



Bundespräsident  
Alexander Van der Bellen

**Address by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen  
on the Occasion of 100 Years Carinthian Plebiscite,  
on 10 October 2020, Klagenfurt**

Check against delivery!

Dear President Pahor!

Dear guests!

Ladies and gentlemen!

Beautiful that we are together in this ceremony today.

Lepo, da danes skupaj obeležujemo to obletnico.

As a Tyrolean, with the history of South Tyrol in mind, national minority issues are always not just a political question for me, but an affair of the heart. That is why I am particularly pleased that we can welcome a very special guest to this ceremony – the Slovenian President, you, dear Borut. For the first time we are attending this day together. I know it takes courage. On both sides. And I am therefore also very grateful to you, dear Governor Kaiser. For me, this joint ceremony is, beyond our good personal relationship, proof of the close neighborly relations between Austria and Slovenia. Proof of a good basis for discussion and mutual understanding.

And it is a sign that Europe is working. Austria celebrated 25 years of membership in the European Union this year. Slovenia has been a member for 16 years – not much less either. The accession of our two countries to Schengen – Austria in 1998 and Slovenia in 2004 – and the abolition of border controls in 2007 make the border less noticeable for all of us. Thanks to Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen!

Carinthia is a very special region. It connects Austria and Slovenia in a special way. People with German and Slovenian mother tongues have lived together in Carinthia for many centuries. The Slovenian national minority is an evident part of Carinthia and Austria! In the plebiscite 100 years ago, also many Carinthians of the Slovenian minority voted for the unity of Carinthia and the affiliation with Austria. Without them, the plebiscite would have turned out differently.

Ladies and gentlemen!

In Article 8 of the Austrian Federal Constitution, the Republic of Austria acknowledges (I quote) "its grown linguistic and cultural diversity expressed in the autochthonous national minorities". And further: "Language and culture, existence and preservation of these national minorities are to be respected, secured and promoted." (End of quote)

Did we always live up to this? Have we lived our linguistic and cultural diversity and always secured and promoted its preservation? Unfortunately, I have to admit: No, that was not always the case. Much came only after long pressure, late, very late.

**As Federal President, I would like to apologize to you, dear citizens of Slovenian mother tongue, for the injustice suffered and for the failures in the implementation of constitutionally guaranteed rights.**

**Kot zvezni predsednik bi se Vam želel iskreno opravičiti za krivice in zamude pri uresničitvi vaših ustavnih pravic.**

Ladies and gentlemen!

The Carinthians have also achieved a lot together: Many long open wounds have largely healed. Carinthia has come a long way, a path of reconciliation: There are bilingual town and village signs, media and choirs, bilingual kindergartens, schools and courts, as well as numerous bilingual associations and projects at state and community level. And a few days ago we learned that there will also be more financial support from the federal government in the future.

I am convinced: Carinthians, whether of German or Slovenian mother tongue, want to move their country forward together. And together they make important contributions to the success of our home country Austria in all areas of life.

Still, not everything has been done. Minority policy must always be further developed. In every country in the world. It must be adapted to current living conditions and needs.

Ladies and gentlemen!

All of our national minorities are always a bridge to our neighbors: At the bilingual schools in Carinthia, Austrian children of the Slovenian minority learn with their German-speaking neighbors and with children from Slovenia. Jointly! They learn from each other. They learn together. That makes me confident! Through them Europe is growing closer. This is how I imagine our common European future.

Dear Carinthians, you are an important part of Austria and Europe. I wish you and the federal state of Carinthia all the best for the future.

Thank you.



Bundespräsident  
Alexander Van der Bellen

[www.bundespraesident.at](http://www.bundespraesident.at)  
follow vanderbellen on   