

**Formal Address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša
at the Rudolf Maister Day
(Maribor, 25 November 2005)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When in 1991 National Holidays were being determined, some of very important historic turning points were ignored. It was forgotten that we had to preserve and protect ourselves already a long time ago to be able to have, in the time of our generation, our own independent state, recognised by the international community. Without a hundred - year tradition of the preservation of the national identity and without a long tradition of attempts to establish a limited or clearly open statehood, we would not have existed today. One such attempt was the consolidation of the northern and northeastern borders without which we would have lost Styria and Carinthia. Without them also Prekmurje would not have belonged to the Slovene nation as it would not have had the united territory to attach itself to it. Thus Maister's deed equals to the preservation of Slovenia and consequently represents a solid basis from which the Slovene state could grow. This is why Maister and his protection of Styria and Carinthia had to be elevated into a National Holiday. This is our debt to this exceptional historic turning point that founded Slovenia in such an important way.

It is important to celebrate as National Holidays the events that do not originate only from Ljubljana but also from other Slovene places as they are of no lesser importance for the preservation of the Slovenes. In this way, by means of a National Holiday, we have paid our debt to Primorska for its exceptional fidelity to the Slovenehood. Next year we shall do the same with Prekmurje. It is important that at last we become aware of the fact that Slovenia, in spite of its geographical smallness, is a large and versified unity that was throughout the history often divided and lived different destinies. Nevertheless, it has always aspired to be so closely together as it is today. The aspiration for the common unity had to be written among the National Holidays with the aim to remind the future generations of our coming into existence, of our uniting and of our preservation. And, in the case of Styria and Carinthia we have to remember who was the one who, with his courage and deeds, made it possible.

Rudolf Maister is one of those personalities in Slovene history whose life and work are inseparably connected with the process of the national-political emancipation of the Slovene nation. He entered the scene in the time when the Slovene nation was facing uncertain destiny. After centuries of living in the multinational framework of the Austrian Hungarian Empire it found itself in the storm of the First World War and after its end it had to fight the pressures of the great powers that wanted to territorially impoverish the small Slovene nation. Along with this, the then Slovene political leadership had to face unitaristic pressures from the Belgrade elite during the transition into the Yugoslav state framework. Severe postwar circumstances joined political troubles which additionally aggravated the every day life of the Slovenes.

In those circumstances it turned out that all the Slovene statesmen were not equal to that demanding task. This also became evident in the issue of demarcation of the Slovene ethnic territory in the new european order. However, among the Slovene leaders there were also such who were capable of facing the challenges. The leaders who had the vision of how the Slovene nation should be preserved and how it should develop its potentials in spite of the unfriendly international milieu. Such a leader was Rudolf Maister. A soldier and a poet. In spite of difficult circumstances he proved that in the crucial moments the Slovenes know how

to acquire from their inner strength and will, how to make their stand for their right and to defend their way in their history. By means of a lightning-like and determined action he rescued Maribor and preserved the then Lower Styria as the land of the Slovenes. He realized the everlasting Slovenian aspiration for a free and unified national development by an energetical military action in those decisive days of November 1918.

The National Council for Styria started to establish local committees in this part of our country already from the end of September 1918, especially in the towns and boroughs with German administration. Simultaneously national guards were organized, after the final disintegration of the Austrian Hungarian Empire and the establishment of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs on 29 October 1918, also the military power was transferred to the Slovenes. The power of the National Council who established the new Slovene authority, took over the post and the railways, surveyed all the supply in the territory of the Slovene Styria, was, after 1 November 1918, no longer threatened by the relics of the former administration. It was on this very day that major Rudolf Maister, the commander of the 26th Black Army Department proclaimed himself a military commander of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in this town. Upon his demand, on the same day the National Council also formally conferred on him the post of a commander and the general rank. Thus he acquired also the political support.

The Slovene liberation will was working hand in hand. General Maister reacted fast and already on 1 November, upon his personal appeal to the soldiers, composed two military units of some 160 soldiers. With them he occupied the majority of barracks and some strategic points in the town. At the same time he ordered all the foreign officers and soldiers to leave the town by the 3 November; several hundreds of German officers and soldiers left Maribor that day. A few days later the Slovene military units were associated into the Styria border command, led by general Maister.

In the strengthening of the Slovene administration in Styria, Maister's call-up to mobilization on 9 November was of crucial importance. On 21 November on the basis of his call-up, the first Maribor regiment with three battalions, a complementary battalion and special units, comprising 70 officers and 2000 soldiers was set up. This was a strong and important Slovene military formation that played a decisive historic role on 23 November 1918. It was on this day that the units of the Maribor regiment, together with the units of Celje infantry regiment, with 1000 men, in a splendidly prepared action under the commandship of general Maister disarmed and disbanded the armed security service Marburger Schutzwehr that was under the command of a German-oriented City Council and consisted of 1500 men. Since then the Slovene authority in Maribor was never more seriously endangered.

From 23 November 1918 on general Maister had his military potentials at his disposal for other important operations as the northern border of the new state had not been determined yet. Maister started the military penetration to the Slovene ethnic border territory in Styria and occupied it to Radgona, Šentilj and Kozjak. Even before that in Slovenian Carinthia his militia occupied the Mežica Valley up to Dravograd. The occupation of this part of the Slovene ethnic border territory was an accomplished fact, that underwent also the trial of the Paris Peace Conference and its determination of the new map of Europe after the First World War.

The motion for the plebiscite for the determination of the state border in Styria, similarly as was proposed for Carinthia, demanded by Austria, was not accepted. The Supreme council of the Peace Conference decided that the Mura river was the border between Austria and the new

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, established on 1 December 1918. At the same time the Council decided that Radgona would belong to Austria and Maribor to the Yugoslav state. Thus was, by the Peace Treaty that entente concluded with Austria on 10 September 1919 in Saint-Germain, almost completely determined even today valid part of our state border, based on the national enforcement will of general Maister and his military units.

Capriciousness of the history, however, was not satisfied. The attempts to change its course were thwarted as well. At the end of November 1918 a considerably strong strike movement was developed in Maribor among the German personnel of railways, post and employees in the courts of law. The movement, along with some socio-economic demands, supported German aspirations for the Slovene territory and was predominantly political. The movement was in the beginning of December disabled by the Slovene authorities with the support of general Maister. After the historic changes, strongly marked in Styria by general Maister, the Slovenes from Maribor and Slovene Styria were justly overwhelmed by a self-confident national pride.

Maister's national will and the will of Slovene militia as well as the will of all the men and women, based on a clear and active determination to achieve the respect of our national existence, is an important historic basis of our national self-confidence. When we think about it, it reveals the power of self-awareness which led Maister and his co-fighters. They were determined enough to, in spite of the experience of the great war or »the years of atrocities«, as Cankar named the first world conflict, react rapidly and efficiently on the basis of their national commitment and comprehension of the far-reach of the moment for the nation's life perspective. We, the Slovenes have been enjoying the fruits of their courage for almost nine decades. From the year 1991 as the citizens of the independent Republic of Slovenia.

Maister's deed was a deed of a sound-minded and into future oriented man with the heart of a fighter, fighting for a just cause. In this part of Slovenia his courage served as an example to Šarh and his co-fighters in the Pohorje battalion that withstood the foreign occupation during the Second World War. He was a shining example to the defenders of Pekre in 1991 and to the members of the Slovene Territorial Defence and of the Police who especially in the Slovene Styria and Carinthia courageously resisted the aggressor YNA in the war for Slovenia. Also today a great part of the professional structure of the Slovene Army comes from this part of Slovenia, so positively marked with Maister's military tradition.

The deed that we dedicate the today's National Holiday to was a courageous deed of individuals and of the nation in the time that was in Europe of that time the time of divisions and demarcations. A stormy night after the years of hard war trials. The night in which the boundary stones were being moved, old fetters as well as nice memories were being buried, new foundations of a new unity and new integrations were being set up.

Today we are celebrating for the first time Maister's day as a National Holiday in the time when Slovenia is as an independent state and a member of the EU after more than 80 years of stirring history on the threshold of a prosperous future. We have secured it with the integration into EU and NATO. The development up to now has given us a sufficiently solid basis that we can, without overstretching the belts, meet the challenges of the reforms, planned for and already implemented practically throughout Europe. For the reason to be able to increase the economic growth and employment and to increase prosperity of us all on this material basis. To be able to take advantage of the positive effects of the globalisation and to protect ourselves against the negative ones. Also for the improvement of our economic and social environment courage and greater unity are necessary. In the same way as the dithering

of the Ljubljana policy and exaggerated divisions were harmful in Maister's times they can be harmful to us now as well. To be adverse to rational changes in the world that is changing faster and faster every day means to accept a bad future, increased unemployment and economic regression. Slovenia does not deserve this. We are sufficient, we know enough and we are capable of reading the signs of the time in our as well as in the european sky in a right way and in time, as Maister did it in 1918, and do everything we can to take advantage of the opportunities.

Dear co-citizens, dear Slovenes, may I extend sincere congratulations to you on the occasion of the National Holiday, Rudolf Maister Day. His historic heritage is the defended northeastern border. His spiritual heritage is love for the homeland, knowledge, courage and a poem. Let us preserve them for the future generations.