Slovenia celebrates twenty years
Basketball has happened to Slovenia. A renaissance in Slovenian biathlon?

Early snow brings a dose of optimism for the winter season.
So what gains can the Slovenian state show, and what does it carry with it into this time of celebration 20 years later?

So what gains can the Slovenian state show, and what does it carry with it into this time of celebration 20 years later? In historical terms, we could say that in the past two decades Slovenia has achieved virtually the impossible: it fundamentally changed its political system from self-management socialism into a normal, multi-party democracy of the Western type; the socialist planned economy was transformed into an almost normally functioning market economy; a system of human rights and freedoms, as well as their protection, was put in place; Slovenia became an internationally recognised country, a member state of the UN, OSCE and other major organisations; just 13 years after independence it was accepted into the European Union and NATO, later becoming part of what is called the Schengen system of the free flow of people; and three years ago Slovenia adopted the euro as its legal tender, thereby occupying a place in the most respected economic club of Western European countries. At the same time, it managed more or less successfully to settle all the previously unresolved issues with neighbouring countries, and established exemplary relations with all the major countries of the world, something that now qualifies Slovenia as a welcome partner in international relations and allows it to anticipate inclusion in the club of the most rapidly developing countries of Europe. We could also put the same question from another angle: is it also possible to find in this time things from Slovenia’s independence story 20 years ago that have not been well or adequately developed? Are there any areas where we besmirched the dreams of our political predecessors, who fought and won Slovenia’s independence? Of course the gravest unfilled legacy of this 20th anniversary is the fact that Slovenian political circles and also the entire Slovenian nation, apart from in certain key moments of its recent history – for instance in the referendum on accession to the European Union – could not find the kind of unity that enabled the then independence-winners, at the beginning of the 90s, when the country and its citizens were brought together by common goals that they all fought for, recognised and supported. The fact is, Slovenia was united in its correspondence to a significant degree divided politically into two halves, with Government measures not being judged on their merits, but on their political origin (whether they come from the left or right), so that even on the most critical issues, such as settling the border with Croatia, the Government can win a referendum with only a couple of points difference. Where it involves vital national interests, such as settling the border with Croatia, the Government can win a referendum with only a couple of points difference. Where it involves vital national interests, we should be concerned to the collective wisdom of the Slovenians, and at certain moments even considered lowering the ballot quorum to validate the plebiscite decision, could thereby entirely open up to the will of the people and carry through the independence project to its completion, right up to the independence of the Slovenian state. For this reason the mass of events that we can follow through the next year, will be devoted to the people – through meetings, actions, words and images – who at that time made history, and even the main event to celebrate independence this year will be of the people, in the renovated and symbolic square of Kongresni trg.'

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From that we may simply take hope that, as was the case in spring this year marking the 20th anniversary of the first democratically elected Slovenian Government, there will not be any repeat of the political point-scoring over who takes credit for the country’s independence, something that has entered Slovenian folklore in recent years. It would be a sad thing if the celebration of all those who fought and still fight to demonstrate the described national unity, was overshadowed by the image of politicians of that time and now, attempting to steal the credit for actions that were of course politically extremely courageous, but would have come to naught without the popular support of all those who marched the whole day, fighting for independence, which will, as mentioned, run to December of the following year, as an event for the widest possible audience. It should be recalled that it was indeed the people who, on that fateful December day in 1990 exactly 20 years ago, went out to the polling stations and in a showing of more than 90 percent of those who voted, adopted one of the key historic decisions in this country, the decision in favour of independence, which before the plebiscite had doubts about the collective wisdom of the Slovenians, and at certain moments even considered lowering the ballot quorum to validate the plebiscite decision, could thereby entirely open up to the will of the people and carry through the independence project to its completion, right up to the independence of the Slovenian state. For this reason the mass of events that we can follow through the next year, will be devoted to the people – through meetings, actions, words and images – who at that time made history, and even the main event to celebrate independence this year will be of the people, in the renovated and symbolic square of Kongresni trg.'

We can discern a similar picture when we talk about the current state of mind in Slovenia in general. It seems that apathy and weariness predominate, as if there was no energy or momentum for new national and developmental ideas that might lead Slovenia to the ‘lighthouse’, as one politician put it. A major factor in this has been the negativism inherent in the beginning of the nineties. Where it involves vital national issues, such as settling the border with Croatia, the Government can win a referendum with only a couple of points difference. Where it involves vital national interests, it would be a sad thing if the celebration of all those who fought and still fight to demonstrate the described national unity, was overshadowed by the image of politicians of that time and now, attempting to steal the credit for actions that were of course politically extremely courageous, but would have come to naught without the popular support of all those who marched the whole day, fighting for independence, which will, as mentioned, run to December of the following year, as an event for the widest possible audience. It should be recalled that it was indeed the people who, on that fateful December day in 1990 exactly 20 years ago, went out to the polling stations and in a showing of more than 90 percent of those who voted, adopted one of the key historic decisions in this country, the decision in favour of independence, which before the plebiscite had doubts about the collective wisdom of the Slovenians, and at certain moments even considered lowering the ballot quorum to validate the plebiscite decision, could thereby entirely open up to the will of the people and carry through the independence project to its completion, right up to the independence of the Slovenian state. For this reason the mass of events that we can follow through the next year, will be devoted to the people – through meetings, actions, words and images – who at that time made history, and even the main event to celebrate independence this year will be of the people, in the renovated and symbolic square of Kongresni trg.'

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SLOVENIA CELEBRATES TWENTY YEARS

Mateja Malnar Štembal Photo Salomon 2000 /UKOM

In Focus

SOMETIME WE SIMPLY CANNOT BELIEVE HOW QUICKLY twenty years can pass. The first twenty go pretty quickly, especially for the young! What then, could one say about a country? Is twenty the age at which it, too, is no longer a teenager?

Who would have dared, twenty years ago, to say that we would, even before the twentieth anniversary of independence, be part of the European and global community? Slovenia can be proud of a number of international successes (membership of the EU, NATO and the OECD), Presidency of the EU, part of the eurozone and has written itself into the history of the Olympic Games with a series of medals. More and more people around the world now know where Slovenia is, and the Slovenians are, as a nation, more than sufficiently stubborn and persistent to overcome the current global crisis.

In the last twenty years, from the day when, on 23 December 1990, 88.2% of the country voted in a plebiscite to make its own way in the world, Slovenia has traveled a long and successful path.

People believed that they could travel that path. Of course, this would not have happened without the support and leadership of politicians, intellectuals, cultural figures, thinkers, businesspeople and many others.

It is therefore only right that twenty years of statehood and independence are marked in the appropriate manner – not with a single, central celebration but with events throughout the year.

The Slovenian government recently passed a framework proposal for official activities to mark 20 years of independence; these will start on 23 December 2010, the twentieth anniversary of the plebiscite on independence, and conclude on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Slovenian Constitution (23 December 2011).

The basic purpose of the year-long celebrations is to involve as wide a public circle as possible, as well as organisers of various events at home and abroad, in the active marking of the historical events that led to an independent state, and to stir memories of the path along which we, as Slovenian citizens, have travelled together in the last two decades.

The main emphasis will be on the successes of the last twenty years and on strengthening awareness that independence was an achievement of the entire population.

Celebrations will begin on 23 December 2010 with a solemn session of the National Assembly and a solemn meeting of the Academy to mark Independence and Unity Day. Celebrations will continue with an exhibition on the plebiscite, organised by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and other institutions. It will start at Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana and will then tour a number of regional museums.

A thematic website, www.20let.si or www.twenty.si, will launch on the day of the twentieth anniversary. It will be the place to find chronological and historical information, as well as an abundance of interactive content (quizzes, games, invitations to our friends to visit Slovenia, online exhibition tours, a Facebook application) aimed at bringing the twentieth anniversary closer to those who are ‘younger than the country’.

However, this is only the beginning – we will have more on the coming events and on the themes and achievements of twenty years of independence in future issues of SinFO in 2011.

THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS SLOVENIA’S INDEPENDENCE

Dr Božo Repe Photo Tone Stojko/The National Museum of Contemporary History

The establishment of the new authority by the Demos Party in the spring of 1990 brought more and more people around the world who formed Slovenia’s independence should be constituted to the forefront of the debates on politics and constitutional law.

Efforts to establish a confederate Yugoslavia had been made previously, including during the deliberations over the last Yugoslavian constitution of 1974, but a proposal for independence (genuine autonomy of the republics) did not receive sufficient support in the Yugoslavia of the day, nor did the Slovenian proposals for confederation after the first multi-party elections.

Slovenian sovereignty had received significant reinforcement from the constitutional amendments to the Slovenian Constitution adopted by the socialist parliament in September 1989, owing to which the top brass of the Yugoslav People’s Army intended to declare a state of emergency. The confederate concept was also developed by the last socialist government of Ivančko Sruget just before the end of his term of office in March 1990. However, all of these concepts still envisaged a reform of the Yugoslav state.

Demos’ programme included Slovenia’s independence (although it also formally advocated confederation as a possible form). The original plan was to achieve constitutional independence by Slovenia adopting a new constitution, firstly by reaching a two-thirds majority in the parliament (which would have meant a consensus both within Demos and with the opposition), and then the citizens ratifying the constitution in a plebiscite. However, ideological disputes broke out within Demos over the constitution and the legislation associated with it, which concerned various topics, including among others the question of the right to abortion, the definition of the “sanctity of life”, the concept of privatization, the question of denationalization, and the restitution of Church property. Furthermore, the adoption of a new constitution would require the holding of new parliamentary elections, and the politicians who had just come into power were not happy about the possibility of losing it again. They therefore attempted to somehow parcel out this bundle of problems, and the parties expressed their support for independence through various resolutions and declarations addressed to the Government. At the parliamentary assembly of 2 July 1990, at a time when Slovenia was neither economically nor militarily prepared for independence, the Declaration of Sovereignty was passed quickly and with no prior consultation (even the presidential didn’t know much about it). The Declaration, which radically announced Slovenia’s secession, was also conditional, as the
In Focus

Wavering and doubt among the parties

Wavering and doubt among the parties (and also partially among the governing coalition), and among the public, concerned particularly the following:

- a plebiscite even necessary (the argument that independence could also be achieved by adopting a constitution or simply by adopting legislation or through the consistent application of already adopted laws on independence);
- if it was necessary, when should it be held (some people thought that the proposed date of 23 December 1990 was too early and demanded that the Government first draw up an analysis of the causes of the plebiscite and all of the consequences of the plebiscite, particularly for Slovenia’s economic, military and international status. They emphasized the unfavourable international circumstances, as the preparations for the first CSCE conference were underway in Paris right at that time, and the international factors were particularly unfavourable towards the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Slovenia was also warned against taking unilateral action. The opposition in particular felt that it was necessary to wait for the result of the multi-party elections in the other Yugoslav republics in January of 1991, and then negotiate with them on a future confederate structure for Yugoslavia, and hold a plebiscite only if those negotiations were unsuccessful. Therefore they proposed a later date for the plebiscite – from February on. The President believed that the plebiscite could be postponed at most until the end of January, since at that time it would already be clear whether Slovenia was capable of reaching a consensus with the other republics, and the representatives of Demos also agreed with this;)
- the question of which laws should be adopted before the plebiscite was held (mainly concerning the Citizenship Act, which was supposed to be the basis on which the plebiscite could be held at all. The objection to the law was that the state de facto did not yet in fact exist and that therefore it was not possible to adopt the Citizenship Act “in advance”. The plebiscite was therefore held on the basis of the same voting registers as the first democratic elections;
- the deadline for holding the plebiscite (some people advocated not setting a date, as the Government and the Parliament would make the decision on the plebiscite at their own discretion, others believed that this was misleading and unclear, and meant deferring independence, the most radical supported implementation on the day of the plebiscite; there were also proposals for putting the plebiscite into effect through the adoption of the constitution. Finally the decision was taken to set a definite date for the plebiscite, while independence would be effective six months after the plebiscite;
- what result would suffice for the success of the plebiscite (quite a few politicians believed that only a simple majority of the plebiscite should suffice, while others thought that a simple majority of participants would suffice in the case that the turnout for the voting was in excess of 50%. The opposition and the presidium believed that even this was not convincing enough and that the plebiscite would succeed only in the case that a majority of all eligible voters voted in favour of it;
- the question arose of what would be written on the ballot: either only the question “Are you in favour of an independent Slovenia?”, or a more concrete decision, e.g. three questions – “Are you in favour of a federation in the current form, or a confederation, or an independent Slovenia without connection to the other Yugoslav republics.”

Plebiscite Act adopted

At the end, after difficult negotiations the parliamentary parties signed an agreement at the last moment, and the Plebiscite Act was adopted immediately thereafter, on 6 November 1990. The question planned to appear on the ballot read: “Should the Republic of Slovenia become an independent state?” The proposers believed that this question left open the possibility for a rejection of the plebiscite and for cooperation with the other Yugoslav republics, respecting independence if negotiations on the confederaacy were not successful, or any other type of connection, and at the same time gave politicians enough room to manoeuvre so as to be able to implement independence gradually.

At a session of all three chambers of Parliament, at which the Plebiscite Act and the announcement to voters i.e. citizens of the Republic of Slovenia with regard to the plebiscite was adopted on 6 November, the deputies also received a report from the Government entitled “Slovenia’s Independence”, on the importance and purpose of the plebiscite, individual aspects of independence (the economy, the international aspect, social activities, minorities, national security) and on activities following the plebiscite. The Declaration on Respecting the Fundamental Conventions of the Council of Europe was adopted, through which Slovenia intended to demonstrate that after holding the plebiscite and attaining independence it would respect human rights and that it wanted to become a member of the Council of Europe, as was the Statement of Good Intent, which was proposed by the Presidium of the Republic of Slovenia. In it the Slovenian state guaranteed the Hungarian and Italian minorities and members of all other nations who held permanent residency in Slovenia all of the constitutionally provided rights and the right to comprehensive cultural and linguistic development, and the opportunity to obtain citizenship if they desired. The viewpoint was also expressed that the establishment of an independent country was not directed towards anyone in Yugoslavia and the proposed confederate arrangement, in which Slovenia was supposed to take its share of the responsibilities for democratization and the arrangement of relations throughout the entire territory of Yugoslavia. Another proposal adopted at the parliamentary session was that Slovenia would invite international monitors to the plebiscite, but the attitude of the European Community, the USA and other important countries toward the plebiscite was negative, so the official representatives of international institutions and individual countries did not participate in the plebiscite.

The Plebiscite Act was adopted in the three-chamber, 240-member Parliament with 203 voting in favour, no one against and four abstentions. Before the balloting the individual Demos deputies, despite the fact that their party had signed the agreement, continued to attempt to adopt a decision that the plebiscite would be adopted by a simple majority of all of the eligible voters voted in favour of it. They were criticized by the opposition parties, as if by persisting with such excessive demands they were trying to destroy the plebiscite. The plebiscite was also criticized by a deputy from the People’s Army (a Serb by birth), who demanded the same status for residents from other republics living in Slovenia as that enjoyed by the Hungarian and Italian minorities. Their proposals were rejected.

The plebiscite was held on 23 December 1990. The voting was participated in by 91.2% of all eligible voters, with 88.2% of the eligible voters voting in favour of independence, including members of other Yugoslav nations. The results of the plebiscite were announced on 26 December 1990. The plebiscite achieved a crucial consensus of political forces and citizens, without which independence would not have been possible to effect. The governing coalition could have announced it in the Parliament, but if Slovenian politics had not been unified and if it had not had the support of the majority of the citizens, it would not have been able to reach the citizens of Slovenia. It would have existed on paper, but owing to internal disunity it would have not been able to withstand the pressures of Yugoslav and international politicians and the intervention of the Yugoslav People’s Army. It was also a unique time, and there would have been no second chance if the opportunity had been missed. The plebiscite was thus the first and the most important step in the process of Slovenia’s gaining its independence.
Was Slovenian independence at the beginning of the 1990s the result of some self-evident historical development of the Slovenian nation, or did independence from Yugoslavia involve some kind of revolutionary break?

This was primarily a break with Yugoslavia. The Slovenians did not intend to make a complete break with the former state, but we were united at that time in the fact that we could not live with that kind of Yugoslavia. The authorities in Belgrade were convinced that Yugoslavia could only survive if it was once again centralised, while Ljubljana took the view that the solution was decentralisation and democratisation of the country. Of course we did not see eye to eye, Belgrade insisted on its view, and supported amending the constitution so as to transfer as much jurisdiction as possible to the centre. We all did actually agree that things needed to be set up from scratch again, and that independent countries needed to be made from the nations, even as units in supranational communities. We expected from the former state a country with normal relations and, since this was not to be, we decided to hold the plebiscite. We also talked a great deal with representatives of the Serbian administration about ways of coexisting, but they were unyielding, advocating democracy but with Serbian domination. This put our backs against the wall, about whether to submit to or leave that kind of union. This was the reason for the independent country, although every major event in history is starting to be interpreted in terms of this being a thousand-year-old dream of the Slovenians and so on. My answer to your question is very pragmatic, it was a response to the very clear circumstances of that time. If I look at that time with the hindsight of EU experiences, and if we had succeeded in our concept of making a Yugoslav commonwealth, things would of course have turned out differently.

What part did Demos play in independence? Was its role vital or would independence have come without Demos, albeit in a different way, or did Demos merely speed up independence?

Demos was the political leadership of a country that broke through to democracy. It was the agent representing the point of that breakthrough, and without Demos there would have been no breakthrough, although it was not the initiator of the independence movement, only joining it subsequently. The Slovenian Democratic Alliance, Nova revija magazine, the Writers’ Association – these formed the core that provided the intellectual base for independence, along with the youth organisation, which was revolutionary.

Would we have still gained independence, or at that time, at the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties, did the Slovenians use the “window of opportunity”, which opened up and which, if we had not used it then, would have closed?

We organised the plebiscite quite early on, and on the surface this was a technical issue, but if we had not carried out the plebiscite in 1990, we would have missed the opportunity. Why? Because up until that time they had not taken us seriously, and we even obtained a list of people who would need to be immediately liquidated. It was only after the attempt to revive Yugoslavia collapsed, yet while world leaders were still trying to revive it, that I received from abroad a draft of the new order in Yugoslavia, which differed from the state system of that time, whereby a modern state would be made of Yugoslavia, which would be similar to a European country, but still centralised. Once again we would have to yield to the interests of the centre, and it was a close call that we did not fall back into the old system.

The international community was absolutely against us. So now, given the very recent current polemics related to the arbitration agreement, I was quite bothered by this fear of ours that could be perceived, about how those outside Slovenia would react. At the time of independence, if Slovenia’s leading political elite had been scared of the international reaction, they would certainly have never moved to independence in that way.

FRANCE BUČAR

The first parliament, led by France Bučar, will be remembered for having adopted the independence legislation, for declaring Slovenia’s independence, for adopting the constitution and starting a new path for Slovenians.

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Mateja Jordevič Potočnik
Was the unity associated with independence a historical fact or merely a myth?

Unity in what? We were united in the fact that such a Yugoslavia was unsustainable. Before the plebiscite all the political parties agreed that we would vote on Slovenian independence. No one can claim greater rights to this, it was a united decision of all parties, and there was unity on this point, actual and formal, although this does not mean that we were united in what kind of future Slovenia should have, and there were differences even then that have remained until today.

There have been accusations that Demos did not have a “clearly thought-out independence strategy”.

Of course it didn’t, we had a strategy of how to get out of Yugoslavia, but no clear idea of what to do with this country after that and how to do it. Neither Demos nor the former continuity-based powers had any picture of that. Right up to the present day we have not had a clear picture of what to do, and what kind of economic and social system we want to have. I wonder if we have ever on any level answered the question, why are we joining the EU, is this wise for us, what do we expect, how should we react, what do we do even want. For myself often say that more Euroscepticism should be developed in Slovenia. Not because we are rejecting Europe, but because we are dependent on it. Indeed we should not be indifferent about how it is developing, so we must be critical towards it, and equally, we should try to influence it.

What tasks did you take on as president of the first parliament?

I was the one back then who held on to the brakes. You have to know that the majority of the parliament had no idea what kind of cabinet we were in. When Yugoslavia had already collapsed internally, the question was how would things unravel, and the military was taking upon itself the function of the federal presidency, with the support of the USA and Western Europe. The federal military was just waiting for the right moment to have a formal reason for intervention. For this reason I had to hold back our politicians from triggering a reason for intervention. You have to understand that the Yugoslav military had the whole world behind it. They let us use the plebiscite, then manipulated our declaration of independence, and only then did they attack us. The fact is, with that kind of result in the plebiscite, the West could not act against us, but they intervened in the form of the great democrats of the West dictating to us in the Briuni dictat, what we could and could not do. They demanded the extinguishing of the situation prior to the declaration of independence, we should release the Yugoslav Army and open the borders. All this was to be done in three phases.

The federal military was just waiting for the right moment to have a formal reason for intervention. For this reason I had to hold back our politicians from triggering a reason for intervention. You have to understand that the Yugoslav military had the whole world behind it.

Could you say today that what you expected and hoped for then has been fulfilled?

Today it makes no great sense to evoke some kind of nostalgia or sentimentality, we need more urgently a consideration of what the plebiscite led us into, and how far our expectations and hopes of that time have been fulfilled. Undoubtedly they have not been fulfilled, since by their very nature things are never fulfilled in the way people expect and hope them to be. For this reason it is more appropriate to ask whether what we expected has been achieved. We expected an independent country, and we got one. Equally, we expected greater freedom, and we got that. And the majority of other things that we hoped to achieve, have in fact been achieved. It is true, however, that today we are perhaps not sufficiently aware of it. Indeed it is normal for the things that you gain and with which you can live a normal life, to be taken for granted.

How did they do this? Where there was not sufficient funds, they did this by buying up companies on credit. And how are they then repaying this credit? They are repaying the debt with the profit from earnings. This is such a perversion, it would be hard to imagine a bigger one! In short, you have in fact stolen a factory, and you are then extracting the profit from it. For this our banks even took loans abroad, and in this way created a deficit for the actual country, meaning a debt for several generations. No one is taking responsibility for this, we are just talking about a credit crunch. We should have registered this as a crime, although it is not that simple, since it involves a strongly associated caste.

How do you see Slovenia’s position on the European and perhaps the world scale? Has the decision to join the EU and NATO turned out to be the right one?

Regarding EU accession, the question cannot be: was it right or not, since books, although it is not that simple, since it involves a strongly associated caste.

The economy of the modern world is necessarily condemned to collapse, and the issue is the true purpose of progress and enrichment. Increasing wealth means increasing the competition to appropriate “industrial magnates” are not about enrichment per se, rather this enrichment is merely a means to subordinate and rule. And politics. As you know, they could I have in mind the tycoons, whom I would impose some order. This is the biggest organised theft since denationalisation, but the tycoons are just the tip of the iceberg, they are a caste that was formed irrespective of political affiliation, they exploited an opportunity, they functioned in the same way as the former communist party with its nationalisation, but now they have gathered up all the former assets in all cases where there was no formal legal basis. How did they do this? Where there was not sufficient funds, they did this by buying up companies on credit. And how are they then repaying this credit? They are repaying the debt with the profit from earnings. This is such a perversion, it would be hard to imagine a bigger one! In short, you have in fact stolen a factory, and you are then extracting the profit from it. For this our banks even took loans abroad, and in this way created a deficit for the actual country, meaning a debt for several generations. No one is taking responsibility for this, we are just talking about a credit crunch. We should have registered this as a crime, although it is not that simple, since it involves a strongly associated caste.
ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INFLATION AS EXPECTED THIS YEAR

The growth in gross investments and household and central government spending are important reserves for the future growth of the Slovenian economy.

 Vesna Bertencelj Papit, Delo  Photo STA

SLOVENIA SAW ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE THIRD QUARTER this year as well, chiefly as a result of an increase in exports. The national statistical office estimates that economic growth in 2011 will be around 3%, as forecast by the Institute for Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (UMAR), while European Commission forecasts for Slovenia were 1.1%. According to these estimates, GDP should increase next year by 1.9% and by 2.6% in 2013. The last month of the year is also indicating that inflation in Slovenia this year will be, as planned, 1.8%. This is undoubtedly encouraging news, although gross investments in the third quarter again fell, household spending stagnated, and government spending is stagnating. Here it is possible to see important reserves for future growth.

According to Minister of Finance Franc Krizanic, Slovenia is winning the battle against the crisis. Industry is picking up, although problems in those sectors that are dependent on export demand continue to affect GDP. The government expects the increase in GDP to continue in 2012, while construction activities fell by 19% last year and by a further 15% in the first six months of this year. Construction at the new block, which is dependent on European funds for the extension of the period of its operation, will have to radically change its social and economic model, which is currently based on 1970s production models, if it wishes to improve competitiveness. In Turk's opinion, it is not even clear whether Europe wanted to be more competitive, since operating in a more competitive environment also brought uncertainty. Changes to the model would lead to a segmentation of the workforce, employment would no longer be permanent, the boundary between study and work would be erased, along with that between sector and industry, as he said. Above all, Slovenia will have to make savings in the public sector and freeze pensions in order to become more competitive.

However, discussions on economic reforms are not proceeding smoothly for the government. On the one hand, public spending is still not decreasing, and the extension of the period of its operation required for a pension, is opposed by the trade unions, who are threatening a referendum; on the other, the government party Deus is opposing the complete two-year freeze on pensions and, as a condition of its support for the government's programme, is insisting that pensions rise at half the growth in wages or inflation, which the government is not prepared to support. The government is therefore trying to pass pension reform without the participation of pensioners, of whom there are many more on account of the ageing population. It managed to pass the state budget for 2011 in a similar way, and discussions on the proposed pension reforms in parliament are also proceeding thus. On the other hand, healthcare reform is meant to rationalise hospital capacities in Slovenia and, among other things, merge maternity hospitals.

Slovenia has around 160,000 disabled persons which, given its population of two million, is a high percentage, with every 12th citizen affected. Through special measures, the government is encouraging the employment of disabled persons and drafting a special law that should, among other things, help disabled persons overcome their communication obstacles. Over 100 Slovenian business figures and five ministers made up a delegation which, headed by Slovenian President Danilo Turk, visited Russia. This was the strongest delegation yet to Russia. President Turk and Russian president Dimitri Medvedev signed the framework agreement on modernisation, with a number of other economic agreements and memorandums also being signed. Slovenian-Russian business conferences were also convened in Moscow, St Petersburg and Samara.

According to figures from the Bank of Slovenia, the growth in direct investment in the Slovenian economy fell by 6.6% last year to EUR 10.8 billion. Slovenian investments abroad also fell.

At this year's 'statistics days', which are organised by the National Statistical Office and the Statistics Society of Slovenia, talk centred on a relative financial poverty line, inadequate, stressed director of the National Statistical Office Lrena Križman. In the future, many more indicators, relating to the living standard of the population, health, access to education, etc. should be employed to measure wealth. A similar theme was also on the agenda of the conference organised by President Danilo Turk and the OECD Secretary General, where it was asserted that the level of growth was not describing a country's level of development. On the other hand, there were opinions expressed at the conference to the effect that GDP is the basis for everything, for without GDP there is nothing to divide and redistribute. Special attention was paid to the relationship also between environmental protection, which demands that companies pay more heed to the environment – this, of course, comes at a price. The residents of Trbovlje warned the government of precisely how a lack of concern for the environment can affect human health as they protested against the company Lafarge, which is engaged in waste incineration in Trbovlje, for which it obtained government approval. The residents of Trbovlje are convinced that the gases released into the atmosphere are leading to an increase in cancers. This is not the only protest to have shaken Slovenia in recent weeks. The government's aim of merging the two state electricity companies, Holding Slovenes Elektarke and Gen, has sparked discontent. Employees at Gen are fighting primarily for their jobs. There are complications relating to the building block of Soitanj Thermoelectric Plant, since employees fear that, with the replacement of the plant's director, Slovenia will cancel construction at the new block, which is dependent on European money, for which a contract with the European Investment Bank has already been signed. This is not the only major energy project on which Slovenia is counting in the long term, since a new block at Krkio Nuclear Plant is also meant to be built. Here the question other things on the difficulties faced by economies in the crisis, including those currently in need of help from all EU Member States or the eurozone. Žiga Turk, former Minister for Development and Growth and Secretary-General of the
This is not the time to sit back and be satisfied with past achievements. We need to look to the future and not only seek to intensify the existing excellent economic relations but also identify new concrete projects. Of course, this is primarily the task of our business community but our governments can help by paving the way and by creating a conducive framework for more bilateral trade and mutual investment. The pharmaceutical company Koka, for example, has invested in a subsidiary plant in northern Germany and only recently the Slovenian IT company Infotehna opened its first branch in Bavaria. For German companies Slovenia was and still is an interesting location for doing business, not only in the country itself but also in the wider region. Slovenia rightfully claims to have the potential to become a business and logistics hub in the region. Slovenian companies have a solid reputation as reliable business partners and German companies with bases in the country especially value the highly skilled workforce, the central geographical location, the modern infrastructure and the quality of life.

Looking into the future, I see renewable energy and energy efficiency as especially promising areas of bilateral cooperation. Long-term global energy trends and climate change are forcing our societies and economies to become more energy-efficient and greener while at the same time remaining internationally competitive. We need to see this not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity for more partnership and economic cooperation which will have to involve our industries, science communities and governments. The other important element in our bilateral relations is the rich and diverse cultural and educational cooperation. Starting with the language, I was pleased to learn that several German universities offer Slovenian language courses, while German is either the first or second language, i.e. Slovenian language courses, for doctors, for young professionals and others. Every year a good number of young Slovenian students make use of this opportunity.

Several German artists visit Slovenia every year and I am proud that among them we had a visit from the German Nobel Laureate Herta Müller, who came to Ljubljana during the last Book Fair. There have also been numerous exhibitions, such as the one on the world famous Bauhaus architecture. Capitals tend to monopolize a country's cultural activities but fortunately this is not the case in Slovenia. I am looking forward to 2012 when Maribor will be the “European Capital of Culture”, hosting many cultural events to which we would be happy to contribute as partners.

Werner Burkart - Ambassador of Federal Republic of Germany in Slovenia

Germany played a very important part in Slovenia’s transformation from a Yugoslav republic into an independent country. Close economic ties with Germany enabled Slovenia to use the German market as a fairly rapid means of getting over the shock of losing the Yugoslav markets on the collapse of the former state. German political leaders were among the first to take the view that Yugoslavia had indeed disintegrated, and were in favour of early recognition for Slovenia and Croatia. This development enabled Slovenia to climb aboard the EU enlargement process along with the countries of central and eastern Europe, becoming a Member State of the EU in 2004. In the preparations for membership of the EU and NATO, Slovenia was one of the most successful candidates, and we are proud of the fact that we completed the preparations for accession to the Union with a great degree of independence and efficiency. There are numerous examples from that period of cooperation with Germany in adopting and applying EU legislation.

Given its demonstrable success in the pre-accession preparation period, Slovenia was the first of the new Member States to gain the status of an “ambassador” in terms of potential to influence and lead the EU Presidency as a trio of countries was first implemented in 2007, and Slovenia found itself in a group of three countries, with Germany and Portugal, and the three Member States jointly planned the Presidency. Our cooperation with an experienced Member State such as Germany was very important, since it had a direct impact on the success of preparations. It was not just during the preparations, but also during the Presidency that Slovenia enjoyed the support and assistance of German know-how and expertise. In this Administration, Slovenia has had the presidency of the council of the EU six times, and in each turn Slovenia enjoyed the kind of developed relations it has with the Federal Republic of Germany with very few other countries. Relations between a large and small country are always more or less asymmetrical, but this general fact must be placed in context, and we should add that in its short history Slovenia has twice found itself at the centre of global decision-making; during the time when it was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1997, 1998 and 1999, and during its Presidency of the EU, in the first half of 2008. Taking into account these individual situations, we could assess relations between our countries throughout the past ten years as being at a very high level, and at certain moments we were tied together much more strongly than many would have guessed based on a comparison of size of territory, population numbers or share of world trade.

Germany has been one of the leading member states in seeking solutions to the existing problems in protecting the euro and mechanisms to prevent the financial crisis happening again. At this moment, the fact that our two countries are part of the eurozone is what links us together especially strongly.

The Slovenian Government wishes to reflect the real ties between Slovenia and Germany by creating a strategic partnership with that country. The Government sees such a partnership as a framework, not just for current cooperation, but also for joint planning for the future. Germany is Slovenia’s most important trading partner, and a partner in the field of technology development and transfer. On numerous issues the Slovenian Government, together with non-member states of these organisations, we readily find common interests. Slovenia can offer partnership in the fields of energy, development of transport infrastructure and relating to its experience and possibilities in the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. We offer a beautiful country for German tourists to seek relaxation and cultural exchanges that can enhance the spiritual life of people in both countries. In Germany we see a partner with whom we could cooperate in peace-keeping operations, offering technical and development assistance and in establishing democracy and protecting human rights in the world.

In 2010 Germany’s Ruhr region was a European Cultural Capital. At the end of 2011 Slovenia will be a giant of the Ljubljana event in Essen, which will end at the beginning of January 2012, in other words at the beginning of the year in which Maribor will be European Cultural Capital. Essenshaking hands with Maribor is a fine example of what is going on between our two countries in many areas. Enhanced cooperation between our countries does indeed exist, and a declaration from our two governments would merely confirm this.

Mitja Drobnik - Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in Federal Republic of Germany
ALEKSANDER MEŽEK WAS BORN IN Žirovnica, in the Gorenjska region of Slovenia, but moved to Britain in 1972, where he began making music. He began his ascent to the stars in 1968 in Zagreb and made many appearances in the 1970s in Britain, recording his first English record under the name Aleksander John, but in England my records had come out as ‘ac’ in print and ‘aco’ in English. I was ‘Aleksandar’ in print and ‘aco’ in English, so was Slovenia. He translated the Slovenian lyrics into English, in a desire to say who he was and where he came from, and to use his real name, Aleksander Mežek, on the record.

Mežek has now re-issued his vinyl effort in digital form, as a special gift to mark his homeland’s 20th birthday. The bilingual CD comes with a booklet containing the lyrics; the cover and inner pages of the booklet were illustrated by Slovenian primary and secondary school children. In search of these illustrations, Mežek visited schools across the country, with the pupils making their creations based on their home region and on music selected from the ‘Given to the Heart’ project. The response of the children was unbelievable. It was particularly fascinating to see how children are able to listen to lyrics and identify with ideas that are timeless.

The CD contains eight songs, dedicated in turn to Slovenia, a mother, a friend, a poet, an old musician, Ljubljana, the sea, with the eye, and ending with a lullaby. As Mežek says, each generation has to confront these relationships and find their own response to it. Some three hundred pupils have so far helped to create the project, with Mežek hoping for another two hundred by the end. The songs dedicated to Slovenia and Ljubljana – the homeland – were given a lush recording treatment with the help of the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Chamber Choir, Slavenski Oktet, Cliff Richard and Rick Wakeman. They work in tandem, presenting Slovenia in a very special way, backed up by the London orchestra.

In a career spanning more than 30 years, Mežek has recorded more than 20 self-penned records, in English and Slovenian, and in the 1970s appeared on Cliff Richard’s RV show, which attracted audiences of 20 million in Britain.

Despite the fact that his career has unfolded in two countries, Slovenia and England, Mežek says: ‘I have never changed my country, even though I have been in England for almost 40 years. I know precisely where my home is.’

ANDREJ JEMEC EXHIBITING IN VIENNA

O NE OF THE MOST FAMOUS Slovenian painters of the second half of the 20th century, and also one of the representatives of the acclaimed Ljubljana Graphics School, Academician Andrej Jemec received major recognition from Austria at the beginning of November in Vienna, in celebration of his upcoming 76th birthday. At the opening of his exhibition in the premises of Knajfel House in Vienna, which is also home to the Slovenian Scientific Institute, he was awarded for the second time the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art first class (he first received it five years ago), and the Institute used his exhibition as a way of marking its own 10th anniversary. Academy member Andrej Jemec, who studied painting under outstanding professors such as Marij Pregelj, Gabriel Štupica, Božidar Jakac and Riko Debenjak, enhanced his brilliant career by also studying in Paris and London, and from 1973 on he taught at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts, of which he was dean twice. Jemec holds Prešeren Fund prizes and Prešeren Prizes, as well as numerous awards especially from a range of graphic exhibitions in Slovenia and abroad. Since 2001 he has been a member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, and he has meanwhile been a prominent champion of the highest quality of teaching work in the fine arts. It was in fact under his leadership that the curriculum of the Fine Arts Academy introduced several decades ago a design course, which represents one of the cornerstones for the outstanding creative achievements of Slovenian designers at home and abroad, moreover his sensitive creative experience let him successfully resist the tendency to subordinate the degree-level courses of art academies excessively to utilitarian criteria, which would undoubtedly jeopardise artistic exploration and experimentation, especially in the fields of painting and sculpture.

DIRECT FLIGHTS BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND ITALY

Text and photo Anita Stankovič

January 2011 SLoN0

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Mitja Čander at the end of November in the team and set up by programme director of time and that the project is therefore anxious voices can now be heard in public European Cultural Capital, a number of Public Institute.

Of the project organiser – the maribor 2012 to the classical role of Slovenian culture, out the programme. Čander now adds urban communities such as maribor and and fulfilment of cultural substance in questions regarding the introduction pleasing and the approach is innovative, website. The concept is certainly quite earlier on his blog entitled Reanimation of of this ambitious project at least a month sHIfTs INTO mARIbOR Art & Culture

Given that there are now less than 400 days to the beginning of 2012, when Maribor is supposed to become European Cultural Capital, a number of anxious voices can now be heard in public opinion that the organisers will run out of time and that the project is therefore under threat. For this very reason we were delighted with the brilliant presentation by the entire creative and organisational team and set up by programme director Mitja Čander at the end of November in the mansion of Vetrnik house; headquarters of the project organiser – the Maribor 2012 Public Institute.

Čander had explained the basic concept of this ambitious project at least a month earlier on his blog entitled Reanimation of the City, which he published on the project website. The concept is certainly quite pleasing and the approach is innovative, and it opens up some fundamental questions regarding the introduction and fulfilment of cultural substance in urban communities such as Maribor and the cities that have joined up to carry out the programme. Čander now adds to the classical role of Slovenian culture, which he believes has been historically one of predominantly ethnic self-defence and identification, some modern social elements: the functioning and influence of culture on the development of the city, the “construction” of the city as a human community with a sufficiently clearly defined and delineated urban area, and the linking of the old and modern into a complete entity that functions both in relation to the wider human community and to each individual. In this sense Čander (and his programme team) does not regard the European Cultural Capital as a template for hatching out numerous cultural events and shows, which take place but later leave no significant trace in the consciousness of ordinary people, but rather as a set of different events borne with equal weight by both the artists and the city’s residents. It is understandable that in such a context a major role is taken on by events that are not classically artistic or cultural, but their essence lies in a human association around some core that brings together and gives sense. Educational processes, sports, even farm work such as grape harvesting, fruit picking, cleaning the city – all this can acquire a new meaning that cultivates the city space into a new value.

Perhaps owing to this kind of approach in the presentation from the organising team, Čander somewhat disappointed those who expected rough lists of investments and new acquisitions and possibly quite specific outlines of the programmes of cultural events that will take place in 2012, but certainly he sought the approval of others who want 2012 to really change the city of Maribor. Čander’s starting point for maximising the city has been joined by the Maribor poet Andrej Brvar, who points out that in the 20th century, Maribor’s roots were cut three times and each time it was pushed into a new, arduous search for its own identity. This happened for the first time, says Brvar, backed up by Čander, after the First World War, when a lot of Germans left Maribor and the ethnic composition of the city changed greatly; it happened the second time in the German occupation during the Second World War, when the urban bourgeois character of the city disintegrated, and for the third time with the collapse of socialism or rather commuting, when Maribor lost its proletarian and industrial character, and up to the present day the city has still not in fact found its new role. For this reason Čander sees the possibility of establishing a new identity through the European Cultural Capital project, which will be one of the most important and precious components setting the tone in 2012.

In line with such an approach the programme is divided into several programme sections, which for the most part are headed by younger management experts who have already shown their skills a number of times organising various artistic and other events. The biggest name among them is of course theatre director Tomaž Pandur, who is also chairman of the programme council, and in the team he heads up the Terminal 12/ MAKs section, which is tied to a planned new cultural venue, the Maribor Centre for the Performing Arts. MAKs is the new name for this already slightly ill-reputed building, which will supposedly be built in one year in the area of the right bank of the River Drava, where there are currently the abandoned buildings of a former textile and spinning mill, once one of the biggest industrial operations in Maribor. According to preliminary estimates, the municipal authority of Maribor, which will lease the building, will have to pay around 40 million euros for it in the next 20 years, something that has dumbfounded some city residents. But perhaps given the fact that the centre will feature two multi-purpose halls, each with 650 seats, and other rooms that will offer the conditions for artistic production on an entirely new level, this price is not high at all. A symbolic, 25 m high viewing platform with vistas of 360° in one of the new buildings, is, in Pandur’s opinion, symbolic structures “which will attract the gaze of the world and from which can grow other European Cultural Capital programmes”.

Similarly meaningful names are borne by the other two sections, Keys to the City and Urban Furrows, headed by Mateja Rataj and Dr Marta Gregorčič, one of the most ground-breaking experts in urban sociology. Keys to the City is a kind of intellectual manufacture within which around 400 events of various types will be created, and one of the main centres of gravity here is studying the history of the city and placing the components of that history in its modern life. Urban Furrows will break new ground in cooperation with various institutions, city residents and quarters, and in these milieus it will attempt to create new links and new energy between people. Thus, for instance, one part of this section will focus on local self-sufficiency, a digital seed bank and urban horticulture, which are areas that in the perspective of city life to date have rarely enjoyed any attention from the governing city authorities. All this will be joined by another section named Life at the Touch, which will create a digital dimension of the entire project, and is being headed by writer and journalist Aleš Car.

The team that has already fixed the specifics of the main criteria under which programme projects will be carried out, has not actually set out any specifics. The most specific of them was in fact Pandur, who has some major and ambitious projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre: a drama school cycle and establishing a theatre institute with the famous figures Rade Serbedžija, Vanessa Redgrave and Dušan Šerbedžija, and in 2012 he also anticipates projects in the area of theatre.
SLOVENIAN GALLERIES AT THE PHOTOGRAPHIC FAIR PARIS PHOTO 2010

Veza Žarkovič Photo Archive

F rom 30TH TO 23RD NOVEMBER THE PARIS Fairground Le Carrousel du Louvre hosted the photographic fair PARIS PHOTO, one of the biggest photographic fairs of the world. The thematic focus of this year’s event was Central Europe, which translated directly into the breakthrough of Slovenian photography onto the world art market. Slovenia was represented by the galleries fotografija, Photon and the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Public Institute.

This year’s event, now the 14th in succession, invited Central Europe as honorary guest. A special place was allotted to Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak and of course Slovenian galleries, which cover both the historical avant-garde from the twenties and thirties, and modern multimedia practices.

The official selector of this work, entitled Statement, was the Paris-resident Slovenian curator Nataša Petelinšek-Bucheler, who is a specialist in modern art, and in the spring she collaborated on setting up a well-received overview exhibition of modern art from Central Europe of the last 20 years at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Regarding her selection for Statement, she said that emphasis was placed on young artists and hybrid practices that also make use of other media, and go beyond the concept of classical two-dimensional photography, such as Uroš Abrah with his series Made in Slovenia, the young graduate of Prague’s FAMU, Abrah, and the general public and media have picked up on Stoja Kerbler. The latter, with his fine portraits I (I)duje iz Haloz [People of Haloze], taken between 1970 in 1980, capturing rural people at weddings and confirmations, best match the cliché of Eastern Europe cultivated by the French, so they occupied honorary place in the latest issue of Figaro Magazine. The Fotografska galerija has a large number of books that will be signed by the authors. Gallery manager Barbara Čerlenin said that it is more than just about mere sales, but there is a grain of truth in it. Professional circles are enthusiasm about the breakthrough of Slovenian photography abroad in the best possible context, and gallery managers take advantage of this mainly to establish contacts and for networking.

In the specialised publishing houses section, Slovenia was represented by the P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Public Institute, which is a modern art gallery and publishing house in Ljubljana. Representative Uroš Legen said that they had already been in Paris a number of times, at the AFI fair organised by the Centre Georges Pompidou, and participation in Paris Photo means for them mainly a means of promotion and a good reference.

the fair is certainly a proper book-festival, and while it ran – for just under five days – there were around 120 events associated with it, part of the fair’s visitor forum there were around 44 presentations of books and their authors, and visitors got to see some youth theatre performances as well as small literary and other workshops. Indeed a very important process of visitors, dominated by school children, needs to be served!

Major attention was stimulated by the Debate Café, organised by well-known publisher Luka Novak. It offered as many as 23 different debates and presented topics ranging from the life of the writer to people’s attitudes to books and modern electronic reading. A special presentation in honour of his 80th birthday was devoted to the writer, translator and classical philologist Prof. Kajetan Gantar.

The Publishing Academy presented a lot of mostly foreign publishers, while in the main reception hall there was a proper “casting” of literary texts, in the form of the open stage of the Slovene Writers Association, at which members gave presentations of the books they have to release. And there were also the obligatory awarding of prizes received by publishers for their titles: the recipient of the main Slovenian publishing award, the Schventer Prize, was Dr Neda Pagon, a professor of sociologyst, who completed one of the most important publishing undertakings of recent years, the publication of the social science and humanities collection Studia Humanitatis, with which back in 1985 Slovenians started obtaining translations of the most outstanding work works in the humanities, and which today still regularly bring to the literature market the most important creative achievements of thought in the humanities. The prize for the best literary debut was awarded to Dr Lado Kril, the well-known professor of comparative literature and former director of the main Slovenian national theatre SNG Drama, who in his lifetime of just over 60 years has published his first, equally outstanding literary work Kosec koso brusi (The Reaper Sharpens the Scythe). The best young translator was Julija Potrič, and the Winged Lion prize for best overall publication of a book went to Slovenija izpod neba (Slovenia from the Sky), produced by printers Goergenski tisk. 
A folding bike is useful if one wishes to avoid walking, since people's journey to work easier and more comfortable, and it is even simpler at that.

As they point out at Studio Moderna, they want their project to provide a template for solutions to the problem of public transport, a problem faced by many of the world's large cities, where overdependence on the car is leading to traffic-choked streets, lower productivity, increased exhaust emissions and unhealthy environments.

Polona Prešeren

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what could be better than to take your bike into your office or apartment, or store it in your car boot, tent, caravan or hotel room? This bike needs no special storage space. In its folded state, it takes up very little room. To sum up: the folding bike may be small, but its functionality surpasses that of much bigger bikes.

**About Bigfish**

‘Bigfish bikes support green lifestyles and sustainable development. The concept of the folding of the bike was developed by engineer and innovator Niko Mihelič. It was planned and designed at Studio Moderna and is manufactured in Italy. The frame is made from a single piece and is no smaller than a normal city bike; it therefore offers a ride as comfortable as a normal bike. The ‘clip-clap’ system allows the bike to be folded up in a mere 12 seconds into a handy package. The bike, when folded, takes up very little space, enabling it to be carried and stored with ease.

Its superb ride characteristics and high-quality internal Shimano Nexus 3 brake system mean that, despite its smaller wheels, one is justified in comparing it favourably with a normal city bike. Because of the folding method employed, which keeps the frame in one piece, the ride is stable; moreover, the fact that there is optimal distance between the key components of the bike ensures a comfortable body position while riding. Bigfish is folded up quickly and straightforwardly – no tools are required and the operation is completed in a few short seconds.

For more information: www.bigfishbike.si

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EVEN MORE THAN THE STORIES, PEOPLE REMEMBER THE ILLUSTRATIONS – ILLUSTRATIONS WHICH INSTIL A LOVE OF READING AND ART INTO YOUNGSTERS.

Most of the illustrations are sparkingly witty and supplement the text by stimulating the reader’s imagination. Everyone carries within themselves one illustration that brightened up and adorned their childhood.

Illustration has been around since Stone Age cave paintings, reappearing in monastic libraries before the invention of printing, with the monks transcribing texts and furnishing them with illustrations and richly decorated initials. As Tatjana Pregel writes in the book *Slovenska knjižna ilustracija* (*Slovenian Book Illustration*), Slovenian artistic illustration cannot really be said to have begun until 1878 with the publication of *Zvon*, a newspaper started by Josip Stritar. The first illustrations were created in 1877 for the arts supplement of *Zvon* by brothers Janez and Jurij Šubic; the following issue already contained illustrations woven into the text. *Pravljice*, the first Slovenian book of fairytales for children with original Slovenian illustrations, came out in 1911, it was written by Fran Milčinski and illustrated by Gvidon Birrola and Maksim Gaspari.

**Biennale of Illustration**

Illustration was first presented as an artistically distinct creative discipline by Cankarjev Dom and the illustration section of the Association of Slovenia Fine Artists Societies in 1993 with the organisation of the first Slovenian Biennale of Illustration. The first lifetime achievement award-winner was Marlenka Stupica; she has since been followed by Anka戈šnik Godec, Jerka Reichman, Marija Vogelsnik, Milan Bizovičar, Marjana Jemec Božič and Stefan Planinc. This year the jury decided to make the award to Melita Vovk Štih.

This year, as part of the 9th Biennale, an exhibition of illustrations created over the last two years was opened under the title ‘The Image of a Book… A Book of Images’. According to the head of exhibitions at Cankarjev Dom, Nina Pirmat-Spašič, illustrations by some 55 artists will be on show until February. Some of the artists, such as Alenka Sōttler and Zvonek Cabi,
The old guard of fairytale illustration

The essence of illustration is the connection it enjoys with the content as communicated by the text. Slovenian illustrators have demonstrated their skill in doing this abroad, as shown by the fact that they have received numerous international awards for their work. Slovenian illustrators have always maintained a presence at events abroad, such as the Bratislava Biennale of Illustration and the Belgrade Book Fair, which awards the 'Golden Quill'. They also take part in the Children’s Book Fair in Bologna, among others, which features a special section devoted to illustration.

Marienka Stupica was born on 17 December 1927 in Ljubljana. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1950, and has worked with the Mladinska Knjiga publishing house for over 50 years; in that time she has illustrated and worked on over 100 children’s books and picture books, the most recent being Drevo pravljic ('Tree of Fairytales'), published this year. She has received a number of awards for her work, including the Belgrade ‘Golden Quill’ award in 1966 and 1973, the BBiB Golden Plaque in Bratislava in 1969, 1971 and 1977, a Preserfen Fund Award in Ljubljana in 1972, and the ‘Best Slovenian Children’s Book’ award in 1993 and 2000. In 1994 she was cited on the IBBY Seville Honour List and received a Levstik lifetime achievement award in 1999.

Milan Bizovicar graduated in 1949 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana and then embarked on studies at Gabrijel Zupan’s special painting school. He has received a number of Levstik Awards and received a lifetime achievement award at the 6th Slovenian Biennale of Illustration in 2004.

Stefan Planinc was born on 8 September 1925 in Ljubljana and completed his specialisation in painting in 1965. He later travelled to Paris on a scholarship. He received a Prešeren Fund Award for his work in 1965 and a Jakoput Award in 1984.

Jelka Šubert Reichman was born on 23 August 1939 in Ljubljana. One of her special achievements was having her work appear on a set of Slovenian stamps – one of them, on a Valentine’s Day theme, was ‘Stamp of the Week’ in the USA in 2003. Many of her illustrations have appeared on greetings cards and postcards. She has produced seven cards for UNICEF and occasionally organises exhibitions of her work (over 20 solo exhibitions to date). She has also taken part in international exhibitions.

Marjanca Jemec Božič was born on 16 September 1928 in Maribor. After grammar school she enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. She has taken part in many group exhibitions and has also had over 20 exhibitions devoted to her own work. Her awards include the Pris upon in 1971, an award for her UNICEF ‘Children in the Village’ greetings card in 1974, the 1985 Kajuh Award and a Levstik lifetime achievement award in 2003.

Ančka Gošnik Godec was born on 5 June 1927 in Celje. In 1948 she was accepted at the Academy of Fine Arts, from which she graduated several years later. She has had over 30 exhibitions at home and abroad and received a number of awards for her work; these include three international Belgrade ‘Golden Quill’ awards, the Smrekar and Levstik lifetime achievement awards (1997 and 2001), and an international IBBY award in 2002.

Marja Vogelnik was born on 15 October 1914, graduating in architecture in 1939 under Jože Plečnik. She was the only Slovenian illustrator to feature in Bettina Hurlimann’s 1965 anthology of modern world children’s illustration. She received the ‘Young Generation’ award in Belgrade in 1958 for her illustrations for young people, a Belgrade ‘Golden Quill’ award in 1975 and the Smrekar lifetime achievement award in 2004.

Alenka Sottler, was born on 24 October 1958 in Ljubljana. She completed her postgraduate studies in painting at Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts in 1983. She has been recognised four times at the Slovenian Biennale of Illustration and received many other awards, including the Grand Prix from the children’s jury at the World Biennale of Illustration Bratislava (BiB) and awards for selection as part of the ‘Emporier’s New Illustrations’ at Bologna Book Fair. Her work has been chosen three times for the National Museum of American Illustration’s annual exhibition in New York. This year she received the main award for illustration at the 3rd Croatian Biennale of Illustration for her work on Niko Grafenauer’s book Prividi (‘Visions’); she also received a merit award for the same illustrations from 3x3 Magazine of Contemporary Illustration, New York.

Zvonko Coh began working as a freelance artist after graduating in painting from Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts and Design in 1980. His major awards include a Belgrade ‘Golden Quill’ in 1983, a Preserfen Fund Award in 1999 and the Hinko Smrekar Award in 1995, 2006 and 2010. In 2001 he received an award for the most beautiful children’s book and made the IBBY Honour List in Cape Town in 2004.
For its size, Slovenia has an exceptional diversity of geography, climate and culture. If we just dwell for a moment on the culture, it should be pointed out that Slovenia is characterised by four main cultural regions, these being the Pannonian, central Slovenia, Alpine and Mediterranean areas. This is of course entirely reflected in Slovenia’s cuisine, including holiday fare. For this reason there are a great many Christmas dishes in Slovenia, and this article could not cover them all. These dishes differ from each other not just in terms of region, but also in historical period, a variety of influences and also in whether they pertain to the urban bourgeoisie or rural folk. As far as Christmas dishes and drinks are concerned, the rural circles are especially traditional, archaic and in many respects ritualised. The old “order” was well-established and pretty simple. For this festival it was obligatory to partake of dishes that included honey, poppy seeds, dried fruit, millet, walnuts, hazelnuts and beans. These dishes were also strongly linked to veneration of the departed, who at this important time of year came to “visit” their kin, the memory of this is still alive in Slovenia. There are also a number of special pre-Christmas fasting dishes, but that is something for another time.

Ancient ritual and traditional foods

The main dishes include numerous special kinds of bread, cakes, pies, strudels and most particularly, potica roll cakes. This is a traditional Slovenian culinary speciality, known throughout Slovenia in various names and versions (povitica, optica, gubana, gubanica, gubana, pogala), and featuring a wide variety of fillings. Even back in the 19th century we “exported” it to neighbouring countries, and today it is known almost throughout the world. It was first mentioned in 1575. To begin with it was an upper class food, but later spread to the peasant class, too. Originally potica was a ritual Christmas dish, but for a long time it has also been an obligatory Easter blessing food. Traditionally there are around 60 types of potica, but today there are something like 120 recipes for it. In Koroška (Carinthia), on both the Austrian and Slovenian sides of the border, the ancient ritual dishes are the kolacija with dried fruit and beans, in memory of the meagre supper had by Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and kracpi, bread rolls stuffed with dried pears and hemp seed. Kračpi come in a wide variety among the Slovians. They are similar to dumplings (when not fried) and are of noodle, risen or potato dough with various fillings involving cottage cheese, cream and other ingredients.

Of course a very common Slovenian Christmas food is pork: grilled and boiled sausages (such as the world-famous and protected kranjska kobasa), liver sausage, blood sausage, and a similar Primorska product, mušle, with sweet stuffing, raisins and unusual spices and so forth. This is accompanied by pickled cabbage or pickled tumpip that has been pickled in various ways (in Primorska, for instance, in grape skins) and also prepared in various ways.

In Gorenjska Christmas dinner would feature potica, pork dishes, dried meat and biscuits, and in Slovenska Notranjska walnut rolls stuffed with sour apples, prunes and chestnuts, and in Dolenska cockerel (in wine sauce). In fact the people of Dolenska are credited with inventing countless varieties of little rolls, at one time also ritual dishes, while the Bela krajina folk boast the fulanka, an especially complicated dish of tripe or smoked pork, bacon, stuffing, spices and other things stuffed into a lower intestinal casing. This festive dish is also known there as folenški or belokranjski nader. There is also a local dish called štulja, a gridel-based potica with cream topping.

The ritual dishes include numerous special kinds of bread, cakes, pies, strudels and most particularly, potica roll cakes.

Slovenia's greatest gourmards include the people of Štajerska

In Pčelka people would eat bosman, decorated milk bread with eggs, potica, white coffee or tea plus wine or spirits for breakfast, for lunch beef or chicken soup with noodles, soup with pork or turkey gizzards, poultry, for instance a stuffed chicken, roast goose, roast turkey with stuffing and flat cakes, boiled beef, roast pork, wine sauces, pickled cabbage with flour thickeners, sautéed potatoes, rice, horseradish with cream or apples, various salads, composites and fruit bread (in Haloz, for instance, the specially spiced križak). In Prekmurje tables featured the special vrtanik bread and gęnjene (leavened, risen) cakes – walnut and poppy seed potica. During the day they offered the now EU-protected prekmurška gibanica cake, kracpi stuffed rolls, bread pastries such as retaili and bicke and cakes such as kuglof or moussa. In that area the special Christmas fruit bread made of apricots, pear, plums, walnuts, hazelnuts, figs and raisins is called pastitski knh (herdsman’s bread). Alongside various soups, such as cream of cep mushroom soup, there were numerous side dishes such as keber, a salad of thick beans doused with pumpkin seed oil, and of course specially stuffed duck.

Potica is a ritual Christmas dish

EU-protected prekmurška gibanica cake

The ritual dishes include numerous special kinds of bread, cakes, pies, strudels and most particularly, potica roll cakes.
In addition to the krapci, something very typical of Koroška is čisava župa, a sour cream soup with diced lamb, and nabulana prata, a special stuffed roast. For Christmas in the Loška valley in the Notranjska region they bake carob potica and prepare a fine lunch. They would bake pastries in the shape of tiny doves for little girls and little birds for boys. On Christmas Eve the table would also feature a cracking potica – špekovka or povanca.

A different world in Primorska

Even in the Idrija area žlikrofi, a protected dish of the Goriška region, there are considerable differences in Christmas dishes there, too. Of course in this area for Christmas, apart from gubancje, a different kind of stuffed presnec cake, made from filo dough, and pinca, leavened pastry, traditionally they eat entirely different dishes from those elsewhere in Slovenia. In many parts of that region, gubanca is substituted at Christmas by cheese rolls (there are in fact dozens of variations in Slovenia) and doughnuts or similar fried, savoury and sandine-filled filcčiji, which could also be a sweet Christmas pudding, and similar fritole and walnut potica. On Christmas Eve, and elsewhere on Christmas Day. A traditional local dish for Christmas lunch is larded noodles and vrzute (boiled or fried Savoy cabbage), and for supper a risotto with kaperocoli (a type of shellfish), beans, cabbage and various salads, as well as various fried fish and crayfish. There are other dishes, too, of course.

At Christmas the people of the Goriška area enjoy horseradish, kuglof (a type of roll cakes), flat cakes, pies, sweet bread and, of course, potica.

A knowledge-based Christmas in the Kobarid area features certain famous but slightly differently prepared dishes (soup with pork or beef) plus the traditional boiled (and not roast) chicken, boiled mutton, roast local rabbit, pock krompi (a special fried potato recipe), sweet cabbage, roasted salad, poštoldja, a “pressed” dish of cabbage, bulja (a stuffing for strudel or roll cakes), flat cakes, pies, sweet bread and, of course, potica.

At Christmas the people of the Goriška area enjoy horseradish, kuglof (a type of roll cake), buttered bread and raisins and walnut potica. On the day before Christmas their fasting food is štokviž (cod) goulash with polenta. Or mulled wine and biscuits.

An obligatory Christmas dish in Primorska is bakala na belo (white salt cod) or again štokviž (cod) goulash with polenta. In some areas this is eaten on Christmas Eve, and elsewhere on Christmas Day. A traditional local dish for Christmas lunch is larded noodles and vrzute (boiled or fried Savoy cabbage), and for supper a risotto with kaperocoli (a type of shellfish), beans, cabbage and various salads, as well as various fried fish and crayfish. There are other dishes, too, of course.

I should add to this very rough sketch of Slovenia’s traditional Christmas dishes – the drinks we can leave for another time – that we have barely touched on the dishes of the urban well-to-do. That would require a special description and a whole other contribution on the rich and varied Christmas fare in Slovenia.

Knowledge Counts. The Patients we help count, relationships we count,” says Professor Igor Gregorič. The transplant activity of the Texas Heart Institute is rated this year as one of the top ten in America, as it has been for the last 20 years, which makes it one of the very best institutions in the world. Prof. Gregorič is Director of Mechanical Circulatory Support and Associate Director of the Transplant Service at the Texas Heart Institute. But to this Slovenian, a graduate of Ljubljana Faculty of Medicine who moved to the United States 26 years ago to widen and deepen his knowledge, titles in reality mean very little. If one had asked him, when he made his ‘temporary’ move from Slovenia (‘I wasn’t planning to stay’), whether he was prepared to work 12 hours a day – on a voluntary basis at the beginning – or to give up his holidays, or to learn and pass on the fruits of that learning to students, he would not have hesitated to say yes. Today, when he occupies such a top position, his answer is the same: he has not had a holiday for 20 years, and has passed on his knowledge not only to his young American colleagues but also to some 500 young Slovenian doctors. And even more importantly: to at least as many as he has tried to communicate and pass on his own principles regarding the correct ethical relationship to the patient.

The Texas Heart Institute is a large institution in the American city of Houston operating in the field of cardiovascular surgery, heart transplants and mechanical support for a weak heart. This world-renowned institution is rated this year as one of the top ten in America, as it has been for the last 20 years, which makes it one of the very best institutions in the world. Prof. Gregorič is Director of Mechanical Circulatory Support and Associate Director of the Transplant Service, as well as a cardiovasculare and thoracic surgeon concerned with following the development trends of science. A desire for knowledge

Prof. Gregorič went to the US in the 1980s as a postgraduate without all the glittering titles he holds today. Ten years earlier, before he settled there for good, he had been in the US and seen the methods of and opportunities for education and research.

Yes, it was primarily a desire for knowledge that took me there. The opportunity came up, a convergence of circumstances, and I went. I found out there was the possibility of visiting the Texas Heart Institute. In the 1980s and at the end of the 1970s, heart surgery was still a high-risk type of surgery. Only highly specialised centres performing a high number of heart operations were getting good results – the biggest at that time was the Texas Heart Institute, which was performing 5,000 operations a year. Since patients from the former Yugoslavia were sent there for operations – I found this out when I was doing my military service in the VMA corunit in Belgrade – that is where I decided I wanted to train. Later, when I was doing my specialisation in Nova Gorica, an opportunity arose for me to go there for additional training. I put my hand up – and the rest is history (smiles). It wasn’t easy at the beginning – at that time, he still hadn’t decided to stay in the US for good. He only wanted to go for three, four months. ‘My ambition lay in cardiovascular surgery and there were very few posts available in Ljubljana. I reckoned that extra training abroad would give me some good references that would increase my chances of employment as a heart surgeon in Slovenia. After four months, there was the opportunity to extend my stay for another six. After that, I had to decide whether to come home, or risk it and stay in America.’ The risk was considerable because he had neither a job nor a secure future, but he took that risk because he believed that, without taking a risk, a person cannot expect or achieve anything greater. At the same time he realised that perhaps he would not be able to make it, since he did not have the proper...
qualifications for the work he wanted to do. ‘Even in the States, I didn’t have approval for my qualifications because I wasn’t counting on staying. After I took the decision to stay, my qualifications were recognised within two years; only then did I also obtain my qualifications, and doctors will probably be asking themselves what things were like today, and it would be great to see what things will be like then’ (smiles). Treating the heart means finding new methods of treatment, he says. ‘Technology has advanced greatly and the flow of information is extraordinary. My area is heart disease, where it is very important to satisfy one’s own desire, since a person is thus able to carry out the very best, the most competitive, research and to pass on to young Slovenian students to do this in particular area of cardiology.’

What about artificial hearts? ‘Medical support is only an additional support to heart surgery. In the last stage of heart disease, the last stage, and that’s where my surgical interest lies, in my research and my clinical work. In the next 20 or 30 years, I believe that mechanical support will be used in this particular area of cardiology.’

But with hard work and persistence, with desire and motivation, a person can achieve anything. ‘With hard work and persistence, with specialisation, which is also difficult to do, but with the desire, since a person is thus able to carry out the very best, the most competitive, research and to pass on to young Slovenian students to do this in particular area of cardiology,’ he says. Of course, this is because of the mechanisms that prevent rudeness on the part of doctors: if a doctor is rude to a patient, that patient can complain to the medical council, which is responsible for relationships with patients. They send the doctor a letter, summon him to their office, listen to the complaint of the patient, and nurse, and try to establish what took place. In reality, the investigation is a cursory one. If they find that the doctor was unjustifiably rude to a patient, the doctor can be asked to explain his or her behavior. If the mistake has consequences for the patient, this is extremely serious for the patient and for the doctor as well. However, if a serious mistake occurs that harms the patient and has long-term consequences for him, there is no way to cover the mistake up and lie. He must never cover up mistakes. He must tell the relatives immediately. It is easier for people to understand honesty, openness and confession than dishonourfulness, arrogance and lies.’

If he had to list the three human and professional qualities that have brought him to such an important position, they would be: first, his vocation. ‘This is a great deal of knowledge and brings a great deal of knowledge to his vocation and spends a great deal of time working with patients. He will never agree with that there are many ambitious, successful people who haven’t trodden on heads to get where they wanted to go. Ambition is a very positive thing. I support the desire of the young Slovenian students that come to us to satisfy their ambition in terms of research and education, a desire to succeed in branches they are interested in – even if this means waiting a year or two for it to happen. Because I know from my own experiences that it is very important to satisfy one’s own desire, since a person is thus able to carry out his profession with pleasure, to go to work with pleasure and give so much more.’

The future is in ‘mechanical support’

Prof. Gregorič is a man and a professional who brings a great deal of knowledge to his vocation and spends a great deal of time carrying out research that will benefit patients. ‘In the medium to long term, the future for the treatment of heart disease lies in stem cell treatment, but the research is still at the early stages. They began to build aircraft in the 19th century, but it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that they were made to fly. At that time, everyone was saying it wasn’t possible. Stem cells are, I believe, at that stage now – these babies have only just started to walk (smiles). In the medium term, however...’ Then, he says, heart surgery as we know it today will probably no longer exist. ‘We will have to learn that heart surgery has only been around for 50 years. We have therefore seen the ascension, summit and now something of a decline in certain branches of heart surgery. In the case of heart surgery, in medicine, I try to show this to the worst thing a doctor can do is try to treat the heart with this with heart – ourselves – and with spirit.’

Igor Gregorič, Slovenian in spirit, citizen of the world in his word – says ‘Those of us who try to treat the heart must do this with heart – ourselves – and with spirit.’
BASKETBALL HAS HAPPENED TO SLOVENIA

What is the taste of a victory if there was no opponent to beat?

Igor E. Bergant Photo Aleš Fevžar

Basketball unanimously elected Slovenia to host the 2013 EuroBasket – the European basketball championship for men. The Basketball Federation of Slovenia was the only candidate to host the prestigious event, as in the months before several other bidders, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Germany and finally Italy had pulled out. The reason – the number of participating teams was increased by FIba europe (to 24), and the Munich Marriott on 5 December around noon, when the Board of FIba Europe, the governing body of European basketball, unanimously elected Slovenia to host the event, as in the months before several other bidders, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Germany and finally Italy had pulled out. The reason – the number of participating teams was increased by FIba europe (to 24), and when the vote of the board of FI ba Europe was all in favour of Slovenia, it became a ‘slovene’ and went on to perform brilliantly for the team.

N ot bad, because there was no loser at all. The sweetness of such a victory was all over the congress rooms of the Munich Marriott on 5 December around noon, when the Board of FIba Europe, the governing body of European basketball, unanimously elected Slovenia to host the 2013 EuroBasket – the European basketball championship for men. The Basketball Federation of Slovenia was the only candidate to host the prestigious event, as in the months before several other bidders, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Germany and finally Italy had pulled out. The reason – the number of participating teams was increased by FIba europe (to 24), and when the vote of the board of FI ba Europe was all in favour of Slovenia, it became a ‘slovene’ and went on to perform brilliantly for the team.

Basketball has one of the strongest national teams in Europe. With its 30,000 registered players and around 200,000 people playing basketball almost every weekend, Slovenia has one of the highest ratios of people involved in basketball in the world.

But the main pillar and the strongest argument of the Slovenian bid was the basketball fans, who have become the most recognisable brand of Slovenian basketball. In 2010, some 5,000 organised Slovenian fans travelled to Turkey to watch the Slovenian national team at the FIBA World Championships for men. Slovenian fans, who are noisy but good-spirited, who are lively and enjoy basketball, deserved to be awarded a major basketball tournament in their own country. And if was to them that the bidders dedicated the motto of EuroBasket 2013 “I Feel Basketball”.

At last, this feeling will be shared in Slovenia with guests from abroad.

A RENAISSANCE IN SLOVENIAN BIATHLON?

Andraž Stare Photo STA

This year’s biathlon world cup got underway at the Östersund winter sports complex in northern Sweden. The Slovenian team began the 3rd World Cup season with a makeover, headed by Olympic bronze medal winner Jakov Fak, 23, who has switched from the Croatian team. Fak has trained with the Slovenian team for a number of years, so his move was only a matter of time. The top professionals that make up the Slovenian team, along with top-quality training and facilities, were the factors that persuaded Fak to make the move.

Jakov Fak

Major successes: 3rd place, 20 km, 2009 World Championships 2009, PyeongChang Bronze medal, 10 km, 2010 Winter Olympics, Vancouver World Cup: 17th place, Anterselva, 2009/10

The first move from the Croatian to the Slovenian biathlon team came a few years ago when Dijana Gudik (married name Ravnikar) became a ‘slovene’ and went on to perform brilliantly for the team.

After Östersund, the world’s best biathletes decamp to Pokljuka for the next round of the World Cup from 14 to 19 December. This is the 14th time Pokljuka has been a World Cup venue, in addition to the three times it has hosted the World Championships. Interestingly, the only podium finishes for the Slovenian team at Pokljuka were in 2007, when they came third in the mass start.

Order of events at the World Cup

Pakljuka, 14–19 December 2010

Men: 20 km individual, 10 km sprint

Women: 15 km individual, 7.5 km sprint

Mixed relay: 2 x 7.5 km men, 2 x 6 km women

Most is expected of the men’s team, where, in addition to Fak, Janez Marž and Klemen Bauer will be competing for top spot. The women’s team, managed by Tomaz Kos, a Czech, also have great ambitions for the 2010/2011 season. The first lady of the team is the experienced Tea Gregorič, who already has a second place in the World Cup and is hoping for her first victory in this elite competition. She also has a silver medal from the World Championships in South Korea in 2009. Gregorič is predicting a serious challenge for a fifth individual win for the Slovenian biathlon team at the World Cup. Gregorič is joined by Tadeja Brankovič-Likozar, who returns to the team after giving birth, and the excellent shooter Andreja Malik. Both can expect to challenge for top honours in at least some of the races.

The main goal of the Slovenian biathletes is this year’s World Championships in Khanty Mansiysk, Russia, which take place between 1 and 13 March 2011. This is the second year in a row that this venue has played host to the world’s best biathletes. As a town, Khanty Mansiysk is really very special. It lies in the Ural’s and is only accessible by air. There are no roads or railways, but wonderful biathlon tracks and hellishly cold temperatures.

T he management of stock exchange and investment fund companies have received more than 350 inquiries and offers of cooperation this year. Roughly 60 of them have been incorporated into the assets of the investees. A total of 300 companies within 100 investment funds have been approved by the vertical and horizontal risk supervision department.

Regarding the financial outcome, euroBasket could even be a profitable event, especially due to the potential for large numbers of tourists that are expected to visit Slovenia. But how can the Slovenians guarantee that they have a bit less than three years to make it happen,” he explained at a press conference in Munich.

Slovenia is the smallest country ever to bid and to host the euroBasket tournament, which is the second largest European basketball championship. But how can the Slovenians guarantee that they will be ready to meet all the financial and logistic challenges?

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I

N SLOVENIA, TOO, THE MOST TYPICAL outward signs of Christmas Eve are the so-called 12 nights. On those nights around Christmas people in Slovenia peep off 12 layers of onion and set them out in sequence, like the months of the year. A little salt is shaken on each piece of peel. Depending on whether the piece of peel is wet or dry the next year, they can judge which will be the rainy and dry months. In Gorenjska, on Christmas Eve girls would go and stare at a stream to see the image of their future bridegroom in it. Of cutting and sharing peels of an onion, it is a time when the “world is open”, or when the “sky opens” to everything evil as well as good. The supernatural world that we cannot see opens up for brief moments: we can see into the future, know our fate and even alter it through magic. All these beings are especially dangerous at the time when the sun is lowest, in other words on the winter nights between Christmas and Epiphany. In Slovenia they are called the 12 nights. On those nights the people would listen to the terrible voices of demons and witches, ghosts, goblins and dreadful werewolves, which became woven into the twisting winds of winter rain and snowstorms. Through the skies runs the wild chase, a host of diverse unknown animals fly through the skies; these beings have horses’ hooves. In the lore of Gorenjska, the wild chase under the heavens is driven by Zlata baba, the Slav witch, who has three made of wheat, rye and buckwheat, and now also maize flour, and there can be five different breads or just one – as named after the napkin used to cover them and the table on which they are placed: poprtnik, poprtnjak, postojek, mižnik, prten kruh, stolnik, and in view of its magical powers, also božičnik (Christmas bread), močen kruh (strong bread), ljupnik (parish priest) and more. These frequently beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 14 days, in other words for all “three Christmas”. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the leftovers from the drumsticks.

Famous Christmas breads
The Slovenian Christmas table is a symbolic kind of sacrificial altar, a very old ritual, full of concern for the year to come and for the family, and full of memories of those departed. At the same time it involves wishes for prosperity in the new year. The majority of ritual Christmas breads – in the countryside they usually have a three, as well as other denominations that have deep symbolic significance. The traditional Christmas decoration for the obligatory holy shire in the house was (and is) made of wheat, rye and buckwheat, and now also maize flour, and there can be five different breads or just one – as named after the napkin used to cover them and the table on which they are placed: poprtnik, poprtnjak, postojek, mižnik, prten kruh, stolnik, and in view of its magical powers, also božičnik (Christmas bread), močen kruh (strong bread), ljupnik (parish priest) and more. These frequently beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 14 days, in other words for all “three Christmas”. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the leftovers from the drumsticks.

Cultural Trails

CHRISTMAS
CUSTOMS
IN
SLOVENIA

Damjan J. Ovsec  Photo Shutterstock

there will be floods and inundations. Apart from its red colour, iron has special protective powers that drive away disease, demons and witches.

Christmas Eve is the night when treasure buried deep in the earth comes to light. It is otherwise controlled by an evil spirit. Numerous legends and stories full of incredible wizardry relate how you can get to the treasure between 11 o’clock and midnight on Christmas Eve. During Christmas, unknown supernatural forces are released, and they traditionalised and consecrated a new upsurge everywhere in the country. They have also spawned widespread interest in novel approaches. Recent decades have also seen live Nativity scenes in Slovenia, presented by people in Biblical costumes and with real live animals. They are organised in various Slovenian locations, and the world-famous Postojna Cave is regarded as staging the most attractive one each year, making it a major tourist attraction.

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In the Dolenska region, for instance, anyone who tries Christmas bread from nine houses gains exceptional power.

Lighting bonfires and burning the Yule log
A feature of Christmas in Slovenia would be burning bonfires outside, using fire to help the sun start rising again, while inside the homesteads they would burn a tree or three in the fireplace. A number of names locally that relate to Christmas, including badnik, badnjak, božičnik and also čok, zglavnik and čuja. This Yule log was selected earlier in the autumn. Often it was two metres long and weighed more than a hundredweight, so it was dragged to the house, if at all possible, by a team of white oxen. It was hauled into the house with chains, or rolled to the hearth on boards or poles. It was absolutely forbidden to touch it with your hands, for it was supposedly a sacred, living being. The tree stump, which the house procured, was lit in the fireplace on Christmas Eve, thereby according to the old beliefs helping the weakened sun and giving warmth and light to the souls of the returning departed, it supposedly represented a veneration of the deity of the domestic hearth. The stump had to smoulder slowly until the new year or until the Feast of the Magi, and in the meantime it was doused with wine and given gifts of food. This ancient custom of burning was still going up until the First World War, or rather while people still had open fires; celebrating around a winter bonfire has Indo-European roots. Predictions and prophecies were made from the sparks, smoke and flames.

Christmas decorations
An important part of the preparations for Christmas is decorating the house and work buildings with greenery: pinewood, oak branches, juniper, ivy, holly, mistletoe, evergreens, moss and straw, as well as arches, made of wheat, rye and grains. These frequently beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 14 days, in other words for all “three Christmas”. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the leftovers from the drumsticks.

In the Dolenska region, for instance, anyone who tries Christmas bread from nine houses gains exceptional power.
In some places three leaves can also represent the Three Kings. Outdoor merriment at this time is also provided by the previously mentioned carol-singers, who appear for Christmas each New Year. The Feast of the Magi and at other times. They got their name from the Roman Kalendae Januarii and acquired a new repertory with Christianity. These ritualistically framed carol-singers bring to houses a blessing for the new year. Health and good fortune for people and animals. The carol-singers would also wander around cities during Christmas, and were very popular in Ljubljana. A few years ago the custom of carol-singing, especially “Three Kings” carol-singers in the Ljubljana suburbs, enjoyed a revival. Associated with the carol-singers are the kales, the carols. Slovenians know an extraordinary number of carols. Another common purpose used to be both played and danced. Performances of Christmas plays hold many božičnice, public dramatic performances.

Cultural Trails

The Slovenian Christmas table is a singular kind of sacrificial altar, a very old ritual, full of concern for the year to come and for the family, and full of mysteries of that departed. At the same time, there were wishes for prosperity in the new year. The majority of ritual Christmas breads – in the countryside they usually take three main forms: bread shaped like a cross, round, or with flour, and there can be different types of bread or just one – are named after the napkin used to cover them and the table on which they are placed. Paprika, poppy seeds, postojšek, mušnik, petraš kruh, stolnik, and in view of its magical powers, also božiček (bread), močen kruh (strong bread), and in the mountains. These beautifully decorated loaves are of pagan origin, and they must stay on the table for 34 days, in other words, for all other Christmases. The bread is shared with all the people around the home and all their animals, even the dog and cat, while the chickens get the crumbs. On Christmas Eve it could burn for hours, and anyone who tries Christmas bread from nine houses gains exceptional power. In some places three leaves can also represent the Three Kings.

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I HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN 15 YEARS of intense study of the symbols of the Slovenian nation and Slovenia, looking closely at the basic components of the identity of nation and state name, designation in international environments, coat-of-arms, flag and anthem.

The basic symbol is, of course, the coat-of-arms. One hundred and sixty-two years ago, the Slovenian nation got confirmation that white, blue and red were its colours. In a letter written in 1848, Ministerial President and Interior Minister Baron Anton von Dobrilovič-Ulter informed the Governor of Illyria, Count von Welsersheim, that the old provincial colours from before 1463 were the same. Welsersheim, that the old provincial coat-of-arms was used by all Slovenians that took part in it. After the war, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia, and up until March 1990, the national flag was not fixed or designated in any written act; this was despite the fact that the tricolour and star was used as the flag of the People’s Republic of Slovenia and the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. In Constitutional amendment C passed at the meetings of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia sessions on 24 and 25 June 1991, the coat-of-arms and flag of the Republic of Slovenia were defined. The coat-of-arms was designed by academy painter Marko Pogačnik. It is very finely placed on the white, blue and red of the Slovenian national flag. The amendment, and later the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia of 1991, provided as follows: ‘The coat-of-arms of Slovenia has the form of a shield: in the middle of the shield, on a blue background, is a representation of Mount Triglav in white, under which there are two undulating blue lines symbolising the sea and rivers and above which there are three golden, six-pointed stars. The shield is bordered in red. The coat-of-arms is the symbolic link between all Slovenians in their ethnic territory.

When the flag of the Slovenian nation acquired its coat-of-arms, this became the flag of Slovenia, the national flag.

The ratio of 12 of width to length had already been set by Constitutional amendment C. It may only be hung horizontally, since the law does not provide for vertical hanging of the flag, which would thus place the coat-of-arms in a heraldically incorrect position. According to the Coat-of-Arms, Flag and Anthem of the Republic of Slovenia and the Flag of the Slovenian Nation Act, which was adopted in 1994 after three years of discussion at the National Assembly, we therefore have a ratio of 2:3 in Slovenia. ‘The flag of the Slovenian nation’ and the ‘flag of Slovenia’. Both may be used simultaneously. The first represents Slovenia throughout the world, the second represents the state of Slovenia.

When I think about the coat-of-arms of the Duchy of Carniola, in whose extensive area around 95 per cent of Slovenians lived, the coat-of-arms of Slovenia, the flag of the Slovenian nation and the flag of Slovenia, I do ask myself why we do not have an official anthem of the Slovenian nation, ‘Naprej zastava Slave’ (Forward, Flag of Glory), in addition to the official anthem of Slovenia. It was set to music on 16 May 1860 and was presented publicly for the first time on 22 October the same year, with great enthusiasm and success.

The music was written by composer Davorin Jenko and the words by poet Simon Jenko.

It has a strong melody and carries an invigorating message to the nation. At the moment, it is only used as the anthem of the Slovenian armed forces. At celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the anthem held at the house in which the composer was born, I proposed that it be officially used as the anthem of the Slovenian nation. The melody of the anthem of Slovenia, the national anthem, was written by composer Stanko Premrl, after a poem by France Prešeren, ‘Zdravica – Zdravljica’ (‘A Toast’). On 27 September 1893, this anthem was defined as the anthem of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia in Constitutional amendment XII passed by all three chambers of the Assembly. The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia from December 1991 also states that the anthem of Slovenia is ‘Zdravljica’. The 1994 act referred to above states that when the anthem is sung, with instruments or unaccompanied, only the words of the seventh stanza of Prešeren’s poem (‘Zve naj vse razožim...’)

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EARLY SNOW BRINGS A DOSE OF OPTIMISM FOR THE WINTER SEASON
Slovenian slopes offer alluring white pistes

Sanja Prelevič Photo STO

Favourable weather conditions were “on the sunny side of the Alps” – as we like to call Slovenia, after an old tourist slogan – have made it possible to start the winter season at the major ski resorts at the beginning of December, some two weeks earlier than last winter. As the first ski resorts started up, the inspectors gave an assurance that Slovenia’s ski resorts are safe and entirely comparable to all European resorts in every standard. In one winter season, Slovenia’s ski centres are visited by up to two million snow recreation enthusiasts.

Visitor numbers have been recorded right from the first weekend of December, when major ski centres such as the Maribor Pohorje, Kranjska Gora and Krvavec opened up. The bigger crowds at the ski resorts are expected starting from 20 December, during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

At Krvavec, (1,450 m – 1,971 m altitude), the closest ski centre for residents of Ljubljana and Kranj (the resort is just 25 km from the capital, and 17 km from Kranj), the biggest novelty this season is a “ski-cross” park around 600 metres long. Another new feature is night tobogganing, as well as the daily testing of skis from acclaimed world manufacturers. Both Krvavec and Rogla now also offer online pass sales, with passes being sent to your home.

Krvavec offers around 30 kilometres of pistes, and every year up to 220,000 visitors come to enjoy about 150 days of the winter season. This year’s snow and the favourable temperatures for artificial snow-making have made operators extremely happy, since last year the lack of snow at the start of the season forced them to wait until the middle of December. Despite the late start, Krvavec was declared last year to be the “top ski resort” in Slovenia.

A one-day adult ski pass for Krvavec this year costs 29 euros. The Maribor Pohorje, (325 m to 1,327 m altitude), after Krvavec the second biggest ski resort in Slovenia, has acquired a gondola cable car with capacity for eight people, and this can carry up to 2,400 people an hour to the summit, a jump up from the previous 1,000 an hour. This month should see the start up of the new entrance and exit station for the cable car system and a garage for all 64 gondolas. Skiers can reach the top in ten minutes, which is a major enhancement for skiing from the top into the valley and for night skiing. Apart from its fame as the host of the Zlata liska (Golden Fox) cup, the Maribor Pohorje is famous for another feature: it has the best (closest) access to a ski centre from a city.

Kranjska Gora, (810 – 1,570 m altitude), a fashionable Slovenian ski resort beloved by all – young and old, competitors and day trippers, politicians and celebrities – ticket prices remain the same as last year. The high mountain environment and imposing surroundings, the skiing is something quite normal for Vogel. Up on Vogel a magnificent panoramic view opens up towards the Triglav mountain range and all the way to the Kamnik-Savinja Alps and the Karavanke range. The high mountain environment and extraordinary views of the surroundings lend Vogel a special charm. Yet despite the imposing surroundings, the skiing is not difficult. The season here will kick off in ten minutes; An adult ski pass costs 15 euros, and one for a child costs 12 euros.

The main ski centres in Upper Gorenjska we might also mention Kobla (540 m – 1,480 m), which is the only ski resort in Slovenia that you can get to by train, from Nova Gorica, or from Ljubljana or Jesenice. They hope to lure more skiers with affordable prices. A ski pass for Kobla runs to 22 euros for adults and 16 for children.

Kiran linked to ski resort on Italian side, Golte gains new hotel

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At the Kanin ski centre (it lies in the
The ski season at Kanin runs from December to the Mayday holidays. The main hope of tourism workers is that they will have sufficient fine and stable weather at the ski centre, which is distinguished for its sunny aspect and dry snow. New developments include a modified menu featuring traditional Bovec dishes, plus an amusement park, and children’s activities will also once again be provided at the centre.

At the beginning of the year links were established with the ski resort of Sella Nevea on the Italian side of Kanin, and a single pass is valid for both resorts.

At the Oscar and ski resort of Rogla (1,517 m altitude) on the Zreško Pohorje range, 90 hectares of natural or artificially snow-covered surfaces offer winter delights than can be enjoyed by all the family, as well as by top skiers and boarders, including competitors. Indeed for more than a decade, Rogla has been a venue for FIS and European Cup competitions. Before the winter season, which in the words of tourism workers has in recent years been reminiscent of the earlier beautiful winters when Rogla would change into a white paradise, they completed construction of an accumulation lake with an artificial snow-making machine. Another new feature is the children’s themed ski centre alongside the “Unioreč” drag lift, featuring five theme houses intended for learning and fun. Increasing competition for all the best-known Slovenian ski resorts is being created by the resort of Črni vrh nad Cerknem (1,290 m altitude). Cerkno Ski Centre is a hypermodern family ski resort that in recent years has acquired the status of a Slovenian Kronplatz.

The ski centre has outstanding infrastructure, state-of-the-art chair lifts and ample capacity for these lifts, which are no doubt good reasons for visiting the little giant, which is also famed for being visited by large numbers of guests from the Croatian part of Istria. Apart from offering the delights of its snow, in fine weather the ski resort is distinguished by an exceptional panoramic view of the Savinja Valley, part of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps in which it lies, and the halls of Posavje all the way to the Gorjanci range and Sljeme above Zagreb.

At the Kanin ski centre (it lies in the Julian Alps above the tourist resort town of Bovec and the River Soča), the highest centre in Slovenia and the only one lying over 2000 m above sea level, there are no worries about snow, which sticks around long into the spring. The ski resort by car along the new road via Šmihel. Apart from offering the delights of its snow, in fine weather the ski resort is distinguished by an exceptional panoramic view of the Savinja Valley, part of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps in which it lies, and the halls of Posavje all the way to the Gorjanci range and Sljeme above Zagreb.

Family outings to Rogla and Cerkno
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Winter resorts launch early skiing season
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Rateče
Photo Darinka Mladenovic