



Independence Day Celebration 2015

Remarks by U.S. Ambassador Brent R. Hartley

Križanke, Ljubljana, July 2, 2015

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear guests.

Dober večer! Dobrodošli! Thank you for joining us this evening to celebrate the 239th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America.

Let me express my deep appreciation to the staff of the American Embassy for putting together such a great event, to these wonderful singers for bringing the Slovenian and American anthems to life, and to our splendid Marine Detachment, not only for the spirit and precision of their color guard, but for keeping our Embassy and all U.S. Embassies around the world safe and secure every single day.

Thanks also to our generous sponsors for helping to make this evening possible.

Every year on this occasion, Americans reflect on and celebrate the vision of our founding fathers who set out to establish a democracy based on truths they held to be “self-evident:

- All persons are created equal;
- All people are endowed with certain inalienable rights;
- These include the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This has proven over the course of 239 years to be an evolving experiment as Americans have struggled constantly to “create a more perfect union.”

Slovenia embarked on this same experiment 24 years ago, as was commemorated last week on June 25. We Americans wish you luck – perfection will never happen but it is critical that you keep trying to live up to the commitment to democratic ideals and civil liberties that marked the end of the Cold War and Slovenia’s transition to independence.

Since my arrival here about six months ago, I’ve learned a great deal about Slovenians and Slovenia, its history and its complex politics.

I’ve learned that Slovenians are a generous and welcoming people. And I greatly appreciate the hospitality they have shown me since my arrival.

I’ve had a chance to visit many areas of Slovenia – from the Soca Valley and the splendid Coast to the pastoral eastern region of Prekmurje to exploring your beautiful capital city of Ljubljana. I’ve been skiing, I’ve been hiking, and I’ve attended a number of exciting sporting events. And I’ve loved every second!

Tonight we have many reasons to celebrate together.



We are both members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, an Alliance built on the daring theory that a collection of democracies dedicated to each other's common defense is a commitment worth making, an Alliance on the right side of history.

NATO has been tested over time, from the Cold War to the Balkan wars to Afghanistan to – today – confronting aggression from the East and instability from the South that challenge our shared vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

Working together, we can and will overcome these challenges.

Our military-to-military cooperation is excellent and we welcome the recently announced steps by the government to begin to address NATO goals for defense spending.

But our commitment to shared values goes beyond the NATO Alliance. We have been proud to partner with Slovenian diplomats in the UN, the OSCE, and elsewhere in fighting for human rights and human dignity around the world. And we appreciate the continuing commitment at the highest levels of the Slovenian government to ensuring stability and integration in the Balkans. Here again, the United States and Slovenia can do so much more by working together.

Since Slovenian independence and your commitment to our shared values, the United States has invested in Slovenia. We have helped to strengthen your institutions, not just in the security arena but also civil society, culture, and education – all the critical elements that make a strong democracy.

- We have been proud to provide more than 1,000 small grants totaling more than \$3 million to non-governmental organizations striving to defend the environment, fight against trafficking in persons, and help young artists find their footing.
- Since the United States started its international exchange programs 75 years ago, the U.S. government has sponsored about 900 Slovenians for participation in programs like Fulbright and the International Visitors Leadership Programs, which help build lifelong relationships one person at a time.
- In order to make Slovenia a stronger and more capable NATO Ally, since your independence, we have provided almost \$60 million for training and equipment for the Slovenian Armed Forces and its brave men and women who have served so honorably with NATO, in EU missions, and with the UN in hot spots around the globe.
- We have also been proud over the years to provide nearly \$175 million to Slovenia's flagship demining NGO, the International Trust Fund, or ITF, for its efforts to remove mines and other remnants of war in the Balkans and throughout the world.

However, U.S. investment goes well beyond what my government can provide.

Major investments by U.S. companies, such as the Goodyear Dunlop Sava Tires tire production facility in Kranj, or the Rogaska glass-making factory, provide what Slovenia and every country needs most: well-run businesses offering good-paying, stable jobs and economic opportunity.

But we can do better.



Our bilateral trade with Slovenia is relatively modest, only about a billion Euros in total trade volume per year, which puts us as only Slovenia's 15th-largest trade partner, at barely 2% of Slovenia's total trade volume.

Some Slovenian companies – mostly privately owned smaller and medium-sized firms – are doing good business in the United States. We welcome this and encourage more Slovenian businesses to look to the U.S. for investment.

But there are more opportunities for investment in both directions. Slovenian companies don't lack for know-how, imagination, or creativity. Your workforce is among the best educated in Europe and can compete with anyone on a level playing field.

The government's reform initiatives are a critical step in opening up the Slovenian economy and fostering freer flow of trade and investments, thereby increasing prosperity for all involved. We will continue to be supportive of the government's efforts to make the Slovenian economy more competitive in global markets and attractive to U.S. investment.

In this regard, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or T-T-I-P, would provide even more opportunities for Slovenia's export-led economy to grow.

One thing is clear. In all areas –security, human rights, the economy – we are stronger if we stand together.

I have seen even in my short time here that Slovenia is blessed by many gifts: a well-educated population, a clean environment, beautiful nature, and – thanks to much hard work – a position on the global stage as a democracy that has grown, and been tested, and is ready to move into the future.

We stand with you as partners as we seek greater peace and prosperity not only in the United States and Slovenia, but around the world. With that, I propose a toast to the enduring friendship of the United States of America and the Republic of Slovenia.

Na zdravje!

Now I hope you will join us in celebrating this great occasion.