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Diplomacy and Religion: The Role of Protocol Visits in Shaping the International Relations of the Republic of Slovenia

*Diplomacija in religija: Vloga protokolarnih
obiskov pri oblikovanju mednarodnih
odnosov Republike Slovenije*

Abstract: Based on original documents of the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia and offering a novel, comprehensive treatment of the subject, this contribution analyses the significance of protocol visits in shaping the international relations of the Republic of Slovenia. It emphasizes that such visits are not merely formal-diplomatic events but also instruments for strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties. Particular attention is given to the rarity and prestige of state visits and to the exceptional symbolic value of Pope John Paul II's visits, which transcended traditional protocol frameworks and reinforced Slovenia's bond with the Holy See. The analysis shows that religion in protocol visits remains an important element of soft diplomacy, complementing political dimensions and strengthening the country's identity in the global arena.

Keywords: diplomacy, religion, protocol, protocol visits, diplomatic law, international relations, state visits

Izvleček: Prispevek, ki je nastal na podlagi originalnih dokumentov Protokola Republike Slovenije in predstavlja novost v smislu predstavljive celostne obravnavane tematike, analizira pomen protokolarnih obiskov pri oblikovanju mednarodnih odnosov Republike Slovenije. Poudarja, da ti obiski niso le formalno-diplomatski dogodki, temveč tudi instrumenti krepitev bilateralnih in multilateralnih vezi. Posebej izpostavlja redkost in prestižnost državniških obiskov ter izjemno simbolno vrednost obiskov papeža Janeza Pavla II., ki so presegli običajne protokolарne okvire ter utrdili vez med Slovenijo in Svetim sedežem. Analiza pokaže, da religija pri protokolarnih obiskih ostaja pomemben element mehke diplomacije, ki dopolnjuje politične razsežnosti in krepi identiteto države v globalnem prostoru.

Ključne besede: diplomacija, religija, protokol, protokolarni obiski, diplomatsko pravo, mednarodni odnosi, državniški obiski

Introduction

Relations between states influence many aspects of life, including security, the economy, culture, and global development. Good relations between states help prevent conflicts and wars and foster cooperation in addressing international crises. States engage in trade, investment, and technological progress, which encourages economic growth and prosperity. International organizations such as the United Nations, the EU, and NATO (Šabič 2016, 33)¹ play an important role in tackling global challenges, while good relations between states also positively affect the exchange of ideas and the appreciation of art and traditions, enriching societies and fostering understanding among nations. Cooperation between states makes it possible to resolve humanitarian crises, fight poverty, and promote democracy and human rights. Precisely because the world faces problems that transcend the borders of individual states (climate change, terrorism, pandemics), international cooperation is essential to address them. Good relations between states therefore contribute to stability, development, and the prosperity of the entire world.

An important aspect of bilateral relations at the highest level between states and organizations is also ensuring and respecting religious freedom as one of the most fundamental human rights and basic liberties. Although this area is protected in all major declarations and conventions, the role of the Holy See in safeguarding and promoting religious freedom in the world is irreplaceable and unique. Even though the Holy See is not a state, it enjoys international legal personality (Brito de Macedo 2010, 35–43). As the representative of the Catholic Church, it is the only religious community with such a status in the world. In 2024, 184 states had established full diplomatic relations with the Holy See. To this number, the European Union and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta must be added. Ninety of these diplomatic missions are based in Rome, including that of the European Union (Baratta 2024) and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Offices accredited to the Holy See are also located in Rome, including

1 After the inauguration of the 47th President of the United States, one of Donald Trump's first executive orders was the withdrawal of the U.S. from the World Health Organization, which is one of the agencies of the United Nations. What impact this decision will have on other world leaders and on the work of the WHO itself remains to be seen in the future.



those of the Arab League, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Press Office of the Holy See 2025, 3).²

Established diplomatic relations between states represent the willingness of both sides to develop dialogue and resolve open issues. They are a sign of good cooperation and respect for international law. Such relations (though not necessarily) enable the visits of high state officials to another country, which manifest and confirm the goodwill of the host country toward the guest and vice versa. The preparation of each such visit requires exceptional precision and an excellent knowledge of the guest and the guest's country, while at the same time it is an opportunity for the host country to present itself in the best light, for example, by directing the guest's attention to important sacred buildings and other heritage of great cultural value to the nation. It is therefore not insignificant that the host country knows the guest's religious affiliation and worldview, as this can help avoid potential inconveniences that could affect the future of bilateral relations.³

1 Protocol visits of high officials in Slovenia

Diplomatic law pays special attention to state and other official visits. The legal act that defines state and other visits of high officials in the Republic of Slovenia is the Decree on the Determination of Protocol Rules (DDPR), adopted by the Slovenian government. According to the DDPR, state and other visits in Slovenia are defined as protocol events, organized by the

2 The Press Office of the Holy See further announced that in 2024 the Second Additional Protocol to the agreement between the Holy See and Burkina Faso on the legal status of the Catholic Church in Burkina Faso was signed. The Holy See and the People's Republic of China agreed last year to extend the validity of the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops for another four-year period. This agreement was originally concluded on 22 September 2018 and subsequently renewed on 22 October 2020 and 22 October 2022. Most recently, on 24 October 2024, an agreement was signed between the Holy See and the Czech Republic on certain legal matters.

3 This is also confirmed by the protocol rules followed by the host country, Slovenia, during state or official visits of high-ranking representatives of foreign states. These rules stipulate, for example, that gifts presented to the guest are chosen according to the recipient's rank and interests. As a rule, the gifts should be made in the Republic of Slovenia and represent Slovenian cultural (sacred) heritage (DDPR 2020, Art. 26).



Protocol of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia (Protocol) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.

State visits take place when our country is visited by the head of another state or government. These visits are not very frequent, but they are solemn, ceremonial, and the most important. On such occasions, the head of state may be accompanied by several ministers and his ambassador to the host country (Cerar 2021, 287). Members of the permanent entourage, designated by the host, include a minister of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the advisor to the President of the Republic of Slovenia, the Slovenian ambassador to the guest's country, the head of the Protocol, a diplomat responsible for the guest's country at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other persons designated by the host. A state visit also includes the formation of an official delegation consisting of the head of state with spouse or partner and members of the official entourage. The official delegation may have up to eight members. Such visits are not supposed to exceed three per year and usually last up to three working days. The hosts of such visits are either the President of the Republic or the Prime Minister, depending on the guest. The flags of the guest, the Republic of Slovenia, and the European Union are displayed at the place of arrival and departure, at the guest's residence, at the venues of official program events, in the premises of official talks and photo sessions, and on the car transporting the main guest.

A state visit includes a welcome ceremony with military honours, followed by a private meeting between the guest and the host, which may also be attended by the guest's spouse or partner. A particularly solemn part of such a visit is the exchange of gifts and decorations. The host organizes one formal lunch or dinner, at which the host and guest exchange toasts, and the Speaker of the National Assembly or the Prime Minister also hosts a meal. If the visiting head of state has executive powers, he also takes part in official talks with the Prime Minister of Slovenia. The visit includes delegation meetings led by the heads of state, the guest meets the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, and the program includes a guided walk through Ljubljana and a visit to the town hall, as well as tours of other historical, cultural, or natural landmarks of Slovenia. Press meetings and other activities, arranged with the host or at the guest's request, are also planned. The concluding event is a farewell ceremony with military



honours. A state visit of a foreign head of state in Slovenia therefore differs from other types of visits in that it includes the exchange of decorations and a farewell ceremony with military honours – features absent from other visits.

Depending on the purpose, state visits are followed by official, working, and private visits of the head of state, the president of parliament and of the European Parliament, the prime minister, the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission, and the heads of international organizations; the president of the National Council or Senate, the president of the Constitutional Court, the president of the Supreme Court, the Ombudsman, the president of the Court of Audit, the minister of foreign affairs, as well as heads of international organizations and specialized agencies at the rank of minister of foreign affairs. According to the DDPR, official, working, and private visits also occur when Slovenia is visited by delegations of federal states, provinces, and regions, when hosted by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, or the President of the National Council. Official, working, and private visits differ from state visits in that they are less ceremonial, more frequent, last up to two working days, have a smaller permanent entourage and a smaller official delegation, and involve fewer activities. As specified in the Instruction on the Implementation of the DDPR (Instruction), an official delegation in official visits consists of six persons, while in working visits the official delegation comprises four persons (2020, 5.7).⁴

2 From one private to only a few state visits

Research on visits of high officials to the Republic of Slovenia is based on official data provided by the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia to the author of this contribution upon request in accordance with the Access to Public Information Act.⁵ These consist of programs of visits by heads

⁴ For further details, see Bohte and Sancin 2006, 176–177.

⁵ On 29 May 2025, the author received an official reply by email from the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia, stating that the Protocol keeps records of protocol events that it is assigned to prepare and carry out by the offices and cabinets of statesmen, for whom it organizes events in accordance



of states (prime ministers, presidents, and organizations) from 1991 to 2024. These programs include information about the nature of the visit, the persons involved, the date and locations, and a summary of the content of individual meetings. The types of protocol visits in Slovenia are defined by the DDPR, but from the transmitted programs it is not always possible to clearly identify what kind of visit it was, since the protocol programs often simply note: »Visit.«

This was the case not only in 1991, when the Republic of Slovenia was just beginning to establish itself as a new state in the international community, but such broadly defined visits appear almost every year. From the collected data, it is therefore not possible to assert with certainty whether, for example, the 1992 visit of Croatian President Franjo Tuđman was a state, official, or working visit, since the designation in the program was simply »visit.« Given that the guest was received with military honours upon arrival and departure at Brnik Airport, that he met with the Prime Minister, and that the President of the Presidency hosted a formal lunch, one might conclude it was a state visit, but the visit ended the same day and there was no exchange of gifts or decorations. The generic designation »visit« also appears in 2024, for example, when Rafael Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, visited Slovenia. That visit included no military honours, no exchange of gifts or decorations, but there was a meeting with the Prime Minister, and the Minister of the Environment hosted a lunch.

Based on the data collected, we can conclude that since independence there has only been one private visit in Slovenia: Croatian President Stjepan Mesić on June 25, 2010. He entered through the Obrežje border crossing, travelled in a motorcade to Cerkle ob Krki to attend the Cerkle 2000 Air Show, met with Slovenian President Milan Kučan, who hosted him for lunch in Kostanjevica na Krki, and left Slovenia in the evening. There have

with the Decree on the Determination of Protocol Rules. Some visits and protocol events in the offices or cabinets of the highest officials are prepared independently or carried out by protocol staff working directly in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, which are not part of the records of the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia. The forwarded list therefore does not include all the visits hosted by the President of the Republic of Slovenia and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia. It is the host authorities themselves – the Office of the President of the Republic of Slovenia and the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia – that are responsible for informing the public about the visits, not the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia.



been 50 undefined visits (not classified as state, official, working, or private in the documents), 115 working visits, and 234 official visits. State visits – the highest-level ones – have taken place only three times in Slovenia, which will be presented hereinafter.

The most high-level protocol visits were conducted by representatives of the Republic of Croatia (26), followed by Hungary (23), North Macedonia (17), Austria and Montenegro (16 each), Slovakia (15), Bosnia and Herzegovina (13), Italy (12), and Serbia (11).⁶ Slovenia has also been visited by presidents of the European Commission and Parliament, Secretaries-General of the UN, NATO, the European Council, the Arab League, and the OECD, and the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

High officials also visited Slovenia on the occasion of international events hosted here, such as the Bled Forum, Trilateral Meetings, the European Parks Day Meeting, the Meeting of Presidents of Neighbouring States and Germany on the occasion of Independence Day and the 25th anniversary of independence, the Brdo-Brijuni Meeting, the Formal Lunch of Neighbouring States, the Slovenia-Benelux Summit, the Informal Trilateral Meeting of Slovenia, Croatia, and Austria, the Three Seas Initiative, the Meeting of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group, and the Meeting of Presidents of Neighbouring States marking the 20th anniversary of Slovenia's EU membership.

6 List of countries whose high representatives visited Slovenia between 1991 and 2024 on state, official, working, or private visits: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Georgia, Croatia, India, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Canada, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Macedonia, Malaysia, Malta, Morocco, Moldova, Monaco, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republika Srpska, Romania, Rwanda, Russia, Slovakia, Serbia, Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Spain, Sweden, the Holy See, Swiss Confederation, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, United States of America, United Kingdom.



3 State visits: weak bridges of international cooperation of the Republic of Slovenia

State visits are intended to occur no more than three times per year. This limited number underlines their prestige, but is also due to the extraordinary demands of preparation and costs. If at least one such visit had taken place every year since Slovenia's independence, there would have been over 30 by now. Surprisingly, however, only three have occurred: the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh in 2008, King Harald V and Queen Sonja of Norway in 2011, and Italian President Giorgio Napolitano with his wife in 2012.⁷

The first state visit, understandably, attracted the greatest public interest, also because of the exceptional personality of the British Queen. We will therefore present it separately as illustrative. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, together with their entourage, arrived at Brnik Airport on 21 October 2008 at 1:45 p.m., followed by a photo opportunity. Upon their arrival in front of Brdo Castle, they were welcomed by the host, Slovenian President Danilo Türk with his wife, followed by a reception with military honours. After the official photo session, the guests, together with the host and his wife, engaged in a conversation in the Golden Salon of Brdo Castle, for which 30 minutes had been scheduled. This was followed by the most significant act of a state visit of the highest rank – the exchange of decorations. The Slovenian President decorated the British Queen with the Order for Exceptional Merits of the Republic of Slovenia, while she bestowed upon him the Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath.

The guests then proceeded to Ljubljana, to the Grand Hotel Union, where the Queen visited the workshop of the British school »Jungle Jangle« and met with organizers and children, while her husband attended the »Creative Cities« workshop. In the foyer of the Union Hall, the guests met with staff of the Embassy of the United Kingdom and members of the British

⁷ That only three state visits had taken place in Slovenia up to 2025 was also confirmed to the author by the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia in an email on 4 August 2025.



Council, after which a reception followed in the mentioned hall. In the evening, the guests and hosts returned to Brdo Castle, where the Queen received the Prime Minister Janez Janša and the Speaker of Parliament Pavel Ganter. The Queen and her husband then signed the Golden Book of Brdo Castle, followed by the official presentation of the guests at the formal dinner hosted in their honour by the Slovenian President and his wife.

After spending the night at the Grand Hotel Union in Ljubljana, on the second day of the state visit the guests visited the Lipica Stud Farm, where, in the company of the presidential couple, they attended a presentation of the riding school program and of stands displaying local crafts and products of Karst women. In the Avgust Černigoj Gallery there, the Queen met with children who were award winners of the Lipica project, while her husband met with representatives of the stud farm. Upon departure, the guests and hosts signed the Guest Book of the stud farm, and the director of the stud farm symbolically presented the Queen with a Lipizzaner horse. At the Maestoso Hotel, within the stud farm complex, they participated in a reception for the participants of the UN Global Compact.

At Ljubljana Castle, the distinguished guests were received by the Mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković, and in the Estates Hall of the castle, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom hosted a luncheon in their honour. Both guests and hosts signed the Golden Guest Book of the City of Ljubljana and took the funicular down to Krek Square. From there, in a motorcade, they proceeded to Tromostovje and walked, accompanied by crowds of people, to the Grand Hotel Union. In the evening, the guests viewed the exhibition »Slovenians in London« in the foyer of the Concert Hall of the Slovenian Philharmonic and attended the event of the »Duke of Edinburgh Awards« ceremony, where they met with representatives of the awards program. Upon returning to the hotel, after a brief rest in the Silver Salon, the distinguished guests bid farewell to the organizers of the visit and had a private dinner.

On the third day, Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh departed from the Union Hotel to Ljubljana Airport, where they were greeted by the hosts. An official farewell with military honours followed, and the guests departed from Slovenia with their official entourage by special aircraft.



The other two state visits followed a similar structure in their essential elements for such occasions, with certain adjustments. The Norwegian royal couple visited Slovenia between 9 and 11 May 2011. King Harald V and Slovenian President Türk, for example, attended the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014 between the Republic of Slovenia and the Kingdom of Norway, and the King visited the National Assembly and the town of Radovljica.

The Italian President, together with his wife, arrived in Slovenia for a three-day visit on the evening of 9 July 2012, without receiving military honours at the airport. This official ceremonial was instead held the next day in front of Brdo Castle. President Napolitano, for example, addressed the deputies of the National Assembly and met with representatives of the Italian minority, but during this state visit no exchange of decorations took place.

4 The historic visits of Pope John Paul II to Slovenia

Although a state visit is considered the highest-ranking type of visit, nothing can compare with the two visits of Pope John Paul II to Slovenia. Firstly, because this was the visit of both a statesman and a world moral and religious authority in one person, and secondly, because he received such broad support from politics, the people, and the media. The visit of the head of the Catholic Church transcended the categories of state, official, or working visit.

The Pope first visited our country between 17 and 19 May 1996. In the records of the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia, this visit is listed as »Visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Republic of Slovenia«. Although the program of the visit does not specify that the Pope's arrival at Brnik Airport would be followed by a reception with military honours, this did in fact occur. Not only with military honours: at the airport, the Pope was welcomed by the highest representatives of the Slovenian state – the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly – as well as by the diplomatic corps. Both the Slovenian and Vatican anthems were played, and the distinguished guest also greeted



the Slovenian bishops. Afterwards, the President of the Republic, Milan Kučan, and Pope John Paul II both addressed those gathered.⁸ The Pope then travelled in a motorcade to Slovenia's national shrine at Brezje, an event not mentioned in the official visit program. There he prayed before the image of Mary Help of Christians, and in front of the basilica he blessed the assembled crowd. He continued on to Brdo Castle, where he was welcomed by the President of the Republic. After the greeting, the host invited the guest into the castle, where they held a private conversation, after which the President of the Republic introduced the Pope to the senior representatives of the Slovenian state and their spouses. The host presented the guest with a silver oil lamp, while the guest presented the host with a relief image of the apostles Peter and Paul. From Brdo, the Pope travelled by popemobile to the capital, and from the courtyard of the Ljubljana Archdiocese walked to the Cathedral, where he blessed the main doors. In the Cathedral he led Vespers with priests, religious, and laity, and concluded the first day with a private dinner.

The Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia also recorded a full second day of the visit in its official program. The first event that day was the morning transfer of the Pope's entourage from the St. Stanislav Institute to the Ljubljana Archdiocese. Since that day was also the Pope's 76th birthday, a children's choir gave him a birthday serenade in the archdiocesan courtyard. At the Stožice Hippodrome the Pope then celebrated Holy Mass before approximately 105,000 faithful, after which he lunched with the Slovenian bishops at the St. Stanislav Institute. There followed a meeting with the Prime Minister, Janez Drnovšek, who presented the distinguished guest with a coloured lithograph of Ljubljana by an unknown author from 1840 (Krznar 1996, 91). The Pope also greeted the directors and staff of the St. Stanislav Institute. He then travelled to the Postojna sports airfield, where a meeting with young people took place, before returning to Ljubljana, where he dined with his entourage at the Archdiocesan headquarters.

⁸ All the speeches that Pope John Paul II delivered during his 1996 visit to Slovenia were published by Družina in the publication *Church Documents* (John Paul II 1996).



On the final, third day of the visit, the Pope departed from Brnik Airport for Maribor, where, before more than 100,000 faithful at the Maribor airfield, he celebrated Holy Mass.⁹ From there he proceeded to the headquarters of the Maribor Diocese, where he lunched with Slovenian bishops and his entourage. He then visited Maribor Cathedral and prayed at the tomb of the Servant of God Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek, and met with representatives of culture and science in the presence of the Slovenian President of the Republic. In the square in front of the Cathedral, the Pope blessed the Fountain of Peace, accompanied by a written memorial, which still stands today. At the Maribor airfield, from where he departed for Rome, a farewell ceremony with military honours took place – something not noted in the program of the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia. The Pope was bid farewell by the Slovenian President and other senior dignitaries, with both guest and host giving closing addresses.

The second and, so far, last papal visit to Slovenia took place on 19 September 1999 and was devoted entirely to Maribor. In its program, the Slovenian Protocol titled the visit simply »Visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Republic of Slovenia«, without specifying whether it was a state, official, working, or private visit. Given that the Pope was received with military honours upon arrival at Maribor Airport, the visit certainly ranked at least as an official visit. The Pope celebrated Holy Mass before approximately 200,000 faithful at Betnava Field, during which he beatified the Servant of God Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek – the central purpose of the visit. He then travelled by popemobile to the Episcopal Palace in Maribor, where he lunched with Slovenian bishops, visiting cardinals, and bishops from his entourage. Afterwards, he visited the Cathedral, where he prayed at the tomb of the Blessed Slomšek. Before the altar, he was addressed by the Maribor Bishop Franc Kramberger, and then the Pope himself spoke to those gathered in the Cathedral. Upon his arrival at Maribor Airport, the distinguished guest was greeted with a handshake by the Mayor of the Municipality of Maribor, and the Pope also signed the Golden Book of the City. This was followed by a one-on-one conversation

⁹ Among the faithful, there was an expectation that during this Holy Mass the Pope would proclaim the first Maribor bishop, Anton Martin Slomšek, blessed, but this happened three years later.



with the President of Slovenia, who had also attended the Mass at Betnava. The last act of the visit was a farewell with military honours.

The visits of Pope John Paul II to Slovenia in 1996 and 1999 represented a peak in the history of relations between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See and an exceptional event in the collective memory of the Slovenian people. Although in diplomatic hierarchy a state visit is considered the highest form of official meeting, the papal visits, by their nature and symbolic weight, transcended protocol frameworks and became historical, spiritual, and political milestones. The Pope's presence symbolized recognition of Slovenian statehood, which had already been formalized through official recognition, since the Holy See was among the first to recognize the independent and sovereign state of Slovenia. At the same time, the visits reinforced the historical and cultural ties of the Slovenian people with the Holy See. In this context, both visits represent more than just an inter-state event – they became a sign of a historic moment that transcended ordinary forms of diplomatic protocol and rose to the level of lasting symbolic significance.

5 Protocol visits in Slovenia with regard to religious connotation

If we set aside the two visits of Pope John Paul II to Slovenia just described, which had a strong religious content, we can note that religion plays quite an important role in protocol visits in Slovenia. Of course, this is expressed differently depending on the nature of the event, the cultural and religious context of the host country, the wishes of the guest, and the very significance of the visit (Valantan 2019).

The most frequent point of contact of guests with our religious identity, which is predominantly Catholic, was in most cases a visit or tour of Ljubljana Cathedral. Slovenian protocol in official programs of visits also mentions that distinguished guests met with religious representatives in Slovenia. In 1992, for instance, the Italian President Francesco Cossiga, during an official visit, was welcomed in front of Ljubljana Cathedral by the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ljubljana, Alojzij Šuštar, with whom he also



toured the Cathedral.¹⁰ The following year, during an official visit, Austrian President Thomas Klestil likewise visited the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ljubljana. More often, official programs indicate that guests visited Bled Island, where in the past the only sight of note was the Church of the Assumption of Mary.

Among the cultural landmarks with a religious, Catholic foundation officially visited by statesmen in Slovenia are several others. In 2001, Queen Margrethe of Denmark, during an official visit, visited the Seminary Library in Ljubljana.¹¹ In the programs of the official visits of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg Henri and the President of Ireland Mary McAleese, who both visited Slovenia that same year, was the famous church in Hrastovlje. In 2003, Czech President Václav Klaus, on his official visit to our country, also visited Škofja Loka and the local Church of St. James. Since there are also members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community living in Slovenia, it is not surprising that the President of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Svetozar Marović, during his official visit to Slovenia in 2003, visited the Serbian Orthodox Church in Ljubljana, where he was greeted by Parish Priest Peran Bošković,¹² while the guest was also received in Ljubljana Cathedral by the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ljubljana, Franc Rode. A year later, Adnan Terzić, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited Slovenia and met with Mufti Osman Đogić at the seat of the Mešihat – the Islamic Community in Slovenia. Representatives of the Association of Slovenian Catholic Guides and Scouts and the Scout Association of Slovenia met with King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden at Ljubljana Castle during his visit in 2004. When Romano Prodi, President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Italy, came on an official visit in 2007, part of the program was also Holy Mass in the Church of St. Bartholomew, celebrated by the Apostolic Nuncio to the Republic of Slovenia, Santos Abril y Castello.

10 During his official visit to Slovenia in 1998, the President of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, visited Maribor Cathedral.

11 The mentioned library was also visited in 2001 by the President of the Republic of Malta, Guido de Marco.

12 The same goes for the visit of Serbian President Boris Tadić in 2009, who also signed the guest book in the Serbian Orthodox Church and viewed the construction of the cultural and pastoral centre, which was visited the following year, during his official visit to Slovenia, by Serbian Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković.



Among the cultural landmarks included in official visits in Slovenia, in 2014 there was the Franciscan Monastery Kostanjevica in Nova Gorica. It was visited by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joachim Gauck, who, under the guidance of the guardian of the monastery, toured the famous monastery library and signed the monastery guest book. He also visited the church. Sveta Gora above Nova Gorica is a well-known pilgrimage centre. In 2014, during the visit of Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, it was part of the program prepared by the Protocol of the Republic of Slovenia. President Napolitano was welcomed there by a representative of the monastery, who presented Sveta Gora to him.

Much media attention in the past has been devoted to the annual commemorative ceremony at the Russian Chapel on Vršič. The higher the guest in rank, the more media attention they are given. Within the framework of his working visit to Slovenia in 2015, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, visited the chapel, but this could not be compared in terms of security and logistics with 2016, when Slovenian protocol oversaw the participation of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the commemorative ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the Russian Chapel in Slovenia. This was a true state-religious manifestation, as the Police Orchestra performed the Russian and Slovenian anthems in front of the chapel, followed by a speech by the honorary patron of the commemorative ceremony, Slovenian President Borut Pahor, and then by Russian President Putin. The Presidents of both countries and the President of the Slovenia–Russia Association laid wreaths, and the gathering continued with an Orthodox church service (panikhida), led by the head of the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, Hilarion, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

From autumn 2015 to spring 2016, the territory of our country was part of the extensive migration route across the Balkans. Since the Holy See under Pope Francis paid special attention to the migration issue (a policy that continues today), it is not surprising that Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Holy See, visited Slovenia on a three-day working visit between 2 and 4 February 2016. He met with the Prime Minister at the Presidential Palace, and the Prime Minister hosted a lunch for the guest at Vila Podrožnik. Part of the visit, organized by the Apostolic Nunciature,



included Holy Mass in Ljubljana Cathedral and a dinner with Slovenian bishops. However, the official working visit also included the ceremonial opening of the new Apostolic Nunciature in Slovenia, where, in addition to the guest, the President of the Republic of Slovenia also addressed those gathered. Together they unveiled a commemorative plaque. As part of the visit, Cardinal Parolin, guided by a representative of the Ministry of the Interior, visited the refugee centre in Dobova and met with representatives of humanitarian organizations in the humanitarian block.

The official state protocol also adapts to the wishes and convictions of guests, which is evident, among other things, from the official visit of the Prince and Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Fra' Giacomo Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto, between 14 and 17 June 2019. The guest first met with the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ljubljana, Stanislav Zore, and visited the SMOM Embassy. He participated in Holy Mass at Brezje during the national pilgrimage of the sick and disabled. He was also present at Holy Mass on Gora Ojka and visited Komenda Castle in Polzela, one of the oldest commanderies of the Order of St. John in Slovenia. The guest was received with military honours on Congress Square by the Slovenian President of the Republic, who also hosted a formal luncheon for him at Strmol Castle. This was followed by meetings with the Prime Minister and the Parliament.

Conclusion

The research has shown that protocol visits in the Republic of Slovenia are multifaceted phenomena that go beyond the purely formal-diplomatic dimension and function as an instrument for strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations. Their content and course demonstrate a high degree of alignment between diplomatic law and practice, as defined by the DDPR and the accompanying Guidelines. Empirical data obtained from the records of the Protocol of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia confirm that the number of state visits, ranked among the most prestigious forms of international meetings, is extremely limited.

A special chapter in this context is represented by the two visits of Pope John Paul II, which by their very nature and symbolic value transcend



traditional protocol categorizations. These were events that simultaneously bore the characteristics of a state, religious, and cultural encounter, and which, in the collective memory of the Slovenian nation, strengthened the bond between the Republic of Slovenia and the Holy See. These visits testify that the religious dimension remains a relevant element of diplomacy, as it contributes to transcending the purely political discourse and opens space for dialogue on the level of values, identities, and cultural heritage.

The analysis likewise confirms that the Republic of Slovenia, through its protocol practices, positions itself among the states that know how to integrate their cultural and religious particularities into the diplomatic framework. In these cases, religion has shown itself to be a silent but important actor of soft diplomacy, enabling the establishment of more enduring symbolic bridges of cooperation. In this way, it is confirmed that protocol visits are not only a manifestation of sovereignty and international recognition, but also an opportunity for strengthening the normative and cultural identity of the state within the global environment.



Abbreviation

DDPR *Decree on the Determination of Protocol Rules* 2020

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