



President of the Republic of Slovenia

**NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR**

## **Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar at the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Riga**

Riga, 18. December 2023

*Check against delivery.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely honoured to be here today at this very special event – the opening of the Slovenian embassy in Latvia. The opening of an embassy marks a new beginning and reinforces the deep bond that already exists between Slovenia and Latvia.

Slovenia and Latvia are located in different parts of Europe, yet they are so close.

These two countries are natural partners in the EU and allies in NATO. Slovenia and Latvia are both committed to the rule of law, solidarity, multilateralism, human rights and the fight against climate change.

Furthermore, our love for sports, a universal language that knows no boundaries, has been a source of pride for both nations. Whether it be the thrill of a hockey match or the passion of a basketball game, our joint enthusiasm for sports serves as a bridge that connects us beyond diplomatic formalities.

These two countries with similar populations and similar experiences of living in a non-democratic state achieved independence in 1991. For Latvia, this was its second independence. Latvia has been a close ally and partner in the EU and NATO for the last 30 years.

And Slovenia has stood by Latvia and other allies in NATO, including through the participation of Slovenian soldiers in the NATO eFP missions in Latvia. Over 50 Slovenian soldiers, who are part of the multinational contingent at the base in Adazi, contribute to the security of this part of Europe and bring back to Slovenia valuable knowledge about the country and fond memories of its people.

Slovenia and Latvia are also aware of the fragility of the post-World War II international order, not least due to the proximity of the war in our neighbourhood. The war in Ukraine, now entering its third year, has shaken Europe and the world. So have the attack by Hamas and the war in Gaza, which have claimed so many innocent lives among children, women and young people, so many unnecessary and senseless victims.

Slovenia is joining the United Nations Security Council on 1 January, while Latvia will be seeking membership in the years to come, and we look forward to exchanging views and working closely with Latvia during our membership in the Council.

Only through cooperation, dialogue, and support and assistance for Ukraine will we be able to achieve the lasting and just peace that Ukraine deserves. And the people of Gaza deserve.

Your excellencies,

Slovenia and Latvia, both very green countries, are aware that one of the biggest challenges of our time is the fight against climate change. COP28 has reached an agreement, which is in some ways positive, but in other aspects not ambitious enough.

It is therefore all the more important that countries such as Latvia and Slovenia and other EU countries lead the way in the rapid transition to renewable energy sources. Latvia is already taking important steps in this area with its planned offshore wind energy projects.

Slovenia and Latvia also share a love of books.

Culture and language have played a key role in Slovenia in establishing its national identity. Our national hero is the poet France Prešeren. The number of books published in Slovenia and Latvia, countries with a national language spoken by only about 2 million people or even fewer, is truly impressive.

Reading is one of the best skills for establishing critical thinking and building resilience to disinformation.

This year, Slovenia as the guest of honour at the Frankfurt Book Fair, presented the Ljubljana Manifesto on Reading at a Higher Level. Reading teaches us how to think and how to make the best decisions based on our thinking. Democracy needs informed citizens who are ready to contribute to the community. The Canadian writer Margaret Atwood wrote: "Reading at a higher level is the key to the survival of democracies."

In the age of fast-food news and social media, reading is one of the most important weapons against manipulation and disinformation. And Slovenia and Latvia can work even more closely together on exchanging information on how to combat disinformation and manipulation. This is also because Riga is the headquarters of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre, which I have just visited.

May this embassy serve as a hub for fostering cultural exchanges, diplomatic dialogues, and the exploration of new avenues for economic cooperation. The new airline connection between Riga and Ljubljana scheduled to start operations in Summer 2024 will bring business partners and citizens of both countries even closer.

As we open this embassy, let it stand not only as a physical representation of our diplomatic presence, but also as a symbol of our enduring commitment to collaboration and mutual understanding.

Let us raise a glass to this new site of friendship between our nations. Thank you for joining us in this momentous celebration.

Hvala lepa in paldies! And I wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season and a very Happy New Year.