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17 May, 2013

Mr Alfred Brežnik,
Honorary Consul General
Consulate-General of the Republic of Slovenia
PO BOX 118
Coogee NSW 2031

Dear Mr Brežnik,

Thank you for your letter dated 7 May 2013, relating to the Slovenian language program. As a leader and spokesperson for the Slovenian community in Australia, we understand and acknowledge the concerns you have outlined in your letter regarding the move from analogue to digital radio and the new time allocation for the Slovenian language program.

The changes made are the result of a long process which included a public consultation in April 2012, to determine the criteria which would be used to select the languages for a new SBS Radio Schedule. The SBS Radio Schedule needed to be reviewed because it had not been changed substantially since 1994 and it no longer reflected the demographics of multicultural Australia as it is today.

In consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census data for languages spoken in Australia, SBS determined which languages would be included on the new radio schedule and on which platform. We acknowledge the Census data is not perfect when it comes to measuring languages spoken in Australia. However, it is the primary population tool in Australia and arguably all language communities have been similarly under-represented by the results.

SBS made four changes to the final Selection Criteria, based on feedback received during the public consultation process. Under the Selection Criteria, languages with more than 20,000 speakers at home were included on the new analogue radio schedule along with 'high needs' languages as determined by the Census data and the criteria. During the process, SBS added six new languages to the new radio schedule taking the total number to 74. Under the new SBS Radio Schedule, not all languages could be accommodated on the analogue networks. Fortunately, the Federal Government increased funding for SBS in 2012 which has allowed us to continue producing content in all languages on the previous schedule including Slovenian. As a result, 21 languages have been moved to a digital only platform and have been allocated one hour per week based on the available funding.

A story in fours: One in four Australians was born overseas. Nearly a half were either born overseas or have a parent who was. Four million Australians speak a language other than English. That's three good reasons (or is it four?) for SBS to provide a thorough exploration of the real, multicultural Australia.

Seven Billion Stories and counting...

Throughout the consultation process, SBS engaged with a range of stakeholders within the Slovenian community including listeners, community organisations, peak bodies and religious groups. Slovenian organisations and contacts engaged during the consultation process included: the President of the Australian Slovaks Association; Slovenian Associations in Melbourne, QLD and South Australia; Slovenia-Australian Cultural and Sport Association Springvale Inc; Slovenian Australian Club (Triglav Panthers); the President of Slovenian Club ('Pianica') Wollongong; Chairman of the Slovenian Aged Care Facility (Mother Romana Home); St Raphael's Slovenian Religious and Cultural Centre Melbourne; Slovenian Religious and Cultural Centre Melbourne; and the Slovenian Media House.

I note your comments about the elderly Slovenian audience and their challenges with new technology and SBS empathises with their needs. The Slovenian program can now be heard on digital radio (SBS Radio 3), digital TV (SBS Radio 3), online (www.sbs.com.au/radio) and via the SBS Your Language app. To coincide with the launch of the new SBS Radio Schedule, SBS has been distributing some digital radios to the language communities which have moved to the digital only platform, including the Slovenian community. I would like to extend the offer of these digital radios to you and your network of community contacts. Whilst there are only a limited number of digital radios available, I would encourage you to contact Lou Petrolo, the Strategy and Community Relations Manager for SBS Radio, to discuss the community's needs. Lou can be contacted at 02 9430 3884.

It is also very easy for listeners to access the Slovenian language program via digital TV. At the end of this year, the Federal Government will switch off the analogue television network and nearly everyone in Australia will have a digital television. If you scroll through to the radio channels, you will find SBS Radio 3. For those who are working or driving during the program, they can catch up online when they get home at www.sbs.com.au/slovenian.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns in relation to the changes to the Slovenian language program. The implementation of the new SBS Radio Schedule has been extremely difficult because of the changes to many language programs. We genuinely value your feedback and support and sincerely hope you will continue to support the SBS Slovenian program.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JOSEPH SKRZYNSKI', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JOSEPH SKRZYNSKI, AO
Chairman