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INDEPENDENT SLOVENIA CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

Slovenia is celebrating 15 years of its independence this year. On 25 June 1991 the then Slovenian National Assembly declared the Basic Constitutional Charter on Independence and the Declaration of Independence, in line with the popular vote for independence in the referendum in December 1990. The Yugoslav People's Army responded to the move on 26 June in what was the beginning of the 10-day war of independence. In its 15-year history the country was successful in changing over to a new political and economic system and in gaining international recognition. It was successful in fulfilling the tasks it had set for itself and is today a respected member of the international community that will soon preside over the EU.

The first clear call for Slovenian independence and for the abolishment of the monopoly of the Communist Party came from the academics involved with the 57th issue of the dissident literary journal "Nova revija" in February 1987. The newly created political parties and their "May Declaration", published on 8 May 1989, demanded a sovereign state of the Slovenian nation and a multi-party political system. Despite being opposed by the authorities of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), Slovenia enacted such a system in 1989. An independence referendum followed on 23

FROM ENDEAVOURS FOR RECOGNITION TO BECOMING A RESPECTED MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

After becoming independent, Slovenia urgently needed international recognition, and obtaining it was a tough task for the country's new diplomacy. But it succeeded in it: it established diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries in autumn of 1991, the EU recognized Slovenia and Croatia on 16 December 1991 (effective on 15 January 1992), and the country was eventually made member of the UN on 22 May 1992.

After achieving independence, Slovenia's primary tasks were joining the EU and NATO. The country signed a cooperation agreement with the EU in 1993, and the accession negotiations began in March 1998 and were concluded in December 2002. Slovenians overwhelmingly voted in favour of EU membership in a 26 March 2003 referendum, when they also voted in favour of joining the NATO. The accession treaty with the EU was signed on 16 April 2003 and Slovenia joined the EU on 1 May 2004, the first former Yugoslav republic to do so. It will switch its currency to the euro on 1 January 2007, it is expected to join the Schengen zone in autumn of that year, and will be the first among the EU 2004 newcomers to preside over the 25-member Union in the first half of 2008.

December 1990, with Slovenians showing an overwhelming support for independence, which was then declared by the National Assembly on 25 June 1991.

Gaining independence was not a peaceful process. Constant opposition from Belgrade escalated into the independence war, which claimed casualties among the Slovenian Army and police as well as among members of the Yugoslav Army and civilians. Diplomatic endeavours to solve the crisis were taking place throughout the duration of the conflict. The result was the Brijuni Declaration, signed between representatives of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Yugoslav Federal Authorities and the EU troika on 7 July 1991 on the Croatian archipelago of Brijuni. In line with the document, Slovenia agreed to "freeze" further steps towards independence for three months and the Yugoslav Army was to refrain from all armed activities in the country. As no new agreement between Slovenia and Yugoslavia was signed by 8 October that year, the international community considered the SFRY disintegrated.

After the passing of the three-month moratorium, Slovenia started enacting its sovereignty. It implemented its own currency, took over control of its borders, and on 23 December 1991 adopted its Constitution.

Slovenia meanwhile joined NATO on 29 March 2004, ten years after it first expressed its wish to join the Alliance.

Slovenia also got affirmation of its international standing by being elected a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1998 for two years. The country also presided over the OSCE in 2005.



Ceremony upon Slovenia's entry into the EU on 30 April 2004 in Nova Gorica (photo: Government PR and Media Office/Uros Hocevar/Mag)

SLOVENIA DEVELOPED A SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY IN 15 YEARS

Slovenia did not have its own diplomacy prior to becoming independent in 1991 and had to create it anew. The same goes for its armed forces. One of the first tasks of the country's fledgling diplomacy was to achieve international recognition, managing to fulfil the task in a relatively short period of time. According to Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenia nowadays enjoys the support and respect of the entire international



Central ceremony marking the declaration of Slovenia's independence on 26 June 1991 on the Trg republike square in Ljubljana (photo: Government PR and Media Office/archive of Salomon 2000)

MINISTER RUPEL: SLOVENIA BEGAN A NEW LIFE IN THE LAST 15 YEARS

community, something that was clearly shown during its turns as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and as OSCE chair. The country will also be the first among the 2004 newcomers to assume presidency over the European Union in the first half of 2008.

The ten-day war, which began on 26 June 1991, the day after Slovenia declared its independence, was a difficult period for the country, during which its diplomacy played a vital role. Signing of the Brijuni declaration on 7 July 1991 is regarded as its first success. Representing Slovenia at the talks on the Croatian archipelago of Brijuni, were France Bucar, Janez Drnovsek, Milan Kucan and Dimitrij Rupel. Slovenia then went on to achieve international recognition and launched endeavours to join the EU and NATO, with Rupel adding that this is a joint victory of the Slovenian and European diplomacies.

The country's diplomacy, also headed by Minister Rupel during Slovenia's first government, managed to overcome financial and staffing shortcomings and managed to make Slovenia member of the most important institutions in a relatively short time. Despite some remaining unresolved issues, Slovenia's diplomacy brought the country international recognition, the EU and NATO memberships, as well as presidency over the UN Security Council and the OSCE.

Slovenia thus became a respected member of the international community that takes part in various international talks and decisions. It was also the venue for top-level meetings of diplomats, with the largest to date being the OSCE ministerial meeting in December 2005 in Ljubljana. Another internationally visible event was the meeting of the US and Russian presidents, George Bush and Vladimir Putin, in Slovenia in June 2001 at Brdo pri Kranju, which, alongside the resort of Bled, also played host to the meeting of 16 presidents of Central European states in 2002.

Slovenia's independence also brought about the

"15 years ago we managed to fulfill a great, and in the eyes of many an exaggerated and unreal ambition, namely the independence of Slovenia. In a couple of months following the declaration of independence we earned the trust and recognition of the international community," Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel said at a ceremony in Trzic marking 15 years of independence. In the last 15 years the country began a new life, the minister said. "Life in Slovenia is beautiful," he added.

He also said in a recent interview that in its 15 years as an independent country Slovenia has secured a place for itself in the very core of European political life. This means, according to Rupel, that it perceives all EU and NATO member states as allies to which it can turn for assistance and advice. "The environment in which we receive support and support others is in fact the EU," he stressed and added that Slovenia has now also developed very good relations with Russia and the US.

In comparison with the duration of systems under which Slovenians lived prior to their independence, 15 years is not a very long period, the minister added. However, the events in that time were "extremely lively, and the changes were momentous," he explained. While some events and changes were brought about by endeavours, even improvisations, of selfless individuals, the country "rushed together with the current of history and shared in the gifts and rewards in the same way as other Central- and Eastern-European nations," said the chief Slovenian diplomat.

necessity for the country to develop and expand its own diplomatic network. It currently has 38 embassies, five consulates general and six permanent representations.

Minister Rupel also pointed to the tasks that remain to be done, including collecting and managing the documents on the history of Slovenian diplomacy and, more importantly, instituting suitable university courses in diplomacy. He also believes that Slovenians need to establish a new attitude towards their state and its achievements. "If we cannot put suitable knowledge about the creation and meaning of the Slovenian state into the education curriculum and media, we cannot hope to create a level of patriotism needed in every state, he explained.

NUMEROUS CELEBRATIONS MARKED 15 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

This year's 15th anniversary of Slovenia's independence will be marked by over 160 events that began on 28 April with the opening of the exhibition "The War for Slovenia 1991" in the town of Lendava in Northeastern Slovenia, and will conclude on 26 October in the port city of Koper in Southwestern Slovenia by marking the anniversary of the departure of the last soldier of the Yugoslav People's Army from Slovenia.

The central ceremony took place on Trg Republike square on 24 June, the eve of National Day, with Prime Minister Janez Jansa delivering the keynote address. Prior to the ceremony, the National Assembly held a special session, while the three chambers of the 1991 National Assembly also met at separate sessions.

Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, Slovenia's first as well as current foreign minister, attended several ceremonies marking the independence anniversary, including a visit to the Northern town of Trzic on 23 June and a speech in Polzevo (Central Slovenia) on 25 June. Minister Rupel



Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel (photo: MZZ/BOBO)

pointed out that Slovenians, in comparison with other European nations, waited for a long time to set up an independent state, adding that we had to do it if we wanted to survive as a nation. On both occasions the minister stressed the importance of diplomacy that the country had to establish anew and stressed the country's achievements in the area of foreign diplomacy and other fields.

Among other important events marking the anniversary, veterans of the Slovenian independence war and members of the Slovenian Armed Forces met in the town of Slovenj Gradec (Northeastern Slovenia) on 10 June. Slovenians living outside of Slovenia and the country's diplomatic representations also staged various events, while the country's museums prepared a number of exhibitions.



Central ceremony marking 15 years of Slovenia's independence on 24 June 2006 on the Trg Republike square in Ljubljana (photo: STA)

THE MILESTONES OF INDEPENDENT SLOVENIA

25 June 1991 – Slovenia is declared an independent and sovereign state

26-27 June 1991 – The beginning of the Yugoslav Army's intervention and of the independence war

7 July 1991 – The Brijuni Declaration is signed between Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Yugoslav federal authorities and the EU troika

9 October 1991 – Slovenia introduces its own currency and declares monetary independence

26 October 1991 – The last soldier of the Yugoslav Army's withdraws from Slovenia

8 December 1991 – The international arbitration committee led by Robert Badinter publishes its decision that the SFRY had disintegrated

23 December 1991 – The first Constitution of the new Republic of Slovenia is passed

15 January 1992 – EU and its member states recognize Slovenia

15 January 1993 – Slovenia becomes a member of the International Monetary Fund

25 February 1993 – Slovenia becomes a member of the World Bank

14 May 1993 – Slovenia becomes a member of the Council of Europe

30 July 1995 – Slovenia accepted into the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

1 January 1998 – Slovenia elected a non permanent member of the UN's Security Council for 1998 and 1999

29 June 2001 – Slovenia and other members of the former Yugoslavia sign an agreement on sign a deal on succession

23 March 2003 – Slovenians vote in favour of the country's entry into the EU and NATO in separate referendums

29 March 2004 – Slovenia joins NATO

1 May 2004 – Slovenia joins the EU

1 January 2005 – Slovenia begins its one-year presidency of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

2 June 2006 – Slovenia assumes presidency over the Human Security Network.