It was quite a pleasant surprise for me to receive in early June 1995 the news that I had been elected as a Corresponding Member of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU in the Slovene acronym). This venerable institution, which traces its roots to an eighteenth-century Enlightenment foundation dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge in all its branches has, since the end of Communism in Slovenia and the winning of national independence, been actively pursuing closer ties with academics around the world who are interested in Slovene studies. It is one thing, however, to know this fact in the abstract, and quite another to be the beneficiary of it in the concrete form of an invitation to attend the induction ceremonies in Ljubljana later that month. It took me a few days, plus the encouragement and support of friends, to decide that I really had to take part personally in this celebration.

Summer comes a bit earlier on the “sunny side of the Alps,” as the tourist brochures have taken to calling Slovenia. Ljubljana at the solstice is warm, green, sometimes a bit wet but always very inviting. It was very pleasant to be back again, and my joy was compounded by the fact that my former advisor from graduate days, Professor Emeritus Rado L. Leneck from Columbia University, was also in town with his family to be recognized by the Academy and the Slovene government as an “ambassador for Slovene scholarship” in the wider world. Some kind spirit or spirits had seen to it that my induction was to complement Rado’s award. Needless to say, it gave the very formal SAZU ceremonies the air of a family occasion, which we celebrated accordingly.

Membership in SAZU comes in two forms: for Slovene citizens it involves ranks not dissimilar to our professional ones, with promotion from corresponding to associate to full Academician based on scholarly or artistic contributions and achievements. Non-Slovenes are elected as Corresponding Members: in addition to their public recognition at SAZU and the conferring of a certificate, they are then invited to take part in the Academy’s scholarly endeavors, which include conferences, publications, lectures, and the like. I am happy to say I have already been invited back, for a conference in 1996, on the translation of the Bible into Slavic languages, an area of particular interest to me.

Following the formal ceremonies was a splendid reception for the newly elected and promoted members and their guests. Then, for those of us who had come from farthest away, an elegant lunch was hosted by Dr. Francê Bernik, the President of SAZU. In a period of intense and often unsettling change, Bernik has steered the Academy masterfully around many potential dangers, towards its scholarly and humanistic goals, and he has done so with a grace that is apparent to everyone. The entire day of ceremonies reflected his high commitment both to preserving the scholarly traditions of his country and to opening Slovenia further to the world.

It is an overworked claim that the world is a small place and that we all live together in a global village. Moreover, it can on occasion be patently untrue, as we see not one hundred kilometers from Slovenia’s southern border. Yet there are also powerful forces for integration, mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation at work in the world today. It seems to be the lot of southeastern Europe, that part of the world I know and study and love, that in the last decade of this millennium, it exemplifies both the worst and the best of our current human condition. I am grateful and honored to have been included in the best!