

**Speech by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša,
at the celebration marking the Reunification of the Primorska region with
the Motherland**

Portorož, 16 September 2005

(Check against delivery)

Dear people of Primorska,
dear fellow Slovenians,
esteemed citizens of the Republic of Slovenia!

For the first time in history, the Reunification of the Primorska region with the Motherland is celebrated as the national holiday. It is a great pleasure and honour for me that today we can remember this great event which does not only bring together the people of Primorska but the entire Slovenian nation.

We are celebrating an event that demonstrates the strength of the survival of a nation that throughout the history was placed before many severe ordeals.

Through the centuries, the Primorska region experienced several changes of its borders. However, regardless of numerous changes reaching back to the times of the Venetian Republic, Habsburg Monarchy, Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Kingdom of Italy, and of course their successor states, Primorska has always been present in the Slovenian mind particularly as a window into the world. This close relationship between the Slovenian nation and the sea may not only be seen in terms of geographical criteria, but also through spiritual eyes.

It was through Primorska that the world under the Alps met Mediterranean cultures during thousands of years. And through this region, the Roman culture penetrated our land. Here I do not refer only to the most ancient road but also to the spreading of bourgeois culture and finally the Christianity which brought us closer to Europe and its spiritual tradition. The Slovenian Reformation, which made us culturally advanced through the first Slovenian book, lifting us even above some European nations, got its first incentives from Trieste.

This extraordinary city by the Adriatic sea, which was always multi-national and characterised by strong Slovenian presence, was also an intermediary in the settlement of some families whose members were fully integrated into the Slovenian culture and even became its forerunners.

Let me just mention the members of Valvasor and Zois families. Through the Trieste district we got acquainted with Humanism, Renaissance and other spiritual flows. Through the history, this has also made the Primorska region the spiritual lungs of Slovenia.

The first Slovenian major entrepreneurs such as the Kalister family from Trieste emerged from among the people of Primorska.

The Primorska region was also the last piece of the Slovenian land on which our numerous emigrants laid their eyes before setting out to the wide sea.

For hundreds of years, Primorska has been an inherent part of the Slovenian ethnical territory. Its outstanding strategic position was a blessing for Slovenians but also the target of many foreign appetites. Slovenians of Primorska were often victims of the play of interests on the part of great powers. By the Treaty of London, concluded by the Entente powers in 1915, a large part of the Slovenian and Croatian ethnical territories passed to the Kingdom of Italy. Not even the battles fought during the First World War, in which the soldiers of Primorska and, in fact, all Slovenian soldiers, distinguished themselves by their bravery in defending their land, could remedy this injustice. Although Slovenians of Primorska had experienced the Italian irredentism and imperialism for at least a century, it was the Fascism that made them face the most severe ordeals. They were not only subjected to democratic and national oppression, but were in fact victims of ethnocide. Everything was done to make them disappear as Slovenians. For this reason, the events associated with the arson of 'Narodni dom' and other Slovenian institutions in Trieste, with the uprising in Marežige, with Bazovica and its heroes, as well as the patriotic activities and national liberation movement of Slovenians from Primorska before and during the Second World War, i.e. from the TIGR anti-fascist organisation to Janko Premrl - Vojko onwards, can be considered part of a long-term anti-fascist resistance that cannot be compared to anything in the world.

Because Slovenian intellectuals were particularly threatened by the fascism, they had to leave their homeland and emigrate to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Some of them were even moved to Macedonia. Many simple people, particularly workers, were forced to look for work in overseas countries. However, the majority of them remained faithful to their Slovenian origins even there, so that on this day, we should also remember them and publicly acknowledge their loyalty to the Slovenian nation.

The Slovenian Government, out of respect for the genuine anti-fascism – from those simple boys who tied their mouths with scarves because they were not allowed to speak or sing in Slovenian, to the 'Društvo svečnikov sv. Pavla', a unique resistance organisation in Europe, and finally to the TIGR –, for the first time decided to organise a state celebration of the Day of Uprising on Mala gora over Ribnica. It was there that the first armed conflict between the TIGR members – antifascist rebels – and the occupying forces took place. Reactions to this memorial ceremony uncovered several decades of abuse of anti-fascism with which we cannot agree, in the name of the truth and also in the name of all those who suffered the most under the Fascism. Primorska's share in the Slovenian history is too significant and the sacrifice of the people of Primorska to remain Slovenians too great to allow that all their persistence in the loyalty to their nation and the Slovenian language is reduced to but a few years and to a single, totalitarian ideology. Slovenian public largely agrees that Slovenian

Primorska deserves a special remembrance day for its loyalty to the Slovenian nation and the oldest anti-fascism in Europe. In the past, a lot of important dates fatally shaped the reality of Primorska. However, according to the general opinion, 15 September is the most appropriate date for Primorska's holiday, for it is the day when the Peace Treaty with Italy entered into force in 1947. Slovenia was then allotted a large part of the Goriška region and there was optimism regarding the possibility of obtaining the Adriatic coast as well. In fact, 15 September reminds us of a partial international remedy of the injustice inflicted on us by the Treaty of London in 1915. If the communist leadership of the post-war Yugoslavia had not pushed the country to the totalitarian side of the iron curtain, we could have also counted on Trieste, Gorizia and the Veneto region. Despite it all, the Peace Treaty of 15 September is a specific international recognition of Slovenians and also an acknowledgment of their two-and-a-half decade-long anti-fascism. It would be irresponsible to overlook such an important event.

Due credit for this recognition goes to the courage of Slovenian Partisans of the Primorska region, who shed blood in battles with the occupying forces. Several decades of struggle of the Primorska patriots against national oppression, armed resistance of the TIGR and the Primorska Partisans, and the military victory of the allied forces, created very favourable conditions for the reunification of the entire Slovenian national territory with the Motherland. Regrettably, the then state policy, blinded by the inter-nationalistic ideology, failed to make full use of these arguments. Even great efforts invested in the negotiations by individual Yugoslav or mainly Slovenian experts after the end of the war could no longer move strategic geopolitical forces of the Cold War. While commemorating those times, we should not forget particularly tragic events after the Second World War when many Slovenian patriots, democrats and anti-fascists were prosecuted and even killed for their opposition to Communism. In recalling this, we are especially grateful to those soldiers of Primorska who under the British military assistance parachuted into the Slovenian territory and were then liquidated as criminals by the UN. The location of their graves is still unknown.

Dear fellow Slovenians!

This holiday would not exist today if Slovenia was not a free, independent and democratic country. Therefore, we owe special thanks to all the inhabitants of Primorska who made significant contributions to the independence of Slovenia and to the international recognition of the Republic of Slovenia. People of the Primorska region, including those who live in the neighbouring Italian Republic, have important merits in this regard. This is witnessed by the annual meetings in Draga, which were, particularly in the totalitarian times, extremely important for the Slovenian self-reflection and especially for the development of democratic thinking. As an important contribution of Primorska during the War for Slovenia

in 1991 and as a significant event in the chain of brave deeds by the members of the Slovenian Territorial Defence and police officers in the Primorska region, the venture of the Major Srečko Lisjak's combat group should undoubtedly be brought forward and highlighted. With brave action, the group took over the border crossing in Rožna dolina and defeated a much stronger troop of the aggressor, the Yugoslav People's Army, and in decisive moments opened to Slovenia an important passage to the West. Since Slovenia's independence, our fellow Slovenians on the other side of the border - which is getting increasingly dimmer within the EU - may be treated, without distinction or division, as an equal and integral part of the Slovenia's national body. Through international contacts, the Republic of Slovenia actively supports their efforts to exercise the national rights. Back at home, it is our duty that the National Assembly finally passes the law regulating the rights of Slovenians without Slovenian citizenship, which our Constitution has required for the last fourteen years.

Because of our mistaken political and economic systems in the SFRY as well as Yugoslav military interests – despite substantial efforts, resourcefulness and unselfishness of the people of Primorska in the past decades – the development of Primorska after the Second World War was not such as it could or should have been. Although as late as in the beginning of the third millennium, the construction of the motorway network is in its final stage of completion. This will not only bring the entire Primorska closer to other Slovenian regions but, as a result, also encourage faster economic and social development. In this context, both new higher education centres, developed in the towns of Koper and Nova Gorica, are of particular importance. The Slovenian Primorska will be on an equal footing with the neighbouring Italian regions only by accelerating the development of science and education; in this way, it will be able to even strengthen cooperation in joint European projects. The university in Koper is increasingly recognised in wider international area. I hope that all conditions for the transformation of the Nova Gorica Polytechnic into the fourth Slovenian University will soon be met. Success in the field of science and education will inevitably be accompanied by better economic achievements. The holiday of the Reunification of the Primorska with the Motherland marks the nation-wide cohesion in the fight for shared values, but also underlines our openness to the world. The Slovenian nation must never again be sacrificed on the altar of geostrategic or ideological interests. Today's Europe is a Europe of equal nations, and I am happy that we share the same position with the neighbouring Italy and other partners in the European Union, which we joined last year. The Slovenia's foreign policy has always been based on efforts in favour of good neighbourly relations and this will also be the case with regard to our common European future.

Dear fellow Slovenians!

This celebration, which is appropriate for the national holiday, is the first to mark the reunification of Primorska with the Motherland. I am delighted that we have finally succeeded in making this nation-building step. I am pleased that we will soon be able to celebrate a similar holiday with our fellow Slovenians in the Štajerska and Prekmurje regions. With some difficulty, but inevitably, we are becoming aware that Slovenia's history is also rich in great events that have united us and that we can genuinely celebrate together. This brings us together in our common endeavours to strengthen the Slovenian culture and economy with a view to ensuring the prosperity for all of us.

Dear Primorska, dear Slovenian Istria and Goriška, please accept my sincere congratulations to you on your, as well as our joint holiday.