



Ambassador of
Slovenia to Japan
Dr Ana Polak Petrič

Celebrating independence, embracing unity

Since joining the foreign services in 2003, Ambassador of Slovenia to Japan Dr Ana Polak Petrič has served her country in a variety of roles. She acted as human rights officer at the permanent mission of Slovenia to the UN and other international organisations (2007–2011) and as high representative for succession issues (2014–2019). She has also been assistant professor of international and European Law at the European Law Faculty in Ljubljana since 2016. Petrič took up her post in Japan in 2019.

What is the main focus of the embassy right now?

Right now, our focus is on preparations for activities in Japan related to the Slovenian presidency of the EU, which we will hold in the second half of 2021, as well as on the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Slovenian independence on 25 June.

We are also trying to prepare as much as possible for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games – but due to the unpredictable circumstances, this is quite a difficult task. Slovenia has great hopes to promote our tourism, food, business, science, and culture. And we also plan to win lots of medals! Slovenia is often one of the most successful nations in winning Olympic medals per capita.

We strongly support Japan and its people in their efforts to organise a successful and safe Olympic and Paralympic Games. Slovenia and Japan have strong ties when it comes to sport; there is ongoing collaboration between teams, athletes, and federations.

For me personally, being at the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games will be the realisation of a longstanding dream. When I was young, I was on the Slovene national rhythmic gymnastics team, and I attended all major events, including European and world

championships. But I never participated at the Olympic Games. So, even though it won't be as a competitor, attending the Games this year would surely be one of the highlights of my life.

How will the embassy be marking the 30th anniversary of independence?

For Slovenia, this is a very important occasion. Statehood Day on 25 June is a holiday that officially commemorates the country's declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. But, even more importantly, it honours the day on which the centuries-old dream of Slovenes to live in an independent state finally came true. It is the day that we celebrate our resilience and the fact that, as a nation of two million, we managed to survive a long, turbulent period of European history with our language and culture intact. It is also the day when we are thankful to all who have helped to preserve Slovenian culture and language abroad.


So, one area of focus in marking 30 years of Slovenia's independence will be on underlining the importance of the friendship between Slovenia and Japan. Together with the Slovenian community here, we will present the history and development of relations between the two countries and recognise individuals who have been key in creating this partnership.

Could you tell me about how Slovenia is preparing for its presidency of the EU Council in the second half of this year?

The Slovenian presidency in 2021 will take place in this most difficult of times, so we have a responsibility to engage, lead, and participate – with all our knowledge and resources – to work towards the post-Covid-19 rehabilitation of our societies and build a bright future for Europe and its global partners.

Therefore, the main objectives of our presidency will be to address the impact of the pandemic, restore the normal functioning of European societies, and help their economies to recover – which EU member states believe should be green and sustainable. One of our key tasks will be to improve Europe's resilience to crises and to devise contingency plans to prepare for future emergen-

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cies, such as pandemics, global cyber attacks, and migration pressure.

Among our foreign policy priorities, it is our aim to reaffirm the EU-perspective on the Western Balkans. Also, as awareness of the importance of the Indo-Pacific Region is growing in the EU, we expect discussions related to this to keep us busy during our presidency.

Could you give a few examples of important collaborations taking place between Slovenia and Japan right now?

It is really unbelievable how many interactions there are between Slovenia and Japan, and the interest in collaborating is only growing. It is difficult for me to highlight just a few, but I believe I have to mention

a project of Japan's New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization, which is collaborating with Japanese and Slovenian energy companies, on smart electricity grids. I am also proud to say that Slovenia is working with Japan on a large number of projects and activities in the implementation of Society 5.0.

Also, Japanese investments in Slovenia is significant for our economy. The Slovenian business environment is recognised for qualified and skilled labour, high productivity, and easy access to the EU and Western Balkans markets.

Since 2013, foreign direct investment from Japan into Slovenia has grown 10 times; Japan is one of the top ten investor countries in Slovenia.

Overall, I can say with confidence that relations between Slovenia and Japan are the very best they have ever been. The contacts between politicians at the highest level,

business, as well as between the people of our two nations, are meaningful, frequent, and friendly.

Could you tell me about the city of Nova Gorica and why it was selected as the European Capital of Culture 2025?

The history of Nova Gorica, or “New Gorica”, is important to Slovenian identity. The city was established after the Second World War when half of it became a part of Italy, where it is called Gorizia. It had a destiny similar to that of Berlin during the Cold War, with one part on the Italian side and one on the Yugoslav side, separating friends and communities.

Nova Gorica is where Slovenia celebrated its accession to the EU on 1 May 2004. It was a symbolic location, which underlined the importance of unity, friendship, and the lowering of borders. This is why it is also so important that Nova Gorica was chosen as the European Capital of Culture 2025, in close cooperation with Gorizia in Italy.

This is a chance for us to show the world that reconciliation is possible. Peoples and states can recognise and accept that atrocities have happened, but they can decide to move forward, to forgive, and to make friendship and collaboration their priority. ●

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