



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar,
on the occasion of the opening of the renovated Collegio dei Nobili Palace in Koper**

Koper, Thursday, 11 September 2025

Dear President of the Republic of Italy, Sergio Mattarella,
Dear Mrs Laura Mattarella,
Dear Mayor of Koper, representatives of state and municipal institutions,
Esteemed Guests,
And above all, dear residents of Koper, pupils, students and esteemed assembly of teachers,

Good morning, everyone.

Buon giorno e un caro saluto a tutti i presenti.

Today is a great celebration for all of us who believe in the power of culture and education. Istria has always been a crossroads and meeting point of cultures and languages. Koper already enjoyed this reputation during the Renaissance as *Caput Histriae* – the Head of Istria, mainly due to its extremely prolific artistic and scientific activity, which even earned it the nickname "the Athens of Istria."

Entering the completely renovated palace of the Collegio dei Nobili, we are stepping into the history of this territory, as it was here that the illustrious sons of this land were educated, including the musician Giuseppe Tartini, historian and jurist Pietro Kandler, economist and enlightened thinker Gian Rinaldo Carli, writer Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini and Fulvio Tomizza, a man of letters and one of the most distinguished ambassadors of Istria in the second half of the 20th century. In times that were not easy, when the border divided our communities and our countries, Tomizza wrote:

"I must fuse my necessary multiplicity with the cement of consistency, even at the cost of solitude, silence, renunciation and oblivion. Only in this way can the border be transformed into an oasis of peace (...), where loyalty and respect for others persist alongside the relics of ancient languages."

(... devo saldare la mia necessaria molteplicità con il cemento della coerenza, costi pure essa solitudine, silenzio, rinuncia, dimenticanza. Soltanto così la frontiera può rovesciarsi in oasi di pace (...), dove accanto alle reliquie di antichi idiomi persistono la lealtà e il rispetto dell'altro.)

That is precisely why your visit to this place, Mr President Mattarella, is of particular significance. Thank you for understanding how important it is for our entire border region to respect minorities as a cultural bridge between our two countries and to understand everything that has happened so that we can build a future together based on mutual trust, respect and sincere friendship. Education plays

the most important role in this regard. Today, the Italian national community in Slovenia is entering a building where young people will be able to learn from each other, discover the world around them and find inspiration for their future lives.

In Italy, too, state schools with Slovenian as the language of instruction, protected by law, guarantee the coexistence of younger generations. Slovenian schools are also attended by many young people from non-Slovenian families or so-called mixed marriages. Just as Slovenia supports the development of Italian schools, we likewise wish for and support the strengthening of the autonomy of Slovenian schools in Italy. Slovenian educators in Italy have carried out this valuable mission since the post-war period, and I expect that they will be able to continue doing so.

I am proud that Slovenia has established a solid system for protecting the Italian national community. In the municipalities of Koper, Izola, Piran and Ankaran there are public kindergartens, primary and secondary schools with Italian as the language of instruction. The Slovenian state does not close Italian classes due to low enrolment, but ensures their preservation and development in line with Slovenia's constitutional principles. The local administration is bilingual, and the Italian community is represented in the national parliament. Relations between the Slovenian authorities and the Italian community are governed by permanent and effective consultation mechanisms.

These municipalities maintain Italian kindergartens even when attendance is low, as this is a constitutional obligation, not an economic calculation. The Slovenian approach is based on the awareness that minority institutions are essential for preserving linguistic and cultural diversity and, at the same time, represent the strongest bridge between the two countries.

Minority educational institutions are not a cost, but rather an asset and a source of wealth. They are the living roots of the community that made a decisive contribution to the history, culture and identity of coastal towns. Today, the bilingual municipalities of Slovenian Istria have the opportunity to present themselves as a European model of successful coexistence, linguistic diversity and cultural openness.

I often like to emphasise the importance of education and knowledge, which are the central pillars of progress in any community. However, education is not only a means to economic success, it is also the foundation for broader social awareness and responsibility. Education shapes an individual's values, worldview and critical thinking skills. Access to quality education must be a right for every individual, regardless of their social or financial status. At the same time, we must consider how to prepare the education system for the challenges of the future. This includes stronger links between education and the labour market, the introduction of new content such as digital, media and financial literacy, the promotion of innovation among young people, and the development of critical thinking, which is essential for understanding the complexity of modern society.

Let me also address all those for whom this building has been renovated and for whom it should truly be a second home.

Dear pupils and students. *Cari alunni e studenti.*

Be proud of your bilingualism and biculturalism, which are an extraordinary asset in today's world. Mastering two languages – Slovenian and Italian, and perhaps another language, opens the door to a

better understanding of the world and gives you more opportunities in life. You live at the crossroads of the Slavic and Romanic worlds, which is an exceptional advantage. That is why you should be proud of your cultural heritage and language – and I am sure you are. Regardless of the language you are learning, I urge you to make the most of your schooling, for only then will you be able to grow into confident and successful individuals. Be compassionate and attentive to the needs of your neighbours, indeed of all others and those who are different.

Let me conclude by borrowing a thought from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Thank you, and best of luck.

Grazie e auguri.