

Sinfo

OCTOBER 2010

BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

**SLOVENIAN
BASKETBALL ON TOP
OF THE WORLD**



38 NATURAL TRAILS
KAYAKING DOWN THE KRKA. PRICELESS.



Darijan Košir
 Director

THE PROJECT OF THE DECADE

SLOVENIA HAS BEGUN THE POLITICAL AUTUMN with the adoption of one of the most important and far-reaching structural measures of the last 10 years: a draft of amendments to pension legislation.

There have been no political, economic or demographic dilemmas over whether such deep social changes are necessary: the population is ageing, a decreasing number of people of working age have to maintain an increasing number of pensioners, and state coffers can no longer cope with the burden. There are two possibilities: either we alleviate this burden and divide it among the generations by making older people work longer, which means that they will have to be maintained for a shorter period, or the value of pensions will continue to decrease over time. Without raising the retirement age, if conditions are unchanged the budget deficit will increase by one percent of GDP every year, meaning that in less than two decades Slovenia will break the Maastricht rule on public debt, posing a serious threat to the stability of public finances.

“ ALL MAJOR PROJECTS IN INDEPENDENT SLOVENIA TO DATE HAVE RESULTED IN A VERY REASONABLE COMPROMISE – AND THERE IS NO REASON TO FEAR A DIFFERENT OUTCOME ON THIS OCCASION. ”

Of course, every social measure that affects rights acquired by the individual is painful and hard to accept at the personal level. That is why the government has spent the last year attempting to agree the reform in consultation with the social partners (particularly the unions). Unfortunately, however, the gap between the urgency of the reform and workers' expectations has been too great to allow a reconciliation of positions within a reasonable time. For this reason the government, headed by Prime Minister Borut Pahor, has been forced to take a risk and place before parliament a draft law on which agreement has not been reached.

This could lead to a number of complications, from demonstrations to a referendum (although a referendum on an issue such as duration of employment would be constitutionally questionable). Nevertheless, the government cannot shirk its responsibility; every year of delay in this reform will cost the country very dearly. On the other hand, all major projects in independent Slovenia to date have resulted in a very reasonable compromise – and there is no reason to fear a different outcome on this occasion.

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Graphic design Boštjan Krajnc **Printed by** Mobinet

Gateway to information on Slovenia www.slovenia.si
Government Communication Office www.ukom.gov.si
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SINFO is printed on the eco-friendly FSC label paper. The FSC label provides assurance, that paper originates from responsible forest management according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.

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Cover photo Sportida



MEETING OF SLOVENIAN DIPLOMATS

Mateja Malnar Štembal
Photo STA

PARTICIPANTS IN THIS YEAR'S SLOVENIAN DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCE PAID particular attention to adapting the content and organisation of the foreign minister's work to match developments around the world.

The foreign minister, Samuel Žbogar, opened the conference with an assessment that the network of diplomatic-consular missions and individual missions has undergone major changes in a relatively short time in the implementation of priorities planned in the field of economic diplomacy. He said that effective economic diplomacy for Slovenia demanded more active cooperation between the ministry and partner institutions in Slovenia and more active work by the diplomatic and consular network.

He also used his address to state that Slovenia had a globally responsible, politically principled, economically dynamic, nationally aware and ecologically oriented diplomatic service.

For Slovenian foreign minister the major successes of the past year have been the intensive work to resolve the border dispute with Croatia, landing the headquarters of the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) for Ljubljana, and the Bled Strategic Forum.

Žbogar said that the diplomatic service had to continue to work towards positive and well-ordered relations with neighbouring states, with particular attention being paid to minorities. It will also retain an interest in the development and stability of the Western Balkan region, and will continue to contribute to preventing and stabilising conflicts. It will also adapt to new developments in the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy and within Nato.

A few days later, the minister also said that the foreign ministry would form an operational group together with the Ministry of the economy to seek solutions on how to help Slovenian business to break into foreign markets.

'Slovenia had a globally responsible, politically principled, economically dynamic, nationally aware and ecologically oriented diplomatic service.'

New solution to outstanding issues

NEW MOVES WERE MADE DURING THE summer to resolve the outstanding issues between Slovenia and Croatia. The respective Prime Ministers, Borut Pahor and Jadranka Kosor, met in Bohinj during the summer and agreed on an approach to solve the issue of money owned to Croatian savers in Ljubljanska Banka, based on a succession agreement.

Prime Minister explained that he had agreed an approach with his Croatian counterpart "in line with the succession agreement, which it will not infringe on the fundamental rights of individuals," so that "the expectations of people affected by this issue will be satisfied." The Slovenian prime minister said that it was a legally grounded, fair and promising approach that could solve the final issue between Slovenia and Croatia that could present an obstacle to Croatia's EU integration. Croatian Prime Minister said that the solution's approach was based on international agreements that



Prime Ministers, Borut Pahor and Jadranka Kosor, met in Bohinj

do not restrict the rights of individuals.

There will soon be a meeting between co-presidents of the mixed committee for the resolution of open issues between Slovenia and Croatia. The Slovenian government appointed the ambassador

Igor Senčar, the foreign ministry's general director for European affairs and bilateral policy to this post, while the Croatian section of the commission is led by Davor Božinović, a state secretary at the Croatian foreign ministry.



Slovenian Prime Minister, Borut Pahor, and Serbian president, Boris Tadić, agreed to support the establishment of a joint railway company

Pahor and Tadić support joint rail company

AT A MEETING IN EARLY SEPTEMBER IN Goriška Brda, the Slovenian prime minister, Borut Pahor, and Serbian president, Boris Tadić, agreed to support the establishment of a joint railway company, Cargo 10, together with Croatia. The aim of the project is to increase the competitiveness of Trans-

European Rail Corridor 10.

Prime Minister Pahor also offered the Serbian president Slovenian assistance in resolving issues between Serbia and Kosovo and stressed that it was in the interest of Serbia, EU member states, and the international community for the text of any resolution on Kosovo to be

written in a manner that met the interests of both Serbia and all EU members.

Elections for members of municipal councils and mayors will take place in Slovenia on 10 October 2010.



PENSION SYSTEM REFORM SECURE OLD AGE FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Alenka Čebular Photo Shutterstock

SLOVENIA IS FACING A NEW REFORM OF THE PENSION system. On 9 September, the Government approved the draft compulsory pension insurance act. There are widely divergent opinions among the Slovenian public as to whether the pension system needs to be reformed, what types of changes are needed and how far-reaching those changes should be, and they are often dependent on which side of the table of the social partnership they come from.

Slovenia is constitutionally defined as a welfare state. The state is thus obliged to provide at least basic social welfare for its citizens throughout their lives. The public pension system, which is based on compulsory pension insurance for everyone with an employment agreement, is a very important part of the social security system, as pensions are for the most part the sole source of income for the elderly population.

However, the fact is that – like everywhere in the developed world – Slovenia's population is continually aging, life expectancy is increasing, and owing to the lower numbers of the younger generations the percentage of the working population is falling. All of this puts considerable pressure on the pension system, as well as on the state budget, from which all losses from the pension coffers are covered. The economic crisis has further aggravated the difficulties of the existing system: the fall in economic growth which has occurred in the past two years has forced the entire country to face the fact that there are no reserves in the pension coffers that could cover insufficient revenues, which appear during crises or similar extraordinary events. If the Slovenian Government hopes to continue to provide regular and decent pensions in the coming years, changes are inevitable.

The basic goals which the Government hopes to achieve through pension reform are:

- to ensure the regular payment of pensions to current retirees and workers who will retire in the coming decades;
- to halt the reduction of starting pensions with respect to salaries and to ensure the increase of their real value with respect to the cost of living, which would provide the present and future generations a decent pension that will provide them security in their old age;
- to increase the fairness of the pension system with a particular emphasis on individual contributions to the pension coffers, on equal burdening of the young, middle-aged and older generations, on the position of workers who began working early in their youth and who work in difficult working conditions and on a gradual approach to the introduction of changes.

The Government's proposals

The key solutions proposed by the Government in the draft act sent for parliamentary discussion are:

- a gradual increase of the retirement age and equal conditions for men and women: the retirement age for both sexes will now be 65, and the minimum age for obtaining the right to early retirement will be 60
- incentives for extending employment periods (rewards, penalties)
- a gradual increase in the accounting period, from the 18 to the 34 best successive years
- new method of aligning pensions with salaries and cost of living increases.

It should be emphasised that the concept of intergenerational solidarity will remain the cornerstone of the Slovenian pension system: the actively employed will pay contributions from their salaries, thereby providing retirees with pensions.

Gradual increase of the retirement age

The retirement age will be raised to 65 for men and women. The change will be implemented gradually: reaching age 65 will be a condition for retirement only in the year 2021 (men) and 2025 (women).

Incentives for extending the employment period

We have already mentioned that along with all of the unfavourable demographic circumstances and the economic crisis, the financial difficulties of the pension coffers are also exacerbated by the Slovenian "custom" of retiring as soon as you satisfy the conditions. The incentives (both rewards and penalties) proposed by the Government in the new system are intended to change this behaviour pattern.

The Government proposes:

- that for each year of work after fulfilling the conditions for early retirement until reaching age 65, individuals will also receive 20 per cent of their early retirement pension;
- that for each year of work after the fulfilment of the minimum

conditions for old-age pensions, the basis for the calculation of the pension is increased correspondingly (which of course positively affects the final pension);

- that upon partial retirement, which will now be extended to self-employed persons and farmers, along with corresponding salaries (with respect to the number of hours worked), individuals will also receive part of their early retirement pension;
- that reducing contributions for compulsory pension insurance will also encourage employers to retain older employees in employment relationships;
- that each born or adopted child will reduce the age condition for retirement by 8 months, but to a maximum of 24 months. This incentive can be exercised by parents who received compensation for child care during the first year of the child's life.

Only one penalty is proposed: for each month of difference up to the fulfilment of the conditions for old-age pensions the pension basis will be reduced by 0.3 per cent.

Extending the calculation period from 18 to 34 years

In addition to raising the retirement age, the extension of the calculation period is one of the items of the pension reform which is generating the most controversy. However, the fact is that Slovenia has one of the shortest calculation periods in Europe, as it is nearly impossible to find a country where the pension bases are calculated over periods shorter than 25 years.

The main criticism of opponents to this measure is that it will result in considerably lower pensions. Since this could actually occur, at the same time as the gradual extension of the calculation period, the Government is proposing two parallel measures which will prevent the reduction of pensions. Thus the accrual percentage, which is crucial to the calculation of actual pensions, will be raised to 80 per cent, and at the same time the horizontal levelling of pensions, i.e. the alignment of new pensions with all already existing pensions (which causes all new pensions to be automatically approximately 20 per cent lower) will be abolished.

It is also significant that both of the parallel measures will be implemented immediately, while the calculation period will be gradually extended until 2026, by one year per year.

New method of aligning pensions

In Slovenia, pensions are currently completely aligned with salary increases. However, owing to the increasing number of retirees this method is becoming unsustainable, which has become particularly noticeable during the present crisis. In addition, comparisons with European countries which are facing similar demographic changes show that the majority have already adjusted the alignment of pensions to the changes in question.

Therefore according to the proposed change, pensions will be aligned with salary and cost of living increases, once annually at a ratio of 60 : 40. A safety valve is also proposed which would prevent the growth of pensions from lagging behind cost of living increases, which would ensure at least the maintenance of the real values of pensions.





Why the proposed changes are necessary

The main reasons for changing the pension system are the already mentioned changes in the structure of the population and the labour market, which we have seen in Slovenia and elsewhere in the developed world in recent years:

- an aging population and a reduced percentage of actively employed population
- late entry of young people onto the labour market
- excessively early retirement

Aging population and a reduced percentage of actively employed population

According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, in 2003 the number of people older than 65 in Slovenia exceeded the number of children, i.e. up to 14 years of age, for the first time. At the beginning of 2010 there were 338,265 people older than 65. By 2060 this figure is expected to rise to 589,900, and will represent 33.4 per cent of the overall population. During the same period the number of people older than 80 is forecast to rise from 71,200 to 249,500, which will represent more than 14 per cent of the overall population.

Since the birth rate in Slovenia has been continually declining in recent decades, the younger generations are also numerically weak. Thus in 2060 in Slovenia, 100 employed people will work for more than 62 people over 65, which of course raises significant questions about the capacity of the pension coffers, since there simply will not be sufficient revenues for the payment of pensions at a level that provides a decent living.

Late entry of young people onto the labour market

The changes in the age structure of the actively employed population are also a consequence of the increasingly late entry of young people onto the labour market and the increased length of educational periods. Thus according to data from the Pension Insurance Institute, the number of insured persons up to 24 years of age decreased by 13 per cent from 2002 – 2008, which had a significant influence on the fact that the average pension period in the 20 – 34 age group decreased by over two years.

This causes a double shortfall in the pension coffers: on one hand the number of people paying contributions is reduced, and on the other, increased life expectancy extends the average period of receiving pensions, even though the period when an individual is subject to compulsory pension insurance is actually shorter.

Excessively early retirement

Although the employment rate of older people in Slovenia is gradually rising, in comparison with the EU it remains at a low level and as such is one of the main structural problems on the labour market. Slovenia has one of the lowest employment rates for people between 55 and 64: in 2008 it sat at 32.8 per cent (the European average (EU-27) is 45.6 per cent). This situation is primarily the result of too-early retirement, i.e. retirement before the fulfilment of the legally determined minimum conditions for old-age pensions, which is characteristic of the Slovenian economy's transition period. And of course the majority of people retire as soon as they fulfil the minimum conditions for retirement.

Furthermore, the consequences of too-early retirement are also reflected in the increasingly worsening ratio between the actively employed population and retirees. This means that while the number of insured people grew slowly in the period from 1990 – 2009, the number of retirees grew significantly faster, which meant a fall in their ratio from two employed persons per retiree in 1990 to 1.6 employed persons per retiree in 2009.

If the changes that the Government is currently proposing are not enacted, in 10 years this ratio will fall to below 1.5, and by 2050 the contributions of one employed person to the pension coffers will no longer cover the pension of 1 retiree.

Pension reform expected to contribute to high autumn temperatures

The parliamentary debates over pension reform will undoubtedly be very intense, as the political parties will use them to gain political points. The country's largest trade union (the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia) has already called for a referendum on pension reform, but despite this the Government believes that the proposals are going in the right direction. Therefore in the next few months it will work hard to get the proposed changes introduced by 1 January 2011. This is the only way that the system will be able to be changed gradually, with sufficiently long transitional periods, which will significantly soften the reforms from the viewpoint of the individual.



BLED STRATEGIC FORUM A SUCCESS FOR ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Vesna Žarkovič Photo STA

THE 5TH BLED STRATEGIC FORUM HAS CLOSED ON A note indicating the success of economic diplomacy. The major participation of "top international policy-makers" is evidence of Slovenia's standing, and also a powerful magnet for Slovenian companies, which regard the forum as an opportunity.

The two-day forum, organised by the Slovenian Foreign Ministry and the Centre for European Perspective, was sponsored by a total of 43 Slovenian companies, and their contributions entirely covered the forum's costs. These amounted to around EUR 150,000, around the level of previous years. The forum was attended by more than 400 people from 40 countries, and they included "top international policy-makers, private sector leaders and experts".

The ministry's main priority is still helping the diplomatic corps seek out new business opportunities, and the Bled Forum represents one of the major opportunities to promote local companies, knowledge and the strategic thinking of Slovenian entrepreneurs.

Among the most prominent figures attending this year's forum, the spotlight was on the former US Secretary of

State, Colin Powell, Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme, Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa and Canadian Minister of Defence Peter Gordon Mackay, as well as on Preneet Kaur, Minister of State at the Indian Foreign Ministry, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, deputy Foreign Minister of Brazil, the European Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik, former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzales, who headed the group considering the future of the EU, and the deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, Richard Boucher. The foreign ministers of Croatia, Gordan Jandroković, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sven Alkalaj, plus numerous others, were also present.

On the transition to the next decade, participants discussed the future challenges in the world. Here they covered a range of topics, including the problems of effective leadership in the world and consideration of the role of the EU in a multi-polar world, the importance of innovation for an exit from the economic crisis, establishing trust in the Western Balkans and bringing it together, the challenges for regional security and cooperation in Central Asia, water issues, energy issues and the internet.



Bled Forum highlights need for global leadership

Participants of the first discussions at the Strategic Forum concluded that in the coming decade, the world faces numerous challenges that will demand above all global leadership.

In his address, Slovenian President Danilo Türk identified realistic assessments, honesty, openness and imagination as the keys for considering the future and seeking solutions. The Prime Minister, Borut Pahor, agreed with the need for new, fresh ideas on tackling the crisis.

Pahor took the view that a dialogue was needed, and the Bled Forum was important in this. Pahor appealed in particular for us at least to maintain some optimism, since you cannot solve problems with fear.

On shifting to new sources of energy

A shift to new sources of energy is essential for sustainable development, but this shift requires systemic solutions and a complex energy policy, participants of the Bled Strategic Forum discussion pointed out. They underlined that the transition could take a long time, since the infrastructure is long-term, so alongside optimism we also need realism.

We need systemic solutions, since energy policy today is much more complex than it was in the past, and is also tied to health, climate change, nutrition and other aspects of human life, pointed out the executive director of the new Joint Institute for Strategic Energy Analysis, Doug Arent. Here he added that it will take a long time for changes to be implemented in the energy

sector, since infrastructure in this field is long-term, so we cannot be over-optimistic, and should also be realistic.

Stephen Tindale, a member of the Centre for European Reform and moderator of the discussion, reminded those present that the transition to new sources of energy was necessary not just in the area of obtaining electricity, but in all forms of energy. The EU's target of 20 percent of all energy being obtained from renewable sources by 2020 includes fuel for transport and heating, and not just electricity.

Here it is true that some new forms of energy are entirely welcome, and there is no doubt about their benefit. This applies to sources such as the sun and wind, and in certain forms, water. Some sources, however, are more problematic, and generate various doubts, including biofuels, explained Tindale.

Calls for integrated and harmonised water policy

Speakers in the discussion on the challenges of water management at the Bled Strategic Forum agreed that an effective response to the challenge of water management required an integrated and harmonised approach that would bring together different policies and take account of climate change. At the same time, they drew attention to the fact that given the speed of climate change, time was running out.

One of the messages from the Bled discussion was that this, together with the demographic explosion in some parts of the world and the rapid economic growth in developing economies, demanded on an increasing scale clear global leadership in the area of water management.

'A shift to new sources of energy is essential for sustainable development, but this shift requires systemic solutions and a complex energy policy, participants of the Bled Strategic Forum discussion pointed out.'

Foreign Minister Samuel Žbogar:

Slovenia's diplomatic corps is striving to open the door for Slovenian companies, and they in turn are capable of exploiting this. This shows that alongside the Vegrads, Slovenia also has companies that are capable of looking into the future and that believe in forums, and that we have companies that believe in economic diplomacy and regard cooperation with the foreign ministry as successful private-public partnership.

Former US Secretary of State, General Colin Powell:

I appeal for greater optimism in solving problems. If the world was able to hold out during the period of nuclear threat in the Cold War a full 20 years ago, then if it is united, and in partnership, it will also solve the current problems. The world is no longer in a time of superpowers, but is a world of partnerships, and in this world small countries will play an increasing part. This also applies to Slovenia.

The driving force for the future in the world will be primarily the creation of wealth, since this drives progress in the USA and Europe, as well as in China. Here there is also a need to create jobs, since this gives people dignity; in this way stability will be created in the world. In this period, Europe has made an exceptional journey, and among the greatest achievements of united Europe I would highlight the open Schengen area. Slovenia has 20,000 square kilometres, two million inhabitants, a total of 7,000 soldiers, but look at the role it plays.

Yves Leterme, Prime Minister of Belgium, which currently holds the EU Presidency:

Mutual dependence in the world is growing in all areas, from the economy to politics, security and climate change. In seeking solutions to what might be local problems, we need to think in a broader, global framework.

For this the world needs global leadership, but in this there should be a shift in the balance of power in institutions. The G20 group is a good framework for resolving the world's problems.

Director for Global Energy Dialogue at the International Energy Agency, Ulrich Benterbusch:

A revolution in energy, if we wish to stay on a sustainable path, is urgently needed. Without major help from developing countries, we will not succeed; countries such as China, India and Brazil are already working on this and they have ambitious programmes for efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Climatologist Lučka Kajfež Bogataj:

Climate change will merely exacerbate existing problems, although global atmospheric warming is just one of the reasons for problems with water. The other



main reason is human activity. Saving water should take priority over major infrastructure projects to provide water sources, such as extremely expensive aqueducts between dry and wet areas.

European Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik:

In Europe, too, the lack of water is a serious problem, especially in the Mediterranean. The boundary between threatened and non-threatened areas is shifting north, owing to climate change, and the areas where water problems are appearing are expanding.

The issue of water management does not involve just the issue of water shortages, but also the quality of water resources. On the issue of water resource management, the European Union has taken the approach of directives, meaning that the Union sets a common goal, which the Member States then try to achieve through various national approaches. The EU's Water Framework Directive was adopted in 2000.

The assumption for successful water management lies in regional cooperation and the bottom-up principle. Success in this area also requires the integration of aspects of water resource management into other policies, such as agriculture, transport, industrial policy and spatial planning.

There are major differences among Member States in the implementation of EU legislation in the area of water. Slovenia is among 11 countries that have not yet presented a response to the Commission in due time regarding measures relating to the management of water catchment areas, and that have therefore received their first reminders from Brussels.

“I did not become Prime Minister in order to be popular. I’m here to make urgent and often unpleasant decisions.”

BORUT PAHOR

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Delo Photo Documentation

Mr Prime Minister, two years have passed since the election. Are you satisfied with the work that the Government has done in this period? What in your opinion is or what would you highlight as the greatest achievement?

The work of the Government in the last two years has been distinctly marked by the struggle with the economic crisis, which came into Slovenia from the outside. We have dealt with the crisis successfully, and in particular we have prevented the occurrence of any serious social consequences resulting from it; we managed to check them in time. The crisis has also either unfortunately or fortunately shown us that the foundations of the Slovenian economy have been chipped away more than they have been elsewhere, owing to which the consequences of the crisis, as expressed in the fall in GDP, are more serious than they are in other places. This has led us to the realisation that we will have to implement key reforms, without which we will not be able to overcome the crisis in the long term. The solutions to date have been successful, and finally after six consecutive quarters of economic decline, in the last quarter we posted a high 2.2 per cent rate of economic growth. In future we will have to create the proper balance between competitiveness and social cohesion.

The data on economic growth in the second quarter of this year indicate that a slow but steady trend of economic growth is beginning. That 2.2% is not

very high, but it will allow Slovenia to return to the path of genuine recovery. On the other hand, despite the growth you mentioned, the question arises of who will get the Slovenian economic machine and financial development going, and how will they get it going, in addition to providing higher salaries and decent pensions in the difficult years facing us, Europe and the world?

As we said, we are facing structural reforms that will repair the foundations of the Slovenian economy and create savings that we will be able to allocate to increasing investments in research and development instead of social transfers and debts. And since we are doing this interview for a newspaper that is published for a foreign audience: we are also putting a great deal of effort into internationalising Slovenian companies,

“AS I SAID SLIGHTLY JOKINGLY IN A SLOVENIAN DAILY: I LIKE TO HAVE BAD INDICATORS IN THE POLLS, AND THEN VICTORIES IN REFERENDUMS.”

into economic diplomacy which will open pathways for Slovenian companies not just on our classical markets, but also new ones such as the Near East, North Africa or Latin America. Slovenia is on the right track with regard to economic recovery, but without reforms that ensure long-term sustainability, we will not be able to get out of the crisis safely. Therefore this Government will be persistent in continuing to prepare reform after reform.

What does that future then look like, and to what extent is Slovenia still a welfare state?

Slovenia is and will remain a welfare state. However, it is true that in addition to social cohesion we now have to pay more attention to maintaining or increasing competitiveness, particularly during the time when the worst part of the crisis is behind us, and it is very important what kind of shape we come out of the crisis in. Therefore a welfare state, of course, but the Slovenian economy also has to be competitive because of the external environment. This is one of the essential elements of the reforms that we are undertaking. It’s going relatively well for Slovenia, and it is on the right track with regard to economic recovery, but we will have to be disciplined and stick to certain decisions, including with regard to structural reforms.

“The latest polls indicate a low level of support for and trust in the Government. The most recent public opinion poll shows that a full 68% of respondents do not support the Government. Do you have any comments on your falling popularity?”

The public opinion polls are probably a certain indicator of people’s attitudes, but I have to say that I did not become Prime Minister in order to be popular. I am here to make urgent and often unpleasant decisions which, unfortunately, are, in these times, unpopular. As long as I believe that we are working well and doing things right, the results of the polls do not bother me more than is



necessary for me not to lose contact with people. I would rather be unpopular and know that I am doing things right than the other way around. The Government performs its tasks because that is the duty, that the voters have entrusted to us and I don't care how that affects my and our popularity. As I said slightly jokingly in a Slovenian daily: I like to have bad indicators in the polls, and then victories in referendums. I was thinking among other things of a possible referendum on pension reform, which I am convinced, and I have stated this publicly, that we will get, that is, that we will win it.

You have called for support for every controversial change that has appeared on the parliamentary agenda. What arguments do you use to justify them?

As I have already said: they are justified by the fact that they are urgently necessary measures which will help us repair the foundations of the Slovenian economic house, so that the next crisis does not do as much damage as the past two years. I could say that it would be enough for my term of office if we repaint the house or erect a new façade. But I prefer to fix the foundation on which it stands, and I have decided to do so because that is my historical duty.

Do you expect the support of the deputies?

I believe the parliamentary discussions will show that the majority of the deputies understand the essence of the problem, and if necessary we will also convince the people in the case that they have to vote on fundamental issues at a referendum. We cannot think of ourselves or our terms of office, we have to think of the welfare of our children and of how they will live in the straitened circumstances of global connections and a competitive world.

Serious conflicts with the public sector trade unions are forecast over wage



“ I COULD SAY THAT IT WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR MY TERM OF OFFICE IF WE REPAINT THE HOUSE OR ERECT A NEW FAÇADE. BUT I PREFER TO FIX THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH IT STANDS, AND I HAVE DECIDED TO DO SO BECAUSE THAT IS MY HISTORICAL DUTY. ”

freezes. What is your response to the trade unions?

Very simply: the crisis has shown that there is no longer enough money for certain desires and needs that seemed realistic two years ago and that the burden on the straitened public financial situation has to be shared equally. It is not fair to create differences between the public and private sectors. If the latter suffers a loss of jobs and up to ten-percent lower wages, it is not fair for the public sector not to share that fate or even demand wage increases agreed upon during times when that was perhaps still possible. The public sector has not endured layoffs and wage reductions during the crisis like the private sector, so I expect that it will understand the urgency of the delay in making decisions about increasing their wages. This is the minimum amount of solidarity that I am expecting from employees in the public sector. As I stated last time in Parliament: if that's not a fair deal, then I really don't understand what a fair deal is.

We are on the threshold of a heated autumn political climate. In your viewpoint, which is the hottest, health care or pension reform?

Both reforms are crucial and urgently needed for the future, and in fact they are also linked. With regard to the pension reforms that the Government already approved at the beginning of September, I should say right at the beginning that they do not introduce anything drastic or radical. We began with the existing pension system and eliminated its key deficiencies. Most important here is of course the sustainability of the pension coffers, which are the sole guarantor of a secure old age for all generations, ours, our parents' and our children's. Second most important is halting pension decreases, and both of these can be achieved only by gradually increasing the retirement age up to 65.

All of the European countries are taking that road...

...some like Germany more radically, some like France less so, but nevertheless nobody can avoid making those decisions. I believe that a consensus has been achieved among economists about the urgency of pension reform. I hope that by the time we are done with the adoption of this legislation we will have reached a suitable compromise. However, I will repeat what has been stated many times: negotiations with social partners are sensible as long as they lead to a reasonable compromise; but if the trade unions remain in their trenches and refuse to negotiate on the basic parameters of change, the Government will have to adopt its own measures unilaterally and stand behind them. The Government could extend the deadline for social dialogue, but it could happen that even then an agreement would not be reached, and in between we would have lost precious time.

What direction will health care reform move in the next few months?

In the health care system we are drafting changes in both the organisation of health care activities and in the system of financing it. In the former we are anticipating huge opportunities in the method of management of health care institutions, where the management will have to have a much freer hand and decision-making autonomy, and with it also responsibility; both are currently mainly in the hands of the Ministry of Health. In changing health care financing we are seeking to strike a balance between compulsory and supplemental health insurance and the basket of rights which accrue to patients in compulsory health insurance. The debate over the payment of on-call doctors has already shown that we are going to be faced with some tough nuts to crack, so that the draft health care reforms will not make it into Parliament before the spring of next year.

You still have half your term ahead of you; what will the Government's priority tasks be in the next two years?

As we said, our task will be to ensure stable economic growth, which may not be fast, but will be solid and sustained. In particular we have to implement all of the key reforms for Slovenia. In addition to the pension and health care reforms, about which I have already spoken and which will give us both public finance sustainability and the savings we need for development, these include reforms in the area of the labour market, which is much too inflexible for more difficult economic circumstances, and undertakings in the area of infrastructure and energy, which are financially demanding but urgently needed measures which Slovenia has been lagging behind on for several years and whose lack of implementation is threatening to turn Slovenia into an uninteresting country with regard to development and traffic routes.

You recently concluded business in Libya for over half a billion euros, which is said to involve construction

and which is said to begin in a few days time. Can you tell us more about this?

I should respond more with regard to principle. I will always try to help the Slovenian economy obtain new business opportunities on new markets. Slovenia is not the only country that is attempting to search for opportunities to revive its domestic economy through investments in third countries. Therefore I am doing everything I can to help companies on foreign markets, as much as possible, whether it be for a state-owned or a private company. It is by all means the Government's job to assist companies in searching for new markets, and I will always try to do so. At the beginning of the crisis we in the Government first of all tried to preserve the social security of the most affected people; we managed to maintain sufficient social and political cohesion so that we can now undertake those measures that represent a deep "anchoring" of the competitiveness of the Slovenian economy. These measures also include economic diplomacy, as I mentioned above. Therefore I would not particularly emphasise the example of Libya at this moment. Like every other

“ IT IS BY ALL MEANS THE GOVERNMENT'S JOB TO ASSIST COMPANIES IN SEARCHING FOR NEW MARKETS, AND I WILL ALWAYS TRY TO DO SO. ”

country, it is a subject of interest to us, since it is one of Africa's wealthiest countries and it has sizeable intentions to make investments in other countries, including Slovenia.

The International Executive Director of the environmental non-profit organisation Greenpeace Kumi Naidoo sent you a letter in which he called on you to take measures in the field of climate change. Among other things he called on you to make investments in the energy revolution and to withdraw political support for fossil fuels. Have

you responded to him yet?

I will respond to him in the same way that I always respond to this question. For me, climate agreements, like the last one in Copenhagen, are crucial. When I came back from the climate summit in Denmark, I also posed the question of the future development of Slovenian energy, especially in the field of fossil fuels, such as for instance the Block Six project at the Šoštanj thermoelectric power plant. We have a problem in this area, because without TES 6 I do not know how we can provide Slovenia with a reliable supply of electricity until the construction of the second block at the nuclear power plant, which will produce clean energy. Therefore the Government and the National Assembly have not yet adopted a final decision on further construction at the Šoštanj thermoelectric power plant. However, investments in fossil fuels are by all means not the basic orientation of the Slovenian Government. This autumn we will complete and conclude a national energy programme, which will include all of the development guidelines for Slovenian energy, including much larger investments in renewable energy sources than in the past. But we are not moving too quickly; we are giving the professionals and politicians enough time to prepare the programme so that it will ensure modern approaches to the exploitation of energy sources and at the same time provide Slovenia with a reliable and long-lasting supply of electricity.

With your demanding and difficult work, how do you care for your health and well-being?

Sometimes it is hard to balance all of my professional obligations, which can end late at night or in the middle of the weekend, with activities that would allow me a healthier lifestyle. But I still run and swim a lot. I take part in triathlons and runs, each time worrying about how I might further improve my time.

Mr Prime Minister, thank you for this talk, and I wish you a great deal of both political and running success. ●

SLOVENIA BREAKS OUT OF RECESSION IN SECOND QUARTER

In the second quarter of this year, the Slovenian economy was no longer in recession.

Vesna Bertonec Popit, Delo Photo STA

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT GREW BY 2.2 PERCENT, something spurred mainly by export demand and renewed growth in gross investment and in stocks in industry and retail, which had previously fallen by 25 to 30 percent per quarter. If these encouraging signs continue, Slovenia will join those other European Union countries that dug their way out of the crisis in the first quarter of this year or even the fourth quarter of last year.

Yet while both industrial output and exports rose in the first half of the year, and the operations of most industrial companies improved considerably, construction remains in a deep recession that is predicted to last through the coming year. This is causing major difficulties for a range of construction companies, which given the nature of their business are also heavily in debt, while owing to loss of income and also to poor payment discipline, which is most widespread right in the construction sector, numerous subcontractors and providers of finishing works in construction are threatened with closure. Owing to the decline in living standards, sales of housing units, especially at the so-called luxury end, have fallen considerably.

On the other hand, with construction of Slovenia's criss-cross motorway network nearing completion, the road should lead building companies abroad. Slovenia's biggest construction company SCT in particular, owing in part to its good track record over the years, has agreed on major works in Libya. Meanwhile the Velenje construction company Vegrad has found itself on the brink of bankruptcy. A poor attitude and very poor pay for its employees and subcontractors have earned it an equally poor business reputation. The court has in fact confirmed that Vegrad should go into compulsory settlement, which still needs to be confirmed by the creditors.

Meanwhile some economists are predicting that in Slovenia, where exports depend largely on the state of the market in Germany, the trajectory out of the crisis may well take the form of a W, meaning that economic growth could be followed by a new fall. On the other hand, some analysts, along with Prime Minister



Borut Pahor, point out that the worst is over, while at the same time they are all saying that upward growth will not be fast.

Meanwhile the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, which has gained a new president in Stojan Binder, former CEO of the

Steklama Hrastnik glassworks and president of the employers' association, is warning of the danger of a spread of insolvency and new bankruptcies for some bigger companies, as evidenced in the bankruptcy of the Slovenj Gradec company Prevent. However, as in the bankruptcy of the Murska Sobota enterprise Mura, which is now very successfully continuing operations in a new company, Prevent should be pursuing a similar course and continuing its work in cooperation with Booxmark Leather.

While some have been predicting that in view of the layoffs and bankruptcies, the unemployment figure in Slovenia might rise towards the 130,000 mark, and while according to some

predictions the number of unemployed should have exceeded 100,000 by the end of last year, for the moment the jobless total is still under that threshold. Minister of Labour Ivan Svetlik has indeed rejected reports that unemployment could rise that much.

Yet it is not just the commercial sector that is having problems. The Government is also having difficulty reducing

public spending, and faces numerous threats from unions of strike action. After an agreement on wage increases was signed with public sector unions under the former government, and in significantly more favourable market conditions, now in the crisis Slovenia cannot afford such increases, and the Government has proposed a freeze on such increases and a curb on some privileges, which has generated discontent, especially among doctors, who with their withdrawal of consent to duty hours outside regular working time have forgotten the Hippocratic oath and also the most serious patients and children, whose operations and more complicated procedures have been cancelled, something that could exacerbate their illness and injuries and threaten lives, and they have demanded that the Government not reduce their compensation for duty hours, whereby just at the weekend they can earn two to three times the minimum monthly wage of a large section of employees in processing enterprises. After just over a week of serious difficulties in health institutions, under public pressure an agreement was reached with health workers, which has in turn goaded other public sector workers, who have called a strike for the middle of September.

The unions are also showing determined opposition to some solutions in the proposed pension reform, both in terms of extending the years of work and regarding the harmonisation of pensions and extended working years, which would supposedly be taken into account in assessing pensions. Since the Government takes the view that it cannot come to agreement with the unions, it has submitted an unharmonised proposal of pension reform to parliament, counting on its parliamentary majority to pass it. However, the unions are threatening a subsequent legislative referendum, and also the Government coalition party Desus, which advocates the rights of pensioners, could by withdrawing jeopardise the adoption of the legislation enabling the pension reform, which following a transition period would start to be implemented in full in 2025. One of the union arguments was that the Government has reduced the contribution of employers for employee pension insurance, and that for this reason there were not more employees, and also a lot of companies have not been paying employee contributions for pension and health insurance even for several years, which is affecting workers on their retirement as well as pension finances, which have received less

money, and the Government is unable to collect funds from what is termed the grey economy or unregistered work. A special civil association has succeeded in getting the

electricity distribution companies to start reimbursing consumers for excess charged electricity consumption. The same association, headed by economist Rado Pezdir, has set itself a new task of putting pressure on banks to reduce their commission on the use of cash machines of non-resident banks.

The credit rating house Dun & Bradstreet, which reduced the credit rating of several countries in its September report, ranks Slovenia in group 2 C, which includes Belgium, Japan and Tunisia. Slovenia's credit rating remains stable.

The country has been less successful, however, in global competitiveness. As published by the World Economic Forum, for the period 2010-2011 Slovenia was ranked only 45th, and has thereby fallen eight places. As identified by Dr. Peter Stanovnik of the Institute for Economic Research, which cooperates on the Slovenian side in analysing global competitiveness, the decline in competitiveness was to be expected owing to the economic and financial crisis, which hit Slovenia harder as a small and open economy than larger and more self-sufficient economies and developing countries. As Dr. Stanovnik has found, the decline in competitiveness was spurred partly by last year's Government policy, which directed greater attention to social security and cohesion among the social partners. This poorer result should therefore also serve as a warning to the Government and social partners to adopt and implement decisive and timely structural reforms.

At the Slovenia-Kosovo business conference in Ljubljana, which was attended by 82 representatives of Slovenian companies and 28 from Kosovo, it was found that there is still ample scope for cooperation with the Kosovo economy, which even in the crisis is achieving more than 4 percent growth. Even now there are around 300 Slovenian companies present in Kosovo with goods and services.

At the 48th international agricultural and foodstuffs fair, AGRA, in Gomja Radgona, which this year involved 1,690 exhibitors from

25 countries, special significance was ascribed to ecological farming, the strategy of farming after 2013, food safety and ecology and protection of the countryside. AGRA, a fair that is gaining importance in the wider region, was visited this year by 120,000 people, who had the chance to view the latest advances in agricultural mechanisation from leading world manufacturers, machinery and equipment for forestry, animal feed and plant protection products and also seeds from the big global

seed houses. This year the Czech Republic was featured as guest country, while there were also presentations from Austria, Poland, Macedonia and the European Commission.



Peter Stanovnik
Institute for Economic
Research



Ivan Svetlik
Minister of Labour, Family
and Social Affairs

'The country has been less successful, however, in global competitiveness. As published by the World Economic Forum, for the period 2010-2011 Slovenia was ranked only 45th, and has thereby fallen eight places.'



DERYA KANBAY

Turkey has lately been one of the most preferred destinations for Slovenian tourists

FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND MY SINCERE THANKS TO the editor of Sinfo Magazine for giving me this opportunity to express my views on the current state of bilateral relations between Turkey and Slovenia.

Turkey and Slovenia are countries that have close bonds of friendship, enjoying excellent political relations free from any major issues. The two share a common history with the Balkans and have aspirations to secure a peaceful, stable and prosperous Balkan region that can remake itself as a dynamic hub for Europe in infrastructure, energy, commerce and transportation.

Beyond this common view and shared vision for the Balkans, thanks to ongoing close dialogue and advanced level of co-operation in the Euro-Atlantic institutions, Turkey and Slovenia are striving together for peace, prosperity and well-being at both regional and global scales. This commonality sets the stage for fruitful bilateral relations between the two countries and constitutes an excellent opportunity for the stability and welfare of the region.

Besides sharing a common geography, the strong adherence of both countries to pluralist democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and a free-market economy binds them in common values, which further contribute to the development of friendly relations between the two countries.

As indicated by Turkey's President, Abdullah Gül, during his official visit to Slovenia on 14-15 July 2010, these close relations between Turkey and Slovenia are being enjoyed not only politically but also in the economic, social and cultural spheres.

It is worth noting that bilateral economic and commercial relations between Turkey and Slovenia have not been greatly affected by the global economic crisis. However, there is still considerable potential for further trade and investment between the two countries. The complementary nature of the comparative advantages of the Turkish and Slovenian companies that are particularly active in the Balkans clearly indicates that there are a number of sectors in which the two countries can undertake joint investment projects. These joint initiatives would benefit not only Turkey and Slovenia, but also the neighbouring countries in the

Balkans.

In another recent development, social relations between the two countries have progressed in a remarkable manner. Tourism plays a crucial role in that regard. Turkey has lately been one of the most preferred destinations for Slovenian tourists. Similarly, Slovenia has also become a destination for winter and summer tourism for Turkish people.

In this regard, the recent abolishment of visas for Slovenian citizens who wish to travel to Turkey, which came into force just prior to the inception of the World Basketball Championships hosted by Turkey, has proved a very positive step. I believe that, the visa exemption will have a strong positive effect in facilitating the already growing trend of personal contact and cultural interactions between the people of the two countries.

In cultural matters, we are delighted to observe the increase in joint cultural activities resulting from the partnership of Turkish

and Slovenian artists, musicians, novelists, photographers and painters. It is clear that the Slovenian and Turkish people have a mutual interest in the literature, music, cinema and other branches of the arts of the other country. The ongoing translation of novels from Slovene to Turkish and vice versa is a concrete example of that.

The field of education is also helping to develop cultural dialogue between Turkish and Slovenian students. There is a growing trend of student exchange and co-operation between our universities, taking place both

under the Erasmus student-exchange programme and in bilateral projects as part of the work of the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) in Portoroz.

I would like to conclude by briefly noting my view that the current level of advanced relations enjoyed by Turkey and Slovenia in all of these fields has set the stage for further co-operation and partnership in the coming years. I firmly believe that the huge potential in these areas will continue to be steadily realised on the basis of the strong alliance and friendship between the two countries.

Derya Kanbay - Ambassador of Turkey to Slovenia



Dr MILAN JAZBEC

Sports and diplomacy can walk hand in hand

TURKEY AND SLOVENIA HAVE LONG ENJOYED FRIENDLY relations. Our mutual cooperation includes a series of bilateral and multilateral viewpoints and projects which are a reflection of our excellent, comprehensive and in-depth mutual relations. The highlights of the past years include intensive and open dialogue between the two countries at various levels, particularly at the highest political level. Both countries have expressed a great interest in a comprehensive strengthening of relations, particularly with regard to business. Slovenian companies see opportunities primarily in transport, energy, logistics, tourism, new technologies and environmental protection equipment.

There are several points of commonality where both countries, despite the difference in size, find excellent synergies and opportunities for long-term cooperation. We should mention in particular our shared and active interest in the stability, security and development of the Western Balkans. The launching of a NATO Membership Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is important for the continued development of security structures in this fragile country, was achieved by Turkey and Slovenia through the persistent presentation of evidence to the allies, whom they succeeded in convincing at the meeting of foreign ministers in Tallinn last November. Furthermore, we should mention Slovenia's collaboration in the global project the Alliance of Civilizations, which was initiated by Turkey and Spain. Slovenia regularly attends meetings and participates in discussions and activities. The Euro-Mediterranean University in Portoroz is steadily creating a place for itself within that framework.

One of the key frameworks for our mutual cooperation is Turkey's ambitions for EU membership and Slovenia's stalwart support of that goal. Slovenia openly supports Turkey's endeavours towards membership in the EU. Slovenia believes that the achieving of this goal is of major significance for both the EU and Turkey. In recent decades, the European integration process has transformed the European continent, and through the free flow of capital, people, goods, services and knowledge and the common currency and common market has united it into a soft power that is effective in a global context. When the negotiation process, which must be supported by both sides, has been completed, Turkey's membership will bring about substantial added value.

This can be illustrated by the fact that due to its extremely important geopolitical position, Turkey is an indispensable player at the meeting-point of regions such as the Near East, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, the Western Balkans, Central Asia and North Africa. At the same time its relations with the EU, the Russian Federation and the USA are so important, owing to the need for regional security and the broader supply of energy, that it plays a pivotal role within this

matrix. Its growing economic vitality and membership in the G 20 are therefore very important for its continued relations with Slovenia.

Mutual goodwill can undoubtedly also be seen in the still striking fact that just before the beginning of the World Basketball Championship, Turkey waived visas for Slovenian citizens. The championship saw fantastic performances from both teams: playing in its second world championship, Slovenia achieved its stated objective by making it into the final eight, and Turkey made it all the way to the final. Moreover, it was once again demonstrated that sports and diplomacy can walk hand in hand: on the evening of their quarterfinal game, which was played on the last day of Ramadan, the presidents of the two countries, Dr Danilo Türk in Abdullah Gül and their staffs met for a working visit in Istanbul, and after discussions and dinner watched the game. Afterwards they visited the players of both teams. This was also a great send-off for the new Slovenian ambassador to Turkey, already the fourth, at the beginning of his term of office.

His most important duties include the continued development of the excellent relations between the two countries in all areas, particularly in business. This also means demonstrating a willingness to support cultural projects (e.g. exhibitions, translations, visits) and exchanges in the fields of education (the number of students studying in both countries via the Erasmus programme is growing), science (the two countries' Academies recently signed a cooperation agreement), tourism and others.

The most recent opportunity appeared in the field of advertising, whereby on the basis of a Slovenian initiative Istanbul will host an international advertising festival, which will combine and increase the reputations and prestige of the four largest continental advertising festivals, Portoroz's Golden Drum, the Iberian-American FIAP, the Asia-Pacific ADFEST and the Art Directors Club of Europe. This will stand as a challenging complement to the festival in Cannes, give Istanbul a new opportunity to show off its treasures and its priceless historical, cultural and economic potentials, give Slovenian advertisers a new long-term partner, and give both countries another noble project.

The new Slovenian ambassador to Turkey and his staff, including the esteemed and active honorary consuls in Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya, will continue the successful work of the past generations and attempt to build upon it in the spirit of the most well-developed relations between the two countries to date and a willingness to search for new projects and opportunities.

Dr Milan Jazbec - Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to Turkey and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana. His term of office began at the beginning of September 2010.



A FUSION OF THE URBAN AND NATURE

Sanja Prelević Photo Matevž Paternoster

SLOVENIA'S PRESENCE AT THE 12TH Venice Biennale of Architecture, the most prestigious international exhibition of architectural and planning solutions and projects in the world, which takes place every two years, is represented by the exhibition All Shades of Green. We could say that the project, the work of landscape architecture studio AKKA (Ana Kučan and Luka Javornik and associates) and design studio Studiobotas, accords perfectly with the common thread of this year's Biennale. Through the theme of the Biennale, People Meet in Architecture, the Director of the Biennale, Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, highlights the role of architecture in relation to the individual and society.

In the words of Ana Kučan of AKKA, the All Shades of Green project explores the incorporation of nature into the human living environment in order to improve quality of life, and at the same time seeks ways to present and implement this contribution of nature in urban environments. Through the project, artists deal with the modern attitude of societies and individuals towards nature, as revealed in particular in urban public spaces. One of the important building blocks of this space is the urban landscape, of which nature in all its forms is a component part. The

purpose of the exhibition, which shows the city landscape as an inseparable part of the urban space, is to contribute fresh stimuli in the direction of the development of urban culture, provoke reflections on the humanisation of public urban space, and place Slovenia in an international context in this field.

'All Shades of Green was in the spirit of the concept of the Biennale and therefore attracted interest with its unusual approach and its subtle treatment of the topic it describes. A visit to the Slovenian Pavilion in Galleria A+A is a satisfying experience because the gallery is located in the immediate vicinity of Palazzo Grassi and is close to a number of other pavilions (Luxembourg, Iran, etc.). In the future, it would of course make sense to consider a Slovenian Pavilion in the Arsenale, where visitor numbers would undoubtedly be higher,' says Blaž Peršin, the commissioner of the exhibition and the director of the Ljubljana City Museum and Galleries.

Other collaborators on the project were photographer Peter Koštrun, Sašo Kalan, who created the audio background that accompanies the exhibition, and the illustrator Urh Sobočan. The well-conceived exhibition is accompanied by a rich catalogue containing, among other things, an article by architecture historian

Luka Skansi entitled 'Space and the City – Observations on Tradition in Slovenian Architectural Culture' and a piece entitled 'What Does the Concept of Public/Private Mean to Us?' by the urban sociologist and anthropologist Edward Robbins.

According to Boštjan Botas Kenda of Studiobotas, the exhibition takes advantage of a specific gallery space (the role of Slovenian national pavilion has traditionally been taken on by the Slovenian-owned Galleria A+A), which is on two levels. On the lower level an idea of nature is presented in the first room, while the second room introduces strategies and elements of planning the urban landscape. The visitor then passes through the audio background to the upper floor, where finished projects are presented in the first room. The exhibition ends, explains Kenda, by combining experience with an idea, where the lower space and the balcony unite to form a space of shadows and sounds.

Asked what Slovenia can do to create an even better impression at events like this, Blaž Peršin is emphatic: 'Slovenia urgently needs better defined goals for its international presence, which needs to incorporate people capable of carrying out this mission at an internationally comparable level. The resources that we invest for this purpose are insufficient, or rather we need to think carefully about the niches in which it makes sense to invest internationally recognisable projects. The Venice Biennale of Architecture is without a doubt one of these niches.'

Fifty-three countries are participating in the Biennale, which ends on 21 November. The number of participating countries is constantly growing. This year's newcomers are Albania, Bahrain, Malaysia, Morocco and Rwanda.

The surprise winner of this year's Golden Lion for Best National Participation is the Kingdom of Bahrain. The little Gulf state is, as already mentioned, among the countries that are presenting their works in national pavilions in the Giardini della Biennale for the first time.

'One of the keys to the success of this Venice newcomer is the fact that in their pavilion they have focused on current conditions in cultural policy,' explains •

PRESENTATION OF SLOVENIA IN ISTANBUL

Polona Prešeren Photo Aleš Fevžer

THE DAY BEFORE THE OFFICIAL start of the 2010 Basketball World Championship in Turkey, The Government Communication Office (Ukom), the Slovenian Tourist Board (STB) and the Basketball Association of Slovenia (KZS) gave a presentation of Slovenia in Istanbul. The presentation included a workshop on Slovenian tourism aimed at forging contacts between Slovenian and Turkish partners. The 70-plus representatives of Turkish tour operators who attended the event were enthusiastic about the possibilities that Slovenia offers, particularly in the field of sports tourism. The guests were entertained by the 'duelling accordions' of the duo Spopad Harmonik, consisting of accordionists Miha Debevec and Tomaž Rožanec, the former on the diatonic accordion and the latter on the classical accordion.

The presentation of Slovenia also included a press conference at which



the organisers focused in particular on presenting the national brand 'I feel Slovenia' and current tourism products available in Slovenia, with an emphasis on winter programmes and sports tourism.

The national brand continues to be present in the field of sport and at major

sports events. 'Our efforts regarding the promotion of the national brand "I feel Slovenia" remain clear,' said Ukom director Darijan Košir. 'We will continue to try and ensure that Slovenian athletes and supporters appear in the uniform colours of the "I feel Slovenia" brand.' Supporters at the 2010 World Championship all sported the same kit – a replica of the team's warm-up shirt, face stickers and supporters' banners with the 'I feel Slovenia' brand. It is therefore no surprise that the most frequent question asked by Turkish partners was: Is everyone in Slovenia involved in sport?

Slovenia's supporters attending championships in other countries continue to be a source of good cheer and positivity. They are a real phenomenon with their Kdor ne skače, ni Sloven'c ('If you're not jumping, you're not a Slovenian'). Slovenian supporters create a special atmosphere. There were up to 4,000 of them at Slovenia's matches. •

30 YEARS OF CANKARJEV DOM

Polona Prešeren

THIRTY YEARS ARE BEHIND US AND ahead of us is a new season with 1,800 events. Visitor numbers are expected to increase by another 500,000 from the current level of 11.6 million,' said the institution's director Mitja Rotovnik at the presentation of the new season at Cankarjev Dom. On 6 October Cankarjev Dom will be celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. Unpretentiously. With an open day to which everyone is welcome.

The coming season at the country's main temple of culture once again promises an interesting programme, meaning that Cankarjev Dom will continue to be one of the most interesting centres of culture and art and spiritual life in Ljubljana. And not only in Ljubljana:

visitors from all over Slovenia and even from outside the country attend events at Cankarjev Dom, where great efforts are made to maintain quality, originality and an exciting programme. The design of the programme for the institution's 31st season follows developments in previous years, while continuing a slight expansion in the spheres of cultural education and literary events.

Cankarjev Dom continues to attract visitors with traditional programmes like its subscription concert series and established musical cycles such as The Sound of Six Strings, Youth to Youth and Tuesday Clubbing. Also popular are festivals such as LIFFE, the Ljubljana Jazz Festival, the Festival of Documentary Film

and Transgenerations, and coproductions such as City of Women, Ex Ponto, Gibanica, Fabula, Fairy Tales Today, the Festival of Dramatic Writing and the Mountain Film Festival. There is also a varied programme for children and young people and an attractive cultural education programme, of which a new feature this season is the D best theatre season ticket.

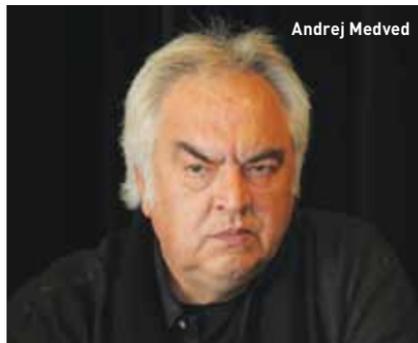
Cankarjev Dom also promises appearances by a broad variety of top visiting artists, including a performance by the famed New York Philharmonic. Conferences and conventions remain an important part of Cankarjev Dom's activities. Cankarjev Dom is the country's leading organiser of conventions, conferences, seminars and similar events. •

VERONIKA AWARD GOES TO ANDREJ MEDVED

Jože Osterman Photo STA

THE VERONIKA AWARDS, GIVEN to the best poetry collections of the year, are the equivalent on the Slovenian literary scene of the Kresnik award for best novel, and the Kranj Theatre Festival award for best dramatic text. Their importance is growing because they are one of the more visible elements promoting the best original Slovenian literary work, and have a tangible effect on book sales.

This year's prize-winner is the poet Andrej Medved, an all-round artist living in Piran, who has had a major impact on the arts as artistic director of Obalne Galerije Piran (Piran Coastal Galleries). His poetic works cover over 20 poetry collections and always garner considerable interest, since, in the words



Andrej Medved

of his fellow poet Ivo Svetina, president of the jury, Medved is "a really special phenomenon, a force that is rare among Slovenian and in European poetry ... because he has always been extremely complete, consistent, true to himself, not dallying with the postmodernists, more

or less artistic dead ends, for whom so-called intertextuality plays a central role." In its grounds the jury added that the prize collection, entitled *The Interpreter of Dreams* "successfully combined thought and poetry, with his poetry full of sensual glowing images, certainly following from his love of painting."

This year the award ceremony was moved from the Old Castle in Celje to the hall of the Celje Cultural Centre. Medved's joy at receiving an award was shared by the poet Neža Maurer, a grande dame of Slovenian poetry, who won the Gold Poetry Medal for Lifetime's Achievements, in recognition of the writer's work covering numerous poetry collections for children and adults, and over 80 radio plays and stories.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

At the end of the summer Slovenia was a major venue for festivals, with programmes offering many items of interest to culture enthusiasts of different tastes.

Sanja Prelević Photo STA

MOST SIGNIFICANT FOR BOOK lovers was the biggest literary event in Slovenia – the 25th **Vilenica International Literary Festival**, which this year took place under the slogan, or rather question, 'Who reads?'

With its focus on central Europe, this year's festival featured the participation of around 20 writers from Slovenia and abroad, with the main focus of attention being the recipient of the Vilenica Prize, the Bosnian writer Dževad Karahasan. The Crystal for the best literary contribution in the Vilenica Almanac went to the Slovenian writer Goran Vojnović for his interpretation of an extract from his novel *Čefurji raus!* ('Southerners go home!').

Over the four days of the festival in early September, the participating

writers presented their literature at several readings. The theoretical part of the festival tried to answer two questions: Who reads today? and What is the level of reading culture? The silver jubilee edition of the Vilenica Festival also focused on Slovenian writers living and working in other countries of the European Union. Writers Maruša Krese, Lev Detela and Brina Svit talked about their own experiences.

On the occasion of the festival's 25th anniversary, the organisers – the Society of Slovenian Writers in conjunction with the Vilenica Cultural Society – announced that 60,000 people attended the various events taking place during the festival.

Between 27 August and 11 September the cultural life of Slovenian Istria was enlivened by the **Tartini Festival**, the



international music festival dedicated to Piran-born composer and violinist Giuseppe Tartini. During the course of this ninth edition of the festival, the sounds of classical music could be heard in several venues – in Piran, Koper and Izola. Performers included the Budapest-based chamber orchestra The Budapest Virtuosi, who were joined by the French violinist Pierre Hommage. In addition to the main concerts, accompanying events were organised with the aim of popularising classical music and Tartini. These events proved to be particularly interesting to young listeners and the local public. The festival's accompanying programme included eight concerts by young musicians as part of the Tartini Junior series. A series of open-air concerts – Tartini Under the Stars – held in Piran's picturesque squares created a very special atmosphere.

The Primorska region also hosts another music festival, **Kogoj Days**, a festival of contemporary classical music

that bears the name of the composer Marij Kogoj, who was born in the region. This year's 31st edition of the festival, organised by the Soča cultural society in Kanal ob Soči, consists of ten concerts. Each year, the festival commemorates the Slovenian avant-garde composer in whose work late Romanticism and Expressionism underwent an interesting synthesis that was remarkable for this environment. The programme of this year's Kogoj Days has been chosen by the conductor Anton Nanut. It has become traditional for the festival to visit other places in the region and beyond the national border. This year it will visit Gorizia and Trieste, Tribil Superiore and Deskle, Nova Gorica and Ajdovščina.

The closing concert of the festival will take place on 28 October at Zemono Manor near Vipava and will feature the Quartetto David string quartet from Milan.

The 17th edition of the **Ex Ponto** international performing arts festival offered 16 events, including eight

premieres. The festival ran from 15 to 22 September at various venues in Ljubljana and even ventured as far as Kranj. The theme of this year's festival was Taboo? – from the point of view of the individual – and attempted to answer the topical question of whether any taboos still exist in today's society for the individual.

The festival opened with the world premiere of *Exit the King* by Eugène Ionesco, an international coproduction (Slovenia-Luxembourg-Macedonia-France) directed by Silviu Purcारेte. The play examines an inevitable moment in the life cycle: the death, decay and decomposition of the human being and the transition from one state to another.

Another coproduction closed the festival: *My Name Is Red*, which received its Slovenian premiere at Ex Ponto, was directed by the Macedonian director Martin Kočovski, considered by theatre connoisseurs to be one of the most interesting directors currently working in eastern Europe.

THE ALPINE MUSEUM IN HONOUR OF AND WITH PRIDE IN OUR MOUNTAINEERS AND MOUNTAINS

Polona Prešeren

Mountaineering in Slovenia is not another sport – it is a tradition that is an important part of national culture and of the feeling of connectedness with the country and the people. These thoughts were also on the mind of President Dr Danilo Türk when he addressed the crowd at the opening of the Slovenian Alpine Museum in Mojstrana at the beginning of August. "We must remember the mission and the merit of the pioneers of mountaineering, who are closely associated with patriotism and Sloveneness and everything that preserves our mountains", he said. The eagerness with which the museum was anticipated was demonstrated by the thousands of mountain enthusiasts who attended the opening. Hiking is hugely popular in Slovenia and is one of the country's favourite forms of recreation.

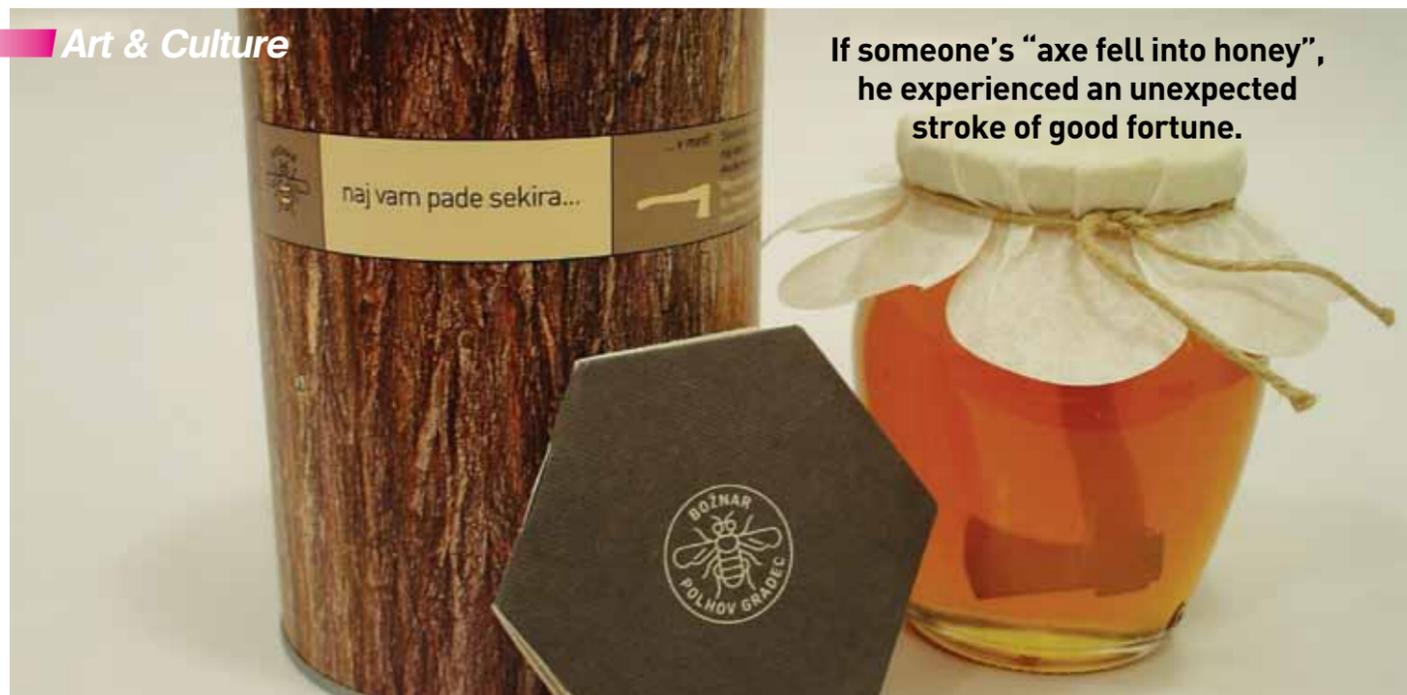
"Generations of hikers, mountaineers and Alpinists have strived for over

a century to see their achievements preserved in the Slovenian Alpine Museum", said Bojan Rotovnik, president of the Alpine Association of Slovenia. Mojstrana, which sits right at the entrance to the Triglav National Park and the Vrata Valley, which leads up to the magnificent face of Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain, is the perfect location for the Slovenian Alpine Museum. The modern museum is designed as a venue for events and a gathering place for all lovers of mountains.

The museum staff say that they will work to make it a true centre of mountaineering, where hikers will meet and find areas for learning, culture and education. They are planning to hold cultural events, organised tours of the museum and the surrounding hills, and educational workshops in the form of seminars, symposia, and educational programmes.

The museum currently houses around 2000 items, and the permanent collection features 450. The exhibition follows the ascent of a mountain and is composed of classical displays in glass cases, objects and old photographs. In the modern part of the museum visitors can learn about mountaineering interactively through audio-visual aids, computer content and interactive games. The goal of the exhibition designers was to create a presentation that follows visitor trends, but at the same time presents information in a user-friendly and entertaining manner.

The Municipality of Kranjska Gora, which is one of Slovenia's largest tourism centres, is also thrilled with the museum. The mountaineering tradition is exceptionally long there, and they believe that this will attract even more visitors. The museum itself expects to have 30,000 visitors a year.



If someone's "axe fell into honey",
he experienced an unexpected
stroke of good fortune.

WORD FOR WORD WITHOUT WORDS

Andrej Savelli Photo Beekeeping Božnar

CURATOR ALENKA Gregorič in cooperation with the Domestic Research Society, which has been recording, collecting, researching and presenting domestic phenomena since 2004, has put together an exhibition entitled Word for Word Without Words, which will be on display at the City Art Museum of Ljubljana from 15 September to 30 October. The exhibition is being held as part of World Book Capital 2010.

The purpose of the exhibition is to present what happens when we remove language's metaphorical quality and take it completely literally. In order to visually present 38 idioms, the curators selected works by 24 Slovenian and foreign artist, collectives, as well as objects and documents from four Slovenian museums. Using the sample of idioms selected from the wide repertoire of the Slovenian language, they researched its direct literal interpretation and presented it in an interdisciplinary exhibition. They started with the everyday use of idioms in formal and colloquial language, focusing on three levels: the literal, the

visual and the spatial.

When using the idiom "he/she has butter on his/her head", we are implying that the person so described is a shady character or is guilty of dishonesty. We usually never think about the idiom in its direct, literal sense. A person with butter on their head could also just be a person with butter on their head. The first level is intended to encourage back translation, i.e. the literal interpretation of the selected expressions.

What does a person with butter on their head look like? Can a back translation of an idiom be used as a starting point for the visualization, the objectification, the making of an artwork, or for the selection of an already existing artwork which appears in a new light thanks to the idiom? The second level shows how to give yourself a shot in the head, drill a hole in your knee, live on the edge, or sharpen a woman's tongue. How can we appreciate back translations and renounce the pathos of portraying circumstances picturesquely, as we tend to do with idioms?

The spatial level of the idiom provides

the answer to the question of how to present a person with butter on their head in a gallery. Who is standing next to them and why are they accompanied by a strip of skin off someone's back, while two news anchors mutely exchange glances on a nearby TV set (apparently, political commentators are most prone to using idioms)? The third level brings together various materials (artworks, museum exhibits and archival documents) in a spatial installation.

The exhibition thus shows us what a "lie with short legs" (the lie will soon be detected, so it is no use lying) looks like, how to "fly like a mouldy axe", how to "pour someone pure wine" (tell them the unvarnished truth) and "sweep something under the rug" (leave problems or unpleasant matters unresolved and to hide that fact – an idiom most English speakers will be familiar with). It is also interesting to see how someone's "axe falls into honey" (they experience an unexpected stroke of good fortune) or what it's like for someone to "live on a big foot" (to enjoy spoiling oneself).

Literalness is not possible. •



EXCELLENCE AT EVERY STEP

Sanja Prelević Photo Archive

An emphasis on training

The CEF's programme consists of training (at events such as workshops), technical assistance (in conjunction with the IMF) and exchanges of experience (peer-assisted learning).

'Our participants particularly value the possibility of peer-assisted learning,' says deputy director Jana Repanšek, as she explains the CEF's concept of work. 'If experts from one country have already implemented specific EU standards, why should they not share this experience with others? This experience can be useful, be it positive or negative. We can also learn from mistakes!'

'We have to recognise that some of our member countries are currently in the situation that Slovenia was in a few years ago,' continues Repanšek. 'At the same time, however, much more is asked of them now. That is why we at the CEF see building people's capacities (i.e. their training) as a priority and devote the greatest attention to it.'

Dobovišek adds that with the new knowledge obtained, very demanding tasks in their home countries have to be carried out by the participants themselves, who are, for the most part, civil servants. What is required of them is, above all, a 'shift in mentality'. Best practice occurs when training is coordinated with the implementation of reforms – when that happens, she says, results are excellent. An example like this, continues Dobovišek, has been seen in Croatia.

When it was founded by the Slovenian government in 2001 within the context of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the CEF had only three employees. Today, explains Dobovišek, whose working day, like that of her immediate team, lasts on average 10 hours, 18 people work at the Center. Many of them are expert economists with international experience. Given that the organisation is still growing, they will soon need even more of them.

In addition to funding from the Slovenian budget, funds are provided from the various projects in which the CEF is involved with its partner institutions. The list of partners that provide the CEF with its outstanding lecturers and speakers is an impressive one: the CEF cooperates with the IMF, the OECD, the World Bank, the finance ministries of the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland, the central banks of Belgium and the Netherlands, and the European Commission. It also works closely with the Slovenian finance ministry, the Bank of Slovenia, the Slovenian foreign ministry, the Government Office for Development and European Affairs and many other institutions. Thus

The Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF; www.cef-see.org) is situated on Cankarjeva, a street in the centre of Ljubljana, in the former Post Office Savings Bank building (built in 1930). The entrance, a fine example of early Ljubljana modernism, is adorned on either side by female statues symbolising lending and saving, the work of the sculptor Ivan Jurkovič. Inside the CEF, the principal function of which is the organisation and implementation of professional training in the sphere of public financial management and central banking for the countries of south-eastern Europe, various quotations and mottos hang on the walls. These serve as an inspiration both to visitors and staff. One of these quotations is the following:

'Excellence can be obtained if you...
...care more than others think is wise;
...risk more than others think is safe;
...dream more than other think is practical;
...expect more than others think is possible.'

Judging from the results that they attain, the staff of the CEF keep these words constantly in mind. Director Mira Dobovišek, who has headed the organisation since its founding almost 10 years ago, emphasises that excellence is not just in the CEF's name but is something that they demonstrate at every step. Dobovišek sees the key to success in the fact that the organisation does not offer standard, traditional training which, in her words, can be obtained elsewhere, but offers concrete help in a manner which requires an in-depth and detailed approach.

In the words of the management team, 'We at the CEF say that our focus is not on the question "what to do" but on "how to do it". In other words we believe that professionals from the countries in the region already more or less know what they have to do, but need help in implementing it.'

Dobovišek believes that regional challenges require regional solutions. 'Not only that, but we offer people regional understanding and regional experience,' she adds. In delivering the programme they seek input mostly from EU and CEF member states' practitioners and international organisations' experts, explains Dobovišek, underlining in particular their excellent cooperation with the Ministry of Finance of the Netherlands.

the funds which Slovenia destines for international development cooperation via the CEF are used very effectively.

More recognised abroad than in Slovenia

The structure of the organisation has helped the CEF build recognisability and enjoy trust in the region. The CEF currently has 11 members: the countries that have emerged from the former Yugoslavia plus Albania, Bulgaria, Moldavia and Romania.

The Supervisory Board is formed by finance ministers and central bank governors from the member countries who prepare the programme in conjunction with experts and approve it at annual joint sessions.

This last factor is very important and because of it the CEF is essentially a regional institution, adds Jana Repanšek, who joined the CEF in 2005 after spending seven years working at the World Bank in Washington.

The flow of information via the Supervisory Board is rapid, because this is the way that they model and direct the assistance which the countries in the region need.

Until last year the programme was prepared for the following year. This year, for the first time, they prepared a two-year programme which is further widened by study visits and repetitions of the workshops in which most interest has been shown.

‘Our programme is demand driven. This means that we are constantly receiving training requirements from member countries which are then reflected in our programme. Our task is to shape and orient knowledge in such way that the countries in the region gain as much as possible,’ emphasises Jana Repanšek, who is the director’s right-hand woman.

The courses are held in premises owned by the Ministry of Finance which are provided as a contribution in kind for the CEF to use. The CEF’s premises contain three separate classrooms and two study suites capable of holding up to 100 people at the same time. Most of those who come to Ljubljana for training are civil servants, for the most part from the finance ministries and central banks of the countries in the region which, besides the countries of the Western Balkans, include Turkey and Moldova. They are frequently joined by colleagues from Eastern Europe (EU member states). Participants from CEF member countries consider it very important to be able to share their experiences with colleagues from countries which are already members of the European Union. Additionally, particularly in the context of the PEM PAL project (Public Expenditure Management Peer-Assisted Learning; www.pempal.org), events are attended by a large number of civil servants from the countries of the former Soviet Union.

‘The knowledge obtained through our training sessions can be applied to public financial management and central banking, which does not however mean that all our lectures are technical in nature and touch directly on public financial management and central banking,’ explains Repanšek. ‘Part of the training covers



Jana Repanšek



Mira Dobovišek

other themes such as, for example, human resources management or techniques of writing, communicating and coordinating.’

One special part of the work of the CEF is the preparation and implementation of training for accountants and internal auditors for the needs of Slovenia. Since these programmes were introduced, several generations of public sector accountants and internal auditors have trained at the CEF and become the driving force behind the development of public sector accounting and internal auditing profession in Slovenia. While there is no shortage of interest for the auditors programme (unlike the first years of the transition, when there were too few of these professionals), interest in the profession of public sector accountants could be considerably greater. Staff at the CEF believe that this problem will be resolved by the new Public

Finance Act and expect demand to increase once it has been adopted.

CEF director Mira Dobovišek nevertheless feels that this activity is not and should not be the CEF’s main function. She adds that in the longer term the priority activity is development cooperation. The fact that the CEF has specialised in this field with excellent results is

confirmed by the requests arriving from Egypt and Jordan, where they hope to found a similar organisation based on the Slovenian CEF.

The staff of the CEF, who, as it happens, are mainly women, believe that there is no such thing as problems. There are only challenges, which are addressed as they arise. At least that is how the CEF confronts them. Diligence and hard work – these are just two of the many reasons why they are successful. They are, however, far from being the only reason for their success. Other reasons include targeted thinking, an emphasis on teamwork, respect and understanding for colleagues and partners, and a focus on the positive side of things. They believe that keeping up to date and maintaining personal contact, both with partners and with those who attend their events and courses, are of key importance for satisfaction and success.

‘Sharing knowledge – building skills’ is the organisation’s slogan. ‘This is something with which we present ourselves to our partners and, at the same time, the thing that we hope our participants will remember us for,’ they explain at the CEF where, one might say, they are attentive to every detail. ●

“ **LAST YEAR AROUND 700 PARTICIPANTS PASSED THROUGH 33 WORKSHOPS. THIS SO-CALLED SHORT PROGRAMME IS JUST ONE PART OF THE OVERALL CEF PROGRAMME.** ”



BIOFUTURA'S GREEN ENERGY

Polona Prešeren Photo Biofutura archive

Biofutura, a company which deals with the collection and treatment of organic waste, recognised that biogas, an efficient energy source, could also be the basis for a business opportunity. They recently opened a biogas plant in Ilirska Bistrica, where they produce electricity from organic waste.

The production of biogas in Slovenia goes back to the 1980s. Its effects on the environment are very positive. Its properties are similar to those of natural gas and it can be used to co-generate heat and electricity or as fuel for vehicles. There are currently around ten biogas plants generating electricity in Slovenia. ‘Our plant is one out of three in Slovenia which uses household organic waste. We are also the biggest commercial biogas plant in Slovenia, which means that the most of incoming raw materials are organic wastes acquired at the market’, says Igor Zmazek, the director of Biofutura.

Around five years ago, Biofutura recognised a business opportunity in the field of organic waste treatment. They began collecting household organic cooking waste in 2006,

and their main objective was to generate enough electricity to treat organic waste. They identified biogas as by far the best technology for processing such waste, as it can then be used to generate electricity in an environmentally-friendly manner. This also lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and electricity is produced from a renewable resource.

This is not a revolutionary procedure, as the production of biogas from organic matter has been known about for some time. It began with the treatment of manure and silage, and later moved on to other types of organic waste. Biogas plants are very widespread in Europe, particularly in Germany, Austria and Scandinavia. The treatment of organic waste is more complex due to various and very inconsistent types of input waste, which strongly affects the biogas process, and it also requires the pre-treatment of waste. ‘Despite

the well-developed technology, the construction of the biogas plant in Ilirska Bistrica required a considerable amount of innovativeness in order to arrive at the most appropriate technology, owing to the specifics of adjusting the process to >>>

“ **OUR PLANT IS ONE OUT OF THREE IN SLOVENIA WHICH USES HOUSEHOLD ORGANIC WASTE. WE ARE ALSO THE BIGGEST COMMERCIAL BIOGAS PLANT IN SLOVENIA, WHICH MEANS THAT THE MOST OF INCOMING RAW MATERIALS ARE ORGANIC WASTES ACQUIRED AT THE MARKET** ”

various types of waste and the pre-treatment of waste," says Biofutura.

They began construction of the biogas plant in Ilirska Bistrica in 2007, and completed it at the end of last year, but production did not begin until the spring of this year. The investment project was run by their own staff, which slightly extended the duration of the project. However, they say that this gave them invaluable experience, which has come in very handy for the start-up and operation of the plant. They hired various Slovenian contractors to do the work, and the equipment was supplied by the world's leading companies in the field, which already have a great deal of experience in building biogas plants. "During construction we realised that it was more expedient to immediately install the majority of the infrastructure for the planned expansion of capacities in a few years, as it turned out to be more a economical and efficient solution, since we will not have to stop production at the biogas plant in order to carry out the additional work", says Biofutura.

How does a biogas plant work?

The slowest part of the process is the waste processing, since the impurities such as plastics, metals, textiles etc. have to be removed from the organic waste. In Biofutura's experience the biggest problem is still the separate collection of municipal waste, since people have not yet become sufficiently aware of what is and is not considered these kinds of waste. But efficient and meticulous cleaning is required, otherwise problems can appear during the process. This is followed by the legally prescribed heat treatment of the waste, which destroys undesirable bacteria. The processed waste is now ready for the biogas process as food for bacteria. The process occurs at approximately 38°C (100°F), and the average retention time of the substrate in the process is around 25 days. After the process is completed a decomposed slurry is obtained, which is a by-product of the biogas process. Since the process is continual, a certain quantity of treated waste is added to the process every day, and is mixed with the existing substrate, and then every day the same quantity of the mixture, i.e. decomposed slurry, is removed, explains Biofutura.

The plant operates using the principle of anaerobic digestion of organic matter using methanogenic and other bacteria. In an oxygen-free environment the organic solids in the waste, which

contain a considerable amount of organic carbon, is converted using bacteria into a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide, as well as various other gases which together form biogas. Since the percentage of methane in biogas under normal operation is above 50%, biogas is flammable and can be used as a fuel in electricity and heat cogeneration plants (gas generators).

Since the harmful greenhouse gas methane is extracted from the organic waste and used as fuel for the production of electricity from renewable resources, the effects of the biogas plant on the environment are wholly positive. The decomposed slurry is an excellent organic agricultural fertiliser and as such does not burden the environment. There is practically no wastewater, since it is entirely used in the technological process, and they even collect and use all of the precipitant water at the location. "In future we are planning to dry the decomposed slurry before it is removed, in order to lower transport costs. We will be using most of the pre-treated wastewater for the process itself, and some treated water will be released to the municipal

wastewater treatment plant via the public sewage system." The odour produced by the organic waste is eliminated by drawing off and biofiltering the air from all areas where a smell could appear. The discharge of odour into the environment is therefore practically eliminated.

“ WE BELIEVE THAT THE DEMAND FOR THE TREATMENT OF ORGANIC WASTE WILL INCREASE IN FUTURE, AND WE ARE HOPING TO BUILD A SIMILAR PLANT IN SLOVENIA OR ABROAD. ”

Value of the project

The construction of the biogas plant was an exceptionally demanding project. The company estimates its total investment at nearly ten million euros, not taking account of their own knowledge and the work of all the company's employees. "We estimate that the investment will pay for itself in eight to ten years, depending on the possibilities of increasing the amount of waste treated."

But Biofutura is not going to stop at the construction of just one plant, as they gained a considerable amount of valuable experience through building and starting up the biogas plant in Ilirska Bistrica. "We believe that the demand for the treatment of organic waste will increase in future, and we are hoping to build a similar plant in Slovenia or abroad." They see opportunities for expansion primarily in the Balkans, where legislation, including in the field of waste management, is slowly moving towards the European framework. ●

How much power does green energy generate?

The biogas plant generates nearly 1 MW of electricity per hour, and about the same amount of heat energy. "If the cogeneration units operate for 8000 hours annually, we will produce 8000 MWh of electricity and 8000 MWh of heat. The electricity will partially be used for our needs, but the large majority of it will be fed back into the network", says Biofutura.



ART THROUGH CARDBOARD

Valerija Mencej Photo Archive of Primož Antloga

CAN YOU IMAGINE FURNITURE MADE OF PAPER? Paper furniture can actually be very solid and can even be recycled when it is no longer needed. Paper furniture is not a new idea. Making furniture from paper using the papier-mâché technique, where the individual item is constructed from torn pieces of paper stuck together using a wet paste, usually containing starch, was quite popular in 18th-century Europe.

Products made of paper and cardboard also awaken

memories of childhood and our first artistic creations. One young Slovenian who has successfully transferred the creativity of childhood into his profession is the designer Primož Antloga, who makes furniture and other products out of cardboard. He began designing with cardboard in 1996 more or less by accident. 'I didn't want to throw away the box that my hi-fi came in and so instead I made a CD holder out of it,' remembers Antloga. 'That's how I realised that cardboard is a very design-friendly material and began



making other things: boxes, models, flower stands, furniture and so on.'

In his hands, cardboard outgrows the functionality of packaging and is transformed into an aesthetically pleasing product that can take its place alongside products made of wood or synthetic materials. He comes up with his own ideas or occasionally develops them in conjunction with a client. His favourite cardboard products are models (of buildings, etc.), scenic elements and boutique packaging solutions for gifts.

In Antloga's opinion, designing with cardboard is not particularly difficult if you know the limitations of the material, both in manufacture and use. Anyone who buys a cardboard product is usually aware of the limitations of the material, and also of its advantages. Practically the only enemy of cardboard is damp, although it can survive getting wet without major problems if the liquid is quickly wiped away. It is possible to protect cardboard against damp using varnish, although Antloga does not usually do this because he likes the natural colour of cardboard.

His products have been exhibited in various galleries, at the Biennial of Industrial Design (a long-running international exhibition of industrial design in Slovenia) and at the California Gift Show in Los Angeles.

Primož Antloga: 'I think my biggest success is that I get practically no complaints, and I hope it carries on like that. My expectations for the future are the same as those I have now: that there will be no shortage of orders and, hopefully, even more work.'

There is no common dominator among the customers who buy his products: they include young people, families, companies, eco-enthusiasts; all they have in common is the need for a product that can most easily be made from cardboard. Although all his work is made by hand, the products are accessibly priced and environmentally friendly. •

“**CARDBOARD ATTRACTED ME BECAUSE IT IS SIMPLE TO WORK WITH. YOU DON'T NEED SPECIAL MACHINES, THERE IS NO NOISE AND THERE IS VERY LITTLE DUST. IT IS EASY TO CUT AND SHAPE. WASTE IS GOT RID OF IMMEDIATELY. YOU COULD SAY THAT MAKING THINGS OUT OF CARDBOARD IS VERY ECOLOGICAL.**”

IT'S BEAUTIFUL (AND TASTY) IN THE MOUNTAINS

Polona Prešeren Photo Iztok Dimc



CURDLED MILK, HOMEMADE cottage cheese and cheese, cream and *masovnik* porridge are real traditional mountain dishes. But since nothing comes without effort, if you want to taste them you just have to go into the mountains. This time, our team took a trip to discover the culinary delights at the Alpine farm in the Kofce highlands, 1500 m above sea level.

The mountains of Slovenia hide many secrets – from the most difficult climbing routes and difficult to access paths and peaks, to the highlands where the secrets of Alpine farms are kept. Slovenia's exceptional hiking tradition is associated among other things with the numerous herdsmen's cottages, mountain huts and Alpine farms high in the Alpine valleys, where the food tastes completely different. And well it might, because sometimes you have to really exert yourself and bite really hard on your knees in order to get a nourishing lunch.

The numerous mountain huts and herdsmen's cottages in the Slovenian mountains are pleasant gathering places for nature lovers and offer simple but exceptionally tasty food. But the Alpine farms are different from the mountain huts. They are essentially a herding community, to which the farmers from the valleys drive their cattle and small livestock to pasture during the summer, and are thus maintained by Alpine herdsmen during the summer. The Alpine herding season lasts from mid-June to the mid-September.

This summer at the Alpine farm at Kofce, which sits next to the mountain hut, they had 65 cows as well as horses and sheep. Uroš Strniša - "Darko" and his partner Tina Horvat, both climbers and mountaineers at heart, have been in charge of the Alpine farm for the past six years. Uroš, who is also a businessman, >>>

is joined on weekends by Tina, who is a journalist and an editor for the weekly magazine *Jana*. This year they have two cooks and several hard-working students to help them work the livestock, process the dairy products and prepare the food.

Life on an Alpine farm has its own rhythm. The work environment is exceptionally beautiful, since Kofce sits on a terrace which opens onto views of Mt. Storžič and the Kamnik and Julian Alps, with Triglav towering above them all. But there is a lot of work to do in this idyllic environment. In the springtime, just when the snow melts, the mountain pastures have to be cleared and prepared, the fences which were flattened by the snow have to be repaired, and there is a lot to do in the surrounding area. And there is no lack of work in the middle of June, when the livestock arrives at the pasture. During the week they tend the cattle, curdle the milk and make cheese and cottage cheese, and at the same time serve meals to their hiker guests. The farm has its own water catchment with excellent mountain water, but some visitors don't trust it and prefer to order water in plastic bottles. Their electricity is provided by solar panels.

Lunch in the mountains

After a few hours of hiking, a nice hearty lunch really hits the spot! At Kofce you can enjoy typical Alpine farm products such as cottage cheese, cream and rounds of young cheese, which is also great for baking, and Alpine stews and soups, which go wonderfully with the Slovenian favourite corn, wheat or buckwheat mash called "žganci" topped with lard cracklings. They also keep chickens and therefore have farm-fresh eggs.

In the kitchen, stews boil in huge pots on the ceramic stove, where they cook with wood, which is much tastier than on a regular stove. The stews are an indispensable part of Alpine fare. Jota, which is made of sauerkraut, beans and potatoes, also traditionally includes a piece or two of meat. Since more and more people are turning to a vegetarian diet, they have also had to make accommodations for this in the mountains, explains Tina, so they add the smoked meat if you want it. Since it is mushroom season, there was



Life on the Alpine farm is beautiful, but hard work, says Tina Horvat.

'Slovenians are of course very familiar with the Alpine menu, and sometimes go into the mountains just to get a good meal.'

also a delicious-smelling mushroom stew. "We only use mushrooms that we gather ourselves, and we try to use as many spices as we can from our own garden, which is definitely one of the highest in Slovenia", says Tina. The cook has meanwhile already prepared invitingly fragrant fresh porcini mushrooms with eggs.

"Ajdovi žganci", or buckwheat mash, has been cooked in Slovenia for centuries, and is a staple of mountain fare. They are served with curdled milk, mushroom stew or sauerkraut and sausage. Gorenjska-style buckwheat mash, as they serve it at Kofce, is a little drier than the Dolenjska style. How are they made? Boil water in a pot, add salt and buckwheat flour (in a ratio of approximately 3:1). Without mixing, make

holes in the flour mixture using a ladle, so that water starts to boil up through the holes. After 25 minutes over medium heat, pour the water off into another pot, since it will be used later. Mix the mash well with a cooking fork and slowly add the reserved water with a ladle. Add a few spoonfuls of hot lard or oil. Mix the mash and continue to add the mash water until the mash is somewhere between too dry and too wet. "Žganci have to be larded with cracklings, that's the only real way", says Uroš. They make their own cracklings at the farm. "This is hearty food for people who work hard or hike a lot, and if you don't eat it every day, there will be nothing wrong at all", he adds. Of course the flour is important too, and at Kofce they get it from a mill in the valley.

While the pots are boiling on the stove, we start making the masovnik. This porridge is a traditional mountain dish. A lot of visitors come up the hill just for the masovnik, which often runs out due to the large demand and the slightly lower availability of its most important ingredient, cream. Some people even call in the morning and reserve it. In the



Mushroom stew.



Jota.



Curdled milk (left) and "ajdovi žganci" (right).



Masovnik.



Porcini mushrooms with eggs.

past, masovnik was everyday food for the herdsmen. Usually they ate it for breakfast, so they had enough energy for the whole day; nowadays it is enjoyed by the most die-hard hikers. It is a hearty floury dish, so you can forget about counting calories. Masovnik is made out of cream, a mixture of corn meal and wheat flour and eggs, and it has to be mixed for a long time in a pan over a hot fire until it thickens and begins to release fat. It is served with bread. It's real energy food, but Uroš and Tina recommend that you don't let your eyes get bigger than your stomach and that you order it in small quantities, just enough to try it if you're not used to it.

Since the temperatures are no longer as high as they were during the summer, the autumn menu already includes sauerkraut with klobasa sausage or pečenica grilled sausage, which is more typically served on colder days. But as a reminder of summer you can still order homemade plum dumplings.

Slovenians are of course very familiar with the Alpine menu, and sometimes go into the mountains just to get a good meal. But even here, 1500 metres above sea level,

you sometimes find people who think that they should expand the menu like a restaurant in the valley. "Some city slickers order pizza or cappuccino, and are very surprised that we don't have it. But then they are very satisfied with our food and Turkish coffee", says Tina. Foreigners are also a bit surprised at first when they get žganci, masovnik, jota or ričet (barley porridge with beans), since they don't know these dishes at all, but most of them are completely satisfied with Slovenian Alpine fare once they try it.

How do you get to Kofce?

The most common route is from the Matizovec Alpine farm, which is reached from the village of Podljubelj, which lies on the road from Tržič heading towards Austria. The hike from the Matizovec farm to Kofce takes one hour. A second option is

from Tržič through the Dolžan gorge and Jelendol, where you can drive very far up the hill, and then the walk is only 20 minutes. In the Karavanke Mountains above Kofce lies the longest uninterrupted ridge in Slovenia, which runs along the Austrian border for 12 kilometres. It is of course also accessible from the Austrian side. Kofce is a great starting point for wonderful hikes throughout the year. The Kofce Alpine farm can accommodate up to 20 people. During the autumn and winter it is also open on weekends, as in recent years Kofce has become very popular among backcountry skiers. The mountains are even more fantastic during the winter.



The following players appeared for Slovenia:

Uroš Slokar, Jaka Lakovič (captain), Hasan Rizvič, Gašper Vidmar, Jaka Klobučar, Boštjan Nachbar, Goran Jagodnik, Samo Udrih, Sani Bečirovič, Goran Dragič, Miha Zupan and Primož Brezec.

The coach was Memi Bečirovič.

Slovenia's results:

Preliminary round: Tunisia 80:56, USA 77:99, Croatia 91:84, Brazil 80:77, Iran 65:60, **1/8 final:** Australia 87:58, **1/4 final:** Turkey 68:95, **5th to 8th place:** Spain 80:97, Russia 78:83

SLOVENIAN BASKETBALL ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Miha Žibrat Photo Aleš Fevžer

SIXTY YEARS AGO NO ONE COULD EVEN HAVE DREAMED that one day a Slovenian national team would be playing at the World Championship! The Slovenian team's eighth place at the 2010 FIBA World Championship in Turkey is a great success for national basketball, given that the team was effectively missing its starting five.

Vujačić, Nesterović, Lorbek, Smodiš and Beno Udrih are all experienced players and former NBA stars, but for various reasons they were not part of the team in Istanbul. Even so, the team acquitted itself extremely well under the expert guidance of coach Memi Bečirovič and for the first time in its history won itself a place among the top eight teams in the world. The final tally was five victories and four defeats. Unfortunately, hosts Turkey proved too strong in the quarter final. If not for them, Slovenia could perhaps have ended the World Championship just below or even on the world throne.

A collective spirit of all for one and one for all prevailed in the Slovenian team. The visible sparks of happiness that were apparent after every successful play, after every basket and after every victory are an excellent sign for the next big competitions. Alongside veterans Lakovič, Slokar, Bečirovič, Brezec and Nachbar, a number of new players performed well at the tournament, notably the excellent centre Gašper Vidmar, Samo Udrih, Hasan Rizvič and Jaka Klobučar. They showed that Slovenia need not fear for its basketballing future.

In competitive terms, Slovenia played some excellent matches. After their opening win against Tunisia they lost to the USA, but then enjoyed a run of three consecutive victories, beating Croatia, Brazil and Iran. The 80:77 victory against Brazil was particularly exciting, a supreme performance in which Slovenia broke down the resistance of the South Americans in the dying moments of the match. Facing Australia in the eighth-finals, Slovenia played the game of their life and scored their biggest victory in the Championship.

The World Championship was also a real festival for Slovenian

supporters. More than 4,000 of them made the journey to Turkey's biggest city, loudly cheering the Slovenian players to victory. As influential Turkish daily Hürriyet put it: 'The USA are the world champions but the title of best supporters goes to Slovenia.' And it is true. With such encouragement and fanatical support, it is not difficult to play at the very highest level.

The quarter-final match between Slovenia and Turkey was watched by the Presidents of the two countries, Danilo Türk and Abdullah Gül. Slovenia became one of the handful of countries to be watched by a head of state complete with supporter's scarf and other signs of enthusiastic support. Turkey were the better team on the day and at the end of the match we shook their hands and wished them the best of luck for the remainder of the tournament. And, for the first time in history, Turkey reached the final, where, however, they ultimately conceded defeat to the excellent players of the USA.

After losing to Russia in the battle for seventh place Slovenia was left with a consolation – an eighth place which is the best result that independent Slovenia has achieved to date in a world championship competition. The next big challenge for Slovenian basketball is to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Games in London. With such team spirit, commitment to common goals and outstanding supporters, this objective too is probably achievable.

Although Dr James Naismith 'invented' basketball in 1896, the first World Championship did not take place until 1950, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. European Championships have been contested since 1935 and basketball has been an Olympic sport since 1936. The former Yugoslavia was among the teams to contest the first World Championship in 1950; its national side included the Slovenian basketball player Mirko Amon, then playing for Ljubljana club Železničar. Basketball was only just starting to develop in Slovenia in those days, and although some sources claim that it was already being played in as early as 1920, there is no solid evidence of this. ●



2010 ICF CANOE SLALOM WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS SLOKA 2010

Matic Švab Photo STA

FOR THE THIRD TIME IN THEIR HISTORY, THE CANOE slalom world championships took place in Ljubljana, as the Tacen White-Water Course welcomed the world's best kayakers and canoeists. Tacen has played an important role in Slovenian kayak history. Its history can be traced back to 20 October 1931 and the foundation of the first kayaking club in Ljubljana – Kajak kanu klub (KKK) Ljubljana. Tacen established its unrivalled position in Slovenian kayaking in 1939, when the Championship of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was held on the left bank of the Sava river.

In the past Slovenian kayakers have achieved great success in this Olympic sport, and Peter Kauzer was even the European and world champion, so expectations were very high in Slovenia before the championships started. In the domestic championship Slovenian kayak internationals again proved that they belong among the very best in the world. Following his silver in the European Championships, the kayaker Jure Meglič won a bronze medal. "I took a bit of risk and it came off. I was already fourth and I know how awful that can be. Now I've made third, I'm incredibly happy, it's what I've been waiting for all my life. It's the first time I've appeared before a crowd like this and today the support really was on another level." In the incredible atmosphere generated by Slovenian fans along the route, the Slovenian women surprised a lot of people in the team event, with a fast and committed performance that gained them a bronze medal. In doing so the Slovenian team laid down a marker to suggest they will be exceptionally competitive in the hunt for Olympic medals in London in two years' time.

The canoe slalom world championships on Tacen's white-water course also featured numerous supporting events. It was a great honour for Ljubljana to host the Kayart exhibition by the renowned Spanish artist Armengol Tolsa Badia, an imaginative exhibition of kayak-themed works. Together with the Slovenian artist, Zmago Modic, they put on 15 pieces around Ljubljana that drew attention

to the fact that the world's best kayakers and canoeists were competing in the city.

The fascinating idea of depicting kayakers came to Armengol Tolsa Badia from the river next to his home, where he would often see kayakers training and began to develop an interest. "The entire production of a kayak, from the idea to actual production, takes years. Once I get the idea, the kayak usually takes about half a year." Critics have often described his work as a visual poetry in which he plays with shape and form.

An eye, shoe, racing car, sandwich or drums – these are just some of the exhibits that have been on view in Ljubljana for over a month. Zmago Modic was also very satisfied with the exhibition: "I am pleased that Ljubljana has hosted an interesting exhibition on a world level, and I'm also very happy that the mayor was so open to foreign artists wanting to exhibit in Ljubljana. It is also a great way to combine a major sporting event with city culture."

It was not just the Spanish artist's kayaks that were on display in Ljubljana. Since the end of the 2009/10 school year, primary school pupils in the Sloka 2010 project have developed their painting skills, together painting 28 kayaks. The starting point for this painting was the canoe slalom world championship, while the emphasis was on ecology and keeping the environment clean. The project included 20 primary schools from Ljubljana and surroundings, Krško, Brežice and Hrastnik and participants in a holiday club organised by the Soča River Power Plant Kayak Club of Nova Gorica and Solkan. The aim of the project was to help children find out about kayaking and also to inform them of the importance of keeping the environment clean, which is so important for our lives and is sometimes not given sufficient attention. The well known artist, Zmago Modic, put kayaks into the very heart of Ljubljana, placing them on five Ljubljana bridges (the footbridge between Špica and the Botanical Garden, and the Prule, Karlovški, Žitni and Ambrožev Trg bridges). ●

THE GREATEST ACQUISITION FOR SLOVENIAN SPORT

Andrej Stare Photo Darinka Mladenovič



AFTER 75 YEARS LJUBLJANA, THE CAPITAL OF SLOVENIA, has gained a new, modern football stadium and a multipurpose arena in the Stožice district on the northern edge of the city.

The official inauguration of the new facilities took place on 10 and 11 August with a basketball match against Spain, the current world champions, and a football match against Australia, fresh from taking part in the World Cup in South Africa.

Both events met with enormous interest. The basketball match between Slovenia and Spain was watched by over 12,500 spectators, while the football match between Slovenia and Australia saw 16,000 spectators pack the stadium. Among the spectators at the two inaugural matches were Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor and his staff and President of the National Assembly Pavel Gantar.

Mayor of Ljubljana Zoran Janković (the 119th mayor of the city since 1504) had promised both projects on being elected in 2006. His inaugural address included the following wishes for the future: 'Dear footballers, may this marvellous stadium be your new home and may it ensure the development and popularity of sport in Ljubljana and the whole of Slovenia.'

The first stadium in Ljubljana, the 'Ilirija', was built in 1920-21 in the Spodnja Šiška district opposite today's Tivoli Hall and had a capacity of 12,000. Its construction was supported by mayor Ivan Tavčar (1911-1921).

Ljubljana's second stadium (the 'Hermes', today's athletics stadium) was built in Šiška in 1930 with the support of mayor

Dinko Puc (1928-1935).

The third stadium in Ljubljana, on the site of a former gravel pit in the Bežigrad district, was originally built for religious purposes, as an open-air church for the needs of the Eucharistic Congress in 1935. In 1937 it began to be used for football matches and athletics events. Three mayors were involved in its construction: Dinko Puc (1928-1935), Vladimir Ravnihar (1935) and Juro Adlešič (1935-1942).

Both matches were spectacular and unrepeatable. The basketball match in the new arena was reminiscent of the matches of the NBA, the celebrated North American basketball league. The packed arena created an incredible atmosphere never before felt in Slovenia. As well as for basketball matches, the new arena in Stožice will be used for handball and volleyball matches. Everything is in place for the installation of an ice rink for ice hockey matches and

figure skating competitions. If necessary it can also be used for short track speed skating and curling (the Slovenian Curling Association was established just a few days ago). With some minor adjustments, the new arena will also be able to host indoor athletics competitions.

The football stadium is extremely beautiful. It provides ideal conditions for top-level football matches and is also

suitable for other events such as outdoor concerts. Artists appearing shortly in the new Stožice sports complex include the tenor José Carreras and singers Joe Cocker and Leonard Cohen, and a series of major concerts, which since 1965 have been held in Tivoli Hall, are in the pipeline. Ljubljana has always given an

enthusiastic welcome to top musicians of all genres, from opera to rock, pop, soul, jazz and country.

The football stadium has been built to all the latest international standards. The heated pitch provides an excellent playing surface. The stands are spectator-friendly and, from the point of view of safety, can be completely emptied in under three minutes. The changing rooms are large and modern and have all the necessary equipment. Special entrances allow players' buses to stop right outside the changing room doors. There are also facilities for journalists and broadcasters and hospitality facilities for VIPs.

The chief designer of the Stožice Sports Park was the architect Boštjan Vuga of Sadar Vuga Arhitekti. His creation and the functionality of the two structures meet all the highest international standards.

To date Ljubljana has hosted 22 European and World Championships. With these two new facilities we can expect new championships at the highest European and world levels in the years to come.

Now that top rowing competitions have returned to Bled, there is a fear that the situation will change once again. Slovenia's rowers are undergoing a generational change. For Čop and Špik, giants though they are, it is much harder than it once was to find the motivation needed to repeat their brilliant achievements of a few years ago. The younger rowers are growing up fast and learning quickly, but rowing is a sport that demands a great deal of experience and a huge amount of intelligence. The World Championships are still over a year away and much can be achieved in the time that remains. Let us hope that all those who will be taking their places at the Slovenian oars in racing shells on their home lake next year are able to prepare themselves calmly and without too much psychological pressure, since only in this way will they be successful. ●

European and World Championships in Ljubljana 1965-2010:

1965	World Table Tennis Championships
1966	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group A
1967	European Figure Skating Championships
1969	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
1970	World Figure Skating Championships
1970	World Gymnastics Championships
1970	World Basketball Championships
1974	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
1982	World Weightlifting Championships
1984	World Ninepin Bowling Championships
1991	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
1993	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group C
1998	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B
2001	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B (Division I)
2004	European Handball Championships
2007	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B (Division I)
2010	Boxing - welterweight world champion title match: Zavec (Slovenia): Martinez (Argentina)
2010	World Ice Hockey Championships, Group B (Division I)



THE GRANITE FISTS OF DEJAN ZAVEC

JUST 20 KILOMETRES FROM PTUJ, THE TOWN WHERE BOXER Dejan Zavec was born, is the Pohorje mountain range, famous for its tonalite (a form of granite), a symbol of strength and solidity. And on Saturday, 3 September, in the new Stožice Arena, Dejan Zavec had fists that were at least as strong and solid as granite.

For the second time in his career he successfully defended his world title, this time against Polish boxer Rafał Jackiewicz, the only man to have defeated him since he turned professional. Zavec was a convincing winner in a match lasting 12 rounds, at the end of which he lifted the red IBF World Championship belt for the third time. The fight was spectacular and was watched by over 12,000 spectators.

'I have been following boxing all over the world for over 30 years and I have never seen such a crowd,' said Dejan Zavec's manager Ulf Steinforth. 'This full arena was without a doubt the best boxing public I have ever had the opportunity to see and enjoy.'

The match between the two stars of the welterweight category (up to 66.7 kg) was also watched by national and local politicians including Prime Minister Borut Pahor, President of the National Assembly Pavel Gantar and Mayor of Ljubljana Zoran Janković. At the end of the match the mayor hung a laurel wreath around Dejan Zavec's neck in recognition of this first great victory in Stožice Arena. The spectators were on their feet for almost all of the 12 rounds and the arena shook with their cheers and applause.

The public that filled the new arena had travelled from all over Slovenia and beyond, and there was an explosion of euphoria when the Belgian referee announced that Zavec had won his match against the Pole and successfully defended his title as World Champion. Zavec personally thanked the spectators, who remained in the arena long after the final gong.

'Thank you! You are the best public in the world. This World Championship belt is as much yours as it is mine, because without you I could not have achieved my 31 victories and successfully defended my world title.'

Zavec is expected to defend his title next spring, although who his next opponent will be is not yet known. In all probability the match will take place in Las Vegas (USA), the centre of World Championship boxing. Possible opponents include Viacheslav Senchenko of Ukraine, the Haitian American Andre Berto and current WBO World Welterweight Champion Manny Pacquiao of the Philippines. In the opinion of boxing experts, Zavec is currently good enough to beat anyone. ●



KAYAKING DOWN THE KRKA. PRICELESS.

In these late summer days the River Krka, the main artery of Dolenjska, is quiet and mysterious.

Polona Prešeren Photo Darinka Mladenovič, Carpe Diem

IN THESE LATE SUMMER DAYS THE River Krka, the main artery of Dolenjska, is quiet and mysterious. It may seem somewhat withdrawn and neglected, but the locals are still happy to call it the pride of Dolenjska. At first glance the Krka is a calm river, as it winds around Dolenjska's largest town, Novo Mesto, and other better known places along the river such as Otočec and Kostanjevica. But that is already its lower course. Higher up, when it flows through the Krka valley and the landscape of Suha Krajina, it reveals its Karstic,

limestone nature more clearly. The famed weirs formed from travertine deposits, hidden in the river's turns and pools, add a touch of adventure. And what better way to explore the beauty of the pride of Dolenjska than by kayak. For a long time, I had secretly wished to paddle down this river. And there could be no better way to do it than in the company of a top whitewater kayaker and former Olympian Borut Javornik.

Carpe Diem

Not far from the source of the river, in the

idyllic village of Krka, it is open house at the Javornik farm, the starting point for canoe trips organised by his company Carpe Diem. This is where Borut Javornik is from, and as a former competitive kayaker he is incredibly enthusiastic about the Krka, on which he learnt the sport. The Krka means everything to him. In his younger days he competed in white-water slaloms, representing Slovenia in the Olympics in Barcelona, before becoming team trainer for Atlanta and Sydney.

Borut has been organising kayaking on



the Krka since 1991, when he started his company. Since then he has developed a wide range of programmes for lots of different target groups – from children's kayak workshops and courses to sports days for primary and secondary schools, special corporate programmes and group work, and, of course, training at various levels of kayak school, and organising kayaking camps and trips down other rivers. They have a wide range of guests too, with whole families sometimes coming along. Borut is also involved in training Slovenia's next generation of kayak teachers.

Most of his guests are from Slovenia, but they also have regulars from abroad. Borut explains: "We're very well established around Venice, and work well with kayak clubs and smaller agencies from that area who think we offer an interesting and attractive programme. Some foreigners find us thanks to my competitive past, but more often it's because we offer an original white-water kayaking package that is fun, safe and attractive." He stresses the decisive role of the conditions the Krka offers, which they know how to recognise and make best use of. The Krka offers the promise of enjoyment for those sitting in a kayak for the first time, but also for experienced kayakers who will find its diversity very attractive.

Since Borut is a local, the grandson of a miller and a sawyer, he also knows many of the secrets of the Krka's upper course. When Borut looks at the Krka he sees a top quality recreational and sports course for kayakers. But the Krka also offers excellent opportunities for fly-fishing,

and has a history marked by a rich cultural heritage. It is sometimes known as the Valley of Castles, largely because of the many castles along the lower course of the river. The upper course is still part of the limestone Karstic plateau, so the Krka is a Karstic river featuring naturally-occurring and engineered travertine dams and weirs. The source of the river is the Krška Jama cave, which it is possible to visit. You could even meet a bear in the surroundings, as their numbers have started to grow in the local forests. Don't worry, though, so far there have not been any problems.

River action

The Javornik family and their team offer many trips down the Krka carefully adapted to groups – short to long and tailored to the group's level of experience. As our group gathers by the Krka on a Saturday morning, Borut Javornik is already speaking. "Okay, let's go. First choose a wetsuit, then let's get on the river!" No hanging around, straight into action. A moment later and we were already on the river, listening to instructions on how to paddle. No problem that we had only just seen the kayaks up close for the first time, never mind not having sat in them before. Trained guides accompany us on our

descent, encouraging us and keeping an eye on our safety. Life jackets and helmets are of course compulsory.

"As we don't just rent out our canoes, but always offer guided trips along the Krka, we have avoided most of the dangers," explains Borut. "It's important to remember that kayaking is a dangerous sport by definition, since it takes place in water and in the countryside where dangers are always present." If the water level is too high, they cancel trips for beginners. This approach certainly gives me additional confidence that the boys on the river will take care of me. Borut adds, "A big danger for us are beginners who are too confident and longing for instant adrenalin, which isn't what we offer. What we are about is offering beginners an entry into kayaking skills."

Any trip starts while you are still on land, since you have to understand the basics of paddling a kayak. The guides showed us how to hold the oars and how to paddle and then we were in the water. In general Carpe Diem uses special sit-on-top kayaks, which are more stable and simpler to use. These are solid-hull kayaks, where excess water drains through drainage holes in the lower section of the kayak. This makes it more stable and easier to use for people with little or no experience. >>>



As a complete beginner it took some time to get the hang of things at first, but I soon realised I would be okay. These canoes are really excellent for enjoying the river. And the river did not seem particularly cold either. At the height of summer it can reach 18 degrees, but now it is already cooling. It really is so refreshing. "Don't worry, just get stuck in!" says the guide Zdenko. And I do. And, of course, Borut encourages our every effort.

From the very moment I set foot in the kayak, I was completely hooked, and by the time I reached the first travertine terrace, I had promised myself that I would definitely come back to the Krka river. After four hours of kayaking and "dropping anchor" at Žužemberk, I was genuinely tired. But it was the kind of pleasant tiredness that you feel when you have really been in touch with nature. Travelling along the river is a wonderful feeling. From

the kayak the environment seems to tell you the story of the places along the river, and you see their culture and countryside from a different point of view. The local forests lend an impression of unspoilt nature as you paddle in the company of trout, ducks and storks. On the river all that matters is the moment and being in touch with the river and its surroundings. Priceless. So I understand why Zdenko, the guide, says that kayaking down the Krka fills you with positive energy. "This is my anti-stress programme. Kayaking really relaxes me," he explains and adds that it offers "a fantastic feeling, when the people you have guided on a unique experience discover the unspoilt nature of the Krka river valley."

But your experience with the Javorniks does not end with the river descent. Their farm is celebrated as one of the best inns in the area. Their food is based around the

excellent local trout, prepared in many different dishes, as well as game. You will also find them serving all kinds of other things that grow or they gather locally. They also offer their own excellent home-made apple juice.

When people slowly begin to harvest the grapes from the vineyards that spread over the slopes of the Krka valley, it is still a good time to kayak down the river. The Javorniks take people down the river during October (the season goes from the start of April to the end of October), and occasionally even organise winter trips for their friends. And when you have finished the kayaking, there really still is more to come. No more hard work, just pure hedonism round a table piled with delicious food. The kayaking and the eating were fantastic. •

For more information see: www.kayak.si

UROŠ AHČAN, physician and surgeon

The devaluation of the word
is the main problem

Miša Čermak Photo Šimen Zupančič

A PHYSICIAN, A SURGEON. A FATHER (that is how he signs himself!) and a husband. The head of the Clinical Department of Plastic, Reconstructive and Cosmetic Surgery and Burns at the University Medical Centre (UMC) Ljubljana, who has succeeded in creating from 'his' department an aesthetic whole, a pleasant temporary home for patients and staff. A teacher of courses on urgent medical aid and plastic surgery at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Medicine, and at the same time a keen fisherman and the author of a number of poems and several books

– his latest, the excellent Orlove sanje (The Eagle's Dream), is a book that grown-ups ought to read along with their children. With all these activities, which he performs at the highest level, conscientiously and with great commitment, he is of course always short of time – particularly for his family and for himself.

A group of medical students were asked in a survey why they had chosen the medical profession. The most frequent answer was: 'Because you are guaranteed to get a job and the pay is good.' Why did you decide to become a doctor?

It is always difficult for a young person to choose a career. I made my decision at the end of secondary school, before doing my military service in the Yugoslav People's Army. In those days there were no guaranteed jobs and the pay was very average. I think that what young people think today about guaranteed jobs and good salaries in healthcare is the wrong way to look at it. Everyone forgets about the difficult studies, the thousands of pages you have to read, the tens of thousands of sleepless nights, the sacrifices, the studying, practical exercises, exams, financial dependence on your parents, and so on. Six years. The best years. And then, once you have finished, the story repeats itself with the specialisation. Another six years. Twelve years just to be able to pursue your profession. And you never get to the point where you have total mastery because the profession is dynamic and full of innovations, new findings and discoveries. And as for liability and the consequences of errors, I would rather not talk about it. It is nice to be the winner of the Tour de France, or to win Wimbledon. But we must never forget the path that leads to a profession, victory (glory) and earnings. I know many much easier ways to earn much more money. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, many years ago I did not know that there would be 'collectors' of privatisation certificates, lobbyists, denationalisation beneficiaries, stockbrokers, receivers and professions involving nothing more than a fountain pen at a business lunch.

What was it that attracted you to surgery? Surgeons were respected and somewhat mysterious figures. The results of their

work were purely dependent on the skill of their hands, common sense and experience. Party secretaries or mayors did not give advice to surgeons but came to ask for advice when they needed it. I was particularly interested in helping people who were injured. People with wounds and shattered limbs.

Are you still as reflective and rational today?

I was already rational then, but now I am even more so because my profession requires it. Even before an operation I have to have a clear conception of what awaits me. A bit like skiers when they inspect

“It is nice to be the winner of the Tour de France, or to win Wimbledon. But we must never forget the path that leads to a profession, victory (glory) and earnings.”

the piste. I have to be able to see all the pitfalls and worst-case scenarios and at the same time the solutions for every possible outcome – simple, complex and unexpected. It is actually the unexpected moments that show the difference between a good surgeon and a bad or average surgeon. When a good team is carrying out an operation you cannot actually tell that anything is wrong. Others become nervous at the first sign of trouble, the sound level increases and you start to see additional, unnecessary movements.

Is it true that your second year as a medical student was decisive when it came to you choosing plastic surgery?

It was very important in my career path, because Professor Janko, for whom I was doing a research project, took me to Professor Arnež, who was full of energy, who was in the hospital '24 hours a day', and who had very high standards. He accepted me and I followed him around: I went with him to the clinic, on duty, at night – I was at the medical centre more than half the week, all as a volunteer and still at the learning

stage, so that I could see whether this interested me. I followed the professor's work and saw satisfied patients. In my third year, under his mentorship, I presented my research in London at the congress of the British Association of Plastic Surgeons at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Eight or even ten hours in the operating theatre without food and drink, the whole time in more or less the same position – that must be hard! Is physical fitness also important?

It is. During a major operation, dealing with major issues, you are full of adrenaline, you do not feel tired and time stops: all there is in front of you is finished work and unfinished work. You say to yourself: five veins are already sewn up and you have to sew up another eight, after that you have to sew sinews, nerves, skin... step by step you finish the work. Without thinking that you have already been hunched over a microscope for six hours, that you have not been to the toilet in all this time, that you have not had a drink... You ignore it. Something similar happens with top athletes during competitions. Our principal training, however, consists exclusively of working in the operating theatre. Only this strengthens precisely defined movements. Composure and reliability only come with a lot of sewing. Usually we surgeons simply do not have time to worry specifically about our physical fitness because we are at work from morning to evening, and often at the weekends as well. I know very few surgeons who go to a fitness club.

You job requires good skills and plenty of knowledge and creativity when you are dealing with the most serious wounds, and of course an aesthetic sense for cosmetic surgery.

An aesthetic sense is also necessary in reconstructive surgery: when you are creating a new breast out of nothing and it must be identical to the other breast if you want the patient to be happy and you want to feel happy with your work. It is a lot harder to make a breast out of nothing than to do a breast enhancement! Most cosmetic operations are simple: a breast enhancement takes just over an hour and is not technically demanding! In reconstructive surgery you have to show greater abilities but there is an aesthetic

element in every type of surgery – everyone wants a nicely sewn-up wound. The finest cosmetic surgeons in the world come from reconstructive surgery. It is very rare for this to happen the other way round. Unfortunately, people who are looking for someone to carry out a cosmetic operation are too little aware of this. Only rarely do they ask about the background of the surgeon who is going to operate on them. In other countries the situation is completely different. Those without suitable training pay enormous insurance premiums, or find that insurance companies are unwilling to insure them at all.

Have you ever considered that being a cosmetic surgeon is 'beneath your dignity' in the sense of dealing with the dictates of fashion?

And whims? I only operate if I am satisfied, after talking to the patient, that the patient's wishes and expectations are realistic and that I can fulfil them. I carefully discuss possible complications and expected results with the patient. With the right choice, even cosmetic surgery can bring a doctor great happiness. It often also brings worry and disappointment. In the end it is always the patient who decides if the result is good, depending on his or her expectations.

What is your personal view of aesthetic requirements that are dictated by fashion?

At one time everyone had to be more pear-shaped, a white skin was desirable (only poor people worked in the fields under the hot sun!) and fat people were those who had enough money to eat well. Today being suntanned means sunbathing in the Caribbean and being slim is a sign of a healthy diet – both are signs of 'success'. Trends change and come from a specific group of people, with precise intentions. These people are not interested in general consequences – collateral damage – but only in personal advantages. Then, via the media, they scatter a few titbits for us to gnaw on or be amused at, and we forget to take a broader view and recognise the true problems. Finally we no longer believe anyone. We are mistrustful and frightened. It is sad that we now have doubts about the Moon landing, the origin of swine flu, the disappearance of healthy seeds, and so on.



All too rarely do we take advantage of a nice day in the countryside, or laugh sincerely. Today life is like a play: there are great actors, and there are actors with minor roles – that of consumers.

We are a little contradictory, are we not?

Yes. It is funny to see guests on a chat show getting indignant about cosmetic operations when they themselves have had at least one such experience which may even be obvious. I would like to see beauty competitions without cosmetic corrections and make-up artists, like sport without doping. Only natural beauty. Seven o'clock in the morning beauty. But in this world of contradictions there are various experts competing with each other, and secret tricks and sponsorship win the day. Artificial beauty beats natural beauty because it brings money to different interest groups.

Do you ever correct unsuccessful cosmetic surgery?

We even correct the work of colleagues from other cosmetic centres. For the most part, those who have not had suitable training. We are waiting for a law that will prevent this. Our primary reason for being here is to help people. We carry out reconstructions at a level that is comparable with anywhere in the world, and in line with global trends. We follow all world congresses on cosmetic surgery and carry out all cosmetic operations at the UMC. We respect legislation that says that it is inappropriate to advertise these services and unfortunately we do not have time to create a good website, because there are eight specialists in the department divided among thirteen locations and we work every day. But word of mouth is effective and we even have patients from abroad. These are the patients for whom we carry out the biggest reconstructions and most difficult operations – these are >>>

our biggest challenges.

In your writings you criticise politics, hankering after money, false ideals of beauty. Do you really think like that?

Yes. Directness and sincerity are part of me, part of my upbringing. When you talk sincerely there are no hard feelings, no game-playing that takes away your energy, when you sit at home wondering what someone was trying to say. I am not afraid to say what I think. I usually use arguments and verifiable information. When I encounter a problem I try to solve it. For example: we were all shocked to learn that the percentage of people in Slovenia who are willing to help in the case of an accident is less than 10%. My feeling was that the problem lies in the knowledge that we experts need to communicate to others, and that is why we wrote *Prva pomoč* (First Aid), which was twice book of the month in terms of sales and sold out an edition of 3,000 copies in one year. *Govoreči prsti* (Talking Fingers) is a book that draws attention to hand injuries. *Orel s Škrlatnega vrha* (The Eagle from Scarlet Mountain) confronts a taboo topic: a death in the family. I am always looking for subjects for useful and effective work. I do not like listening to people who talk a lot and have little to say. Can you imagine a doctor standing over a dying patient talking about what could and should be done and what others have failed to do? What he needs to do is prescribe the medicine, pick up the scalpel and make the incision. Immediately, without lots of talk. This is something that I also expect from other professionals and politicians.

Do you 'rule' your department with an iron hand?

There is no ruling, there is cooperation and complementing each other's work. Openly, with discussion, correctness and equality for all! I am well aware that every single person in the department is necessary. I want us all to have the same conditions for work and to reach our goals. I realise that all of us have given the greater part of our lives to medicine.

Were you an outstanding student?

For a while, but I always kept something in reserve. That means that I never failed an exam when I was a medical student, but at the same time my average mark was not ten

out of ten. I was rational: one investment of effort for one result!

Are you ambitious? in a relatively short time and at a relatively young age you occupy a responsible position, you run a more than exemplary department, you are an excellent surgeon...

Youth is a relative concept. The last time I noticed that was at the hairdresser's. I enjoy my work and I have always loved team sports. Leading and encouraging a team. Being head of the department is also the result of a combination of circumstances and the departure of three colleagues. It also means additional work that is not connected with treating patients and is therefore less interesting. When you become a head of department you do not become cleverer, more experienced or better overnight. Perhaps you merely have more opportunity to influence the results of the whole, and a great responsibility. In surgery

"The word plasticus means design, and here you can demonstrate the movements you have learnt, your ideas and all your hidden talents."

you can never stray from solid ground, not even with one foot, and surrender to luck, triumphalism, arrogance or believing that you are irreplaceable. If you think like that you will be taught a serious lesson the very next day! You have to stay realistic and keep your feet firmly on the ground.

You have two daughters, Ivona and Hana, aged nine and four – am I right in thinking you have not been married long?

My wife and I have been together for 20 years (laughs), since the first year of university. I cannot remember what year we got married but I do know that it was in September. I kept my wedding ring on for all of two hours. Such external symbols seem entirely unnecessary to me. The important things are the head and the heart. A settled family life is a condition for being able to

work well and hard, and to have a tranquil life. Some people like a more exciting life, full of tragedy, comedy and adrenaline... perhaps they are adventurers because they have a more tranquil working environment. Fortunately everyone makes their own decision. The essential thing is not to harm others with our actions.

Are you an artistic spirit?

In a way: I enjoy word games, photography, design... work: plastic surgery. The word plasticus means design, and here you can demonstrate the movements you have learnt, your ideas and all your hidden talents.

Your writings reveal how much your family means to you, how you breathe with them, the relationship you have with your wife and your two little girls. At the same time you love freedom.

A family is a group of people bound together by ties of kinship. Good families are also connected by shared activities, sports, hobbies, fun, having lunch together, playing ludo or Monopoly, sincere conversations, a healthy upbringing. There are people who write bestsellers that try to explain to us what a true family is and how to bring up children properly, but I do not read them because I do not know their authors and their families and children. I respect the basic principles that my parents gave me. I would like my children to be hard-working and creative, to have a fighting spirit and to be free in their decisions. I try and help them as a more experienced, wiser partner.

Do you ever feel guilty about spending too little time with your family? Do your daughters miss you?

Frequently! I am only rarely at home, and even then I am sometimes only there in body. But when the family is together we are together very intensively. At the moment other members of the family often take my place and act as drivers, cooks, tutors, and so on. But I realise that the stormy period of adolescence is approaching, and that schoolwork will become more demanding. Then I will need to make more of an effort. The heroes of books will be replaced by two heroines and the cosmetic operation will be replaced by the 'operation' of physics or chemistry. I am well aware that family and children are the only thing you are left with in the end... •



A NEW BEGINNING FOR JESENICE

Jože Osterman Photo Darinka Mladenovič, archive of Gornjesavski museum Jesenice

J ESENICE, AN OLD IRONWORKING town lying at the foot of the Karavanke Mountains at the beginning of the Upper Sava Valley, is still thought of by many Slovenes as a symbol of a grey, sooty town whose look and life were sacrificed to industrial production. Its somewhat murky image was created from the middle of the 19th century onwards, but the nineteen-seventies were undoubtedly the most intensive period, when the Jesenice Ironworks employed more than 8000 workers who came to Jesenice from all over the region, which reached from Rateče on the Italian border southwards to Podbrdo on the Primorska side of the Julian Alps and to the east as far as Kranj, and to a considerable extent from all over the former Yugoslavia. In those days, the human ant-hill which teemed between

the tall factory chimneys, which belched forth so many solid particles that even on the clearest day the town was covered in a reddish fog, traded a large part of its quality of life for the good wages that the factory paid. Of the municipalities which recorded the highest income per person, Jesenice was ranked in the top ten wealthiest Slovenian municipalities for at least thirty years.

The decline of the socialist economy in the nineteen-eighties turned the town's position on its head. The ironworks shrank to a mere 20% of its former size and today employs just over 1000 people. It moved from the centre of town to a new plant, which it had built in the eastern suburb of Koroška Bela during the good years. The town, which grew for a century alongside the factory to which it had become subservient, found itself with an

empty and even physically decaying core composed of old industrial plants, thus with a sort of hole in its centre. It looked as if it had survived a huge bombing raid, and its life was in fact sucked out of it quite quickly. Half of the companies which had formed the former ironworks failed and found themselves in one or another type of bankruptcy proceedings. Unemployment in the town rose to unbelievable proportions, with more than a third of the inhabitants out of work. The depression was somewhat eased by the proximity of Austria, where many Jesenice residents worked on the black market in those years, performing the most menial tasks. During the nineties Jesenice fell to last place on the list of developed municipalities, behind even the most impoverished rural municipalities, which had lived off small



farming and had been considered chronically underdeveloped for years.

On the way up

“When you’re at the bottom, you don’t have a lot of choices”, says former Jesenice mayor and current Deputy Mayor Boris Bregant, undoubtedly the person most responsible for the town’s renaissance. You have to start over and work hard, since the other option is total ruin. After four years in the grip of the companies’ endless bankruptcies and the loss of socially-owned and their own property, the municipal authorities were just barely able to compile an approximate overview of the situation with which they could weigh their opportunities for digging themselves out of their hole. They drafted an urban planning study in which they set out the bases for the

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town’s future. They had to relocate the majority of the town’s municipal services, since due to its subordination to the ironworks the town was no longer a communications hub with clear divisions between activities. The ironworks and the railway line, which had run down the centre of the narrow valley, had divided the town into two barely connected parts. The long and narrow town of Jesenice did not have

a proper town centre, but instead had various underdeveloped cores which had formed around restaurants, railway station and secondary school. The worst part was that the exhausted municipality had practically no money with which to begin the process of saving the dying town.

The breakthrough in the entire matter was undoubtedly the visit by European Commissioner

Padraig Flynn of Ireland in 1999. “We literally dragged the European delegation to that abandoned, sad, dirty environment”, says Bregant, “and they understood that something totally new had to be done and that they had to help. Then we filed applications, which at the beginning met with little success, but already when Slovenia was an associate Member State, the first funds began flowing from the EU.” Together with state



funds allocated primarily for the renovation of heritage, in ten years they received some 12 million euros, and approximately the same amount was contributed by Jesenice itself. “I am aware”, says Bregant, “that the people gave up a lot of things during those years; they put up with poorer services in schools, day care centres, and cultural institutions, since they knew that they first had to get back a functioning town.”

In a felicitous agreement with large retailers, in the year 2000 they first built a large shopping centre, right in the centre of the former ironworks, and in exchange for the favourable construction conditions the retailers completely renovated the concrete factory chimney, which is now the only remaining monument to the site’s former activity. In connection with this a project was carried out of renovating the town’s cultural and industrial heritage in the Stara Sava industrial complex, which will certainly be one of the most important monuments to Slovenia’s industrial era. After many decades the former “barracks” were renovated, which housed workers’ families; it is now the site of a



‘Today, Jesenice is a town with a completely new, nearly ten-hectare centre. A centre in which historical monuments are interspersed with the new opportunities that the town has acquired.’

music school, a library and public areas for weddings. They are renovating the old water collectors which once powered factory machinery, and they have renovated the Church of St. Roch, which was part of the industrial framework, and the Kolperna, an old building which is now a venue for cultural events and conferences. In between all the buildings a beautiful space was created, which was redesigned as wonderful squares and parks with benches for pedestrians and the possibility of hosting fairs and social

events. Only the magnificent Ruard manor and the adjacent production building are still awaiting renovation in this new ambience. They will house a collection of the largest examples of the industrial heritage, and a stone’s throw away they will also renovate the oldest smelter, which was the place where ironworking in Jesenice first began.

A new centre, a different town

But the people of Jesenice have not finished yet. In the coming year they will open a marketplace and commercial and business complex comprising nearly five hectares of former factory buildings.

In an agreement between the municipality and the companies, approximately one third of the space will be allocated for municipal services, while the rest will be used for business. The same ratio was used for the financing of the renovation, which included the renovation of the municipal and traffic infrastructure and

the restoration of buildings, which function as a well-restored old industrial area and remind people of what was once here. In this respect the marketplace will play an important social role, as it will serve not just as a marketplace but also a gathering place which will host various social and especially cultural events.

Today, Jesenice is a town with a completely new, nearly

ten-hectare centre. A centre in which historical monuments are interspersed with the new opportunities that the town has acquired. The town is now clean, as the red smoke which once greeted visitors is now a thing of the past. The people of Jesenice can once again be proud of their town. I know of no other Slovenian town which has undergone such a radical change over the past twenty years. The usually empty saying that a crisis can give way to positive change has become a reality here. ●

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Otočec Castle
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