

**Address of H. E. Archbishop Jean-Marie SPEICH,
Apostolic Nuncio in Slovenia and
Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to Slovenia,
on the occasion of the presentation of the
New Year's greetings 2021 to
H. E. Mr. Borut PAHOR, President of the Republic of Slovenia**

Honourable Mr. President of the Republic of Slovenia,

(Your Excellency the Prime Minister,
Your Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Distinguished Members of the Government,
Dear Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen),

At the beginning of this year, 2021, as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Slovenia, I am deeply honoured to present my best wishes to you, Mister President, to the Government of this country and, through you, to all Slovenian citizens. The year 2020 was very significant and strange characterized by the rapid and inexorable spread of Covid-19, which has put Slovenia and all humanity to the test. The pandemic, in fact, caught us by surprise, upsetting our plans and plunging us into an unprecedented and global, 'epochal' crisis. In the very middle of our technological and managerial euphoria, we have found all our countries and ourselves socially and technically unprepared for the spread of the contagion: it has been difficult to recognize and admit its impact. And now, we are rushing to limit its spread, to find solutions, to look for the desired vaccine. The Slovenian Government tried to do its best. At the beginning of the crisis, it was very helpful in facilitating the repatriation of foreign citizens stocked in Slovenia. Some of my Colleagues', at the end of past March, thanked the Slovenian Authorities, the health workers and all Slovenian citizens for taking care of the citizens of their respective countries living in Slovenia, indicating also that in their own countries, the Slovenian citizens have been treated in the best possible way. Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to give reciprocity a new face, a human face.

Of course, we have to deal with a health crisis, but at the same moment, and we cannot forget it, a food crisis is already underway. According to the latest Report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, published last July by the United Nations agencies operating in the sphere of nutrition, almost 690 million people were undernourished, and the number is increasing. The causes are many and partly depend on an uneven distribution of the earth's goods. They also include a lack of investment in the agricultural sector, increasing food losses and waste, as well as the proliferation of conflicts in different areas of our planet. Making matters worse, there is climate change, which especially affects small rural producers not only in far countries, but also in each of our countries, there is the threat against biodiversity, all that exposing the population to natural disasters, so that we can speak of a global environmental crisis.

Obviously, to all of this is added the post corona economic and social crisis. The pandemic continues to have significant economic repercussions with substantial effects on the labour market. It revealed and amplified many vulnerabilities and injustices that were already present. Regarding its impact on the health, the virus does not discriminate. Many families in Slovenia as well as in other countries are endangered by the economic instability and by social and psychological problems. Family is for our societies the place of care, hope and security. In 2021 many families would need our help and we should be prepared to give it. However, in the world of work, it is the most disadvantaged and most vulnerable ones who are hit the hardest and with the most cruelty. The Governments and the political parties are pushed to find concrete solutions, to put under bragged rivalries of another age.

During the current period of the global epidemic, state borders were closed, national and global solutions were being pursued to answer the question of how to move forward. In this harsh context, the Diplomatic Corps noted with satisfaction that the Slovenian diplomacy has been able to meet these challenges, and that a new and very interesting diplomatic dynamism develops. The Slovenian diplomacy seems to be visible everywhere. The Diplomatic Corps greets the efforts made to promote contacts and dialogue with the neighbour countries, and to deepen the relations with non-European countries in Latin America and Africa for example, so as the participation in many multilateral meetings. The Diplomatic Corps noted the wish of Slovenia to be considered as a responsible ally and a constructive partner. The Diplomatic Corps wishes to Slovenia to continue to deepen the bilateral and multilateral relations enriching not only legitimate national interests, but also contributing to the edification of the international community promoting peace, serenity and freedom. The Diplomatic Corps notices with satisfaction that, throughout the period, the Slovenian Diplomacy Day was celebrated on the date when Slovenia is commemorating its admission to the United Nations. This step represents Slovenia's entry into the world of diplomatic team, which was followed, in a relatively short time, by EU and NATO membership and a few years later also by the admission to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

This year will be for Slovenia a significant: celebrations and commemorations to marks certainly the 30th anniversary of the Plebiscite, which was a landmark occasion on the journey towards the independence of this country. The Diplomatic Corps is happy to share this important moment in your national life. The celebrations of this year will

certainly also take place in the wider context of the European Union and of the countries that emerged after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which certainly share many aspirations with Slovenia. Promoting reconciliation and union is good. Slovenia has become a role model of democracy and prosperity. In this context, in the second half of this year, your country will take over the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the second time. The first time, in 2008, was a success. The Diplomatic Corps is very excited to look at the Slovenian propositions and priorities. The pandemic has brought the urgent need for unity, among nations, among political parties, among the citizens. We all had to learn to put aside the political differences and unite in the protection of human lives. Let's hope that this spirit shall survive and we would be able to face other challenges of the third decade in the century together.

Allow me, Mr. President, to end this speech by applauding the doubled Slovenian victory in cycling giving the opportunity to listen the first time the Slovenian anthem on the Champs Elysée's, by underlining the great successes especially in kayaking and skiing, and by noticing that Slovenia is a nation of sport. We sincerely hope that the Slovenian athletes may keep the prestige of this country high and that, beyond their success in the competition, they may be good ambassadors of the values that the coming postponed Olympic Games brings with them. Trying to be complete, it seems necessary to mention a field: the gastronomy. After the release in 2019 of the first Gault and Millau guide dedicated to Slovenia, it is the Michelin guide that has come to celebrate Slovenian gastronomy in 2020, with a restaurant with 2 stars and 5 to one star. As the gastronomy has experienced one of the most complicated years in its history, these success stories may be a beacon of hope for recovery in 2021.

Again, Mister President and on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Slovenia, I would like to reiterate the best New Year's wishes for the wellbeing of us all. May this year, 2021, bring to the citizens of Slovenia reconciliation and peace, prosperity and happiness, and the strengthening of the bounds of friendship uniting our different countries. Thank you.