



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Keynote address by
the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar,
at the ceremonial opening of GO! 2025
European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica–Gorizia**

Europe Square, 8 February 2025

*Dear Mr President, mio caro amico Sergio,
Dear Mayors Samo Turel and Rodolfo Ziberna,
Distinguished guests from Slovenia and abroad,
Dear Slovenians and residents of Gorica,
cari amici, nostri vicini di Gorizia e d'Italia,
cari tutti cittadini d'Europa.*

Today, 8 February 2025, will be remembered in our hearts as a historic day. A day of a century-old vision of peace, freedom, good neighbourly relations and mutual respect. Of friendship and love between us.

Today, Slovenians at home, abroad and around the world celebrate the Slovenian Cultural Holiday. On this day in 1849, our greatest poet, France Prešeren, put down his pen for the last time. During the Spring of Nations, he wrote Zdravljica, A Toast, his most important work, which since 2020 has borne the European Heritage Label and whose seventh stanza has been chosen by the Slovenian nation as the Slovenian national anthem:

"God's blessing on all nations, Who long and work for that bright day, When o'er earth's habitations No war, no strife shall hold its sway; Who long to see That all men free No more shall foes, but neighbours be!"

Prešeren's words are so dear to me not only because they have become our anthem, but also because, as early as the mid-19th century, they outlined Slovenia's internal and foreign policy vision, which we are living today as an independent country and a member of the European Union. Peace, freedom, good neighbourly relations, mutual respect.

That is why today our hearts are so touched by the historic importance of this project. It is heart-warming that on Prešeren Day, in Europe Square, where we became part of the European family more than twenty years ago, together with our neighbours, our friends from Italy, we are inaugurating the

European Capital of Culture, which for the first time in its history brings together two cities, two countries, two nations.

Nova Gorica and Gorizia are twin cities; they are the European Capital of Culture 2025. Together, we are inaugurating it on the day we celebrate our cultural holiday in Slovenia, and in the year that marks 80 years since the end of the Second World War, on the ruins of which the survivors shook hands with each other, forgave each other, and, on the basis of reconciliation between nations, promised each other: never again war and trampling on humanity. The European Union, our common homeland, today still stands on these foundations. On a promise of and a commitment to peace, freedom, good neighbourly relations, mutual respect – a promise that we must never, ever renege on. On the recognition that "there is so much more that unites us than divides us", as noted by my predecessor, President Pahor, from whom I proudly and responsibly took over the honourable patronage of this historic joint project. And I am particularly grateful to you, dear President Sergio Mattarella, for being with us today as our friend and leader of our neighbouring and friendly Italian Republic. Thank you, Mr President – for your statesmanship, your friendship, your commitment to coexistence and to a common, bright future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe and the world seem to be at a crossroads of values, and we must not forget our past when we plan for the future. Nova Gorica, hand in hand with neighbouring Gorizia, is taking up the honour and title of the European Capital of Culture as a unique conurbation aware of its past, but above all with a responsibility for our common future and the generations to come, who deserve peace, freedom and creativity, but never in a way that deprives others of these values or oppresses them. That is why this European Capital of Culture is truly unique and historically important. Because Nova Gorica and Gorizia and the people here also coexist and co-create, inspired by Prešeren's verses and the recommendation of our poet Srečko Kosovel: "Let us be one in spirit and love, but maintain our own faces."

Distinguished Guests,

On behalf of my country, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the dedicated and passionate artists who have spent several years preparing a varied and rich programme. I am particularly pleased that many joint projects have also been developed by the two minorities. I am confident that each of us will be inspired by the programme and feel the love and responsibility with which it has been prepared. Warm greetings and best wishes from Europe Square also to the German city of Chemnitz, which is also the European Capital of Culture 2025, inviting visitors to discover the unseen under the motto of "C the Unseen".

Let's go forward, Europe without borders! Avanti Europa senza confini!