



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

# NEWSLETTER

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## Annual Holiday Gathering of the Fulbright National Capital Area Chapter



This was the fourth time the embassy hosted the NCAC.

**For the fourth year in a row, the Embassy of Slovenia hosted on Sunday, December 13, the traditional holiday gathering of the Fulbright Association alumni of the National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC).**

Around 150 students, academics, business people, and government officials who participated in the Fulbright exchange program and now work in the nation's capital, joined the event, which included

a performance by the DC jazz-piano band, as well as a potluck dinner of culinary specialties of different countries, and Slovenian wine and beer.

Opening remarks by the Board Vice President of Washington D.C. Fulbright Alumni Club, Mr. Cris Ramon, were followed by a welcoming speech by the Slovenian Ambassador, Dr. Božo Cerar. He emphasized the importance of international exchanges for achieving cross-

cultural understanding. The ambassador also stressed that in 2015 the Slovenian embassy in Washington and the U.S. Embassy in Ljubljana commemorated 50 years of Fulbright exchanges between both countries. In addition, he mentioned the recent visit to the U.S. by Prime Minister Dr. Miro Cerar, himself a Fulbright alumnus, with a delegation. One of the main goals of the visit was to enhance cooperation between the two countries in





Traditional holiday gathering of the Fulbright NCAC.



Ambassador Dr. Cerar and NCAC Vice President Mr. Ramon.

the educational, science and research fields.

The Fulbright program, supported by U.S. Congress, is the international exchange scholarship program between the U.S. and partner

governments of 155 countries, including Slovenia. Since 1964, when the first Educational Exchange agreement between the U.S. and the now former Yugoslavia was signed, over 350 Slovenian scholars have

taken part in the program and even more Americans visited Slovenia as part of their grant, some of them also joining the embassy for the Sunday annual event.

## HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

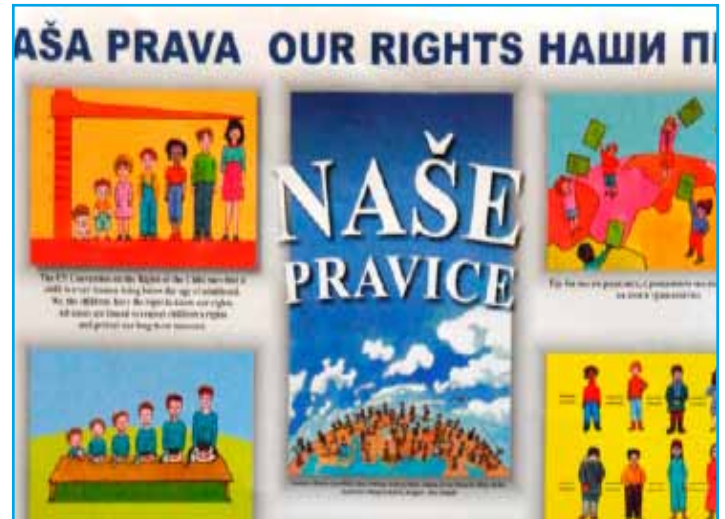
# Ten years of 'Our Rights' Project

On October 28, 2015, Slovenia was elected to the Human Rights Council for the 2016–2018 periods by the U.N. General Assembly in New York. The success in the elections is an acknowledgement to Slovenia and its diplomacy, including its long-standing engagement in,

and positive contribution to, the protection and implementation of human rights around the world.

Human rights fundamentally contribute to long-term peace, stability and security. Respect for human rights can be achieved only by

informing individuals of their rights and the rights of others and actively championing them both at the individual and collective level. Education about the significance of human rights leads to preventing violations of human rights and helps achieve a just, democratic, tolerant



and sustainable society that cherishes values and mutual respect. Focusing on the young generation, particularly children, can greatly contribute to the awareness of human rights, which contributes to their respect.

In order to achieve this goal, 10 years ago, the experts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared the 'Our Rights' study material for children aged between 10 and 12. In its role, as the presiding country of the OSCE, Slovenia secured approval of all OSCE members and launched the pilot project in 2005, which was implemented in 17 languages of interested countries and minorities.

In the last decade, the project continued during Slovenia's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2009) and many other activities and developmental aid projects. Internationally, Slovenia is among the most active countries in terms of promoting education on human rights. Within the Human Rights Platform, Slovenia significantly contributed to the U.N. declaration on human rights education and training. This is a crucial document for promoting the World Program for Human Rights Education internationally. In the last ten years, Slovenia has enabled education about children's

rights for over 180,000 children in many countries of Europe, the Western Balkans, Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa, Latin America, the Russian Federation (Northern Ossetia-Alania, Chechnya, Dagestan) and Turkey.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Slovenia will continue with this and other projects and devote special attention to traditional human rights priorities: children's rights, gender equality, and women's rights, the protection of vulnerable groups, human rights education, and links between the environment and human rights.

## EMBASSY ADOPTION PROGRAM

# Fourth Embassy Visit of the Mann Elementary School



As part of the Embassy Adoption Program, this year, the Embassy of Slovenia "adopted" two fifth-grade school classes of the Mann Elementary School in Northwest Washington, DC. The program, offered by DC Public Schools in conjunction with the Washington Performing Arts Society, every year pairs embassies with classes

throughout the DC Public School (DCPS) system. The program is designed to combine embassy officials, teachers, and students from participating schools in order to expand the students' knowledge of different countries worldwide. Teachers work with their students to help them learn about their adoptive country, and representatives from each

embassy provide monthly cultural visits to their adopted classes, giving the students a personalized understanding of their nation's culture.

On Wednesday, December 16, 2013, Ms. Nuška Zakrajšek, public diplomacy and cultural affairs officer at the Embassy of Slovenia made her fourth visit to the fifth graders at the

Mann Elementary School. During the lesson, students revised their knowledge of Slovenia's geography, history and cultural features. The group then got acquainted with the specifics of the Slovenian language and the Slovene alphabet and learned 25 Slovenian words starting

with each of the letters of the Slovenian alphabet.. They also learned how to count in Slovenian and, through fun games, practiced the pronunciation of a few essential phrases of introduction. In the upcoming sessions, the students will learn more about the Slovenian

government, arts, food and cultural traditions. They will also visit the embassy premises and, at the end of the school year, present to the Slovenian ambassador and diplomats at a special event what they have learned.

## DIASPORA

# 51st Annual Saint Nicholas Celebration in Washington, D.C.



Children singing traditional Slovenian St. Nicholas song.



Visit of St. Nicholas.

The Bishop Baraga Society, Lodge #257 of the American Slovenian Catholic Union (KSKJ), organized in the afternoon of December 5, the traditional Slovenian Saint Nicholas Celebration -- Slovensko Miklavževanje.

The seasonal program took place in Chevy Chase, MD, and was opened with the address of the lodge's President, Mr. Chris Bohince. The event featured musical performances by the attending children. In keeping with the tradition, Saint Nicholas paid a visit to the kids and then distributed presents. Slovenian foods, including traditional pastries and Carniolian

sausages with sauerkraut, were offered at a buffet dinner, which provided a nice atmosphere for an evening gathering of around 100 members of the Slovenian community of greater Washington, who joined the event to celebrate their Slovenian heritage.

In Slovenia, the winter holiday season begins with the feast of St. Nicholas on December 6. St. Nicholas or, as called in Slovenia, Sveti Miklavž, brings presents to children during the night between December 5 and 6. When he visits the children, Sv. Miklavž is accompanied by angels, who help him carry and distribute the presents, and devils, who

reprimand children who had been bad.

Since, according to the legend, one night St. Nicholas threw three pieces of gold into a house of a poor man for his three daughters, traditionally children get oranges as a present on December 6, along with other small gifts, cookies, dried fruit and, sometimes, if they hadn't been so good, a switch.

Special bread, called poprtnjak, is made at this time. The bread is covered with a cloth and placed on the table, but it is not eaten until the feast of the Three Kings on January 6, when it is distributed to the children.

# Frank Štanger and Band Tops at Polka Music Awards



Frank Štanger.



Forty-two musicians appeared on the main stage in the traditional jam session on Friday evening.

The Frank Štanger Orchestra enjoyed a third-time win as Band of the Year at the 28th annual polka music awards ceremony presented by the National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame and Museum on Saturday, November 28, 2015. Štanger also collected trophies for Musician, Album and Song of the Year, as did bandmates Paul Yeager and Joe Zdelar for Side Musicians. The late Cleveland musician and radio host Eddie Bučar and the late drummer Dave Wolnik were inducted for their lifetime achievements in polka music. The Awards Show was the high point of the 52nd Thanksgiving Polka Party Weekend, staged at the Downtown Cleveland Marriott Hotel by the American Slovenian Polka Foundation.

The show theme, "A Century of Cleveland-Style Polka," saluted the Slovenian and American influences on the music, especially Slovenia's late polka powerhouse Slavko Avsenik and bandleaders Johnny

Pečon and Frank Yankovič, America's Polka King, both of whom would have been 100 this year. Pečon's sons John and Jeff and Yankovič's son Bob performed in honor of their fathers.

The Thanksgiving Polka Party Weekend brought 27 polka bands and busloads of fans from the U.S. and Canada for the three-day polka event. Featured entertainer was Denis Novato, World Diatonic Accordion Champion, who arrived from Trieste for the occasion. Several Polka Hall of Fame honorees appeared on stage, including Canada's Polka King, Walter Ostanek, Joey Miškulin of TV's Riders in the Sky, past President Fred Kuhar, and Dušan Maršič, who was recognized by polka radio host Tony Petkovšek for his 90th birthday. Four Polka Hall of Famers celebrated 80th birthdays, Walter Ostanek, Hank Haller, Del Sinchak, and Eddie Vallus. Featured performers were the Alpski Sekstet, which performed the tribute to Avsenik.

The National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame was founded in 1987 by musicians and leaders of Slovenian and nationality organizations. Museum exhibits trace the story of Cleveland's home-grown dance music from its roots in the city's Slovenian neighborhoods to nationwide popularity. Historic instruments include accordions belonging to famous bandleaders, including Frank Yankovič, America's Polka King. The archive preserves 6,500 vintage recordings, some dating back a century. Each year, the organization's 1,300 members vote for best album and top musicians by category. The Polka Hall of Fame's annual Awards Show celebrates this style of American popular music.

For information on and photos of the 2015 Thanksgiving Polka Party Weekend and Awards Show, check [www.polkafame.com](http://www.polkafame.com) or the National Cleveland-Style Polka Hall of Fame page on Facebook. (Text by Joe Valencic)

## Ptuj–Ormož Regional Museum



Ptuj Castle (Photo by Anže Malovrh/STA).



Ptuj Castle, interior (Photo by Boris Farič, PMPO).

**What better way to learn about Slovenia's history, art and heritage than by visiting various museums spread throughout the country? When making a list of things to do in Slovenia, do not forget about interesting galleries and museum collections. We will do our best to introduce as many as possible in our newsletter.**

Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum is a general museum with numerous collections and sections for archaeology, history, cultural history and ethnology. The museum was established in 1893 when the Museum Society was founded with the objective to keep unearthed archaeological findings in Ptuj. Nowadays, the museum covers the area of Ptuj and Ormož.

### **Rich archaeology of the Lower Podravje region**

The modern town of Ptuj is the direct heir to various settlements which developed along the amber road crossing the Drava River precisely in Ptuj. The region

knew its greatest boom in the Roman era, from 1st to 5th century. The antique Poetovio (Ptuj) was a truly cosmopolitan center with numerous state administrative offices, well developed trade and crafts and was one of the centers of Mithraism in Europe. The remains of two Mithras's temples are presented in situ. The altar containing the statue of Taurophorus (the dragging of the bull) is one of the last two remaining in the world.

### **Ptuj Castle**

The most representative collections are on view in the castle of Ptuj. Already in the 11th century, when the whole area belonged to the Salzburg archdiocese, a medieval fortress stood on the site of the modern castle. The archbishops leased the castle to the Lords of Ptuj who, during their 300-year-old tenure, founded the Dominican and Minorite monasteries, and built a pilgrimage church on Ptujška Gora. Between 1656 and 1802, the castle was held by the Scottish family of

counts Leslie. Last owners of the castle were counts Herberstein, from 1873 to 1945 when it was nationalized and together with the castle equipment annexed to the museum.

Now, the castle hosts collections of feudal dwelling culture, arms, traditional carnival masks, a gallery, and the most important collection of historical musical instruments in Slovenia. The most representative castle halls are decorated with rich stuccos, while the equipment contains some exceptional pieces of furniture and other artefacts ranging from the 16th to the 20th century. The dining hall is adorned with precious Brussels tapestries from the beginning of the 17th century.

The festival hall holds a collection of "turqueries" from the 17th century. The portraits show Turkish and European dignitaries and military leaders, the beauties from a sultan's harem, and members of different exotic countries around the world. The collection, the largest of the kind in the world, testifies to the

early interest of the European intellectuals in other cultures.

The arms collection contains more than 500 different exhibits of cold weapons, firearms, and of armor spanning the period from the 15th to the 20th century. The exhibits are displayed as in an ancient castle armory. Artillery pieces, decorated halberds, armor worn by provincial mercenaries, cold weapons and firearms made after the oriental patterns testify to the defensive role of the Ptuj castle.

Musical instruments are valuable and numerous (300). The collection consists of several thematic sections: the military band, town brass band, woodwind instruments, bowed and plucked string instruments, and keyboard instruments. The true world rarity is tibia – the antique double flute. The second floor of the castle displays paintings made between the 16th and 18th centuries. These are portraits of noblemen, the imperial Habsburg family, but also show religious and mythological subjects, still-lives and landscapes. Among the Gothic artefacts, without any doubt stand out the statues of Saints Barbara and Catherine, executed around 1410 and representing an exceptional achievement of the Gothic statuary

art in Europe.

This region of Slovenia is particularly well-known for its numerous traditional carnival masks. The collection, staged in the former horse stables, exhibits the masks in the order they take place during the carnival procession; among them, the most well-known and popular mask is Kurent or Korant, a demon who is believed to chase the winter away to make room for the spring.

### Mihelič Gallery

The gallery was named after a great Slovenian artist: France Mihelič, actually donated his entire collections of graphic works and drawings to Ptuj. Today, the gallery hosts various exhibitions and other local and international events dedicated to the fine arts. Ormož Castle, Castle Outbuilding, and Velika Nedelja Castle Archaeological, historical and ethnological exhibits displayed in the castle and its outbuilding in Ormož represent the past of the Ormož area. On the other hand, the ethnological exhibition in the castle of Velika Nedelja displays the most characteristic features of the rural environment, the dwelling culture and past everyday life in



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the Ormož area.

The wider area of Ptuj and Ormož is extremely rich in pre-historical and antique sites, in medieval and modern testimonies of economic and cultural importance of Ptuj, and in picturesque folk traditions. All the richness of the past is reflected in the museum collections and exhibitions, which attract visitors from near and far, and some 67,000 people from 70 different countries visit the museum every year. There must be something to the saying "Ptuj – a treasure throve of millennia"! (Text by: Metka Stergar, PMPO)



The Korant (Photo by Boris Farič, PMPO).



Velika Nedelja Castle, Ethnological collection (Photo by Boris Farič)

## UPCOMING EVENTS - WASHINGTON, D.C.

### **NATURA MORTA: A CHRISTMAS STILL-LIFE EXHIBIT WITH THE ARTWORK OF TERESA VELIKONJA OAXACA**

Teresa Velikonja Oaxaca, an award winning artist, was born in the United States. Her parents are of Slovenian and Mexican heritage. She has lived and traveled in many places throughout her life, and art has always been a part of it. These days she spends her time between the United States and Europe collecting inspiration, working on her oil painting, teaching master-classes all over the world and taking portrait commissions. Her work exhibits regularly both nationally and abroad, and her portrait sitters consist of an eclectic mix of individuals including notoriously hard to capture young children, ambassadors, Smithsonian museum Curators, and rock stars. When not traveling, she keeps a busy studio in Washington, DC.

The show features a range of mediums and sizes including large scale oil painting to small finely crafted drawings and etchings. The work will be focused on the representation of classical still life as the title suggests; "Natura Morta" is Italian for Still Life, and indeed many languages use the term Dead Life, rather than still to convey the time honored genre. Figures do make appearances in this show however they are often as not mere effigies of the human. There are masks of all expression, painted faces on models, skulls, dolls and German Nutcrackers, paintings of children's blocks from another age depicted Aesopian Fables with stern warnings. Through the stern reminders of vanity and mortality the nature and life spring forth in the abundance of rich colors and fabrics, abundant heads of hair and above all the flowers. If one was to count the number of flowers in the show there would be hundreds, possibly thousands. Life is represented in the cycle of demise, renewal and rebirth. Much like the celebration that takes place in the dead of winter in cultures throughout the world.

On her Slovenian side, her mother is Maria Velikonja, her grandparents were Joseph Velikonja and Tilly Rus Velikonja. Maria Velikonja has conducted some genealogy research, and discovered that the Slovenian baroque painter Anton Cebej is an ancestor. The Velikonja family comes from Predmeja, and the Rus family comes from Novo Mesto. Teresa's grandparents immigrated to the United States in 1955. This exhibit includes a large portrait of Teresa's grandfather, Joseph Velikonja, who died earlier this year in Ljubljana.

When: [Show runs December 21-February 8, on view Monday through Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.](#)

Where: [Embassy of Slovenia, 2410 California Street, NW, Washington D.C. 20008](#)

For more information call: [+1 \(202\) 386-6610](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS - NEW YORK

### **CONCERT BY IN NYC SAŠO SANDIČ, JOE BONADIO, KEVIN BENTS**

Slovenian-born singer-songwriter and guitarist, Sašo Sandič, moved to NYC in 2014. After a couple of open mic appearances, Sašo released an unofficial album of demo songs with the help of Oz Noy, Keith Carlock, Mike J. Visceglia, Kevin Bents, Joe Bonadio, James Genus, Jeff Kazee, Danny Lapidus and Ted Spencer. On January 4 he will perform at the Bitter End in West Village (NYC) with Joe Bonadio (Sting) and Kevin Bents (Bozz Scaggs).

When: [Monday, January 4, 2016 at 8 p.m.](#)

Where: [The Bitter End, 147 Bleecker St., 10012 New York, NY](#)

Line-up: Saso Sandic, Joe Bonadio, Kevin Bents

More information: [www.bitterend.com](#), T: (212) 673-7030

[www.sasosandic.com](#)

<https://sasosandic.bandcamp.com>

[www.facebook.com/sashosmusic](#)

<https://sasosandic.bandcamp.com/album/alley-raven>

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