



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

**NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR**

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar  
at the State Ceremony on the occasion of the Statehood Day**

Ljubljana, 24 June 2026

***Check against delivery.***

*Dear Slovenians, both at home and abroad, citizens and residents of the Republic of Slovenia, ladies and gentlemen,*

Thirty-five years ago Slovenia became an independent state. Over these years, we have shown the world that being small is no limitation. Small and large nations alike have the power and courage to achieve their goals. Many nations – dozens around the world – envy us. They still dream of having their own state, while we were fortunate to realise that dream. The fact that at the plebiscite in December 1990 we were united in our decision on independence – with 93% voter turnout and 96% votes for – should have forever strengthened us as a community. A proud and confident community united in choosing and pursuing its goals.

However, we must honestly acknowledge that the work of building our community is not yet complete. We are not completely united with regard to the constitutional values or our vision of the country's development. Trust between us has eroded over time, and this trend continues today. Vindictiveness and revanchism, even the disregard for and disparagement of state institutions, have become acceptable among politicians on both sides of the political divide. For years, from government to government, we have watched fear rise in the public administration, education and science sectors, media and civil society with every change of power. Who will stay, who will be replaced. Who will get what and who will be deprived. Fear, because professional and personal competence are not the decisive factors in filling many, especially – although not exclusively – leadership positions.

Too often, political affiliation takes precedence. This is like replacing the first-choice goalkeeper of a national football team with the third-choice one simply because the latter eagerly agrees with everything the new head coach says and thus ingratiates himself with him. Such an approach is detrimental not only to a team, but also to a country.

Just as it can be detrimental to a nation if it is not able to face its historical traumas and overcome them. We may sometimes feel alone in our pain. We are not. Many countries are still dealing with the trauma of killings during the First and Second World Wars, the post-war period and the Cold War. In Slovenia, human remains have been waiting for a peaceful, quiet and dignified farewell for eight decades. Let us finally give them such a farewell without political games, without division, with the agreement of all: those on the right, on the left and in the centre. Together.

I have said on many occasions: let reconciliation be Slovenia's new independence. This year is particularly fitting for Slovenia to enter the history books as a nation that has passed this fundamental test of maturity. To become a community that is able to deal with divisions, to overcome them together and to unite. A nation does not become great because of its power or wealth. It becomes great when it knows how to preserve its humanity. When it listens and hears. When every individual is capable of understanding the pain of another and accepting it deep in their heart. When every person condemns any crime, regardless of who committed it and when.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

The burden of the past is so heavy that it can sometimes prevent us from looking to the future. Our path to the future is also hindered by the lack of a clear and shared vision for our development. As a community, we must know how to talk to one another and agree on what Slovenia's development means and what it should be based on.

When we talk about development, we are referring to economic and political progress, advances in science, technology and art, and the development of high-quality, accessible public services in healthcare, education and sustainable development. Development is indivisible. Everyone has the right to it. This is why politics should reach the widest consensus possible in shaping it, to ensure that no one is overlooked or excluded.

A community is united only when every member can identify with its vision of development and when this vision protects the dignity of everyone, from children to the ill and the elderly. This is the most important task of decision-makers. It is certainly not easy. But we must protect the dignity of each and every one of us, through legal certainty and equality before the law, which is particularly important in at least six areas.

First, the system of checks and balances is not only the cornerstone of every development policy, it is the cornerstone and essence of the Slovenian Constitution, which clearly separates the three branches of power. This system must prevent arbitrariness, concentration or even abuse of power. As the legislator, the National Assembly plays a key role in adopting the country's policies, and deputies must set an example with their actions and expression. The Government has a special responsibility to represent the interests of the country, which means the interests of our entire community, and not only certain political options, interest groups or individuals. In this system, a fair, responsible, effective and above all independent judiciary plays a particularly important role.

The system of checks and balances is a matter of pressing state importance and must be considered very seriously if we want to preserve our democracy. Every part of this system plays its role, including the appointment of experts proposed by independent commissions or the President to head supervisory institutions. In the broadest sense, the system of checks and balances includes independent supervisory institutions: the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, the Information Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the Court of Audit. The same applies to the State Prosecutor's Office and the Police. These institutions are an important part of development, as they guide us towards better and more responsible actions. The subjugation of any independent supervisory body to one branch of power, in particular the executive branch, is dangerous. Very dangerous.

Second, the economy and the social state are closely interconnected parts of our overall development. There can be no development without a dynamic and successful economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises in particular are the driving force of Slovenia's economic development, and without their success there can be no social state. But the reverse is equally true: without a social state, without access to social and economic rights for the people of Slovenia, there can be no development. Under its Constitution, Slovenia is not only a state governed by the rule of law, but also a social state. If, therefore, we wish to live by our Constitution and build Slovenia as an economically competitive, solidarity-based, secure country whose people enjoy a high quality of life, we must not demonise taxes. Our society has been built on intergenerational solidarity. We have long taken pride in our strong public healthcare and education systems, and many other public services. Today, however, we are rightly asking whether high-quality healthcare remains accessible to everyone, particularly those on lower incomes. Not everyone can afford private medical care. And this is a challenge that no government has yet succeeded in resolving.

Cutting taxes is always a politically popular move, and business leaders also advocate lower taxes. However, a misleading and insincere tax policy does not serve the development of our community. There can be no social state, including universal access to high-quality public services, unless we are prepared to pay for it. If taxes are reduced in one area, development can only be financed through other sources of tax revenue. If the Government truly wishes to act in the interests and for the well-being of all the people of Slovenia, it must openly and honestly explain, both when shaping and implementing its development vision, how we will finance the development of our social state.

Third, a high-quality public education system is the starting point for the successful development of our country and the community that lives within it. Without excellent education, there can be no educated society of critically thinking individuals, no successful entrepreneurs, no scientists, no healthcare professionals and many others without whom we cannot even imagine our society. We are capable of maintaining such a system of education because we possess the knowledge and experience to do so – knowledge and experience that are comparable at home and abroad.

School is a child's first introduction to understanding and studying the society in which we live. That is why the kind of education system we have is very important. First and foremost, it should be a high-quality public system accessible to all. A system in which children will acquire knowledge and skills, learn to distinguish truth from lies and disinformation, and a system in which they will come to understand and internalise the importance of empathy for people and nature, critical thinking and a culture of dialogue. The latest results of pupils in national examinations Give cause for concern. Serious concern.

A modern school, as we understand and demand it, enables and encourages the freedom of critical thinking and reasoning. In order for the education system to contribute to the development of our community, it must be based on the values enshrined in our Constitution. This is the "ideology" that we need in schools, and it is what the logic of development requires.

Fourth, high-quality public media, with credible, objective and independent journalism, are an important factor in the development of a democratic state and in strengthening our community. This is particularly essential today, in an era of disinformation and its relentless spread into every sphere of society. Unfortunately, our 35-year history has also become a history of constant struggles for influence over the media, and all too often a history of attempts to discredit and silence journalistic exposés of corruption, foreign interference in elections, and other scandals of international dimensions. The announced measures against non-governmental organisations and civil society in general, which play an important role in the broader system of checks and balances, are reminiscent of the revival of the old methods of influence and control that independent Slovenia firmly rejected 35 years ago.

The subordination of public media and other critical actors is not merely an attack on the freedom of journalism. It is also a path towards intellectual conformity, enabling those in power to do as they please, even if it is illegal, since compliant media will not hold them to account. Turning public media into state media and promoting private media at the expense of public media is not conducive to development. We all want high-quality, diverse and trustworthy media content; more than that, we are entitled to it. At the same time, we should not forget one important distinction: a commercial media outlet produces content in order to make money, whereas a public media outlet receives funding in order to produce content.

A clear message should therefore be addressed to those in power and to the opposition: restricting independent public media that are critical of those in power, or reducing or abolishing their funding, requires no particular intellectual effort – you take such measures simply because you can. It is far more demanding, and far more state-building and development-oriented, to enable and encourage high-quality journalism that will credibly, critically and objectively carry out its task – promoting a diversity of opinions that are not based on sensationalism, half-truths, discrediting, and the indiscriminate, often uncritical reproduction of foreign contributions, but rather stem from verified facts and original research. Only such a media landscape means a free society.

Fifth, it is necessary to ensure the defence capability of our country. The community in which we live is capable of development only if it is resilient; if we know how to defend it, and if others know that we are also capable of defending it. Membership in NATO and the European Union is important, if not crucial, for strengthening our resilience and security. However, that alone is not enough. The experience of 1991 shows us that we can defeat an enemy only if we are united and deeply believe in our country and our community. Our love for our homeland is our greatest strength, and it is difficult to defeat a nation fighting for its own survival. Therefore, let us each day remember, with humility and pride, all the events in which members of all parts of Slovenian society, from the Territorial Defence and the police to civilians, participated in the struggle for the independence and sovereignty of our country and also gave their lives for it. I thank them. And I thank you.

Sixth, there can be no development without empathy for fellow human beings and respect for their dignity. In the world, we have become a respected country because we nurture qualities that are rarely seen today: we care about our fellow human beings; we condemn injustices, regardless of where they occur or who commits them. We are not afraid to speak out against genocide and crimes against humanity at any time, in any place and regardless of who is listening. We are not afraid because, throughout our history, we too have been victims of violence as a nation. We must never forget that our grandparents, aunts and uncles also suffered greatly during the Second World War. They died in concentration and labour camps; Ljubljana was the only capital city surrounded by barbed wire and bunkers; and as many as 63,000 of our compatriots were expelled from their homes. Is all this alone not a stark enough reminder? That violence against a nation can happen to anyone? At any time? And are we to remain silent? It would be irresponsible to remain silent. We will not remain silent.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

As a nation, we have achieved our greatest successes throughout history when we joined forces and stood together. Although this happened all too rarely, those moments proved decisive for our destiny and led us to victory. In today's uncertain times, our unity is once again being tested. Perhaps even more than we care to admit, which is why we must ask ourselves: do we want our future to be built on mutual recriminations or on cooperation and solidarity instead? On a society in which everyone can express their views freely and responsibly. On a state in which the system of checks and balances functions properly, and where security means more than merely the absence of war – it means trust, justice and respect: among ourselves and towards the environment in which we live. And on an economy that enables a dignified life for all: one that allows young people to build their future at home, in Slovenia, while ensuring older generations the dignity in later life that they have rightfully earned through their hard work.

It is therefore our responsibility to finally overcome the shadow cast by the Second World War and its aftermath. It is our responsibility to demonstrate and prove that our model of development is inclusive and based on solidarity, confident and respectful – one that guarantees everyone access to fundamental human rights and freedoms. Thirty-five years of independence is a short time, yet within this period we have achieved a great deal and, most importantly, we have placed Slovenia firmly on the world map. And we have done so with pride. There is almost no indicator on which Slovenia does not rank among the countries that still care about the well-being, security and freedom of their people, as well as about the natural environment that surrounds us – an environment that many others envy. The goal of development policy must therefore be to safeguard what we have achieved, preserve it and build upon it. All of us, together as a community. Diverse in freedom, united in statehood.

*My heartfelt congratulations to all of you on this important anniversary of our country. Thank you.*