



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

Address
by the President of the Republic of Slovenia Nataša Pirc Musar
at the opening ceremony of the
Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention (YPAC) 2024 session

Kamnik, 12 March 2024

Check against delivery.

*Headmaster of Rudolf Maister Grammar and Secondary School Kamnik,
Mayor of Kamnik,
Professors and participants from Rudolf Maister Grammar and Secondary School
Kamnik,
Delegates of the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention 2024,
Ladies and gentlemen.*

As Slovenia is presiding over the Alpine Convention this biennium, I am delighted that Kamnik is already for the second time hosting all of you from many Alpine countries. I am proud to be able to welcome you, delegates of the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention 2024, at your yearly gathering here in Slovenia.

The general topic this week, Protected Natural Areas, coincides perfectly with celebrating 100 years of Triglav National Park this year, as our oldest and biggest protected natural area.

We Slovenians are proud of our mountains and the mountaineering way of life. Hiking is a valued weekend activity, as is discovering and conquering various mountain peaks. There are infinite hikes to be taken, and in times of virtual "reality" and of instant gratification offered at the fingertips of our smartphones, hiking is an activity of bonding with nature and of perseverance.

Coming from the Alpine countries, I am sure this resonates deeply with your traditions and cultures too.

Our countries also greatly treasure winter sports. And we would unfortunately be hard pressed to find sports more affected by the ongoing climate change as are skiing, cross-country skiing, ski jumping and other winter sports. Winter rain instead of snow is a result of the warming atmosphere and is devastating for the Alpine regions, traditionally strongly dependent on winter tourism.

This past summer, we also witnessed unprecedented flooding, yet another manifestation of the changing weather patterns due to climate change. The town of Kamnik and its surroundings were hit by the floods among the hardest.

Yet this also is an excellent example of the urgency of the Alpine Convention. We have entered into this complex system of international agreements and commitments precisely to cooperate in the protection and management of all relevant cross-boundary issues. The value of the Alpine Convention is that it treats the Alpine mountain range as a solid geographical entity, going beyond national borders.

Delegates, there is one additional point I would like to make tonight.

That is the importance to recognise and accept the spark we all have inside of us. To nurture it and ignite it with the courage to take part in something that truly matters to you. Democratic participation is a civilizational achievement that allows us to do so. And you, my dear young friends, are an indispensable part of it.

For almost two decades, the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention has been bringing together students and teachers who genuinely care about the prosperity and sustainable development of the region, something I am passionate about too and something that largely contributed to my decision to go into politics.

You being here tonight confirms that. I see the courage and vigour when I look at every single one of you sitting in the auditorium. Though still young, your participation means that you are prepared to actively engage in shaping society and making the region a better place to live and thrive in – for people, for animals, trees and plants, for our environment.

You are the future leaders of your generation and architects of our future. Whether it be climate change mitigation and adaptation, cultural heritage, international or national politics, science, finance, the economy, arts, craft or sports, you have a chance to define your generation and shape the future for the better. The Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention might be the first step for some of you. One thing is clear, though: it is one of many steps that will shape who you are and will make up your heritage.

So go ahead – be creative, be bold, take risks, be thoughtful, considerate and kind. Give it your best shot. I cannot imagine better encouragement than this quote from the

devoted European Jacques Delors, who passed away last year but left us with this powerful message: "Don't be a pessimist. Or an optimist. Be an activist."

In conclusion, I would like to express my admiration and gratitude to every teacher and mentor who has been involved in this project since it began in 2006. To its "founding mothers", Mrs Irmgard Senhofer and Mrs Claudia Rauchegger, to everyone from all the participating schools and beyond who have helped the project grow; to everyone from this year's host school and to those who will carry the project on in the years to come. Special thanks also to the parents, who encourage and support their children in this project and who have opened their homes to participants from abroad.

Finally, yet most importantly, thank you, dear delegates of the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention 2024, not only for inviting me to be a part of this year's session, but above all for the courage and your decision to make the Alpine region a better place one step at a time.

I wish you lively and insightful discussions, creative ideas, and many opportunities to gather new knowledge and experience, to make new friendships and renew old ones.

The very best of luck to you all!