IN FOCUS INTERVIEW: Karl Viktor Erjavec, Minister of Foreign Affairs
WONDERLAND: Bled – a vision of paradise
EUROBASKET: EuroBasket 2013 is just around the corner and Slovenian hearts are beating to the beat of the basketball team
Our August issue highlights EuroBasket and the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF). The BSF 2013 is entitled “A Changing Europe in a Changing World”. We asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karl Viktor Erjavec, what changes and challenges would be explored at the forum. He gave us a very interesting and informative answer. As the environment is one of the central topics to be discussed at the BSF, the issue features the setting of the forum, the town of Bled. It is set against a backdrop of splendid nature and remarkable history, rowing sports and a unique oral tradition. All these aspects will be presented to you by the mayor of Bled, Janez Fajfar, the secretary-general of the Rowing Federation of Slovenia, Jernej Slivnik, and the Bled parish priest, Janez Ferkolj. Certainly, we could not cover everything, but we do hope that our description of Bled and its features will encourage you to visit this treasure of the Alps.

We are all eagerly anticipating the EuroBasket championship. It will undoubtedly be a truly memorable event that it would be a shame to miss. Apart from great basketball games and the overall atmosphere of adrenaline and excitement, fans will be able to experience excellent cuisine. You will surely enjoy kranjska klobasa (Carniolan sausage), wine-soaked ham or at least one of the official EuroBasket 2013 wines. The issue also reports on the Brdo Process, the meeting of Western Balkan leaders, and the French President François Hollande’s first official visit to Slovenia. Moreover, we bring you interviews with the businessman Janez Škrabec, director of the Riko company, the programme leader of the Okarina Festival in Bled, Leo Ličof, and Igor Fabšin, a Russian businessman.

Last but not least, we warmly congratulate the Trieste writer Boris Pahor on his centenary. At his venerable age, Mr Pahor is incredibly vigorous and full of inner strength. We have tried to reflect at least a part of his creative life and literary work.

Hear the proud Slovenian call
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As the official EuroBasket anthem puts it, “Hear the proud Slovenian call, feel the heartbeat of us all!” It is a story of Slovenia, its outstanding sportmen, writers, artists, businessmen, and its beautiful land. This is the story you will find in Sinfo.
Slovenia is counting the days until the start of the European Basketball Championship, which will be the greatest sporting event in Slovenia so far. From 4 to 22 September, four Slovenian towns, Ljubljana, Celje, Koper and Jesenice, will host the competition between twenty-four European basketball national teams for the title of the champion in Europe. Slovenia is currently not on its best economic and financial form, to use a sporting term. The best way to respond to such conditions, in spite of this, is to believe in the capabilities of Slovenia and to talk openly about a medal. The greatest optimists are those who have experienced in organising great sporting events. Slovenia has already experienced in the organisation of events such as winter events in Planica, Kranjska Gora, Maribor and Pokljuka, to mention only the most renowned. This is why I am confident that EuroBasket 2013 will be the greatest basketball sporting event in Slovenia so far, and I cordially invite you to visit us and feel Slovenia directly. You know - I Feel Slovenia.

I Feel Slovenia – I Feel Basketball
Meeting of the Brdo Process - Together on the path of opportunity

On 25 July 2013, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, and the President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, hosted the Leaders’ Meeting of the Brdo Process at Brdo pri Kranju, with special guest, François Hollande, the President of the French Republic.

Together with the President of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, the President of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, decided to continue the initiative begun in March 2010 at Brdo pri Kranju with a meeting of Prime ministers, which has now been shifted to the level of heads of states.

On 25 July, the heads of states of the Brdo Process met to seek ways to strengthen the process of enlargement in their informal working discussions. The meeting focused on the significance of reforms and close mutual cooperation and support as the foundations of accelerated progress towards EU membership. Good communication and cooperation between the region and EU Member States are also important, and for those purposes, in addition to two Member States, Slovenia and Croatia, France was also present as a guest. The presence of France at the presidential and ministerial levels added special weight to the meeting. In their discussion, the leaders noted the significance of several key social processes, such as building trust, reconciliation, compliance with binding international treaties and the rule of law.

After the plenary session, the President of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, and the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, held a press conference. Firstly, President Pahor expressed his gratitude to President Hollande for attending the Leaders’ Meeting of the Brdo Process as the first head of state of one of the most important countries in the Union, which is significant in terms of EU enlargement. President Pahor stressed that the leaders engaged in the Brdo Process recognize the opportunities that the Process offers for the resolution of open issues and efforts for reconciliation, peace, security, stability and welfare.

“This part of Europe offers many opportunities which must be used to the advantage of the region and the European Union,” said the Slovenian President.

The President of Slovenia also noted that one of the main purposes of the Brdo Process is to point to the numerous special characteristics and features of the region to make it interesting also for enlargement. The Slovenian President is certain that such informal meetings contribute to eliminating prejudices about the Balkans as an unstable region with no concrete plans. In future, the Brdo Process may play an exceptional role in the enlargement process, added President Pahor, and he confirmed that the informal meetings between the leaders of the Brdo Process would continue. The next meeting of the Brdo Process will be in Croatia and will be attended by Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament.

At the press conference, President Hollande said that his participation in the summit of the Brdo Process was a great honour for him. He noted that the region of the Western Balkans was still weighed down with open issues which require “alertness”. He expressed his certainty that the Western Balkans must continue the reform process and find alternative solutions for disputes, although the door to the European Union might perhaps remain closed for a while after Croatia’s accession.

The President issued a joint statement or so-called conclusions of the meeting at the end of the plenary session of the Brdo Process, which also included the idea that the shared vision remained unchanged i.e. to include the Western Balkans in the European Union. The enlargement of the European Union must continue and the countries of the Western Balkans must continue on the path of reform and reconciliation.

The leaders’ statement also highlighted the fact that the area of the Western Balkans has already seen important positive changes which have contributed to stabilising the region and economic and social progress. “Together, we want to prove that open issues can be resolved within the framework of the proposed forum through open political dialogue,” they stated, stressing that they wish to change the impression that Balkan countries cannot resolve bilateral issues unaided.
The President of the French Republic, François Hollande, first official visit to Slovenia

France sees Slovenia as an important economic partner

Following discussions with his Slovenian counterpart, Borut Pahor, the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, said that they agreed that economic relations between the countries must be strengthened.

On the occasion of his first official visit to Slovenia, during which he also attended the meeting of the heads of states of the Western Balkans, the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, hosted by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, also met the President of the National Assembly, Janko Veber, and Slovenian Prime Minister Alenka Bratusek.

Following discussions with his Slovenian counterpart, Borut Pahor, the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, said that they agreed that economic relations between the countries must be strengthened.

"France trusts in the Slovenian banking system, which will nevertheless have to prove its reliability, just like the systems in other countries," said the French President, who also believes that Europe must be a synonym for trust, not fear. In this respect, he rejected the fears relating to the existing European Union: "The countries will undoubtedly remain in the eurozone in spite of the problems in some of them," he stressed. According to President Hollande, it is necessary to focus particularly on overcoming the recession. "Europe must focus on boosting economic growth and not on strict austerity measures," Hollande stressed. With regard to the economic conditions in Europe, the French President was optimistic: "An array of indicators published in recent days show that we have good reasons to believe that we will overcome the crisis," he added.

FRANCE WISHES TO STRENGTHEN BUSINESS RELATIONS WITH SLOVENIA

Following discussions with his Slovenian counterpart, Borut Pahor, the President of the French Republic, François Hollande, said that they agreed that economic relations between the countries must be strengthened.

"France has confidence in the Slovenian banking system," the French President said. "France does expect the National Assembly of Slovenia to adopt the new law on Turkish banks in the near future. I wish to assure the French President that the Slovenian Government will support the French President’s position on this matter."

"France wishes to strengthen relations with Slovenia and supports the business links between the two countries," said the French President. "The efforts of the French companies to invest in Slovenia are welcome. I am pleased to note that Renault has been an investor in Slovenia for the past 20 years."

Mr Veber strongly advocated closer cooperation between the French and Slovenian national assemblies at committee level and between parliamentary friendship groups. President Veber presented the guest with an invitation for the President of the French National Assembly to visit the Slovenian Parliament. The discussion ended with a joint statement proposing that national parliaments play a greater role in strategic agreements. The Slovenian Prime Minister, Alenka Bratusek, also emphasised excellent friendly relations during her talks with the guest from France and introduced the Government’s plans to overcome the crisis. The discussion partners paid special attention to enhancing bilateral economic relations and agreed that when preparing and adopting measures, social solidarity must be maintained. According to President Hollande, the efforts of the Slovenian Government are encouraging and inspire confidence.

On the political agenda

STRENGTHEN BUSINESS RELATIONS WITH SLOVENIA

The Slovenian Prime Minister, Alenka Bratusek, also emphasised excellent friendly relations during her talks with the guest from France and introduced the Government’s plans to overcome the crisis. The discussion partners paid special attention to enhancing bilateral economic relations and agreed that when preparing and adopting measures, social solidarity must be maintained. According to President Hollande, the efforts of the Slovenian Government are encouraging and inspire confidence.

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President Hollande expressed his certainty that balancing anti-crisis measures on the one hand and concern for economic growth on the other is the correct way to preserve hope which the citizens of the EU Member States must have in these difficult times, and that we can only be successful together. The parliaments of Member States must have an important role in achieving this goal: in the photo: President of the French Republic, François Hollande and President of the Slovenian National Assembly, Janko Veber.
ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Interview

Torbjörn Månsson, Msc
Acting executive director, BAMC

The rehabilitation of the banking system tops the list of the Government’s priorities

The rehabilitation of the banking system tops the list of the Government’s priorities. How bad is the situation in Slovenian banks in your opinion? It is not good if the three system-relevant banks, i.e. banks that are too large or too important to let them go down, are unable to raise fresh capital in the market. If these banks were not so important for the Slovenian economy and society, the state would revoke their banking licences and they would collapse. However, the damage done to society by this would be too severe and its cost would be much greater than the cost of state aid to banks through recapitalisations and the Bank Assets Management Company (BAMC), which will take on the management of non-performing loans of these banks. It is clear that billions have already been lost, and by managing and selling non-performing loans the BAMC will aim to recover as much of taxpayers’ money as possible.

The European Commission and the ECB also require the performance of an independent external audit of banks. Do you think this is necessary and, if so, why? I cannot comment on what the European Commission and the ECB understand as necessary. In any case, the BAMC will examine their findings and use them to the greatest extent possible in its preparations to take over loans to avoid unnecessary costs.

Do you also share the opinion of the European Commission and the European Commissioner for Finance, Olli Rehn, that the transfer procedures of bad bank loans to the BAMC can only be initiated when the external auditors deliver their opinion? Transfer procedures which involve any kind of state aid have to be agreed on with the Directorate-General for Competition of the European Commission. External audits must be carried out because the Competition Directorate-General needs these external audit findings in order to make credible decisions. This means that this really is necessary in order for the packages of loans to be transferred. However, a pilot transfer of assets at a price equal to the market price and without hidden state aid could take place sooner.

When will the majority of bad loans be transferred to the BAMC? Can you also tell us more about the specific deadlines? I cannot comment on what the European Commission and the European Commissioner for Finance, Olli Rehn, will announce at the general meetings of the two banks. What is your explanation for this?

The main purpose of the State’s assistance to banks – whether directly or through the BAMC – is to create conditions for the sustainable and profitable operation of banks so that they will be able to raise capital from external, international sources under favourable conditions, thus improving their capacity to provide lending to the Slovenian economy. By doing so, banks will contribute to the recovery of the Slovenian economy and help it get back on its feet. Aid to banks is therefore a package solution involving bank recapitalisation, the transfer of non-performing loans to the BAMC and the setting of a new strategic direction in banks’ operations.

The measures to rescue banks and the new bank rehabilitations and liquidation rules without burdening the taxpayers were also discussed by the EU finance ministers a few days ago. What is your comment on this?

I cannot comment on the discussion of EU finance ministers. What bad loans are scheduled to be transferred first to the BAMC? At this stage, it is too early to give any details.

Do you consider the law governing the BAMC appropriate and sufficient to guarantee the effectiveness of your work? What is your explanation for this? The law is very good, giving us a considerably better basis for effective bank resolution than in other countries, for example Spain and Greece, have had. On the other hand, there are also inconsistencies, to which we must pay attention and seek appropriate solutions, which is very time-consuming. That is why it is important that we find solutions to these issues which will guarantee the effectiveness of our work.

How will the BAMC contribute to the recovery of Slovenia’s economy?

We are convinced that Slovenia, if it takes the right political decisions, can solve its problems on its own.

We are convinced that Slovenia, if it takes the right political decisions, can solve its problems on its own.
In early September, Slovenia is expecting approximately 450 guests from about 40 countries, including heads of state, prime ministers, foreign and other ministers, high representatives of international organisations, entrepreneurs of successful foreign and domestic companies, academics and young people, to attend the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) taking place in Bled, beside the beautiful lake surrounded by the Alps.

The 8th Bled Strategic Forum, to be held between 1 and 3 September, is organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Centre for European Perspective. In the last few years, the Forum has gained considerable visibility, becoming one of the most prominent international conferences in the region and developing into a popular gathering of politicians, businessmen, academics and young people.

This year, the Bled Strategic Forum will have additional segments. These segments are intended to promote Slovenia as a country that is open to the world and the future.

In the area of Thematic Segment, we will focus on the political and economic approaches, it is clear that in the future, the European Union will be more integrated - as a banking, economic and political union. Discussions will also deal with EU enlargement policy. One of the panels will focus on EU-Turkey relations and the other on the current situation and current integration progress of the Western Balkan countries, and on the question of which country will be next after Croatia’s accession to the EU. A special panel will discuss the relationship between international criminal justice, the provision of justice and successful economic future of the post-conflict countries. The BSF will also focus on an environmental topic - water, the source of life and link between regions - which may serve as an opportunity for closer cooperation and strengthening of confidence, peace and stability in the Middle East and North Africa. The United Nations is aware of this fact, and therefore declared 2013 to be the International Year of Water Cooperation.

This year, the second Business BSF and third Young BSF will be held as part of the BSF. The Business BSF, organised jointly with the Slovenian-Russian Business Council and the EDC Business School of Management, will focus on the Russian Federation and the countries of Central Asia. Successful Slovenian and foreign entrepreneurs will discuss the energy, industries that are being developed in the region, and high technology, with special emphasis on strengthening of multilateral economic relations, creating new business opportunities and discovering the potential for cooperation with the Russian Federation and Central Asia. The main topics of the Young BSF, entitled “The Clash of Generations”, will be: Young People in the EU, Digital Revolution and Doing Business. Among 150 young people from Slovenia and abroad are expected to participate in the Young BSF.

This year, the Strategic Forum is again organised with the support of Slovenian companies. We are very pleased that, despite the uncertain economic situation, Slovenian and foreign companies support the Forum, seeing it as an added value and an opportunity for strengthening existing economic cooperation and entering new markets, and also as a meeting point of politics and economics. Special thanks should go to our media partners and everyone who participated in the preparation of one of the largest government projects in Slovenia.

We wish all the participants of the Bled Strategic Forum every success with the conference, many new acquaintances and, of course, a pleasant stay in Slovenia.
The open-code concept is becoming the rule of renovation. New businesses operate in unusual working environments as workplaces are changing drastically. At the same time, new technologies enable them to work with the best professionals, who may be scattered all across the globe.

Changing the world is not a simple goal, but it can be achieved one step at a time; the Young BSF participants have demonstrated that they do indeed dare to dream. The discussion of new tools and new rules for doing business mainly revolved around the role of informal education, ethics and entrepreneurship. While the participants agreed that the current EU welfare system is not sustainable, a combination of policies and solutions can provide young entrepreneurs and researchers with opportunities to overcome obstacles in the current market structure and launch their ideas, patents and products. Harald Katzenhüger spoke inspiringly of the importance of ambitions. While Tommy Hutchinson challenged the participants to take a different look at the challenges of business objectives and access to resources.

The passion and courage to take risks was the common thread of the business breakfast on youth entrepreneurship with His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex, hosted by the British Slovenian Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the British Embassy Ljubljana and the British Council. The panelists, Olympic medal-winners Petra Maldivi, Ilan director Mitja Oken and the President of the SBC Management Board, Miha Žerlin, encouraged young people to take risks, to learn to cope with failure and to act as real entrepreneurs to set up their own networks, establish connections and be practical.

The challenges of the Clash of Go have thus been defined and published on the online platform (www.bledstrategicforum.org/ideas), where a discussion is now taking place. The participants and the public are invited to share their ideas and arguments to help find solutions, our main goal for the Solution Conference in early September.

The YBSF Solution Generator Conference in Bird (1 September 2013) will host about 120 participants, whose solutions to our challenges will encourage them to take action in their daily lives. Taking proper action and changing the world is a daunting task, but defining the obstacles and challenges and sharing ideas with people of different cultures, mind-sets and professions is certainly a good way forward.

Karl Viktor Erjavec
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cooperation is of the utmost importance: it opens doors

Karl Viktor Erjavec was born on 21 June 1960 in Aiseau, Belgium. Mr. Erjavec has served in the Government of Slovenia as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister since 2012. He was Minister of Defense from 2004 to 2008 and Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning from 2008 to 2010. Until 1990 he worked in private sector and entered public service in 1990. Between 1995 and 2000, he was Director of the Expert Service of the Office of Human Rights Ombudsmen and Head of the Office of Ombudsmen. Since 2003 he has been the president of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia. Mr Erjavec graduated at the School of Law at the University of Ljubljana. He is the author of a variety of articles on the protection of basic human rights, the functioning of the judicial system and security issues. He is often invited to lecture at various professional seminars and conferences at home and abroad. He is married and has two daughters.
I am a die-hard European. It is important for Slovenia to remain in the EU, especially because it is a small country.

Slovenia has rich experience in water management.

The theme of this year’s Bled Strategic Forum (BSF) is “A Changing Europe in a Changing World”. What changes are these? As we can see, the world is changing, and so is Europe. On the other hand, new global centers are emerging, such as China and Russia. Meanwhile, as a global superpower, Europe faces an economic and financial crisis. BSF will serve as a platform for discussions on the future of the EU and the position of the EU in these changed global circumstances. The question of why the EU is in such a crisis also arises. One theory may be because of its efforts to ensure societal security for its citizens, environment protection etc. Certain funds are required for this, which reduces its competitiveness. In relation to this, the historic fact that Europe experienced many wars throughout its history also has to be noted. The establishment of the EU was actually a response to the Second World War. Europe has never had such a long period of peace since the formation of the EU. If the Balkan wars are excluded. We will primarily discuss the question of how Europe should remain competitive and stable and maintain its leading role.

What is your position on the future and prospects for the economic and monetary union? Is the existence of the EU also in the interests of Slovenia? I am a die-hard European. It is important for Slovenia to remain in the EU, especially because it is a small country. Experts say that a normal country requires six million citizens to perform well all the functions that citizens expect from it. I am certain that in this global world, where it is necessary to compete with the biggest players, the opportunity for Slovenia lies within the EU. It is nevertheless true that the EU will have to become more integrated, as this will also help overcome the crisis. Two important agreements were adopted on the idea of a banking union, on the uniform supervision of banks in the Eurozone and how to structure banks. Integrating the EU will not be successful if the result does not produce a way out of the crisis. Speaking of integration, the most topical question is how much sovereignty can an individual Member State preserve if it transfers certain functions to the EU level. I am certain that the EU would be more competitive at least in the economic field if it was more integrated.

The economy is a priority for economic, political and social stability. The BSF started in 2006 and the result of this was the EU at the beginning of high economic growth. Not enough thought was given to mechanisms for periods of distress, which were not even developed in the EU. The political level presents another issue; where, due to insufficient integration, the EU is losing its leading positions, and certain political decisions relating to the certain global situation will have to be adopted. I take the resolution of problems with Syria as a concrete example. So many different opinions were expressed in the EU on the weapons embargo that it was very difficult to form a united position on the matter. Resolving the Palestinian issue is another such example. The different political positions weaken the EU as a negotiator. So it will be necessary to implement mechanisms to enable united political positions on global political issues. BSF will host important political leaders, and I am certain that the discussions on these topics will be very interesting.

2013 is the international year of water cooperation, a strategic resource and asset, which is scarce in most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa. You will also discuss this at BSF. What is Slovenia’s position on these issues? Slovenia has rich experience in water management. We manage water resources very prudently. When the discussion on privatisation of water resources began, Slovenia was at a time of high economic growth. Not enough thought was given to mechanisms for periods of disease, which were not even developed in the EU. Slovenia’s public’s reaction was decidedly negative. Since water will gradually become a strategic asset, this will also be a strategic advantage for Slovenia. Although it seems that other strategic resources such as oil and gas are more important now, I am certain that water will be in the future.

In return to the actual discussion of water and strategic resources, this will be an excellent opportunity for Slovenians to share our experience with foreign visitors, especially because in some countries there is a shortage of this strategic resource, while in others it is abundant, but not sustainably exploited. Slovenia has the knowledge. The priority of foreign policy is not only to ensure peace and security, but to provide and protect natural resources, which are more and more important global challenges.

Accompanied by Prince Edward, you attended the Young Bled Strategic Forum. What can you tell us about that meeting and the event itself? What were your impressions? BSF is not only a political event, so we tried to expand it into a meeting point for politicians, businesspeople, young people and scholars. The Young BSF is very important, because the young are our future and it is only right that young people use the forum to discuss topics that concern them.

Slovenia has many successful young people who have broken through with their innovations in new technologies. At the Young BSF in June, young people discussed the digital revolution, new business models and their position in the EU. In cooperation with the British Chambers of Commerce, we prepared an interesting event, which included a meeting with Prince Edward. The young people were thrilled, which means we have been presented with a great responsibility and challenge for next year. Prince Edward inspired us with his openness, approach and genuine knowledge of the problems of the young generation. We also hosted other interesting guests at the Young BSF like Peter Mandel, our most accomplished cross-country skier, and Mitja Okorn, a renowned and talented film director.

Returning to the part of BSF which focuses on the economy, why are you focusing on the markets of Russia and Central Asia? This year’s business forum is organised in cooperation with Bled School of Management and the Slovenian-Russian Business Council. In Slovenia foreign policy economic diplomacy is a priority, which is why the business section of BSF is a vital part of the forum. If, on the one hand, the participants at BSF are politicians, it seems logical that businesspeople should also be there. BSF is a place for working business opportunities, and we have to be aware that conducting business in the EU is different from conducting business in other parts of the world. In the EU, the assistance of national authorities is not really needed. But in Turkey, Russia and Kazakhstan, for example, different rules apply when making business connections. When I was visiting these countries I mentioned with businesspeople, they all agreed that such political-economic meetings had a different, more positive atmosphere, because at these meetings, we met not only businesspeople, but also heads of state, parliament, governments and ministers. Cooperation is necessary.

At present, when the European Union is facing a crisis, individual economies outside the EU are growing stronger. I mean mainly the BRICS countries, and Turkey, which is also increasing its economic and political presence. Is Turkey’s future still in the EU, and is this one of the questions at BSF? That’s true: Turkey is experiencing an economic boom. In the document adopted by the Slovenian Government, International Challenges 2013, Turkey was defined as a priority for economic cooperation. In addition to Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and India. We are doing our best in this field. The Turks have expressed great interest in investing in Slovenia and also in cooperation with our companies. Certain Slovenian companies have been present in the Turkish market for some time, and we are combining efforts to pave the way for others. Slovenian and Turkish companies are working together on some projects as strategic partners in third countries. For example, we are cooperating on the construction of major hydroelectric power plants in Montenegro.

The relationship between Turkey and the joint membership of the Croatia and Slovenia in the EU has benefits for our citizens on both sides of the border. We look forward to future cooperation in all fields: political, economic, cultural and scientific.
and the EU is undoubtedly in- 

searching for our country. I believe that it future is in the EU, for geopolitical, 

political and economic reasons. Its 

accession is also important with 

regard to the question of the aging 

EU population. By the way, we are 

already thinking a panel for next 

year on the significance of aging 

population trends in the EU. I think this is a global issue that should be addressed.

BSF also focuses on rights, in- 

ternational law and several particularly women’s rights. What is the po- 

sition of the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this issue? 

Slovenia condemns all viola- 

tions of human rights. On every occasion, I personally stress the 

role of the International Criminal 

Court. The discussion on the role of the International Criminal Court, 

the EU and the UN is a special 

panel of BSF will focus on the question of the efficient protec- 

tion of the civil population as 

particularly the most vulnerable 

groups of people, who are fre- 

quently the innocent victims of 

armed conflict. All violations of 

human rights would be reduced if 

the authorities responsible knew 

that they would be prosecuted for 

these crimes. The sever viola- 

tions of human rights cannot and 

should not be go unpunished. This is 

why the role of the International Criminal Court is of exceptional 

significance. For numerous vic- 

tims, the international criminal justice system freely offers the only hope of justice. It is also a key provision of crimi- 

nals.

On 1 July, Croatia became a full 

member of the European Union. When settling disputes between 

Slovenia and Croatia, you bore a 
great responsibility. What is your 

view of the new member of the 

European family, and above all, 

what does this mean for Slove- 

nia?

Geographically, this means that 

all our neighbours are EU Mem- 

ber States. Slovenia is no longer on 

the edge of the EU, but we have 

already moved closer to the cen- 

tre, and that is positive. The joint 

membership of the countries of 

the former Yugoslavia is already in its EU benefits for our 

citizens on both sides of the border. We look forward to future 

cooperation in all fields: political, 

economic, cultural and scientific. 

We managed to resolve the open 

issues between us, which resulted 

from the dissolution of the coun- 

try of which we were parts, in a 

civilised manner. This was diffi- 

cult, but we have always been in 

a relationship with Croatia, which was also the result of the 

relationship between Borut 

Pahor, who was prime minister at 

the time, and the former Croatian 

prime minister, Jadranka Kosor. 

The same applies to my relation- 

ship with Slovenian Foreign 

Minister Vesna Pusić, who 

cooperated actively throughout 

and agreed to ask the EU for 

financial aid for the European 

strategy. Another important 

aspect is the role of the EU in 

the EU is important to have 
good communication. A panel discussion with all our am- 

bassadors is held annually, which is an opportunity for discussions 

on joint projects. Slovenian for- 

eign policy priorities, open issues 

and possibilities of improving the 

work of the diplomatic and consular 

network. The discussion is open. I believe our diplomats 

are professional and perform 

their duties with efficiency and 

responsibility. At the moment, 

I think that this percentage 

could be higher, especially 

because we need specific 

contacts for certain posts, in particular in organisations, such as the OSE and 

OSCE. This quota will be 

discussed in the future. 

Let us briefly mention the new 

foreign policy strategy. What are 

your starting points? 

The objectives of the strategy 

planned in 1999 were accom- 

plished. The strategic goals were 

that the accession to the EU, 

the Schengen Area, OECD, OSCE and 

NATO is the key to economic and political 

development. We needed to make 

progress in international trade, 

in governmental cooperation, in 

economic and scientific coor- 

dination. Today, we have achieved 

these goals. The objective of the strategy 

was to contribute to the 

European family, and above all, 

to support the enlargement of the 

European Union. 

You’ve already mentioned that 

it is Slovenia’s interests for the 

country and the whole family. 

Can you further elaborate on this po- 

sition? 

I pleased that great progress 

has been made as regards the point of property re- 

stitution to the EU. The issues between 

Bulgaria and Portugal are being 

resolved successfully. Slovenia has always made efforts for Serbia 

to allocate a date to begin ne- 

gotiations, as it already has can- 

didate status. Our proposal was 

October 2013, but the negotiators 

will begin in January 2014. In the 

case of Macedonia, the issue of 

the name remains. I hope a com- 

promise is found soon. During my 

visit to Skopje at the beginning of 

April, I stressed that Macedonia, 

irrespective of this barrier, should 

implement the agreements required to 

meet the criteria for accession to the EU, as far as possible. Regard- 

ing Montenegro, I was pleased 

that it is making good progress and has 

taken the first step of accession. Bosnia and Herzegovina is 

becoming a special problem due to 

the political deadlock. I hope that 

next year’s elections will break the deadlock. Because Bos- 

nia and Herzegovina consists of 

different entities, it is also a per- 

manent question which may 

cause instability in the region, so 

its accession to the EU is impor-

tant particularly in terms of peace 

and security. Slovenia will cer- 

tainly offer its experience to help 

these countries.

You have rich political and min- 

isterial experience. Prior to your 

appointment as the Minister of Foreign Affairs you were the Min- 

ister of Defence and Minister of the Environment and Spatial Plan- 

ning. This is your second year as 

Foreign Minister. How frequent are your contacts with foreign 

diplomats in Slovenia and on 

which occasions?

I believe that personal 

energy and attitude are very important. If there is positive energy, doors open. Formal diplomacy is one 

thing, but informal diplomacy, 

when you are a foreign minister, 

is not just the exchange of letters, but also the personal, informal 

contacts with foreign ministers. 

This applies to all partners. To 

the participants enjoy or not, 

the approach is the same. We 

talk about the same issues as the 

Chinese or the Russian or the 

French foreign minister. We 

try to have an open mind and to 

stimulate new solutions. 

I would like to express personal 

welcome to everyone who comes to Slovenia. 

Slovenia is beautiful; they should use their time to see the natural 

sights. We also have a great range of excellent wines and spirits. They should try Slovenian nut 

roll if they have more time; they could see some places near Bled: 

Bohinj, Bled, Kočevje, and also 

Postojna Cave etc. And of course, 

they should definitely see a game during EuroBasket 2013, which 

Slovenia is hosting between 4 and 

22 September.

I think this is a global issue that 

should be addressed.
Nothing is more permanent than change

He is demonstrating to the world that Slovenia is not a tiny country in the middle nowhere but a state capable of manufacturing highly innovative and state-of-the-art products. A complex in the centre of the Belarus capital Minsk which will include a five-star Kempinski hotel, 81 housing units and business premises worth more than EUR 100 million and the production and marketing of ecological and energy-saving wooden buildings highly valued in Europe are only some of the achievements placing the Riko Group among the world leaders in its field.

Mr Janez Škrabec, as Riko’s managing director, what are you currently most involved with?

It is the Kempinski project that I am focusing on. This is a prestigious project won by Riko after tough negotiations and with the help of Slovenian diplomacy and the personal involvement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karl Erjavec. As the principal contractor, what we are aiming for in the implementation of this project, to the greatest extent possible, is to include a Slovenian component. A few months ago, we signed a contract with Marmor Hotavlje for the construction of the Kempinski hotel’s stone façade. The contract value is EUR 10 million, which is as much as normal annual turnover for this Slovenian company. Opportunities will also be given to Slovenian suppliers of interior furnishings and furniture. In addition to the Kempinski complex, we are devoting attention to other promising business operations in the former Soviet Union. A contract worth EUR 100 million that we recently signed in Moscow covers the construction of the Ivanovo textile factory for the production of specialty fabrics. It has already become a tradition of ours that we focus on markets of the former Soviet Union that Slovenia perceives as highly promising and strategically important.

One of your flagship projects is the first eco house constructed in cooperation with the French designer Philippe Starck. You have already signed the first sales contract for the supply of a P.A.T.H. eco-house to buyer Ray Tammi. Philippe Starck is certainly the most famous design icon in the world. Looking for a partner, what we’re aiming for in the Kempinski project is our company to be the powerhouse of the project and the project co-founder, both in unspoilt nature in designer wooden houses and our engineering projects. Our eco houses are currently the most prestigious real estate project in England. “The Lakes” is a project that connects an idyllic location which is only 60 km away from London with a sustainable design of a settlement of wooden houses designed by Philippe Starck, Jade Jagger and Yoo Studio. I am proud that it was us who the investor entrusted with the construction of the wooden houses. To date, we have built some 60 units occupied by those who want to spoil themselves in a rural environment, in unspoilt nature in designer wooden houses. This five-star settlement is closely interlinked with the superlatives of the setting itself, including an eco marketplace, antique shops, excellent pubs and restaurants, sports facilities, fishing, golf and so on. Many famous people, including supermodel Elle Macpherson, Mark Owen from Take That and actress Tina Hobley, have already chosen a Riko wooden house as their weekend cottage.

Do you think that Slovenian companies are internationally oriented or competitive enough?

We can hardly be satisfied with the state of Slovenia’s economy. I share the opinion of Slovenia’s President, Borut Pahor, who some time ago emphasised that after the crisis, the structure of Slovene’s economy will completely change. Companies which until recently were still pillars of the Slovenian economy have, to a great extent,written off their investments, with the help of foreign capital, which many of our policymakers have recognised neither the real value and importance of foreign capital nor the idea that a market-oriented economy which takes account of foreign competition, is the long run, much more effective than an introverted economy. Just take a look at Lek, a pharmaceutical company which, despite foreign ownership, has kept its entire development sector in Slovenia and retained jobs as a socially responsible company in all respects.

Does that mean that we need a more entrepreneurial way of thinking?

Absolutely, because the point is that the entrepreneurial way of thinking enables you to maximise and optimise your opportunities by yourself, without relying on others, not even on the state, whereas in our country there is still a widespread belief that it is the state which must take care of everything. But the state cannot react to a never-ending cycle of change superimposed on our company community is much more flexible and also aware of the fact that nothing is more permanent than never-ending change.

Who, in your opinion, would run the country better, businessmen or politicians?

I do not advocate the idea of managers running the state. On
I am trying to promote Slovenia in the Russian Federation and vice versa. I have intensified these efforts since my appointment to the position of Chairman of the Slovenian-Russian Business Council. With its highly dynamic economy and capital surplus, Russia is one of the most promising markets in the world. Russia is certainly a very important business partner for Slovenia. At Riko, we see ourselves as integrator of Slovenian know-how and products. We always integrate a strong Slovenian component in all projects implemented in Russia. Let me mention just a few examples of this policy: the reconstruction of the Peter I Hotel in the centre of Moscow, where the Slovenian input exceeded 49%, or the current project including the construction of a Zvezda Plant in St. Petersburg, where a new generation of diesel engines with 400-1700 kW power range will be made. The relevant contract was signed at the end of last year and provides for the integration of several Slovenian products.

Last year, the volume of trade between the two countries exceeded EUR 1.1 billion, which is 28.2% more than in 2010, with Slovenia's exports to Russia last year reaching EUR 747.7 million, representing a 26.6% increase in comparison with 2011, and imports from Russia amounting to EUR 299.3 million, up 31.5% on 2010. These figures suffice to illustrate the situation. The protagonists of Slovenia's exports to the Russian Federation are largely those companies which have been operating in this country for quite some time. Riko's success in this market is by no means a recent phenomenon. I always like to stress that we have been operating there for twenty years on a twenty-year basis. The same is true of other successful companies, such as Kika, Lek, Iktatek, Gorefe and others. It is quite possible that the figures will be even higher in the coming years, because the Russian Federation is investing heavily in modernising its industry, especially the automobile industry, while other challenges can also be identified in civil engineering. Moscow alone is making plans to renovate or build several hotels. And there are further opportunities in the energy sector, with the emphasis on efficient use of energy and renewable energy sources.

Is Russia a very demanding market considering the fact that the entire global competition has gathered there? I am trying to promote Slovenia in the Russian Federation and vice versa. I have intensified these efforts since my appointment to the position of Chairman of the Slovenian-Russian Business Council. With its highly dynamic economy and capital surplus, Russia is one of the most promising markets in the world. Russia is certainly a very important business partner for Slovenia. At Riko, we see ourselves as integrator of Slovenian know-how and products. We always integrate a strong Slovenian component in all projects implemented in Russia. Let me mention just a few examples of this policy: the reconstruction of the Peter I Hotel in the centre of Moscow, where the Slovenian input exceeded 49%, or the current project including the construction of a Zvezda Plant in St. Petersburg, where a new generation of diesel engines with 400-1700 kW power range will be made. The relevant contract was signed at the end of last year and provides for the integration of several Slovenian products.

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Janez Fajfar
Mayor of Bled

Guests in Bled appreciate friendliness the most

You have a lot of experience in the hospitality field, but you have also been mayor for a while now. What made you change directions in your career?

That’s right; since 2006. In the first term, I was a candidate of the Slovenian National Party (no longer a parliamentary party) and then I was candidate of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (a coalition party). I like being mayor of the Municipality of Bled. It is a great challenge and honour, but above all, a great responsibility.

That is true. You are one of the most well-known Slovenian mayors. Official visits are frequently on your agenda. Yes, I suppose that’s true. But I have an exceptional team of colleagues whom I can rely on. I would not be able to deal with both municipal problems as well as protocol matters. And I don’t want that. But it is true that I follow the content of individual official events and I am present sometimes if I can. Bled is twinned with many municipalities, such as Henley-on-Thames, where the Royal Regatta is held every year. Rowing, which has a long tradition in Bled, enjoys high status in Great Britain as an elite sport. In addition to official visits, famous people and others, Bled also hosts many journalists and historians. They are particularly interested in the history of Bled and also admire its spectacular landscape. They have been so impressed that Bled has been featured in full-page articles in newspapers such as the Guardian. The Times and others. Bled receives an abundance of free promotion, which makes us happy. As far as official receptions are concerned, these are harmonised with representatives of the President of the Republic, the public, the National Assembly, the Government and other institutions. We are also happy to welcome these guests.

Could you mention someone in particular?

I was exceptionally thrilled about Sunita Williams, the American astronaut with Slovenian roots. She really is a fantastic person, a fantastic woman. Very pleasant, agreeable, sparkling, she was interested in everything. Laura Bush, who showed a lot of interest when she visited Slovenia, left a similar impression on me. She is also a very educated and interesting woman, and very well-informed.

We have had quite a few interesting official visits recently. Mitra Kumar, the Speaker of the lower house of the Indian Parliament, and her large delegation visited us. The mayor of Chungnam was in the delegation as well. We took them to an Indian restaurant in Bled, which is very good, and which I highly recommend. They were very pleased. The meeting with Prince Edward and his wife was also very nice. Their visit was private. They were joined by Janez Škrabec, the director of the Riko Group and Danica Purg, Dean and President of IEDC-Bled School of Management. The British royal couple also met several British citizens who live in the vicinity. As you know, I also have fond memories of the visit of the Japanese imperial couple, Prince Akishino and his wife. They are both avid nature enthusiasts and were excited about Bled. The parents of the Japanese prince were at Bled in 1970. Their advice to their children was that if they visit Slovenia, they must go to Bled. It seems that their advice was taken. The imperial couple especially admired Bled Island and everything else connected to nature. They even congratulated the newspapers happened to meet on the island.

Are these guests genuinely excited about Bled and Slovenia?

They all express sincere admiration, they like Slovenia very much. Naturally, there is always room for improvement, and we try to keep in mind their suggestions. It is true that as a municipality, the costs of official visits are high. We have a very ambitious municipal plan and we want to see these plans followed through. Official events are important, but the municipality must first take care of the local residents. Better roads will have to be constructed, the cleaning of the lake and regulation of water levels will have to be considered. Bathing areas will have to be arranged. I am trying to be mayor to all inhabitants of Bled, not only to those who elected me. But above all, Bled is a Slovenian gem, so I feel an even greater responsibility.

There is no high quality tourism in Bled yet, but there is. Bled will be more expensive, in which direction do you want to develop tourism, to make it accessible to everyone or maintain it as an elite location?

Slovenia is small and Bled must be available to all Slovenians. But it will also be necessary to offer a hotel to suit guests with above-standard requirements in every respect. I think it is true that the people we call elite guests come to Bled primarily to seek peace and quiet. They do not like to disappear in the crowd and be ordinary. Many crowned heads have walked around without reporters knowing anything about it. Well-known and famous people appreciate that. I believe that it is friendlyness that people appreciate the most. Above all, tourists want a friendly welcome. And to all those who are just now walking around Bled or who are planning to come: you are welcome.

So, will you be running for mayor of Bled again?

I will. I have come to love my work, although I was first persuaded into running for this position, and for a very long time I doubted that it was the right thing for me. The Municipality of Bled is very active; we are planning many projects and I want to be there to see them come to fruition. I especially want to see the roads in Bled finally arranged properly.
Igor Falshin
Director of Petsdialog LLC team
Woof, woof at Bled castle

What do Renee Davis from the USA, Alexander from Russia, Vesna from Serbia and Denis Cebulec from Slovenia have in common? They all have dogs and they are all taking part in a competition that was announced last spring on the website http://petsdialog.com/lord/. The main prize is 100,000 euros. Is this really true?

The first time I visited Slovenia was in 2000 after a very important government official said to me, “You should visit Slovenia. I was reborn in this country. It’s a real Paradise on Earth.” Two weeks later I visited this wonderful country with my pet. It was like a dream come true. It was more than love at first sight, it was a fountain of emotions. I fell in love with this wonderful country with its tender Adriatic Sea, unique Alpine lakes, natural parks, sky-blue rivers, outstanding architecture, reviving thermal springs and fantastic cuisine. I also fell in love with the Slovenian people, with their hospitality and open souls. And after 12 years nothing has changed. Slovenia still has a very special place in my heart.

Igor, when did you visit Slovenia for the first time?

The first time I visited Slovenia was in 2000 after a very important government official said to me, “You should visit Slovenia. I was reborn in this country. It’s a real Paradise on Earth.”

Now I understand why you decided to organise this competition in Slovenia. When our team needed to choose a place for this world-wide competition for the “Petsdialog” project, we had no doubts about what country to choose. There was only one choice Slovenia.

It was extremely important for us to draw attention to the problems of animals and popularise charity work with homeless and handicapped animals.

Please tell us something about the participants. How many participants do you already have?

First of all, all our participants have one thing in common, which is their endless love for their pets. Now we have more than 500 active participants on our website and everyone is ready to prove that his or her pet is the best.

It is stated on your website that the prize for the winner is 100,000 euros. Is this really true?

The winner will not only receive 100,000 euros but will also get the opportunity to be the caretaker of Bled castle for a day. I also would like to emphasise that there will be five finalists, who will all get the chance to go to Slovenia and discover this wonderful country with their pets. They will then write special blogs about their experiences in the country. People all over the world will be able to know more about Slovenia through these blogs.

Ok, so there will be 25 semi-finalists. What’s next?

As I’ve said, you need to get the most votes from visitors of our website. The voting process will be absolutely transparent and fair. We have been discussing the procedure of voting for a very long time, because the prize is very substantial. Finally we decided to let visitors of our website decide who will be the winner. You will be able to see your position in the competition daily. We would also like to point out that it is not prohibited for friends and relatives of competitors to vote for them.

How will people be able to make their decisions?

First of all, your detailed and interesting application form will help visitors of the website make the right decision. We have already had several examples of incredibly interesting and creative descriptions of why people think they should win and go to Slovenia.

Semi-finalists will also need to make a video about themselves and their pets and answer questions from our site visitors and readers. All this will help our visitors to make the right choice.

Four finalists will be chosen by the public and one by the members of our jury. The five finalists will go to Slovenia together with their pets, where they will spend a whole month and will be competing for the main prize.

Who will pay their travel and accommodation expenses?

It goes without saying that we will cover all the expenses. Consider it their salaries. They will be writing their blogs, describing a new country, its traditions, cuisine and amusements for their pets. In short, they will be preparing all kinds of materials that will help them to win. Finally the winner will be announced. He or she will become a caretaker of one of the most beautiful castles in the world, with a salary of 100,000 euros. The other finalists will receive other prizes. But in my opinion the most important prize will be given to all the finalists. This of course is the trip to this wonderful country.

Have you got a message for your participants in the competition?

I would like to wish good luck to everyone. Do not waste your chance to win a dream job in one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Tania Glogovčan
Director of Bled Castle

I would like to wish good luck to everyone. Do not waste your chance to win a dream job in one of the most beautiful places in the world.
Boris Pahor turns 100

If you exist in order to talk and be heard by certain people, you are not alone and not completely ruined

Boris Pahor, a Slovenian writer, will celebrate his 100th birthday at the end of August. At his venerable age, he continues to write and publish his work. His novel Mesto v zalivu (The City in the Bay) was published in French this April under the title Quand Ulysse revient à Trieste.

Boris Pahor was awarded the 2013 European Citizen’s Prize by the European Parliament. The prize is given to individuals and groups in recognition of their contribution to mutual understanding and closer ties between nations in the European Union. Mr. Pahor will receive his prize in Slovenia at the end of August when he celebrates his 100th birthday.

Mr. Pahor was nominated for this prize by all Slovenian MEPs who said that “as a critical writer and a great intellectual he has had an invaluable impact on the Slovenian language and on the cultural development of the area between Italy and Slovenia.” For the slomedia.it portal, Mr. Pahor expressed his satisfaction at receiving this honour.

“When the European Parliament, through my person, recognises the existence of our culture and the validity of the European spirit in Slovenians, then this comes as a great satisfaction experienced not only by me, but by all of us, as I am the son of the people of Trieste and Pimorska. This is an honour for all our culture and the level of our European culture,” he said.

Boris Pahor, born on 26 August in Trieste, is considered one of the best known Slovenian writers. His fame in Europe stems from publications about the atrocities in Nazi concentration camps, but in Slovenia and among Slovenian minority in Italy he is well known for his social and political engagement, in addition to his writing.
He has no great expecta-
tions for the future, not
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ber everything that hap-
pened in the 20th cen-
tury so that I can say to
myself: Boris, if you ex-
ist in order to talk and be
heard by certain people,
you are not alone and
not completely ruined.”

In anticipation of his 100th birth-
day, La Repubblica (daily of Milán’s
Il Corriere della Sera, La Repub-
bllica is the most influential Italian
daily with the highest circulation
published a two-page interview
with Mr Pahor in which he an-
nounced that a special event
marking his 100th birthday
would be organised in Ljubljana
on 26 August, and a special book
published about his life and work.

He also talks at length about his
childhood marred by the Fascist
arson attack on Našndí Dom, a
Slovenian cultural centre in
Trieste, that signalled the begin-
nings of attacks on every Slovenian
over a long period of
time. The Slovenian language was
banned. Slovenians were forced
to use Italian in written and spo-
lom communication. Slovenian
books were burned, and children
in schools were no longer allowed
to declare themselves Slovenian.
All of this filled Pahor with suf-
ferring, fear and shame. He also
speaks about his father, a travel-
ling salesman who sold butter,
cottage cheese and honey. He
does not forget to mention his ex-
pertise from Bencsári in Africa
where he completed secondary
school. Until September 1943 he
worked as a translator for a mili-
tary information service. After It-
aly’s capitulation on 8 September
1943, he returned as a civilian to
Trieste where he joined the resis-
tance movement.

NO GREAT EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In his interview for La Repub-
bllica, Boris Pahor speaks about
his attitude towards death for the
first time. “I am afraid that I will
ever have to say goodbye. I think et-
ternity is a great void. You can find
salace in Catholicism but for that
you have to have faith,” said Mr Pahor
and went on to answer the question
whether he was a religious
person by saying, “Learning to
love and forgive is what I like
about Catholicism, but there
is not only one Jesus; there are mil-
ions of suffering people, millions
of Jesuses. If God is so almighty
and good, why has he let all this
happen?”

In his opinion, he lives a solitary
life: he gets up at half past six and
at seven o’clock listens to the Slo-
venian radio broadcast in Trieste.
He is not fond of social life or sa-
lon-style parties. He does not eat
much, but writes and occasion-
ally goes for a walk. If he has to
.go somewhere, he takes the bus.
If he has to see someone, he pre-
fers that the meeting take place
in the back room at Lükka bar in
Prosecco near Trieste, a kind of a
sanctuary for him.

He has no great expectations for
the future, not even for an indi-
vidual or humanity. “For me it is
enough just to remember every-
thing that happened in the 20th cen-
tury so that I can say to my-
self: Boris, if you exist in order to
talk and be heard by certain
people, you are not alone and
not completely ruined.”

Sources: Summarised from Delo, La
Repubblica and STA.

In August, the Okarina Ethno
Festival is once again enriching
the cultural activities of Bled, in
its 23 years, it has gone through
numerous changes and has had
its ups and downs. “The begin-
nings of the festival date back to
1991, when we got a phenom-
enal feeling of experiencing a
kind of change. It was at that
time that we decided to organi-
sate a festival which would bring
good entertainment, grounded
in quality, to Bled Ethno music
had just started to become pop-
ular in Europe, and it seemed
that there were the beginnings
of a new style which would un-
doubtedly have a great impact
on the music scene. World mu-
sic was born, and after many
years, the fusion between ethno
music and other diverse styles
such as jazz and blues, which
use the ethno tradition as their
basis, took place. Today, this is
again becoming extremely pop-
ular, bringing about an upgrade
to original ethno songs.

After all these years, we have
come visible, and one of
the resulting drawbacks in or-
ganising the festival is the fac-
t that we have to turn down a
large number of music groups
which would like to participate.
There are many great and lesser
groups that would like to appear
at the festival, but we cannot
afford them all for financial or
scheduling reasons. We simply
cannot have 60 performing art-
ists, since we are limited to two
weekends. With the finances
available, we try to organise a
music programme which is as
good and as interesting as pos-
sible and one that satisfies us all.

Since ethno music is full of nos-
talgia, times supported by dif-
erent influences in different ways,
it allows everyone to discover its
tradition or message typical of a
pleasant music experience.”

All the concerts are free of
charge, except for those staged
at Bled castle, where visitors
have to pay the castle entrance
fee. Local residents enjoy free
entry even at the castle. In the
last 23 years, the financial situ-
ation has changed significantly.
Nowadays, the festival needs more
than thousand euros just to fly
a music group from Paris. For a
number of years, the Bled
Culture Institute has not only
been the main financial sup-
porter of the project but has also
helped in different ways for the
festival to take place.

“Each of the genres possesses
beauty and unique features. It is
not about one message based on
one intellectual concept, but is
about a feeling of an intuitive
and very deep nostalgia that
every nation has in itself.”

Leo Ličof, artistic director of the
Okarina Ethno Festival

Along with Ljubljana’s
Druga Godba Inter-
national Festival, the
Okarina Ethno Festival is one of the
oldest festivals of traditional
music in Slovenia. The organis-
ers named the festival after a tradi-
tional folk instrument.

French literary and film critic
Jean-Luc Drouot once said: “Despite
doubt, despite faithful memory of
the tortured fellow prisoners, despite
the momentary conviction that he
is no longer capable of being happy,
his stand on the threshold of a
creatusuum... Pahor still believes
that desire and love can bring
salvation. And he provos that.”

Leo Ličof, artistic director of the
Okarina Ethno Festival
BLED
A vision of paradise

Dark blue on the top, light grey, sometimes even white as snow in the middle, and different shades of green below. A mirror glitters at the bottom. Dark blue sky before the storm. White as snow, light grey limestone covers the mountain ranges. Forest of different shades of green. As the seasons change, so do its colours.

LAKE BLED

Lake Bled lies at the centre of the Bled Corner. A tectonic hole made later by the Bohinj glacier was once at the location of the present lake. The glacier ran into an obstacle, a huge rock against which it rubbed and scraped for so long that the only thing that remained was the present island. The glacier met the basin and the basin was flooded with water, which led to the appearance of Lake Bled. It is up to 2.12 km long and up to 1.30 km wide. Lake Bled is a mirror of the sky. It is surrounded by a location of the water on the hill. The increased water level occurred during the last glaciation, which pushed away and stacked; the rivers created the ice ages, the rivers created when their currents settled. During the spring, the ice was scraped, deepened, and scraped for so long that the only thing that remained was the present island. But the story of the island is probably even more magical.

Lake Bled lies at the centre of the Bled Corner. The site is a massive tectonic hole made later by the Bohinj glacier. It was the site of the present lake from which the glacier flowed. For a long time, the glacier was scraped, deepened, and scraped again, creating a location of the water on the hill. The increased water level occurred during the last glaciation, which pushed away and stacked; the rivers created the ice ages, the rivers created when their currents settled. During the spring, the ice was scraped, deepened, and scraped for so long that the only thing that remained was the present island. But the story of the island is probably even more magical.

By the 12th century, Bled was located on a high hill above the Great Stone in the Rudovna Valley. What you are about to read happened to an old man who ventured unsuspecting from Radovna to Mass in Gorje along a lonely path by the river. "Suddenly something frightened him near the Great Stone. Something raided horribly in the bushes right next to the old castle. He quickly hid behind a tree to wait and see what was hiding in the bushes. He did not have to wait long. He caught sight of a large fat snake slithering down over the stones and rocks into the valley. It crawled into the water, screaming loudly." This story is from a tale about an accused woman who used to live in this accursed castle and the tall hill above the big stone is still called Gradišče (fort).

THE OLDEST CASTLE IN SLOVENIA

A mysterious castle was once located on a high hill above the Great Stone in the Rudovna Valley. What you are about to read happened to an old man who ventured unsuspecting from Radovna to Mass in Gorje along a lonely path by the river. "Suddenly something frightened him near the Great Stone. Something raided horribly in the bushes right next to the old castle. He quickly hid behind a tree to wait and see what was hiding in the bushes. He did not have to wait long. He caught sight of a large fat snake slithering down over the stones and rocks into the valley. It crawled into the water, screaming loudly." This story is from a tale about an accused woman who used to live in this accursed castle and the tall hill above the big stone is still called Gradišče (fort).

On 10 April 1004, the German king Henry II granted the Bled estate to Albuin, Bishop of Brixen and his bishopric. In 1011, Henry II granted the castle atop the cliff (Castellum Veldes) to Albuin's successor, Adalberon, with a new deed of gift, which is the earliest known record of the castle. From the records of historical value, the castle had little valuable equipment of historical value. The Bled estate was nationalised in 1803. When Napoleon occupied Carinthia, the estate came under the ownership of the Illyrian Provinces. The property was returned to the Brixen diocese in 1838. After the feudal system was abolished in 1848, the Bled owners could no longer afford the rising costs of upkeep, and so the property in Bled was sold in 1856 to the entrepreneur and owner of the famous ironworks Viktor Raund. Raund sold the castle and estate to wholesale merchant Adolph Muhr.

Throughout history, tourists’ motives for visiting Bled have been diverse: pilgrimages, trips, spa, resort, hunting and fishing, sports, culture, congress, ecotourism. During the period of modern tourism, the culture of villas, summer houses and hotels developed here.

With its great natural beauty, Bled and its surrounding rank among the most beautiful alpine resorts, and are renowned for the mild, healing climate, and thermal lake water. The beauty of the mountains reflected in the lake, the sun, the serenity and fresh air ensure pleasant feelings in visitors throughout the year, guaranteeing an ideal relaxing break or an active holiday.
in 1882. The restless history of the castle continued, and the castle, lake and island were bought by Ivan Kendra, a hotel manager from Bled, in 1918. He had great plans and wanted to convert the castle into a hotel. He over invested and his entire property was con- fiscated in 1937 by the Coop- erative Business Bank, and later taken over by the Draza Banara. A fine bookie out in the castle on 18 August 1947 which destroyed a significant part of the roof. The history of Bled castle is diverse and tumultuous. Organised pro- fessional reconstruction began in 1952 according to the plans of architect Tone Binic, who was a student of the famous Slovenian architect Jule Pličnik. The recon- struction took ten years and was completed in 1964. During the re- construction, Bled castle gained a somewhat more modern appear- ance adjusted to tourist tours. The Bled Culture Institute renovated the museum section in 2008.

**THE WISHING BELL**

It is still true that, once in the Church of the Assumption of Mary on Bled Island, one should ring the bell and make a wish. The wishing bell comes from a story about a young widow who had a bell cast in memory of her husband.

**THE REFLECTION TAKES SHAPE**

You will also enjoy the mixture of wines and watch a demonstration of bottling from oak barrels. Those visitors who fill up a bottle as a souvenir, and cork and wax it, receive a commemorative certificate.

**THE WISHING BELL**

Bled became a meeting place of diplomats and politicians as early as in the 19th century. Organ- ised-diplomatic activity began in Yugoslavia, when King Alexan- der Karadžordević declared Bled his summer residence. The most impor- tant foreign policy events include three meetings of the Little Entente (1926, 1935, 1938) and one meeting of the Balkan League (1935). Bled maintained its important political and dip- lomatic role even during World War II, becoming the centre of the German occupation au- thority in Upper Carniola. After World War II, the decision of the former Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito to build a residence in Bled strengthened the official role of the place. It was at that time, especially in the 1960s, when Yugoslavia began to open up to the world, that Bled saw the peak of diplomatic tourism. The Tito–Dimovitch treaty on the Yugoslav–Bulgarian federation (1947) and the Balkan Pact (1954) were signed here.

**BLED FOLK TALES**

One tale relates the story of a mountain guide from Bled-called Bavan. One day, he met a fear- some Turk in battle. They swore, spat over their shoulders, loaded their guns, aimed and boom! But what do you know: when the smoke dispersed, they were both still standing. The people of Bled still believe that their bullets col- lided.

In the days before refrigeration, ice-masking offered an oppor- tunity to make some cash in the winer, and was also a kind of tradition in Bled. The following story was well known. In order to cut the ice, workers removed one handle of a mire saw, made a hole in the ice with an axe, and saved. As they were work- ing, a man from Ljubljana came by. The man watched and then started shouting for the workers to change places or else the one in the water would drown. He thought that another person was working the other end of the saw underwate in the years before World War II, the Karadžordević royal fam- ily decided to buy some horses in Norway, so-called Fjord horses. Stables were arranged in Pržina, opposite the entrance to Villa Bled. At the end of the war, one of the regally-bred Fjord horses was taken to the partisans, which did not please it very much. He even bit the partisans on more than one occasion. The horse was des- tined to be cooked in a cauldron somewhere in Jelovica.

The history of the Bled period is diverse. Who knows if climb- ers from Bled know that Birk's patients were the first climbers from Bled to master descent us- ing a rope? There was not enough room in the open huts by the lake for all the patients, so they also stayed in hotels. At night, they would descend to the ground by using shorter tied together. Coach- men waited for them around the corner and took them to good inns. The hard-working Mr Birkli, however, was convinced that only he could take credit for the good appearance of his patients. The people of Bled used to go ice-skating (modern ice-skates with metal blades) on the lake - ice-skaters, particularly women, dressed up to go skating. It was such a joy to watch them. More prominent houses used uphol- stered armchairs with blades (ice-skates) attached to the front to drive on the ice. People were hined to drive prominent ladies around on the ice like this. One of these armchairs was also owned by the parish. It was beautifully made and upholstered in cardi- nal red plush. On St. Blaise’s day, the altar boys used this armchair to push the priest to the island.

Then one catches sight of the shining mirror. And what does one see? The fractions of the im- age have names; only the sky remains just that. The mountains with Tri- glav are the core of the Julian Alps; the colourful part is the foothills and forest of Pokljuka, and the mirror is Lake Bled. The image in the eye of the trav- ellers in a vision of paradise.

**SOURCES:** Summarised from a story by the Mayor of Bled, Ivonek, and the publication ‘Bled – 1,000 years’.

**SINFO – SLOVENIAN INFORMATION**

The image in the eye of the trav- ellers is a vision of paradise.
Rowing Wimbledon at Lake Bled
The best and most beautiful rowing course in the world

Lake Bled, a Slovenian natural paradise, offers ideal conditions for rowing. The length of the lake is the same as that of a standard rowing course and its width is just right to accommodate six lanes. Owing to its natural beauty, it is known as the best and most beautiful rowing course in the world, a kind of Slovenian Wimbledon of rowing, which can boast of having already organised four world championships, the last in 2011.

The secretary-general of the Rowing Federation of Slovenia, Jernej Slivnik, explains that sportsmen and visitors are keen to keep returning to the town and its lake. The first recorded regatta in Bled, which brought a medal to the local team, was in 1905, though rowing clubs on the Slovenian coast existed as long ago as the 19th century. The Bled Club was established in 1949 and a rowing federation, whose members first participated at the Olympic Games in 1956, followed three years later. In the 60s, two coaches – former rowers Milko Janša and Stanislav Špik – got to work on reorganising the club, paving its way to a place among the best in the world. In 1992, soon after Slovenian independence, two rowers – Izjak Čop, one of the most successful Slovenian athletes of all times, and Luka Špik – started to participate in competitions. Čop is the holder of three Olympic medals. In 2013, he started the season without his long-term partner in the double scull Luka Špik, who finally retired from competition last year. Even in the post-Olympic season of 2013, centring his efforts on the competition in the single scull, he is aiming for top places.

The club also takes pride in the rowing centre that they established in the 1950s and renovated in 2011. This is one of the most beautiful centres in the world, Mr Slivnik says proudly; when there is a competition, everything runs smoothly, like clockwork.

The silver from Athens (2004) and bronze medals from Barcelona (1992) and London (2012); as if this were not enough, he is also a quadruple world champion. Špik is the holder of three Olympic medals. In 2013, he started the season without his long-term partner in the double scull Izjak Čop, who finally retired from competition last year. Even in the post-Olympic season of 2013, centring his efforts on the competition in the single scull, he is aiming for top places.

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Despite having reached the end of his racing career, Čop still likes to take to the water and now and then still enjoys training.

“You are still a man. Occasionally I am not completely out of the rhythm yet. However, when I come to Bled and see the training schedule but the weather is bad, I am not in the least sorry. The boys have to go out on the lake whatever the weather conditions, but I can decide to do otherwise. It is the beauty of Bled and the local rowing knowledge that made me persist in rowing for three decades.”

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To Potičnica on Bled Island for a slice of nut roll

You cannot truly experience Bled without tasting the legendary Bled cream cake, taking a drive in a coach (fijaker) or visiting the island by traditional wooden boat (pletna). And now we can add: you cannot truly experience Bled without visiting the Potičnica Café on Bled Island.

Potičnica offers the roll filled with almonds, hazelnuts, chocolate, tarragon, poppy seeds, caots, dried pears, apples, figs, chives, raisins, cracklings, onions, bacon and, most important of all, walnuts. Some people say when you crack walnuts, you also crack your problems.

In addition to the gallery, the facilities on Bled Island have been enhanced with the addition of the Potičnica Café. The parish priest Janez Ferkolj says that Bled has always been too strongly associated with the cream cake (in Slovenian: kremna rezina), which does have a long tradition in Bled. But still, he believes that it does not deserve so much attention, as it is not a traditional Slovenian cake. So he decided that the Bled parish should transform the old inn facilities on the island into the Potičnica Café.

**NUT ROLL IS QUEEN**

In Potičnica, you will be served their own Slovenian nut roll (in Slovenian: potica), baked on the island. The name of the café comes from the name of the earthenware baking dish in which the nut rolls are baked. Potičnica offers the roll filled with almonds, hazelnuts, chocolate, tarragon, poppy seeds, caots, dried pears, apples, figs, chives, raisins, cracklings, onions, bacon and, most important of all, walnuts. Some people say when you crack walnuts, you also crack your problems.

The nut rolls are also made a la carte and to order, according to the customer’s wishes. Father Ferkolj says that the most wonderful thing about the traditional recipe is that it offers so many options for new ideas.

Potičnica on Bled Island is the first Slovenian café devoted to serving the dish, and was opened out of a wish to serve guests and visitors to the island with home-made Slovenian desserts. The most popular fillings are walnut, almonds, chocolate and salted leek. I tried the walnut and have not had such a good one for a long time.

**YOU CAN TREAT YOURSELF TO A DELICIOUS NUT ROLL**

Father Ferkolj, the parish priest at Bled (the father of the Potičnica Café, as it were) still has many ideas for developing Bled Island and adding to the tourist offer. He would like the island to become a meeting point for anyone who wants to enjoy the wonderful natural surroundings, a good book or a pleasant chat in the shade of the trees on the Island, the delicious nut roll and fragrant coffee. You should definitely visit the Potičnica Café. You will surely want to taste the nut roll.

As the administrator of the I feel Slovenia brand, our Office decided to examine ways to link this national brand with major sporting events that are potentially interesting for the brand’s promotion. The brand was first put to the test at a friendly football match between Slovenia and England in London in the autumn of 2009. We provided the supporters of the Slovenian team with T-shirts and presented the national brand at a press conference. Slovenian fans identified themselves with the I feel Slovenia brand. The British media and tour operators were unanimous in agreeing that this is one of the best marketing slogans ever.

This positive response in London prompted us to continue with special promotional activities at big international events abroad.

The Olympic Games are undoubtedly one of the most important sporting events in the world joined by the Olympic spirit, athletes, their coaches and fans, curious spectators and sports enthusiasts from all over the world. For the Games in London, we provided the supporters of the Slovenian team with T-shirts and presented the national brand at a press conference. The brand was first put to the test at a friendly football match between Slovenia and England in London in the autumn of 2009. We provided the supporters of the Slovenian team with T-shirts and presented the national brand at a press conference. Slovenian fans identified themselves with the I feel Slovenia brand. The British media and tour operators were unanimous in agreeing that this is one of the best marketing slogans ever.

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The story of the Slovenian brand in sports

The desire to make a part of every Slovenian the eagerness with which we pursue our recreational goals is a consequence of the desire for balance. We excel in sports because we enjoy movement. Because nature is everywhere around us and because nature calms us and gives us renewed energy, being active is a part of our everyday life. Slovenians connect jogging, skiing, hiking, or any other physical activity with the quality of life. We cannot imagine balanced living without physical activity.

We ski where nobody has skied before; we climb where nobody has climbed before; we swim where nobody has swum before; we cycle for distances that others have not. We do not overcome basic natural laws and limits. We discover them. Because we engage in sporting activities that we enjoy, we are capable of excelling at them. It is our tenacity that makes us discover limits set by nature. And because we value balance and safety, we respect these natural limits.

The I feel Slovenia slogan was extremely well received by visitors to the Olympic Games in Canada: “Very imaginative.” “Excellent marketing.” “I like it.”

It would be difficult to find a national brand that would better match the Olympic spirit. At the Summer Olympics in London, the brand was clearly visible. The experience with the I feel Slovenia brand in sports is a positive signal for the future and a foundation for further development of the brand. It will also help connect the brand with the image of sports.
The European Basketball Championship is drawing near and tension between both the competitors and fans is rising. The host towns are putting the last touches to their preparations, and all the locations have been tested successfully by the Slovenian national team in team-ups matches. In the towns which traditionally host top sports events, the team dedicated all corners. The additional players – fans Ingenium and journalists – who are also writing the story of these wins. Slovenian sports fans are very proud of the successes of our sportsmen, and women and like them, are great promoters of Slovenia who also write the story of the “I feel Slovenia” brand.

In cooperation with the Slovenian Basketball Association and the host towns, the Government Communication Office prepared various promotional activities for the fans, providing them with cheering props at warm-up matches in the host towns. Between 2 and 4 August in the Lasko Group Tournament in Celje, the fans used clapping fans as fans to cool off in the hot Zlatorog Hall and the energetic atmosphere at the matches of the Slovenian national team.

On 25 August, the Office held a fan conference in Congress Square in Ljubljana, where the fans were able to compete with the legends of the Slovenian basketball, participate in price games and acquire cheering props to boost the Slovenian national basketball team during the championship. The sports event in the spirit of the “I feel Slovenia” brand will take place in Congress Square in Ljubljana, further developing the championship in cooperation with the Municipality of Ljubljana.

You can also follow the fans activities on social networks and websites – we will create the atmosphere with fans throughout the entire championship as FR. Feel Slovenia, and Twitter, #IfeelSlovenia. Before the championship, the Office will post ‘instructions’ for cheering in a sporting way on YouTube, so that visitors will also be able to feel Slovenia as different, as green, presenting a balance between the calmness of nature and enthusiasm for all that we love.

Slovenian Brand and Basketball

The brand of Slovenia must be presented with a full measure of energy and associated with the movement and action that are typical of Slovenians. Slovenian sports enthusiasts feel and share the energy of the Slovenian basketball team, which has been successful in recent years and thus created great expectations for the upcoming European basketball championship. At EuroBasket 2013 to be held in Slovenia from 4 to 22 September, the Government Communication Office of Slovenia, in its role as the administrator of the 1 I feel Slovenia brand and in cooperation with the Basketball Federation of Slovenia, link the stories and the energy of the national team and the brand. Slovenian basketball players will become the key promoters of the national team during preparations for the championship, while their supporters, with their invigorating green, will energetically cheer them on at matches.

The European Basketball Championship is just around the corner and Slovenian hearts are beating to the beat of the basketball team.

In September, Slovenia will host the European Basketball Championships. The pulse of basketball can be felt everywhere: fans’ hearts are beating in time with their Slovenian basketball heroes, who are deep into their preparations for the greatest sports event in the history of Slovenia. The main aim of the players selected by Boštjan Maljkovič is to qualify for the 2014 World Basketball Cup in Spain, but their secret wish is to win a medal too.

For the second time in their history, there will be 24 teams competing at the 38th European Championships on 4-22 September. The first round of the championships will be hosted by the Bonfika Hall in Koper, Podmezaklja Hall in Jesenice, Zlatorog Hall in Celje and legendary Tivoli Hall in Ljubljana. For the second time in their history, there will be 24 teams competing at the 38th European Championships on 4-22 September. The first round of the championships will be hosted by the Bonfika Hall in Koper, Podmezaklja Hall in Jesenice, Zlatorog Hall in Celje and legendary Tivoli Hall in Ljubljana. The anthem in the Beat of Basketball, expressing the sentiment Ves, I feel basketball (the Slovenian national brand “I feel Slovenia”), will resound through halls across Slovenia during EuroBasket 2013.

The Slovenian team began their preparations on 19 July

The preparations for the Slovenian senior team began 47 days before the start of EuroBasket 2013. National team coach Boštjan Maljkovič first invited 16 players to take part. On his list of candidates to wear the national kit were Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič, Jaka Blažič, Jure Balalak, Jakša Blažič. For the second time in their history, there will be 24 teams competing at the 38th European Championships on 4-22 September. The first round of the championships will be hosted by the Bonfika Hall in Koper, Podmezaklja Hall in Jesenice, Zlatorog Hall in Celje and legendary Tivoli Hall in Ljubljana.
The fans are also proof that Slovenia is a basketball country. They are renowned throughout the world as knowledgeable about the sport and follow their team’s every move.

This year, during the preparation period and EuroBasket itself, the national team will use the official Twitter and Facebook hashtags #ju and #SLonbasket, under which fans opinions and forecasts will be collected and, more importantly, the team’s victories will be celebrated. The choice of the phrase is the result of a successful trial to unite Slovenian fans on these favourite social networks.

Slovenian team players and management are not the only ones who are aware that Slovenian fans play a very important part in the sport. The EuroBasket 2013 Organising Committee has made fans the main stars of the video of the official EuroBasket anthem in the Beat of Basketball, performed by Zoran Predin and Cover Lover. With this, the Local Organising Committee wished to emphasise the importance of Slovenian fans for the success of the team and the championships as a whole and to show that fans have a special status in the country and that cheering for the Slovenian team feels great. Foreign visitors will also enjoy the special experience of being a fan in Slovenia.

**Slovenian National Team on Social Networks with *Ju Nikki (Heroes) Hashtag***

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**Many Favourites***

The EuroBasket this September will certainly be one of the most evenly contested to date, looking at the teams. At least ten teams can be counted among the favourites for medals, so in addition to good training and daily form, luck will definitely play a part. According to experts, Spain, France and Montenegro are the main favourites. Then there are Lithuania, Russia, Turkey and Serbia. The wider group of favourites also includes Slovenia, but every championship brings one or two surprises. One thing is certain: the road to ultimate victory will be long and hard for any team.

Many teams, including Slovenia’s, have faced losing players. But as the saying goes, needs must when the devil drives. In any case, we are in store for some excellent basketball in September in Jesenice, Koper, Celje and Ljubljana, Koper, Celje and Ljubljana. And of course we hope the Slovenian basketball stars will play the leading role.

Mr Križnar, the European Basketball Championship is about to begin. What is happening at the moment?

We can rest assured as far as the preparations are concerned though there were some fears a while ago due to the economic situation, things have developed in the right direction with the sponsors, and with tickets, as well as with our partners. We hope there are no great shocks before the championship begins, and our hard work in the past few years is rewarded by the success of the Slovenian national team. We are entering a period of action, which means that what we have been doing for the past two and a half years is being realised in the warm-up matches. Our team has already begun preparations. Everything we planned will be tested. Many things are ready to be delivered, the reconstructed stands are in place, and the parliament has been laid. In this sense, the warm-up matches are vital, as they point to potential shortcomings. During these games, the media involvement of the event will be tested.

What are the expectations from the sporting, social, tourist and economic perspective? The European Championship in Slovenia offers more than just sporting spectacles.

We have constantly emphasised that this is a project of national importance, as it is one of the most important sporting events in the EU this year, and it has numerous multi-purpose effects. In the towns where matches are played, i.e. Ljubljana, Koper, Celje and Ljubljana, the hotels will be renovated to the highest international standards, which will also showcase the development of the municipalities and towns, and other sporting and cultural events. An important aspect of the championship is the popularisation of sport among the young, given that 90 games will be played by 23 foreign national teams. In addition to basketball, other events and accompanying activities will also contribute to this. The promotional effects will also be strong, but difficult to measure. The information that there are 1,400 officially accredited media which will report to the world about our country and EuroBasket during the championship says it all. The
Taste Slovenia

The EuroBasket menus and wines

EuroBasket 2013 will be an excellent opportunity to promote supreme quality Slovenian wines and Slovenia’s culinary offer among the visitors to the Championship. The organisers have made sure that information on Slovenia’s gastronomic offer and exquisite wines is spread to Europe.

We had a meeting with all the heads of national teams, and their responses to what they saw were very positive. For three days, we drove them to all the venues, showed them all five sport halls and the hotels, and presented novelties to them. They were thrilled with our small size, which makes it easy to travel between towns.

We must provide them with good conditions so that they can do their job well. In this respect, accommodation is extremely important. It is similar with referees and delegates who are also involved in the competition. And we have prepared a few accompanying events, fan centres in towns, numerous events and shores for fans. The country will live and breathe the tournament.

What is the system of ticket sales like? There is enormous public interest in tickets for EuroBasket 2013. You know, it is never easy to fill the seats for 90 games. Ticket sales began in February. The prices range from four euros for the cheapest in the group from fifth to eighth place, up to 180 euros for the most expensive seats in the final.

The first round was intended for foreign basketball federations whose national teams qualified for the competition, while sales to the general public began in March. Tickets for the decisive medal games are still available. We were the first to offer tickets for each individual game and not daily ones, when fans were often left empty handed. Tickets can be bought only through the official vendor, Eventim, or Palma Tourist Agency together with their packages. 4,000 to 5,000 tickets are available to the general public for the first round, also in Celje where the Slovenian national team will be playing; for the second round in Slovenska Bistrica, between 9,000 and 10,000 tickets are available. Ticket sales for the second round began on 1 April. For better availability, we have set affordable prices comparable to the previous European Championship in Lithuania. So the lowest price is only four euros for tickets in category 7 for games for placing from the fifth to eighth place. Tickets for the first round cost a minimum of 15 euros and a maximum 25 euros. Prices for the second round range from 17 to 55 euros, for the quarter-finals 19 to 75 euros and for the semi-finals from 25 to 120 euros. The finals will cost 250 to 180 euros, and prices for the third place game range from 30 to 150 euros. We think that a total of 250,000 tickets will be sold, which will generate an income of 4 to 4.5 million euros.

How many people have been directly involved in the organisation of this magnificent event? In addition to all the officials, approximately 1,000 volunteers can be seen to the undisturbed conduct of the championship. The EuroBasket 2013 company will be managing and supervising 6,000 people in various offices, managing committees in towns, referees, delegates, healthcare workers, etc. Of course, this number does not include players or representatives of various national teams. During the championship, between 50 and 60 hotels around Slovenia will be full. Then there are restaurants, transportation operators and shops, so a lot of people will benefit one way or another from EuroBasket.

How satisfied are the representatives of the basketball federations with the halls they have seen and the general situation? We had a meeting with all the heads of national teams, and their responses to what they saw were very positive. For three days, we drove them to all the venues, showed them all five sport halls and the hotels, and presented novelties to them. They were thrilled with our small size, which makes it easy to travel between towns.

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WINES OF EUROBASKET

2013 European Basketball Championship will offer a novelty. Together with their colleagues from the organising committee of the Championship, a special catering and wine service company selected the official wines of EuroBasket 2013. The offer will include 14 wines from 13 wine producers from all around Slovenia. According to the connoisseur estimates, over 65 thousands of bottles of wine will be sold, which will be on offer at official fan centres, selected bars, official hotels and stores. EuroBasket wine bottles will be labelled with the official logo of the Championship in green and purple, and will be on offer as souvenirs or gifts.

Two varieties of sparkling wine will be available: Radigona Gold Brut Natur sparkling wine from Radigonaotope in the first Slovenian sparkling wine prepared according to a French method of fermenting in bottles. The second variety, from Vila Irene, is a sparkling wine with a citrus aroma based on a medium dry Chardonnay.

White wines come from all corners of Slovenia. Rebula Quercus from Goriska Brda is a supreme quality wine with a moderately-rounded flavour and a pleasant acid taste, giving the wine its distinct freshness. It reflects the uniqueness and locality of Brda. Šipon Gomila comes from Ormož and is produced by P&J Jeruzalem Ormož. It has an intensive flavour of white flowers, herbs and citrus. The dry white wine 1 Corso-triska is from the Škofja Loka region. Zelen Lanthieri is a medium dry wine from the Maribor region, which is rippled by flowering and fruity aromas and hints of Mediterranean herbs. Gavnder, rosemmary! Dunaj Kristančič’s Chardonnay, with its fresh, fruity and lasting flavour, will also be on offer. Two dry wines are from the Mavro Winery in Prekmurje: Beli Krul, which is of the highest quality, and Belo Kristančič’s Chardonnay, produced from the smallest grapes which ripen in the warmest terrains.

The committee selected three red Varietals. Belfor Ivan Fucus is a dry red wine typical of Slovenian Istria from the Primorska region. Stara Breda from Goriska Brda, with an aroma of ripe red fruit, spices and brushtwood, will also be on offer. The Stoka Winery from Kras is offering its characteristic Teran, produced from wines whose vines grow in the terra rossa soil of the Karel.

Two rosé varieties will also be on offer during EuroBasket 2013: the famous Cuklik from the Maribor Winery in the Dolenjska region is a light, dry, fresh and

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The culinary side of EuroBasket

The tastes of Slovenia interpreted by Jezeršek Catering

Anja Polajnar
Photo: Jezeršek archive

Anja Polajnar, Managing Director, graduated from the elite Swiss school, Ecole hoteliere de Lausanne. He then spent two years acquiring knowledge, international experience, acquaintances and friends from all around the world. He returned from Switzerland with fresh ideas and a plan to make the family business one of the leading catering companies in Europe. Martin believes in his team and work, but not in borders. He is a connecting, calming, creative, hard-working team player, daring, compromising, decisive and persistent. His closest family members describe him in this way. In April 2008, Martin received the Georges Baptiste Award at the prestigious European catering competition. He then spent a year and a half at the prestigious European catering competition. He then spent a year and a half at the prestigious European Championship and the culinary side of EuroBasket.

The culinary themes will vary and include concepts such as Taste Slovenia, O Concept, Mediterranean Day, Taste the World and others.

Mediterranean Day, Taste Slovenia, O Concept, culinary and catering fields, ly-qualified experts from the Slovenian partners will be used, Slovenian ingredients provided by the Erzetič Winery in Brda has a mellow orange-red colour and aroma of red fruits and dried spices; both wines can be served on any occasion.

SLOVENIAN CUISINE SUPPLEMENTED WITH GLOBAL CULINARY TRENDS

In addition to the excellent basketball team, Slovenians can also be proud of their reputation and the fact that foreign visitors to EuroBasket 2013 will be able to taste.

EUROBASKET

The official catering partner of the EuroBasket Championship is Jezeršek gostištvo d.o.o., a family business with a 30 year tradition in catering and organising catering at various events. Their goal is to exceed the culinary expectations of the organisers and participants of the Championship. They will prepare dishes combining traditional and modern Slovenian cuisine, complemented by global culinary trends. As well as the demanding requirements of the client and guests, they will comply with the guests frequent expressed request to add Kranjska sausage, a Slovenian specialty, to the menu.

Jezeršek Catering will prepare most of the dishes in cooperation with Slovenian suppliers. Pamita Group, distinguished for its environment-friendly food production and sustainable animal production, will supply meat and meat products. Provuna Lahore, which maintains its leading position in Slovenia with responsible and environment-friendly management of beer sales, will provide beer, wine and non-alcoholic beverages.

Juices will be supplied by Fruitos, which has been making various high-quality products from fruit and other products of nature since 1945 and strives to retain the richness of natural ingredients without additives in its products. Milinotest, a company with a 200-year tradition of producing quality, tasty and healthy food, will supply pastries and pasta.

Jezeršek will also include protected Slovenian products in their dishes, such as Karst prosciutto, Nano cheese and Kranjska sausage.

As their special dish, Jezeršek highlight their venison fillet in red wine sauce, fuje (bread dumplings) wrapped in prosciutto and sautéed pear in wine with cranberries.

The tastes of Slovenia interpreted by
The culinary side of EuroBasket,

How will the catering be provided?

Jezeršek gostištvo d.o.o is a selected partner of the European Basketball Championship. EuroBasket 2013, providing catering for VIP guests, international delegates, business guests, the media and volunteers. The project is a big organisational challenge in the field of catering. The creative team includes highly qualified experts from the culinary and catering fields. On the basis of agreements which are regularly harmonised with the client, the development managers at Jezeršek are organising procedures for preparing food for their chefs, who will be preparing dishes at various locations. The procedures involve the creative design of the dishes, the preparation and measurement of ingredients for individual dishes, photographing the preparation process and the final presentation of the dishes, the entry of data and photographs in their computer-supported catering programme and instructing the staff. The purpose of the demanding and lengthy procedure is to ensure and maintain a high quality of food preparation.

More than 66,000 people will be served during the EuroBasket 2013 matches, in three to five different segments (VVIP, VIP, corporate hospitality and the VIP programme in Stozice). For the latter three, the catering is at the highest level, and the extent of service is broadened, because our chefs will be preparing dishes in front of the guests. In the last part of the competition in Stozice, dishes for the highest level of participants will be served in the form of different concepts which involve various types of catering, table settings and culinary themes. These include Taste Slovenia, O Concept, Mediterranean Day, Taste the World and others.

Different dishes will be served depending on the segment and location of the competition. The schedule of dishes has been prepared in such a way that the concept of the dishes changes daily, and guests will also be served international dishes in addition to Slovenian specialities. Each section of the Championship has different requirements and standards for the selection of the menu.

In the last three sections of the competition, the level of catering will be at its highest and the extent of service will be at its broadest, because chefs will be preparing dishes in front of the guests. In the last section of the competition in Stozice, dishes for the highest level of participants will be served in the form of various concepts, featuring various types of catering and table settings. The culinary themes will vary and include concepts such as Taste Slovenia, O Concept, Mediterranean Day, Taste the World and others.

COOKING IN FRONT OF GUESTS

The volunteers, media representatives and special guests of the Championship will be catered for every day of the European Basketball Championship.

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Our food will be served in three to five different segments, which depend on the phase and location of the competition. Each segment has different requirements and standards for the selection of dishes. The schedule of dishes has been already prepared to provide a diverse daily offer or rotationally, depending on the type of participants.

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The Jezeršek, O Concept: cold starters served on round dishes and in a special environment. A modern concept introduced in public for the first time at the opening of Ljubljana festival in summer 2011.

Dried cod in bianco with roasted black olives

The best Kranjska sausage, horseradish, mustard. Part of the permanent offer at Dvor Jezeršek.

Prawn cocktail

We have prepared about 100 different starters, 125 hot dishes and 80 desserts. These numbers vary and are added according to the client’s requirements. The purpose of the Jezeršek House of Culinary Arts is to exceed all the culinary expectations of the organizer and participants of the Championship. We will use mostly Slovenian ingredients when preparing dishes, supplemented with foreign specialties. From all the ingredients, we wish to create high-quality dishes and stress the best qualities of the simplest ingredients. The dishes were also planned thoughtfully with regard to the dietary requirements of participants: vegan, vegetarian, Islamic, gluten-free and more. The dishes served will be a mix of traditional and modern Slovenian cuisine, occasionally supplemented with global culinary trends. In spite of the demanding requirements of the client and guests, we still most frequently hear people say they would like to see "our Kranjska sausage" on the menu.

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This ocean, so terribly open

Until 1 January 2014, Piran

This exhibition of works by Augustin Cerquigl, Lojze Spacal and Hermann Novak at Piran Coastal Galleries offers a new view of the confluence of these artists’ oeuvres and on understanding the selected motifs in the geopolitical context of the Slovenian coastal region. The exhibition is dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of Trsteno writer Boris Pahor, who is from the same generation as the artists and knew Augustin Cerquigl and Lojze Spacal personally.

Sweet Istria 2013
13 September 2013, Ankaran

Visit the international festival of desserts and sweet products and applaud the best confectioners who are participating in the competition. In addition to tasting various Slovenian desserts, you can also attend the public lectures, workshops and other events and buy sweet products.

TIPS!

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31 August 2013, Idrija

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Shoemakers’ Sunday
1 September 2013, Tržič

Shoemakers’ Sunday is no longer only a fair, but a centre for crafts, shopping, sport, entertainment, prize games, education and enjoyment. The tradition of Shoemakers’ Sunday also includes the custom of ‘frelišprehng’, once a traditional event on this Sunday, when shoemakers’ apprentices and assistants were hired in Tržič. In the past, shoemakers were known to have a good time after working hard in their shops and successful sales at the fair, which is why the Angel Shoemakers’ Sunday always ends with dancing at the shoemakers’ party.

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Борис Пахор
НЕКРОПОЛЬ

In the photo: Russian translation of Nekropola. Photo: Jana Mancevič/STA