rates. Until the situation stabilises, the credit rating will continue to be high. If the interest rates decrease, current, however, the recent years have shown that, with respect to rating agencies, our investors distinguish among the countries. We expect that Slovenia will successfully implement the policy that we have announced and that we will succeed in reducing the debt, stop the growth in borrowing, successfully carry out the recapitalisation issues of banks and, as a result, stop the decline in ratings.

Slovenia does not yet possess sufficiently of the funding opportunities provided by the EIB. Despite fiscal limitations, the Government wants to launch a new investment cycle. To what extent can the EIB help? What financial potential are we talking about? We have several options; the EIB potential depends on the quality of the projects prepared. We have already established contacts; a meeting is scheduled to be held shortly. We have invited the European Commissioner for regional development so that we can review the drawing on European funds. We are determined to get the wheels in motion. It is about more favourable loans.

The Government, however, postponed structural reforms until next year, but there are warnings issued on a regular basis from the international institutions, recently again from the European Commission, that Slovenia is not ambitious enough with regard to pension reform. In light of this, do you think that we should try with the reform as soon as this year? We are, of course, aware of the great importance of pension reform. Nevertheless, our coalition agreement has left the solutions relatively pending because we need to discuss them with social partners, there is no other way. We would like the negotiations to be constructive. The previous term of office has revealed that the trade unions did not deny the urgency of the pension reform, the question was how to distribute the burden. We therefore agreed to proceed openly. The Government has assumed its role, we are in a hurry to adopt the revised budget with a view to balancing the budget for this year; and while dealing with it we cannot open the matters that need more time to be peacefully discussed. At the EIB, the trade unions indicated they would be prepared to accept the proposal that was rejected at the referendum as a starting point with discuss acceptable adjustments for both parties. If this is feasible, then matters can be resolved very quickly; otherwise, we will have to start planning the reform all over again, which will take considerably more time. A swift response would undoubtedly send a positive signal abroad. In my opinion, too much attention is paid to the reform, the reform is irrelevant in the short-term; its relevance, however, is essential in the long-term and taken as a signal that we are able to agree on a range of unpalatable measures that are to follow and that it is not the only touchstone in discussions with partners.

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

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

We need to clearly define responsibilities. As regards legislation, the simplification of the administration will obviously lessen the impact of the state on the economy; as regards the ownership issue, we need to agree on the system where the management will be left to professionals. We need to define what is in the public interest and responsibility for this must be assumed by the Government, it is also necessary to distinguish between two matters: the achievement of certain public goals through property where this is justifiable and where this is a matter of professional management of shares, and the re-structuring of companies, which can be carried out by experts. In Slovenia, there are a number of institutions with different terms of office, here, the system needs to be simplified, which is a task about to be undertaken.

Is the economic situation in Slovenia worse than elsewhere in the EU? It is worse than in many other countries; until the recession, our economic growth was approximately 2 percentage points higher than the average; since the recession, it has been lower than the average. This is bad and points to our structural problems. The fact that a 6% deficit did not help also shows that problems lie elsewhere and that they are structural in nature. We are about to address this issue.

The main objective and measures envisaged by the Government to implement the coalition programme are to ensure that, from 2013 onwards, Slovenia will develop at a rate exceeding the EU average and increase employment, thereby improving the standard of living and welfare. In this regard, the three key objectives are fiscal consolidation, the stimulation of economic growth and the creation of new jobs. How are these objectives to be achieved? Internal measures will contribute to some extent, tax incentives, the simplification of the business environment, procedures for obtaining building permits, the functioning of the rule of law, payment discipline, attracting investment to Slovenia... the interest is there. But so far, we could not make sufficient efforts, i.e. we have not yet demonstrated sufficient credibility. A part of our tax changes will ease the burden on jobs, in this way, the resulting economic growth will be conducive to increasing the rate of employment.

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

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

In the last quarter of 2011, growth was positively influenced by foreign demand, which is weakening, unfortunately. A comparison of the last quarters of 2001 and 2010 shows a 3 % increase in exports of goods and services, which is considerably less than in the last half of 2010 and the first half of 2011. Domestic consumption has also sharply fallen, and was 4.4 % less than in the same period of the preceding year. This decline is due to smaller household final consumption expenditure (1.8 % less), smaller final consumption expenditure incurred by the state (2.8 % less) and smaller investment expenditure (12.3 % less). In most sectors, the added value also decreased in real terms in the last quarter of 2011. In the manufacturing sector, it decreased by 2.6 % in relation to a year earlier, in the construction industry by 15.5 % less, in trade, transport and catering by 1.5 %, and in technical, scientific and similar sectors by 0.5 %. The overall added value dropped by 3.0 % in comparison with the last quarter of 2010.

Creating jobs is crucial


One of the conclusions of the report is that the pace of reforms, measured in relation to the previous issue of ‘Growing for Growth’, was greater overall than before the crisis. According to the OECD and given what has been done in the recent years, priority should be put on jobs in the context of ongoing fiscal consolidation. In countries that experience renewed economic slack, it will be important that economic policy reforms draw on the lessons learned during the economic crisis.

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

While drafting the revised budget, the Ministry of Finance has been receiving numerous proposals on how the government’s or their own institution’s spending is not prudent enough, but who is to blame has no means of making this known to the institutions responsible. Proposals may be sent by e-mail to: referatVA@financa.si. More information is available on the website of the Ministry of Finance.
THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND DEVELOPMENT IN POSOČJE

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

At first the PRC offered assistance to entrepreneurs and the unemployed, but in 2002 assumed the role of coordinator in the implementation of the Programme to Foster Development in Posočje 2002–2006, the short form of which is the Soča Development Programme. The earthquake in 2004 resulted in the programme implementation being extended until 2013. “Until then, working on this programme will be a priority for our institute,” stressed its director, Almira Pirih, who is well aware of the fact that the timely and quality accomplishment of operative tasks regarding the preparation and implementation of public tenders in the aforementioned programme enables the applicants concerned, i.e. businesses, to draw on as much funds as possible within the envisaged financial scheme limits.

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

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

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

PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL AREA

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

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

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

PRC OPERATION WITHIN THE REGION

Soon after its establishment, the PRC joined up with three other development agencies (the ICRA from Idrija, the RRA from Vrtojba, Northern...
The PRC is the institution responsible for the Regional Scholarship Scheme; this includes employers from throughout the region who mainly require technical job profiles for their further development. Scholarships within the said scheme, which includes participation by some 40 small- and large-sized employers and the majority of municipalities, are paid both from EU and municipal funds. Some 50 to 70 new scholarship recipients are added to the scheme each year, mostly for the needs of Kolektor and Hidria - two large-sized companies from the Idrija-Cerkniansko area.

**CROSS-BORDER AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

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

The beginnings of cross-border cooperation between Slovenia and Italy within the PHARE CBC programme go back to 1994. In the first three years, the funds were partially intended for the implementation of small-scale projects, which was also beneficial for the PRC. We have recently participated in several large-scale cross-border projects relating to the promotion of informal learning, links between entrepreneurs, and other wholly practical projects. One such project is aimed at establishing a circular cycling route to link Posočje and the entire Slovenian border area, and at providing visitors with all the information available on this interesting tourist route.

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

One such project seeks to encourage the use of local resources such as wood biomass to heat public buildings; in the second project, we attempt to encourage integration between companies in the Alps and, as a result, enhance their visibility and competitiveness within the entire EU context.

In this context, one cannot overlook the Bovec airport construction project, which is implemented by the Municipal- ity of Bovec as a lead partner in the IPA Adriatic programme. Finally, through the quality and professional implementation of its various activities, the PRC attempts to get closer to the needs of the local population. To this end, certain activities (various education programmes, workshops, and similar) are carried out in all three Posočje municipalities, while other projects, including those which are cross-border and international in nature, are to be tackled in cooperation with the local environmental institutions; on one hand, this approach contributes to resolving problems at a local level and, on the other hand, helps the aforementioned area become part of cross-border and international integration structures.
February 2013

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

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

In Maribor, the first highlight of the Italian Embassy is the exhibition of photographs of Lipizzaner horses in the University of Maribor’s Campus. Genius of Color which explores the deep cultural roots of a world class Italian tradition in the Spanish Riding School, is the occasion to celebrate the slavonic Reconquista of the University of Maribor. The exhibition, which is divided into three parts - the Sportsman, the Artist and the Designer - presents the richness of Italian culture and the fascinating life journey of an emblematic entrepreneur with deep ties in the Eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, together with horses for a non-trivial look on well known places, such as Ravenna, Aquileia, Trieste, the Italian coast. The copies of mosaics of the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna take us back to the Byzantine era they represent a wonderful synthesis between figurative and linear culture, a model for the protection of original works and a symbolic bridge between the shores of the Adriatic, in the name of a common artistic and linguistic matrix. The photographic exhibition "Imago Triestina" organized by the Unione Popolare di Trieste, it displays prints from the collection "Stilo e Tiro furia", offering a multicolored image of the Italian city and its surroundings, as well as a striking reconstruction of the historical railway linking Trieste and Vienna. An exhibition on Aquileia, crucibles of the Empire organized by the Association “Pro Aquileia” and the gallery “Spomenik-vojvosteni vastrva” will be displayed in Ljubljana at the same time. Here, very dear to us all, will be portrayed in Istria through its long time, a multimedia project related to the collaboration between Unione Italiana and Università Popolare di Trieste, with the support of RTV Koper-Capodistria and the Historical Research Centre of Rovigno: it will present an objective reconstruction of the key events that shaped the history of the Istrian peninsula.

Going back to visual arts, we have chosen to coordinate a second exhibition with the first one, presenting in close collaboration with Slovene cultural institutions to present to the Slovenian public new insights into contemporary Italy. Our ambition is to engage our Slovene friends with innovative forms of cultural cooperation to match the continuous upgrading of our bilateral relations in the political field. The so-called Spirit of Trieste, fostered by President Napolitano and President Tursk – together with President Della Croce, has set a paradigm of deeper understanding, reconciliation and reciprocal trust nurtured by shared values and a common vision on the future of Europe.

In Maribor, the first highlight of the Italian Embassy is the exhibition of photographs of Lipizzaner horses in the University of Maribor’s Campus. Genius of Color which explores the deep cultural roots of a world class Italian tradition in the Spanish Riding School, is the occasion to celebrate the slavonic Reconquista of the University of Maribor. The exhibition, which is divided into three parts - the Sportsman, the Artist and the Designer - presents the richness of Italian culture and the fascinating life journey of an emblematic entrepreneur with deep ties in the Eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, together with horses for a non-trivial look on well known places, such as Ravenna, Aquileia, Trieste, the Italian coast. The copies of mosaics of the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna take us back to the Byzantine era they represent a wonderful synthesis between figurative and linear culture, a model for the protection of original works and a symbolic bridge between the shores of the Adriatic, in the name of a common artistic and linguistic matrix. The photographic exhibition “Imago Triestina” organized by the Unione Popolare di Trieste, it displays prints from the collection “Stilo e Tiro furia”, offering a multicolored image of the Italian city and its surroundings, as well as a striking reconstruction of the historical railway linking Trieste and Vienna. An exhibition on Aquileia, crucibles of the Empire organized by the Association “Pro Aquileia” and the gallery “Spomenik-vojvosteni vastrva” will be displayed in Ljubljana at the same time. Here, very dear to us all, will be portrayed in Istria through its long time, a multimedia project related to the collaboration between Unione Italiana and Università Popolare di Trieste, with the support of RTV Koper-Capodistria and the Historical Research Centre of Rovigno: it will present an objective reconstruction of the key events that shaped the history of the Istrian peninsula.

Going back to visual arts, we have chosen to coordinate a second exhibition with the first one, presenting in close collaboration with Slovene cultural institutions to present to the Slovenian public new insights into contemporary Italy. Our ambition is to engage our Slovene friends with innovative forms of cultural cooperation to match the continuous upgrading of our bilateral relations in the political field. The so-called Spirit of Trieste, fostered by President Napolitano and President Tursk – together with President Della Croce, has set a paradigm of deeper understanding, reconciliation and reciprocal trust nurtured by shared values and a common vision on the future of Europe.

In Maribor, the first highlight of the Italian Embassy is the exhibition of photographs of Lipizzaner horses in the University of Maribor’s Campus. Genius of Color which explores the deep cultural roots of a world class Italian tradition in the Spanish Riding School, is the occasion to celebrate the slavonic Reconquista of the University of Maribor. The exhibition, which is divided into three parts - the Sportsman, the Artist and the Designer - presents the richness of Italian culture and the fascinating life journey of an emblematic entrepreneur with deep ties in the Eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, together with horses for a non-trivial look on well known places, such as Ravenna, Aquileia, Trieste, the Italian coast. The copies of mosaics of the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna take us back to the Byzantine era they represent a wonderful synthesis between figurative and linear culture, a model for the protection of original works and a symbolic bridge between the shores of the Adriatic, in the name of a common artistic and linguistic matrix. The photographic exhibition “Imago Triestina” organized by the Unione Popolare di Trieste, it displays prints from the collection “Stilo e Tiro furia”, offering a multicolored image of the Italian city and its surroundings, as well as a striking reconstruction of the historical railway linking Trieste and Vienna. An exhibition on Aquileia, crucibles of the Empire organized by the Association “Pro Aquileia” and the gallery “Spomenik-vojvosteni vastrva” will be displayed in Ljubljana at the same time. Here, very dear to us all, will be portrayed in Istria through its long time, a multimedia project related to the collaboration between Unione Italiana and Università Popolare di Trieste, with the support of RTV Koper-Capodistria and the Historical Research Centre of Rovigno: it will present an objective reconstruction of the key events that shaped the history of the Istrian peninsula.

Going back to visual arts, we have chosen to coordinate a second exhibition with the first one, presenting in close collaboration with Slovene cultural institutions to present to the Slovenian public new insights into contemporary Italy. Our ambition is to engage our Slovene friends with innovative forms of cultural cooperation to match the continuous upgrading of our bilateral relations in the political field. The so-called Spirit of Trieste, fostered by President Napolitano and President Tursk – together with President Della Croce, has set a paradigm of deeper understanding, reconciliation and reciprocal trust nurtured by shared values and a common vision on the future of Europe.

In Maribor, the first highlight of the Italian Embassy is the exhibition of photographs of Lipizzaner horses in the University of Maribor’s Campus. Genius of Color which explores the deep cultural roots of a world class Italian tradition in the Spanish Riding School, is the occasion to celebrate the slavonic Reconquista of the University of Maribor. The exhibition, which is divided into three parts - the Sportsman, the Artist and the Designer - presents the richness of Italian culture and the fascinating life journey of an emblematic entrepreneur with deep ties in the Eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, together with horses for a non-trivial look on well known places, such as Ravenna, Aquileia, Trieste, the Italian coast. The copies of mosaics of the early Christian basilicas of Ravenna take us back to the Byzantine era they represent a wonderful synthesis between figurative and linear culture, a model for the protection of original works and a symbolic bridge between the shores of the Adriatic, in the name of a common artistic and linguistic matrix. The photographic exhibition “Imago Triestina” organized by the Unione Popolare di Trieste, it displays prints from the collection “Stilo e Tiro furia”, offering a multicolored image of the Italian city and its surroundings, as well as a striking reconstruction of the historical railway linking Trieste and Vienna. An exhibition on Aquileia, crucibles of the Empire organized by the Association “Pro Aquileia” and the gallery “Spomenik-vojvosteni vastrva” will be displayed in Ljubljana at the same time. Here, very dear to us all, will be portrayed in Istria through its long time, a multimedia project related to the collaboration between Unione Italiana and Università Popolare di Trieste, with the support of RTV Koper-Capodistria and the Historical Research Centre of Rovigno: it will present an objective reconstruction of the key events that shaped the history of the Istrian peninsula.
**Government Communication Office**

**A good harvest in the first three months**

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

The Director-General of the Maribor 2012 Public Institute, Dr Suzana Žilič Fišer, and the Programme Director, Mitja Cander, modestly assessed the events of the first three months: The Director-General was pleased to report that in this period, the cultural project had attracted more than 250 foreign journalists, who had published several excellent reports and photo articles, so Maribor had received more than the routine advertising expected. At the information points in Ljubljana and Maribor, turnout and public interest has been good and is still on the rise, as the monthly turnover of the initial 2,000 visitors in February has now doubled.

There were successful promotions in Zagreb, Graz and Trieste, and, further afield, in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London. The project is attracting the attention of both Slovenian and foreign audiences, and with warmer weather, events will move outdoors, which will significantly increase accessibility and give the city a whole new experience that practically every resident will be able to enjoy. The events of the Town Keys programme, which revives the cultural tradition of the place, have really started to come to life, and the Urban Furrows programme – a social cohesion programme aimed at integrating through their everyday work people who are otherwise not included in any other cultural events – will be intensified in the summer. Vegetable gardening, the arrangement of urban spaces in residential and other areas, new social activities and the discovery of new elements in places where people live might be considered the most innovative parts of this huge project.

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

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

**Pandur’s homecoming**

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

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

War and Peace remains faithful to this principle. The stage is materialised symbolism of culture (e.g. a viewing tower, the banks of the Drava). They survived only as a torso and speak of Maribor’s potential yet to be exploited through Pandur’s proposals. Glamorous visiting performances by world renowned theatres are nothing but fantasy. It is true, however, that the organisers are doing their best to find substitutes for the glamour of which Maribor was deprived by the financial crisis, and judging from the innovative content coupled with their own creations, they are successful.

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

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

The artist explained the diversity of her paintings to the Slovenian media as follows: “Of course people change over time; even if the direction and the idea remain the same, there are various ways of attaining the realisation. I am not afraid to take a new path, per- haps the fear that you follow the same path, even after it has run its course, is even greater.” The self-critical concern of finding herself stuck in a rut is thus one of her basic creative premises. “When the path I walk comes to an end or has run its course, I hit a dead end and get a feeling of being wallowed in... Then it’s time to take a hammer and knock down the walls that have surrounded me, so I can escape from captivity and take a step forward towards something that is beyond me;” she told Mladina magazine. This speaks of an artist who firmly and, above all, stands with curiosity in a space, drawing on every moment to inspire new creative challenges. Her constant search for something new is a result of the surprising fact that she has managed to paint continuously for four decades, her creativity facing no longer time gaps during which she would have to struggle to find new challenges.

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

The retrospective includes 62 large-format paintings and 120 drawings on paper. The show also includes her red paintings from the period between 1970 and 1979; the drawings and paintings on paper from the New Image period in the 1980s; the “Neo-Classicist images” of faces since the late 1980s. The exhibition also features her final period, in which her Neo-classicist manner developed in painting and drawing into an iconography of angelic figures in landscapes, labyrinths with cypresses, and Mediterranean groves.

The works were selected and the exhibition designed by the artist and the exhibition curator Martina Voke; the exhibition will run until the end of April. The exhibits have been loaned from a variety of Slovenian public and private collections. On this oc- casion a catalogue was published which includes essays by Petja Grafenauer, Miha Jukić, Mojca Kumerdej, Andrej E. Skubic, Goran Vojnović and Suzana Tratnik, all of whom are considered to be the most acrais garde writers of the younger generation. Together they have launched a brilliant and socially committed project – a collection of short stories entitled Dan zmage (The Day of Victory).

In line with the festival’s tradition, literary readings by promi- nent authors from Slovenia and the rest of the world are key events at the Festival. The most interesting reading was that delivered by the British writer, Hanif Kureishi, known in the Slovenian public for The Buddha of Suburba and The Black Album, translations of both bestsellers were published in 1999. Kureishi, born in the United Kingdom to a Pakistani father and English mother, is according to The Times one of “the 10 greatest British writers since 1945”. Ku- reishi writes of immigration, racism, nationalism, all forms of dis- crimination, but also deals with sexuality, which is one of the areas where discrimination and hatred play a major role. As these are top- ics that are crucial for understanding the current competitive world, the audience was captivated.

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

Other prominent guest authors at Fabula were Amitav Ghosh, a well-known Indian writer and anthropologist, who presented his work The Hungry Tide; and the Russian author, Mikhail Shishkin, who explores the fate of Russian emigrants in his novel Venezio (Maiden’s Hair). The authors’ literary performances were held in the cosy environment of the Klub Cankarjeva doma. Their books have been published by Studenska založba under the auspices of the Knjiga za vsakogar project (Books for everybody), which was established during the Ljubljana World Book Capital event. They can only agree with Uni Gicle, the man responsible for culture in the Municipality of Ljubljana, that “nothing is how it used to be on the Ljubljana book scene” since it hosted the World Book Capital event. Books are getting the attention they deserve, their authors are well known, the public is all ears and the book remains the focus of the city’s attention.
The Mladinsko Theatre is planning to perform at many prestigious festivals this year. The theatre performance “Damn be the Traitor of his Homeland” will be the main performance. According to theatre critics, the play presents the personal histories of characters related to Slovenia, the former Yugoslavia and the wider environment, as well as the attitude towards “foreigners” and points of view regarding Serbs and Croats, “the aggressors” and “the victims.”

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

The first international festival to host the Mladinsko Theatre this year was the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels, beginning on 4 May 2012, with the performance “Damn be the Traitor of his Homeland!” directed by Oliver Frijljić. The festival is highly renowned as an event, presenting new theatre works by firmly established authors, and is intended for a theatre audience that is willing to consider one's attitudes towards the world.

At the end of May, the play will be performed at the Festival TransAmériques in Montreal. Provocative and current theatre performances are presented at this festival, which is considered to be the central cultural event in Montreal, and is important to Canada and on an international level. In June, the theatre group will be travelling from Munich to Braunschweig, Germany, to an important international theatre festival entitled, Festival Theaterformen, which is considered to be the central cultural event in Germany, to an important international level. In June, the theatre group will be travelling from Munich to Braunschweig, Germany, to an important international theatre festival entitled, Festival Theaterformen, which is considered to be the central cultural event in Germany, to an important international level. In June, the theatre group will be travelling from Munich to Braunschweig, Germany, to an important international theatre festival entitled, Festival Theaterformen, which is considered to be the central cultural event in Germany, to an important international level.

In September the theatre group will be participating in the third international festival of children and youth in Slovenia. Until the 2012, the Mladinsko Theatre this year was the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels, beginning on 4 May 2012, with the performance “Damn be the Traitor of his Homeland!” directed by Oliver Frijljić. The festival is highly renowned as an event, presenting new theatre works by firmly established authors, and is intended for a theatre audience that is willing to consider one's attitudes towards the world.

In 2012, the Slovenian Mladinsko Theatre continues on its path of “European cultural ambassador,” the title received from the European Commission in 2006. Slovenian photogra- phers and photojournalists monitor and record a variety of interesting and gripping stories every day. The Slovenian Press Photo 2012 contest is an opportunity to take a look at the best photograph- journalist achievements of the past year and is for all professional and skilled amateur photographers who are permanent residents in Slovenia.

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

The second exhibition of this year’s festival entitled “The Arab Spring – On Revolution Road” displays the work of the internationally renowned Russian photographer, Yuri Kozyrev, who is also a member of Noor. The organisation also invited American photographers to participate in the competition this year. At first, an irrelevant regional event, the competition quickly grew, after Slovenian independence, into a prestigious national competition where it is possible to perform only after undergoing a rigorous selection process via regional competitions, many candidates fail to qualify. Foreign choirs can also participate, since Naše Pesem is one of the festivals which enable choirs to qualify for the final European competition. One can imagine the strict selection for international choir festivals, whose winners then qualify for the final selection.

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

Slovenia, more precisely Maribor, hosted the finals of this competition for the first time this year. The project was part of the European Capital of Culture, although it had been in the making for several years. The foundations were undoubtedly laid by the excellent Slovenian choirs, who have not only earned respect in international circles, but also won the trust of Slovenian organis- ers of choir gatherings. For many years now, Maribor has been the centre of the largest such gatherings in Slovenia - Naša Pesem (Our Song) - which was held for the twenty-second time this year.

The summit of European choral singing in Maribor

Maribor from very different places.

We were able to hear the powerful unison of voices of a variety of musical cultures, because the choirs came to Mari- bor from very different places.

Unlike the majority of previous finals, the repertoires were almost entirely a mix of the most demanding choral works. However, there was still an element of novelty, as some choirs wanted to test themselves and perform with their warm lyrical sound, which is traditionally mastered by Swedish choirs.

The finale was sponsored by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture,Multilingualism, Youth and Sport. The finale was sponsored by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport.
The construction of the complex in Minsk, entrusted to Riko, will contribute to the further development of the highest standard hotel facilities and provide new impetus to tourism activities associated with this business hotel, the highest rated to date in Minsk and Belarus.

The Kempinski Hotel will have approximately 22,000 m² of floor space, while the residential units and offices will stretch over 14,000 m² and 15,000 m² respectively. The complex will also include parking and support facilities covering 23,000 m².

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Slovenian companies will be awarded 40% of the business regarding the construction of the hotel, 15% will go to Belarus companies and the rest to companies from other countries.
and in a rather just and equitable way. It is, however, interesting that the perception Slovenians have of this social equality is far from a reflection of the truth. We largely believe that we are ranked towards the bottom. We have to become aware that social innovations are a true driving force of society. I believe that it is innovative leadership that has made Riko a successful company. The management style is very democratic, while the structure is lean and allows a lot of autonomy. Anyway, all I think about is how to make life easier for my staff so that they can be as industrious as possible. I see to it that they have company cars at their disposal, travel and participate in education and training, learn foreign languages, and so on.

Škrabec considers the company’s orientation to sustainability very important and believes company culture to be equally vital in the long run. ‘I like to think that Riko is managed in a very innovative way. I can say that my formula for success is a moment of inspiration and then continue without pause. Success is not necessarily created by great innovations. Ordinary things must be done in a somewhat better way,’ he adds that only those companies that are constantly alarmed have a chance to succeed. ‘He says that he experienced the feeling of being in crisis even in boom times and acted accordingly. He often says that he relies on nobody and does not hold out hope that anyone will do anything for him. ‘We must know that Slovenia cannot compete with China. We cannot compete with low wages, what we have to do is change the quality of our lives, democracy, liberalism, our still-existing social homogeneity, fairly low polarisation and diversification to our benefit. All these represent the foundation for the knowledge and creativity-based society we aspire to attain.’

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

**RIKO HOUSES**

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

Ever since 1997, when Riko Houses started manufacturing massive wooden elements for a foreign partner, the company has continued the valuable heritage for ecological high-quality prefabricated wooden buildings, joining excellent business results with social responsibility. By using wood as a renewable source in construction, the company highlights towards the bottom. We have to become aware that social innovations are a true driving force of society. I believe that it is innovative leadership that has made Riko a successful company. The management style is very democratic, while the structure is lean and allows a lot of autonomy. Anyway, all I think about is how to make life easier for my staff so that they can be as industrious as possible. I see to it that they have company cars at their disposal, travel and participate in education and training, learn foreign languages, and so on.

Škrabec considers the company’s orientation to sustainability very important and believes company culture to be equally vital in the long run. ‘I like to think that Riko is managed in a very innovative way. I can say that my formula for success is a moment of inspiration and then continue without pause. Success is not necessarily created by great innovations. Ordinary things must be done in a somewhat better way,’ he adds that only those companies that are constantly alarmed have a chance to succeed. ‘He says that he experienced the feeling of being in crisis even in boom times and acted accordingly. He often says that he relies on nobody and does not hold out hope that anyone will do anything for him. ‘We must know that Slovenia cannot compete with China. We cannot compete with low wages, what we have to do is change the quality of our lives, democracy, liberalism, our still-existing social homogeneity, fairly low polarisation and diversification to our benefit. All these represent the foundation for the knowledge and creativity-based society we aspire to attain.’

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

**RIKO HOUSES**

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

Ever since 1997, when Riko Houses started manufacturing massive wooden elements for a foreign partner, the company has continued the valuable heritage for ecological high-quality prefabricated wooden buildings, joining excellent business results with social responsibility. By using wood as a renewable source in construction, the company highlights towards the bottom. We have to become aware that social innovations are a true driving force of society. I believe that it is innovative leadership that has made Riko a successful company. The management style is very democratic, while the structure is lean and allows a lot of autonomy. Anyway, all I think about is how to make life easier for my staff so that they can be as industrious as possible. I see to it that they have company cars at their disposal, travel and participate in education and training, learn foreign languages, and so on.

Škrabec considers the company’s orientation to sustainability very important and believes company culture to be equally vital in the long run. ‘I like to think that Riko is managed in a very innovative way. I can say that my formula for success is a moment of inspiration and then continue without pause. Success is not necessarily created by great innovations. Ordinary things must be done in a somewhat better way,’ he adds that only those companies that are constantly alarmed have a chance to succeed. ‘He says that he experienced the feeling of being in crisis even in boom times and acted accordingly. He often says that he relies on nobody and does not hold out hope that anyone will do anything for him. ‘We must know that Slovenia cannot compete with China. We cannot compete with low wages, what we have to do is change the quality of our lives, democracy, liberalism, our still-existing social homogeneity, fairly low polarisation and diversification to our benefit. All these represent the foundation for the knowledge and creativity-based society we aspire to attain.’

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

**RIKO HOUSES**

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

Ever since 1997, when Riko Houses started manufacturing massive wooden elements for a foreign partner, the company has continued the valuable heritage for ecological high-quality prefabricated wooden buildings, joining excellent business results with social responsibility. By using wood as a renewable source in construction, the company highlights towards the bottom. We have to become aware that social innovations are a true driving force of society. I believe that it is innovative leadership that has made Riko a successful company. The management style is very democratic, while the structure is lean and allows a lot of autonomy. Anyway, all I think about is how to make life easier for my staff so that they can be as industrious as possible. I see to it that they have company cars at their disposal, travel and participate in education and training, learn foreign languages, and so on.

Škrabec considers the company’s orientation to sustainability very important and believes company culture to be equally vital in the long run. ‘I like to think that Riko is managed in a very innovative way. I can say that my formula for success is a moment of inspiration and then continue without pause. Success is not necessarily created by great innovations. Ordinary things must be done in a somewhat better way,’ he adds that only those companies that are constantly alarmed have a chance to succeed. ‘He says that he experienced the feeling of being in crisis even in boom times and acted accordingly. He often says that he relies on nobody and does not hold out hope that anyone will do anything for him. ‘We must know that Slovenia cannot compete with China. We cannot compete with low wages, what we have to do is change the quality of our lives, democracy, liberalism, our still-existing social homogeneity, fairly low polarisation and diversification to our benefit. All these represent the foundation for the knowledge and creativity-based society we aspire to attain.’

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

ON THE PROJECT LET’S CLEAN SLOVENIA 2012

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

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

As mentioned above, the project Let’s Clean Slovenia 2012 was part of the global initiative World Cleanup 2012, which between 23 and 24 March, and 24 March, the volunteers participated in the clean-up action in Slovenia. The main event of the project Let’s Clean Slovenia in one day! was a clean-up action which took place in 207 Slovenian municipalities between 23 and 24 March 2012. The main event of the project Let’s Clean Slovenia 2012 was a clean-up action which took place in 207 Slovenian municipalities between 23 and 24 March 2012. The action was divided into two parts. Groups of volunteers from educational institutions and several organisations cleaned the surroundings of schools, kindergartens, residential areas and walkways on 23 March, and on 24 March, the volunteers focused on cleaning illegal waste dumps. The preparations for the clean-up began a year before the all-Slovenian clean-up action, when the Ecologists Without Borders Association first invited municipalities and municipal companies to participate in the project in order to ensure funds for the removal and disposal of waste. Since 2010, volunteers have regularly updated and developed the digital register of illegal waste dumps which was created in 2010. With time, the register has become more user-friendly, users can now register with their mobile telephones. Before the beginning of the clean-up action, a digital map on the website www.geopedia.si displayed about 16,000 illegal waste dumps. During the preparations, the project Let’s Clean Slovenia 2012 used various activities to raise awareness among Slovenians of the importance of an environment-friendly life. Observing trends in Slovenian society, we can see that people’s attitudes are slowly but constantly changing for the benefit of environment-responsible conduct. How much awareness raising activity will be needed in Slovenia in order for the environment to be clean has yet to be seen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

As mentioned above, the project Let’s Clean Slovenia 2012 was part of the global initiative World Cleanup 2012, which between 23 and 24 March, and 24 March, the volunteers participated in the clean-up action in Slovenia. The main event of the project Let’s Clean Slovenia in one day! was a clean-up action which took place in 207 Slovenian municipalities between 23 and 24 March 2012. The action was divided into two parts. Groups of volunteers from educational institutions and several organisations cleaned the surroundings of schools, kindergartens, residential areas and walkways on 23 March, and on 24 March, the volunteers focused on cleaning illegal waste dumps. The preparations for the clean-up began a year before the all-Slovenian clean-up action, when the Ecologists Without Borders Association first invited municipalities and municipal companies to participate in the project in order to ensure funds for the removal and disposal of waste. Since 2010, volunteers have regularly updated and developed the digital register of illegal waste dumps which was created in 2010. With time, the register has become more user-friendly, users can now register with their mobile telephones. Before the beginning of the clean-up action, a digital map on the website www.geopedia.si displayed about 16,000 illegal waste dumps. During the preparations, the project Let’s Clean Slovenia 2012 used various activities to raise awareness among Slovenians of the importance of an environment-friendly life. Observing trends in Slovenian society, we can see that people’s attitudes are slowly but constantly changing for the benefit of environment-responsible conduct. How much awareness raising activity will be needed in Slovenia in order for the environment to be clean has yet to be seen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEIR STORY

At the beginning of the 1970s, Biljana left her home town of Skopje and came to Ljubljana to study. (Her brother is also a prominent artist – the director Slobojan Unkovski). ‘I am happy to have had parents who were very understanding, loving and who never imposed their own wishes on me,’ she says that she and her brother grew up in a cultured environment: ‘We went to the theatre, opera, and also to see exhibitions. On various occasions, my mother organised performances for children. My father was a representative of the Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce in Istanbul for eight years.’

For many years, she went on holiday and became acquainted with the colourful images of the world from The Thousand and One Nights – she was so taken by them that they have become permanently interwoven in her rich, meaningful and multi-layered art. There was no peace to work in the evenings, so I always went to the library after lectures at the Academy. ‘Rudolf was also a regular visitor to the library shelves: ‘I regularly went there before, because I am a “systematic” person and I became muc-
naturally acquainted with our library in the four years. I read everything – from the first to the last book, I kept a notebook, and from each book, I copied what I liked by a certain artist.’ Biljana first fell in love with his paint-
ings. She explains that their studio was next to the studio of students doing spe-
cialised studies. She once saw a canvas she liked and said that she would like to meet the painter. She thought that the painting had been done by an older gentleman. ‘I found it unbelievable that a young person could paint with such seri-
ousness and accuracy. But I was wrong,’ she laughs. As Rudolf explains, Bilja-
a was the ideal woman for him, and the first who truly understood his painting.
As painters and graphic artists, Biljana and Rudolf could not be more different from each other, and yet, they influence one another creatively. ‘I have to admit that some of my paintings were the creations of her thoughts, and to be fair, I should have signed her name on the painting as well.’

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

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

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

What is life like in Venice? I ask. ‘It is full of splendour, history, art, romance, but when the sun sets and the tourists leave, there are only tired caterers, sleepless students, and an odd policeman left on the streets. I do not regret spending almost five years of my life there. I became a better person than I would have done had I stayed in Ljubljana.’ When comparing the educational systems in Italy and Slovenia, he stresses the approach of the teachers. ‘They are more relaxed and open there; he says. ‘Establishing a connection with a student is important to them, and they always offer support. It could also be said that they are sometimes typically slow in their Italian way. I have been waiting for the original copy of my diploma since 2008, and the main officer at the student office always says to me ‘Calma, carino’ (Take it easy, my dear).’

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

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

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

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

What is life like in Venice? I ask. ‘It is full of splendour, history, art, romance, but when the sun sets and the tourists leave, there are only tired caterers, sleepless students, and an odd policeman left on the streets. I do not regret spending almost five years of my life there. I became a better person than I would have done had I stayed in Ljubljana.’ When comparing the educational systems in Italy and Slovenia, he stresses the approach of the teachers. ‘They are more relaxed and open there; he says. ‘Establishing a connection with a student is important to them, and they always offer support. It could also be said that they are sometimes typically slow in their Italian way. I have been waiting for the original copy of my diploma since 2008, and the main officer at the student office always says to me ‘Calma, carino’ (Take it easy, my dear).’

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

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

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

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

What is life like in Venice? I ask. ‘It is full of splendour, history, art, romance, but when the sun sets and the tourists leave, there are only tired caterers, sleepless students, and an odd policeman left on the streets. I do not regret spending almost five years of my life there. I became a better person than I would have done had I stayed in Ljubljana.’ When comparing the educational systems in Italy and Slovenia, he stresses the approach of the teachers. ‘They are more relaxed and open there; he says. ‘Establishing a connection with a student is important to them, and they always offer support. It could also be said that they are sometimes typically slow in their Italian way. I have been waiting for the original copy of my diploma since 2008, and the main officer at the student office always says to me ‘Calma, carino’ (Take it easy, my dear).’

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

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

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

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

What is life like in Venice? I ask. ‘It is full of splendour, history, art, romance, but when the sun sets and the tourists leave, there are only tired caterers, sleepless students, and an odd policeman left on the streets. I do not regret spending almost five years of my life there. I became a better person than I would have done had I stayed in Ljubljana.’ When comparing the educational systems in Italy and Slovenia, he stresses the approach of the teachers. ‘They are more relaxed and open there; he says. ‘Establishing a connection with a student is important to them, and they always offer support. It could also be said that they are sometimes typically slow in their Italian way. I have been waiting for the original copy of my diploma since 2008, and the main officer at the student office always says to me ‘Calma, carino’ (Take it easy, my dear).’
Slovenian ski jumper, Robert Kranjec, wins gold in FIS Ski Flying World Championships in Vikersund

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

The “Slovenian” ski jumping hill in Norway has bestowed the title of world champion on Robert Kranjec of Kranj. Being among the best in the world for a number of years, this thirty-year old ski jumper, in his most important jump in the final round, landed at the 244.5 metre mark, a new Slovenian record and the third longest in history. This Saturday evening was truly something exceptional, and the Slovenian national anthem reverberated “slovenian” ski jumping hills in Norway and Turkey

Slovenian ski jumping

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

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

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

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

This has been Slovenia’s most successful season since it placed fourth in the Cup of Nations with 1,412 points – 1,784 more than the year before, however, the Slovenian ski jumpers also collected 1,800 points more than in 2002/03 – Zupan’s most successful season (2,259 points).

This year, Slovenia’s ski jumpers have achieved five great milestones. At the Ski Flying World Championship in Vikersund, Kranjec became the first Slovenian ski flying world champion, the team won a ski flying medal and Slovenia’s first ever team victory in the men’s World Cup Team Ski Flying event when Prevc, Kranjec, Tepeš, Velepec, and Zupan triumphed in Oberstdorf with a record points haul at the end of the season in the Cup of Nations; they also claimed the first Slovenian victory on Letašica Bratov Gorike (the Gorilek brothers’ ski flying hill in Planica). Slovenia has applied to host the 2017 FIS Nordic World Ski Championship in Planica. Its competitors for the honour are Germany’s Oberstdorf, Finland’s Lahti and Poland’s Zakopane; however, the host of the Alpine Ski World Championship will be decided at the International Ski Federation at the FIS Congress to be held in South Korea on 31 May 2012.

JAKOV FAK – 20 km BIATHLON WORLD CHAMPION

The Slovenian biathlete Jakov Fak won gold in the 20 km individual at the World Biathlon Championship in Ruhpolding, Germany. Fak missed only one of the two targets and edged France’s Simon Fourcade into second place by seven seconds. Slovenia’s success was rounded off by Klemen Bauer who also missed one target and finished fifth (6:45.80).

The Czech Republic’s Jaroslav Soukup (+2:12.3) placed third. The third Slovenian biathlete; Janis Marič, finished in 34th place (+16:44.1) coming 84th.

The Slovenian biathletes’ performances during the week in Ruhpolding had promised great success. “The feelings are the same as before. It is rare to become a world champion. Some, during their entire career, never know what it means to overcome everything. This is really something exceptional – a great success for our national biathletes and me personally.” Fak explained, still glowing with success two hours after the race – he was on his way to the awards ceremony in Ruhpolding – and then explained the tactics that brought him victory: “I paced myself very well in all loops and this resulted in victory.” The best biathlete, then explained that the tactic he had planned with his coach Uroš Velepec on the evening before the race had come to fruition.
FOLLOWING THE PATH OF THE HOCKEY SUPERPOWERS

The Lynx to the World Championships

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

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

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

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The result of the outstanding preparedness of our team was a splendid competitive success, which was achieved after three matches and three victories, and the team confirmed its excellent readiness with their success in the fourth match. The competition reached its peak in the fifth and final match against neighbouring Austria, when the Slovenian team achieved their fifth victory in the prestigious match with the northern neighbour. Thus Slovenia ended the World Championships undefeated, and qualified for the elite group, with Austria, with all 15 points.

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

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

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

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

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The Lynx to the World Championships

The selector Matjaž Kopitar has done a great job and laid the basis for further work. In July, he is preparing the first training camp for young players, while in May he is going with expert staff to look for strong competition for training matches at the IIHF session in Sweden. At the end of the year, qualifications for the goal that Slovenian hockey has not yet achieved, to be represented at the Olympics, are awaiting the team. We hope that the Slovenian team next year will be even stronger, with the currently injured Jan Urbas and Edo Terglav, and perhaps with a player from NHL, and we believe that the silent wish of the Slovenians to play among the 16 best teams in the world will become a reality. Perhaps it will be a time when we live to see yet another, new fairy tale.
Towards the middle of the windswept Vipava Valley, Zemono Manor sits atop a little hill. The charming, almost fairytale setting of Zemono, where the cold breeze from Nanos mixes with the manor of culinary delights and speaks about the hospitality business with the great enthusiasm.

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

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

Tomaž has received many accolades – only recently, the Dining Guide presented him with an award for best restaurant in Central and Eastern Europe; it took him by surprise; but he had a hunch that something was about to happen when the organisers insisted that he attended the Food Show in Budapest to person. In his view: such achievements confirm that you are on the right track and provide inspiration for the future. They motivate every team member and further encourage creativity. Before being proclaimed the winner in January 2012, Gostilna pri Lojzetu had been shortlisted as one of the finalists from ten countries. Tomaž, as he is called by his friends, is very pleasant to talk to and speaks about the hospitality business with the great enthusiasm and modesty that is characteristic of the best in any profession. “Guests often ask why we didn’t change the name from gostilna (a pub or a restaurant in Slovenian) to the more sophisticated restavracija, which is foreign in origin. For me, gostilna entails something special. The Slovenian language has one of the most beautiful terms for a restaurant (gostilna) because the root of the word is gost or guest in English and gostiti means to host.” This connection between the words tells you everything. It conveys the essence of culinary science. Neither Italians nor the French – two great culinary nations – can boast such terminology. I will stick to this and will not change the name of my Gostilna pri Lojzetu (Gostilna chez Lojzer).”

WHAT KIND OF FOOD IS PREPARED?

Slovenian dishes hold sway. Slovenia’s culinary delights encompass a rich variety of food. Different cultural influences have intermingled in our region for centuries, which is reflected in our culinary heritage. In a way, this mix of cultures gives us privilege since the best things have always remained with us. Most of the ingredients used by Tomaž come from the region. “I make sure that I do not use much food of foreign origin in my kitchen. I prefer food that is traditionally ‘part of us’ and then I adjust it to modern tastes. My grandmother baked bread with pork lard; back then, this was, of course, required for the hard work to be done in the vineyards. These days, such a rich diet is not necessary,” explains Tomaž, who has a very good understanding of the needs of modern guests. The restaurant at Zemono is best described as the cuisine of ideas. What Tomaž does and cooks is actually original cuisine. “Cuisine is the basic ingredient. I am always careful not to spoil it. We care for what we do and we serve food to guests so that they can see and feel our attitude. I would like them to see and feel that somebody did something especially for them. I choose different techniques, but I am faithful to those that do not change the primary taste of food. This is the very concept of my cuisine.”

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

WHEN YOU LET GO ..

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

“When I serve dishes, my guests often ask me what to eat first. Whatever we do, we have to abide by so many rules; therefore, in my restaurant I advise them to relax and do as they please. I would recommend that salty or spicy food is eaten at the end. I always do my best so that every guest feels comfortable.” He has also noticed that people either visit restaurants frequently or prefer to visit them only on special occasions. The latter need more attention to relax and properly enjoy fine dining. “In our restaurant we help guests to breathe easily, instead of breathing down their necks.” Slovenians, Italians, and many other foodies from near and far number among the guests at Zemono. Some travel across the world to taste what they have heard and read about, which in a way cre-
ates a sense of obligation to continuously provide high quality food and service. Furthermore, his guests are spoilt since he is always there for them.

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

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

**MANOR OF CULINARY INNOVATION**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**ABOUT MICHELIN STARS**

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

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

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

Therefore, the European Union has declared 2012 the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. In this context, several introductory events took place in January and February that promise that the activities throughout the rest of the year will not be taken as a mere routine. They are expected to peak within the traditional Third Age Festival, which will take place at the beginning of autumn in Ljubljana.

It seems that this year will be marked by a deeper reflection about the general social attitude towards the elderly, people who are more vulnerable and weaker than much of the rest of society, and – in a way – comparable to children, who must, for the sake of their future, enjoy the best possible protection. As for the elderly, the future is no longer their ally. Such reflections will have to be built into all those principles we observe as a society in providing assistance and support to our senior citizens. In this context, residential homes for the elderly are of particular importance. These residential facilities ensure relatively good living conditions by providing a safe building and internal programmes, and to a large extent apparently look after the elderly and usually already dependent people well; nevertheless, there are some serious reasons for concern.

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

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

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

To summarise: The first segment we touched upon in this paper gives a much better image of the situation than it is in reality. This shows how important it is that rather than for fine, yet empty celebrations, the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations be used for hard analytical work.
Vodnik was a man of the Enlighten-ment and the first in many fields in Slovenia - he was a teacher, linguist, translator, journalist, archaeologist, coin collector and priest. He was also the edi-tor of the first Slovenian newspaper, Ljublanske novice. He constantly expressed great concern for the Slovenian language and planned to write a German-Slovenian dictionary, for which he collected some thirty thousand words.

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

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

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

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

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

**APPLE ICE-CREAM**

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

**A GOOD DISH CALLED ‘POOR MAN’**

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